

Mt Warning our latest natural wonder

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IT has been millenniums in the making but finally Mt Warning Wollumbin has been recognised as Australia's latest natural wonder.

National tourism bosses yesterday revealed the peak and the surrounding Wollumbin Caldera would become the nation's next icon to rival Uluru, the Great Barrier Reef and Kakadu National Park.

The attractions will be promoted internationally under a joint Tourism Australia and National Parks initiative to entice the lucrative experienced eco-traveller market back to Australia.

Tourism Australia managing director Geoff Buckley said 20 potential sites had been identified under the National Landscapes project but the top eight would be officially launched on June 14 in Perth.

"We have some of the best nature experiences on the planet and we need to get the message out that what we have is unique and world-class," he said.

Mr Buckley was supported by National Parks director Peter Cochrane and eco-travel TV producer Sorrel Wilby at the Tourism Futures conference at Crowne Royal Pines Golf Resort yesterday to spruik the new National Landscapes campaign.

Ms Wilby said eco-tourism had taken the world by storm and Mt Warning Wollumbin and the surrounding caldera had a chance to capture a new, intrepid global audience.

"This area is utterly beautiful and precious beyond belief," she said.

"This project is about inviting people to connect with nature but also to preserve it and support environmentally sustainable travel options."

The mountain and the caldera are all that remains of the 2km high Tweed Volcano that spewed lava 23 million years ago before becoming extinct.

The area to be featured in the National Landscapes campaign includes the mountain, the caldera and rainforest land stretching to Lismore and Byron Bay in the south, Kyogle and the foothills of the Great Dividing Range in the west, and Beaudesert and the Gold Coast Hinterland in the north and the Tweed Valley in the east.

Passionate locals have lobbied for two years for the iconic status, led by co-ordinator Robyn Rae, who doubles as project manager of The Rainforest Way, a federally-funded tourist drive linking the World Heritage listed rainforests on the border of Queensland and NSW.

"The locals around here already knew this area was iconic but we are glad to see it finally recognised by other people too," she said.

"But what we have is unique -- nowhere else in the world can you stand on the rim of an ancient eroded volcano

amongst World Heritage rainforest."

About 80,000 people visit Mt Warning Wollumbin National Park each year but tourism on the mountain has encountered opposition from Bungjalung elders who continue to consider it a sacred site, akin to Uluru.

Visitors are asked to respect the elders' wishes to not climb the peak but the NSW Government ruled out banning people from the mountain.

Some tribes have supported the push to have the area named under the National Landscapes project with the hope of educating visitors about the mountain.

Kyle Slabb, from the Wollumbin Indigenous Consultative Community, said the project was a chance to promote but preserve the natural environment.

"We think it's a good idea to promote the area and we're happy to help educate visitors," he said.

"We hope that with education people will see what we value about it."



Storm clouds clear to reveal Mt Warning's famous profile - now the rest of the world will hear more of the Tweed landmark