

# Summary of ECO Certification 2009



## Background

ECO Certification was designed and developed for the Australian tourism industry and the first step is a self-assessment model.

ECO Certification includes comprehensive coverage of the triple-bottom line Sustainability method: economic, environmental and social/cultural sustainability.

ECO Certification is product-specific – this means that you will need to answer the criteria as it applies specifically to each of your products. This also means that you are able to apply for ECO Certification even if not all of your products are nature-based.

The credibility of the program is maintained through a comprehensive, third party, independent audit process.

## ECO Certification - 3 Levels

ECO Certification has three levels of achievement. Three levels of certification were developed to accommodate for a range of businesses and their level of commitment to sustainability, dedication/applicability to social and cultural responsibilities and the level of interpretation and education involved in the product/s.

### Nature Tourism

- To apply for Nature Tourism Certification you will need to complete all core criteria in sections 1-6, covering business and environmental principles only
- This level is most suited to accommodation products that do not incorporate any interpretation/education

### Ecotourism

- To apply for Ecotourism Certification, you will need to complete all core criteria for all sections, covering business, environmental, social/cultural and interpretation/education principles.

### Advanced Ecotourism

- To apply for Advanced Ecotourism Certification, you will need to complete all core criteria and at least 75% of advanced criteria applicable to your product/s. This level also covers business, environmental, social/cultural and interpretation/education principles.
- Those businesses that achieve Advanced Ecotourism Certification and have cultural content and/or enter into lands significant to Indigenous people are automatically eligible for ROC accreditation (only available in a workbook version – contact Ecotourism Australia for further information).

\*\*Exemptions to core criteria are permitted where the criteria are deemed inappropriate  
(evidence from you is required)\*\*

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## How do I go about getting certified?

1. Contact Ecotourism Australia to order a workbook, or register to apply online by clicking [here](#)
2. Complete the self-assessment criteria
3. Submit your application to Ecotourism Australia for independent assessment
4. An onsite audit will be conducted within the first 3 years of applying to ensure the standards are being maintained. The audit may be within weeks after gaining certification or any time up to 3 years thereafter.

**NB.** If you already have ATAP or TAAL business accreditation, then you will receive credit for section 1 – you won't have to fill out this section, just provide us a copy of your certificate.

| The fees below are based on the turnover of your business and the table below details the cost for each level |                          |            |
|---|--------------------------|------------|
| Gross Turnover  | Once-only Assessment Fee | Annual Fee |
| < \$250,000   | \$385                    | \$335      |
| \$250,001 - \$1,000,000   | \$445                    | \$530      |
| \$1,000,001 - \$5,000,000   | \$550                    | \$770      |
| \$5,000,001 - \$10,000,000  | \$645                    | \$930      |
| > \$10,000,000  | \$850                    | \$1040     |

## Prerequisites for Certification

All necessary licences, permits and approvals have been obtained, including rezoning applications, development consents, building approvals, tour operator's permits and vessel surveys. The regulations, licences and permits table supplied has been filled in correctly.

## The 10 Sections of ECO Certification...

### 1. Business Management and Operational Planning

If the business has an existing Business and Marketing Plan and Operational Strategies it is not necessary to redo these, as long as the existing plan and operational policies and procedures meets the criteria.

If the business does not have the documentation in place, blank electronic templates are available for use by the business.

If the business is currently accredited under one of the ATAA national tourism accreditation programs, and is already using the logo (green circle with gold tick), the Business Management and Operational Planning section does not need to be completed.

#### 1.1 Legal Compliance

There are a number of regulations, licences and permits including vessel surveys that are required to operate a nature tourism or ecotourism business

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## 1.2 Insurance Details

Public Liability Insurance, and other business insurance provide the nature tourism and ecotourism business with necessary security in the event of an accident affecting the business operation

## 1.3 Business Plan

A Business Plan helps set out a vision for the nature tourism and ecotourism business and facilitates sound future decision making. Ecotourism Australia has a template that you can use if you need to develop a Business Plan.

## 1.4 Marketing Plan

A Marketing Plan helps the nature tourism and ecotourism businesses identify where its visitors are coming from and how to best access and communicate with those visitors. Ecotourism Australia has a template that you can use if you need to develop a Business Plan.

## 1.5 Human Resources

Effective management policies for staff, combined with staff training, will result in more motivated and loyal staff.

## 1.6 Operational Management and Business Systems

The operational management of nature tourism and ecotourism businesses is documented to ensure consistent standards and service quality outcomes.

## 1.7 Customer Service

Established customer service standards set by the nature tourism and ecotourism businesses lead to greater customer satisfaction and consistency of service.

## 1.8 Risk Management

The nature and ecotourism business is committed to providing a safe workplace, providing safe experiences to all customers and has documented risk management and emergency procedures accessible to staff and customers.

## 2. Business Ethics

The business and all its personnel adopt and follow ethical business practices such as:

- accepts a commitment to best practice ecological sustainability, natural area management, and the provision of quality ecotourism experiences;
- works through ecotourism to protect and preserve the natural and cultural heritage and Indigenous relationship to land;
- values the social, cultural and natural heritage diversity of Australia;
- values cultural and natural integrity and authenticity in business;
- will eliminate any practice that is unacceptably damaging the environment, heritage or Indigenous culture and beliefs;
- will eliminate any practice that could be damaging to trade or consumers or to the dignity of the ecotourism industry;
- acknowledges its responsibilities in meeting the reasonable expectations of all customers to the best of its ability. Customers include any individual or business wishing to use or receive the goods or services of the business;
- is committed to complying with the National Privacy Principles contained in the Privacy Act.
- shall endeavour to treat all customers equally;
- reserves the right to change its goods and services to meet the expectations of its customers;
- is responsible for all of its advertising and promotional activities, which accurately reflect the activities of the business;
- will inform direct customers of all the terms and conditions of the contract including the terms of payment and any cancellation conditions. We will do this prior to or at the time of entering the transaction or purchase of our goods and/or services. This business will adhere to those terms and conditions;
- will ensure that all monies received from a customer are receipted and an authentic copy will be provided to the customer;
- will fairly and amicably deal with all reasonable customer concerns and queries. The decision of any mediator who may be employed will be final and binding
- will present its goods and services in the best possible way;

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- will exercise all reasonable care to address customers' safety and comfort;
- will take all reasonable measures to ensure that all plant, equipment and products are in good working order. We will, under duty of care, list potential hazards and risks that exist within the business and implement methods to regularly assess and minimise them;
- will where possible inform customers of pertinent facts concerning other tours, transportation, accommodation or other tourist services available to our customers; and
- will adhere to industry codes of practice where they apply.

## 3. Responsible Marketing

Marketing provides clients with information that increases respect for the natural and cultural environments visited. Operators provide clients with an accurate and responsible depiction of what to expect from the product. Nature tourism and ecotourism marketing and supplementary information provide customers with an accurate and responsible depiction of what to expect from the product and how to respect the natural and cultural environments visited.

## 4. Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is achieved when the experience offered consistently meets or exceeds the realistic expectations of customers. Ecotourism operations monitor and act upon customer feedback.

## 5. Natural Area and/ or Cultural Focus

Applicants need to complete this section to determine which program they wish to qualify for. If you have both a nature and cultural tourism focus, you may wish to apply for both ECO and ROC Certification.

### 5.1 Natural Area Focus

Nature tourism and ecotourism occurs in and relies on, the use of the natural environment. It includes a focus on its biological, physical and cultural features. Nature tourism and ecotourism focuses on directly and personally experiencing nature.

### 5.2 Indigenous Cultural Focus

Tourism is sensitive to the value of interpretation and involves different cultures, particularly Indigenous culture. Many tourism areas have significant cultural values and tourism should embrace the cultural aspects of an area visited.

## 6. Environmental Management

Nature tourism and ecotourism activities should not degrade the natural environment. Ecotourism operations are developed and managed to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural environments in which they operate in, through the recognition and application of ecologically sustainable practices.

### 6.1 Environmental Planning and Impact Assessment

Operations have been established on the basis of understanding potential environmental impacts and are consistent with local and regional environmental planning.

### 6.2 Operational Environmental Management

All operations have considered their environmental aspects and the management of such are documented.

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## **6.3 Location**

Operations are only undertaken in locations where nature tourism and ecotourism is an appropriate use and impacts are minimised.

## **6.4 Construction Methods and Materials**

Construction has maximised the use of renewable and recycled materials and has involved practices to minimise environmental impacts.

## **6.5 Site Disturbance, Landscaping and Rehabilitation**

The operation involves minimal disturbance; any areas disturbed are rehabilitated to restore ecological processes.

## **6.6 Drainage, Soil and Water Management**

Site drainage reflects the natural site topography and the operation does not cause soil loss, or impacts such as erosion and sediment pollution to down slope lands and waterways.

## **6.7 Visual Impacts**

Nature tourism and ecotourism operations are not visually dominant.

## **6.8 Biodiversity Conservation**

Provide evidence that the nature tourism and ecotourism products' biodiversity impacts have been minimised.

## **6.9 Lighting**

Where natural lighting is inadequate, lighting is minimised to a level where the visibility of signs and displays is still clear, and to also provide for safety and security.

## **6.10 Water Supply and Conservation**

Operations involve minimal use of an ecologically sustainable supply of water.

## **6.11 Waste Water**

Sewage and effluent is minimised and has no significant environmental impact.

## **6.12 Noise**

Nature tourism and ecotourism operations enable customers to experience the natural sound-scape.

## **6.13 Air Quality**

Nature tourism and ecotourism operations involve minimal air pollution.

## **6.14 Waste Minimisation and Management**

The waste minimisation policy of reduce, reuse, and recycle underpins the operation of the product.

## **6.15 Energy Use and Minimisation: buildings**

## **6.16 Energy Use and Minimisation: transport**

## **6.17 Minimal Disturbance to Wildlife**

## **6.18 Minimal Impact Nocturnal Wildlife Viewing**

## **6.19 Minimal Impact Marine Animal and Mega Fauna Viewing**

## **6.20 Minimal Impact Walking**

## **6.21 Minimal Impact Camping**

## **6.22 Minimal Impact Vehicle Use**

## **6.23 Minimal Impact Power Boat Use**

## **6.24 Minimal Impact Non-powered Boat Use**

## **6.25 Minimal Impact Aircraft Use**

## **6.26 Minimal Impact Rock Climbing and Abseiling**

## **6.27 Minimal Impact Caving (show caves)**

## **6.28 Minimal Impact Caving (wild caves)**

## **6.29 Minimal Impact Snorkeling and SCUBA Diving**

## **6.30 Minimal Impact Trail Riding and Animal Tours**

## **6.31 Minimal Impact Fishing**

## **6.32 Minimal Impact Houseboat Use (inland waters)**

## **6.33 Minimal Impact Houseboat Use (marine)**

## **6.34 Minimal Impact Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP)**

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## **7. Interpretation and Education**

Ecotourism products attract customers who wish to interact with the natural environment and, in varying degrees, develop their knowledge, awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of it. Ecotourism operators provide an appropriate level of interpretation about the natural and cultural heritage of the areas visited, through the employment of appropriately qualified guides and the provision of accurate information both prior to and during the experience. The level and type of interpretation is planned, designed and delivered to meet the interests, needs and expectations of the customer and includes a broad range of interpretive opportunities, both personal and non-personal.

### **7.1 Interpretive Services**

### **7.2 Content of interpretation and educational information**

### **7.3 Interpretive planning**

### **7.4 Staff training, awareness and understanding**

## **8. Contribution to Conservation**

Ecotourism involves active participation in the conservation and enhancement of the natural area visited. In particular, ecotourism products provide constructive contributions to the management and conservation of natural areas. This contribution may include the provision of physical, financial or in-kind assistance.

### **8.1 Conservation initiatives - local**

### **8.2 Conservation initiatives - global**

## **9. Working with Local Communities**

In many situations the local community is integral to the ecotourism product. The benefits of ecotourism should be distributed to the local community. Benefits may include employment of local guides, the purchase of provisions and services and the use of local facilities.

### **9.1 Provision of local benefits**

### **9.2 Minimal impact on local communities**

### **9.3 Community involvement**

## **10. Cultural Respect and Sensitivity**

Although the focus of ecotourism is primarily on the natural values of an area, many of these areas have significant cultural values, especially Indigenous values. Hence, ecotourism should also embrace the cultural aspects of an area visited.

### **10.1 Consultation and Training**

### **10.2 Visitor Information**

### **10.3 Indigenous Arts, Crafts & Goods**

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## Examples of Best Practice

### Responsible marketing

- The operator uses only Eco Certification Program accredited accommodation, carriers or principals.
- The operator's web site is not linked to another operator's web site that offers Eco Certification Program accredited products.
- The operator promotes another operator's Eco Certification Program accredited products in his/her own marketing material.
- The operator takes bookings for Eco Certification Program accredited products on behalf of another operator.

### Natural area focus

- The acquisition of land for conservation purposes.
- The registration of property on the Register of the National Estate.
- Become a part of Australia's National Reserve System.
- No more than five customers per guide.
- A tour guarantees that a group will not encounter another operation's tour throughout the experience in the natural area.
- The overall environment is dominated by the sounds of the natural environment. To meet this, all audible tonal and impulsive noises and maximum sound pressure levels must come from background sources, as measured at key visitor areas on the site.

### Environmental sustainability - impact assessment

- Remove vessel from the river each night via a fixed crane to: reduce stress to the riverbank; reduce marine growth on the bottom of the vessel, which reduces the need to anti-foul; and eliminate the need for anchoring or mooring in the river.
- The operation and management of the structures and facilities are undertaken in accordance with an environmental management plan, which meets the requirements of the International Environmental Management Standards in the ISO 14000 series or equivalent.
- A study has been undertaken to determine limits of acceptable change, or the social and environmental carrying capacity, of the tour site.
- An ongoing, independent monitoring program assessing environmental impact has been established.

### Environmental sustainability - site location

- Development of the ecotourism facility has occurred on a degraded site that is restored and rehabilitated with local native species.

### Environmental sustainability - energy consumption

- Using vegetable based oil for engines.
- The operation uses solar powered vehicles that are either directly charged by the sun or via an electricity supply sourced from renewable energy.
- The operation sources part or all of its energy from a methane-based composting system.
- The operation runs a program that rewards customers who choose to use less energy, water and resources during their experience.

### Environmental sustainability – waste minimisation

- The operation recycles waste paper into products for customers to purchase.

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## Interpretation

- Tours are filmed to provide further feedback and interpretation on the trip, as the guide can further explain and point out things that guests may have missed. These videos are for sale to the group as an ongoing conservation resource and memento of the trip.
- Customers are encouraged to provide constructive written feedback about their interpretive or educational experience so that quality can be further improved.
- Interpretive material promotes concepts of ecotourism beyond the area of operation.
- The operator shares best practice ideas with other operators through publications, training programs, workshops and influence in professional organisations.
- The operator commits resources to regular community service aimed at educating the local community
- The operator commits resources to regular community service aimed at educating the local community on ecotourism and sustainable practices.
- Interpretation promotes tangible environmental actions.
- The operator demonstrates a significant commitment to upgrading the skills and training of guides and interpretive personnel.

## Contributions to conservation

- Funding of fauna and flora research.
- Offering guests the opportunity to participate in conversation activities, such as monitoring the flora and fauna, and research/regeneration projects.
- Provide information on wildlife to Parks and Wildlife services about nesting and hatching sightings to monitor changes in population numbers.
- Setting aside land for conservation/research and to use it as a control area to monitor visitor impacts.
- Long-term partnerships with local conservation groups are formed which provide mutual, tangible benefits.
- The operator and/or staff are involved with a formal scientific research project aimed at measuring and understanding environmental impacts.
- The operator and/or staff formally contribute to, or are members of, a scientific advisory committee.
- Financial support is provided to research initiatives and public land management projects beyond normal permit/licensing fee arrangements.
- A full-time qualified environmental management officer(s) is employed.
- Customers spend more than a third of their time participating in research, management or rehabilitation of the natural area.
- A privately managed area for nature conservation is created and developed.
- Significant infrastructure/site hardening is developed to protect an area and is provided for all visitors to help protect/minimise damage to an area.
- The operation has entered into a voluntary conservation agreement with a protected area manager or private landowner.
- The operator contributes to the further professional development of ecotourism through active involvement in a relevant professional association eg. Ecotourism Australia, Australian Tourism Operators Network, Interpretation Australia Association, Inbound Tourism Organisation of Australia, Tourism Council of Australia.

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## Working with local communities

- Operators should encourage local and regional tourism bodies to experience all of their products.
- The operator offers a permanent discount off fares/entry for locals.
- The operator has identified how to minimise negative social impacts through discussions with specialists and has acted according to information gathered.
- The operator has been involved in a social impact study undertaken on the local community.
- The operator is assisting to implement the recommendations of a social impact study undertaken on the local community.
- The operator has a contract with a community-based food cooperative to purchase food in bulk on a regular basis.

For further information on ECO Certification, please contact: 07 3252 1530 or [Amy@ecotourism.org.au](mailto:Amy@ecotourism.org.au)

For a full copy of the program, please contact the National Office on 07 3252 1530.

