"Protect our parks
Involve our operators
Invest in the future
Incentivise quality"
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After a few hard years 2015/16 has been a pleasant surprise for our members, the industry and for Ecotourism Australia (EA). Most regions across Australia are reporting record years of visitation, length of stay and yield. Smiles all around.

EA continues to grow by expanding our offerings into new regions, developing new products and providing greater benefits to members. For example, the dramatic increase in our audit program has allowed our auditors to spend significant time with many of our operators, ensuring that they meet certification standards but more importantly sharing information and working with operators to improve their businesses. To date we’ve received extremely positive feedback.

It is hard not to reflect when an organisation achieves its 25-year milestone. When we established EA, the first World Wide Web site had just been launched the year before (1990), the first Gulf War began, Bob Hawke was Prime Minister of Australia and the report from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was released.

A key to our success has been remaining relevant in a rapidly evolving industry and ensuring that the value we offer our members exceeds expectations – a focus that will continue into the future. Engaging with developing countries in the South Pacific, creating Ecotourism Destination Certification (initially for National Parks), providing leadership and support for National programs and building meaningful partnerships are current examples of this.

Tony Charters has been a Director of Ecotourism Australia since its inception, serving as President, Vice President and Treasurer and managing most of our conferences. He is retiring from the Board at this year’s AGM and I wish to pass on our sincere thanks to Tony for his profound and extensive contribution to EA. He will be greatly missed.

I also wish to thank our Directors who continue to make enormous contributions to our success by meeting regularly as a Board, providing the strategic direction and support to our CEO to steer the organisation and often going that little bit further for EA as dedicated individuals.

I look forward to seeing you all in Hobart in November for the Global Eco Conference as we celebrate our 25th year and Tasmanian Parks’ 100th year.

Rick Murray
Chairman
2015/16 has been a year of new opportunities and a year to reflect. In our 25th year Ecotourism Australia (EA) continues to broaden its reach and offering by building new products and developing its value proposition to members. As the tourism industry changes and evolves, we do also.

Key activities this year include:

**Embedding our auditing relationship with members.**
Working with Conservation Volunteers Australia, we have greatly increased the quantity of audits in a year. This brings our certification programs greater credibility and creates increased opportunities to directly engage with our members.

**Expanding our reach to the South Pacific with a strong relationship developing in Vanuatu.** We have signed an MOU to assist Vanuatu in developing ecotourism and introducing ECO Certification. Depending on uptake and sustainability we will expand into other South Pacific nations.

**Creating ‘Ecotourism Destination Certification’ for National Parks and other protected areas.** Parks and protected areas can demonstrate to their stakeholders and visitors that they clearly understand their role within the tourism industry and in building a region’s destination. New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service has begun a trial using Kosciusko National Park and four more parks are expected to join this calendar year. Most other parks agencies in Australia have expressed strong interest.

We also conducted an online members survey where we learnt that:

- Our members are happy with the services and value proposition supplied through their membership with EA.
- EA needs to improve communication with members, highlighting benefits available through their certification.
- Members are seeking stronger international marketing opportunities through membership with EA.
- There is a genuine pride held by the majority of our members in attaining and retaining their certification levels.

Partnerships continue to add value for our members who identified these key relationships:

- The Global Sustainable Tourism Council and TripAdvisor ‘Greenleaders’ program, providing global marketing reach.
- Attending the Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE) as a buyer and a seller promoting EA members.
- Sponsoring the “Ecotourism” Category at the Australian Tourism Awards promoting excellence in tourism.

The financial loss in 2015/16 is a reflection of the true cost of auditing. Close to $70,000 was spent on auditing this year, as it is the first full year of our partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia.

This has not impacted on our balance sheet, which shows a 20% improvement in our organisation’s financial value compared to last year. Close to $100,000 in revenue has been brought forward to the 2016/17 financial year.

My thanks go to our Board Directors whose tireless dedication and willingness to do ‘a bit more’ is an inspiration. They have provided clear direction and engaged at a personal level with our key stakeholders to build our relevance, influence and standing within the tourism industry. Our staff remains a lean outfit and I applaud them for their commitment and dedication. I ask too much of them but they always deliver.

Finally, I want to thank our members for your continued support and enthusiasm. Hearing your stories of hard work and success truly motivates our team, inspiring us to continue building the value proposition of your membership. Thank you.

Rod Hillman
Chief Executive
Key achievements 2015/16

Certification
- ECO certified tour operators gained Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Approved Status, with ECO Certification one of only three certification programs in the world approved by the GSTC.
- Our first international ECO certification was announced for CapeNature’s Koegelberg, Goukamma and Robberg Nature Reserves in South Africa through our partnership arrangement with ECO-Tourism Africa.
- We held successful ECO certification workshops with Mackay Tourism, Fraser Coast and Sunshine Coast.
- We piloted Ecotourism Destination Certification.
- EA signed an MOU with the Vanuatu Government to introduce ECO Certification in Vanuatu.
- The combined annual revenue of Ecotourism Australia’s certified operators reached $1.2 billion.

Partnerships
- The South Australian Tourism Industry Council (SATIC) and EA signed a partnership agreement to drive the growth of sustainable tourism in South Australia, granting all ECO-certified operators in South Australia full accredited membership of SATIC at no additional cost.

Membership
- We held a membership survey amongst our ECO, Respecting Our Culture and Climate Action certified operators, receiving very positive feedback from the majority of operators (see page 13).
- All but one Australian Protected Area Management Agencies are now Members with formal MOUs.

People
- EA welcomed two new Board members, Rob Pennicott of Pennicott Wilderness Journeys, and Wendy Hills of NSW Parks & Wildlife Service.
Conference

- We held the 2015 Global Eco Asia-Pacific Conference on Rottnest Island, receiving our best conference feedback yet.

Australian Tourism Exchange

- EA attended the 2016 Australian Tourism Exchange as both a Buyer and a Seller for the first time, where 130+ EA members made up more than 25% of all Sellers.

Australian Tourism Awards

- EA sponsored the Ecotourism Category
- EA members made up 25% of winners in eligible categories at the State Tourism Awards – a total of 51 EA members took home 71 awards, including all awards in the Ecotourism category across all states, excluding only South Australia.
- EA members made up 35% of all finalists and 22% of all award winners at the 2015 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards, taking home 17 Gold, Silver and Bronze awards.
Website & social media

Over the financial year 2015/16, www.ecotourism.org.au received almost 240,000 page views over almost 80,000 interactive sessions, by over 60,000 users.

The most visited pages on our website are:

- www.ecotourism.org.au (Our homepage)

Ecotourism Australia
- Facebook following increased by 20.5%
- Followers on 30 June 2016: 3343

@EcotourismAus
- Twitter following increased by 20.6%
- Followers on 30 June 2016: 3,092

@EcotourismAustralia
- Instagram following increased by 132%
- Approx. followers on 30 June 2016: 1,300

Ecotourism Australia
- LinkedIn following increased by at least 31%
- Followers on 30 June 2016: 1,901
Craig Wickham, Managing Director of Exceptional Kangaroo Island was recognised by Outside Go as one of their Best Five Tour Guides from across the Globe. Craig, his wife Janet, and their enthusiastic team have been sharing Kangaroo Island's secrets with guests since 1990.

Walk Into Luxury
Advanced Ecotourism
Walk Into Luxury’s four-day Margaret River Cape To Cape Walk was announced as the first Western Australia Great Walk Of Australia.
Cobbold Gorge Tours made the news when two new species of gecko were discovered in the Cobbold Gorge Nature Refuge. The species were discovered by scientists from Australian National University who work collaboratively with Cobbold Gorge Tours to classify and register fauna in the area.

Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary launched a new Kids on Conservation Trail, designed to educate kids about some of Australia’s endangered wildlife including bilbies, brush-tailed rock wallabies and the Kroombit tinker frog while exposing them to the Sanctuary’s conservation programs.

The Sanctuary also announced the establishment of 15,000 gum trees and a purpose-built koala gum shed to store koala fodder.
South Australia
The state released a strategy and action plan to transform the state’s nature-based tourism sector: ‘Nature like nowhere else. Activating nature-based Tourism in South Australia.’ They aim to inject $350 million a year into the state economy and create 1,000 new jobs by 2020.

Mount Christopherson Retreat
Nature Tourism
Owner operator Alan Petschack and his late wife Helen worked hard to replant the a 200 acre division of the Mount Christopherson property which was set aside in 2001 under a voluntary conservation agreement with the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service. The area is part of a regional wildlife corridor for native animals and is one of the few surviving examples of the Dorrigo Plateau vegetation.

Fair Food Forager Business Member
Fair Food Forager founder Paul Hellier launched a new app listing hundreds of restaurants, cafes and grocery stores across Australia that support environmental sustainability, allowing users to search and share healthy, ethical and sustainable food options.
Ecotourism Australia recently conducted a membership survey among its certified operators to gain a better understanding of what value they take out of their membership and what they expect of us. We also highlighted some of our newly developed opportunities.

"Being part of a strong and credible brand"

"Raises awareness among our customers"

"Our certification is a central element of our marketing"

Key Results

Ecotourism Australia has been working on several new opportunities for our certified members. During the survey we asked how beneficial our members perceive these opportunities, as well as whether or not they were aware of them.

45% of eligible operators were not aware of their GSTC Approved status, and are going to display this logo in the future.

90% of GSTC eligible operators perceived this partnership as valuable.

48% of eligible operators were not aware of the TripAdvisor GreenLeaders program, but will display this logo in the future.

91% of TripAdvisor GreenLeader eligible operators perceived this partnership as valuable.

90% of Ecotourism Australia's certified operators perceive EA's involvement in the Australian Tourism Exchange as valuable.

95% of Ecotourism Australia's certified operators perceive EA's involvement in the Australian Tourism Awards as beneficial.

97% of EA certified operators perceive the Global ECO Conference as useful.
General

96% found that the auditing process with Conservation Volunteers Australia had been helpful for their business.

90% of our members are happy with our services.

70% of EA members operate within a National Park, of which 87% perceives real benefits from their ECO certification for their parks licenses.

Audit Process

Office Procedures

National Park Operators

Member Sentiment

93% of our operators had a better than expected summer season.

97% of our operators have a positive outlook for 2017.

Key Learnings

- Our members are happy with the services and value proposition supplied through their membership with Ecotourism Australia

- Ecotourism Australia needs to improve communication with members, highlighting benefits available through their certification

- Members are seeking stronger international marketing opportunities through membership with Ecotourism Australia

- There is a genuine pride held by the majority of our members in attaining and retaining their certification levels

The staff and board of Ecotourism Australia wants to thank our members for their constructive feedback through this survey.
“Ecotourism Australia has a reputation of doing, not talking,” says Tony Charters, current Board Member, Past President and one of the founders of Ecotourism Australia. While ecotourism has evolved from niche to mainstream over the past 25 years, Ecotourism Australia (EA) has remained relevant and influential to tourism in Australia and beyond. As EA celebrates its 25th anniversary, we reflect on the practicality, partnerships and adaptability that have made the organisation successful and where it is headed next.

EA was born following an international conference on ecotourism held at the University of Queensland in September 1991 when a passionate group of people decided to form the ‘Ecotourism Association of the Indo-Pacific Region.’ The progressive founders of the world’s first national ecotourism society met regularly by teleconference and twice a year face-to-face, aiming to promote ecotourism throughout Australia and its immediate region.

In November 1993, the already 230 member-strong Ecotourism Association held its first annual conference in Port Douglas, followed by a conference every year since. In 2002, the International Year of Ecotourism, 428 delegates from 20 countries attended the organisation’s first international conference in Cairns, Queensland, Ecotourism - A World of Difference, a highlight for the longest running ecotourism conference in the world.

Better together: partnering for sustainability

From the start, partnerships have been at the core of EA’s success. Kingfisher Bay Resort provided fundamental support during EA’s establishment phase while Tourism Queensland invested in certification by supporting auditing, reviewing and marketing benefits to operators - creating the impetus for other states to get on board.

In 2003 EA reached a milestone when protected area managers began rewarding tour operators holding ECO certification with the Western Australian Government making it mandatory for tourism operators in restricted protected areas to have ECO certification.

EA also developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) forming a cooperative relationship that is still strong today.

The GBRMPA’s and Western Australia’s engagement gave EA greater credibility and opened up the door for other government agencies to consider ECO certification. “Agencies often walk around the edge of the pool but no one wants to jump in,” says Charters. “GBRMPA was one of the first groups to recognise that certification could help them manage the reef better and benefit the industry, customers and the Reef.” Today, most protected area managers in Australia are financial members of EA, recognising and rewarding certification through options such as longer permits.

Cont’d
Making certification relevant to businesses

EA first investigated certification soon after its establishment as a means of avoiding greenwashing in tourism. When the Commonwealth Government funded development of a certification program that was too complex for tourism operators to participate in, the Association proposed to develop a practical, applied system that worked with the tourism industry. The result was the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP), launched in 1996 as the world’s first ecotourism certification scheme.

EA has since expanded beyond ECO certification, launching EcoGuide certification in 2000, taking over administration of Respecting Our Culture (ROC) from Aboriginal Tourism Australia in 2008 and launching Climate Action certification that same year.

Over the past 20 years EA has built the critical mass needed to run a self-sustaining certification program that provides clear benefits to its members. EA certified members have always ‘punched above their weight,’ gaining over a third of all applicable finalist positions at the Australian Tourism Awards, making up 25% of all sellers at the Australian Tourism Exchange and generating a combined annual revenue that has topped $1.2 billion.

Looking forward: ecotourism of tomorrow

EA has remained relevant in its 25-year history by being flexible and adaptive and this dynamism will carry EA forward. While the internet and social media have created free information and informal networks, the organisation’s business model has shifted from a focus on membership to conferences, certification programs and, recently, consulting. As EA looks forward, we are excited to use our experience and partnerships to benefit the environment, communities, our members, partners, travellers and the tourism industry in new ways.

Whilst designed with the involvement of academics, protected area managers, tourism operators, tourism professionals and Indigenous groups, EA’s ECO certification program is primarily driven by practitioners. This basis in operational tourism makes ECO certification relevant not only to operators in Australia, but potentially to developing international markets. “The Australian tourism industry has embraced ECO certification and other nations are seeking to join the success,” said Rod Hillman, CEO of EA. “ECO certification is now available in Southern Africa and will shortly be available in Vanuatu and other South Pacific nations.”

Reflecting our adaptability and deepening partnerships with protected area managers, EA designed and developed a new product for the Australian context: Ecotourism Destination Certification. Based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Council’s Destination Criteria, the program focusses on demonstrating effective sustainable management and maximising benefits to environment, communities, visitors and culture, including economic benefits for host communities.

“Recognising Kosciuszko National Park in New South Wales as the first certified destination in Australia is the latest of many firsts for us, including many world firsts,” said EA’s Chairman, Rick Murray. “It has been a real privilege to help guide ecotourism’s journey and we’re excited to keep pushing best practice forward.”

Here’s to the next 25 years of ecotourism in Australia and beyond. |
MILESTONES 1991 - 2016
Key events in Ecotourism Australia’s history

1991
Ecotourism Australia was formed following the ‘ECO Tourism Incorporating The Global Classroom Conference’ from 25-27 September at the University of Queensland, Brisbane. A group met called the Ecotourism Association of the Indo-Pacific Region.

1993
The first conference and inaugural Annual General Meeting were held in Port Douglas, Queensland on 15-17 November with 41 members present. In the first two years the Association had 230 members.

1995
The Commonwealth Department of Tourism provided the Association and the Victorian Tour Operators Association with a grant of $60,000 to develop an ecotourism accreditation scheme.

1996
The association launched the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) at the national conference. There were two levels of accreditation - Ecotourism and Advanced Ecotourism.

2000
EAA launched the EcoGuide program at the national conference, to endorse guides who deliver authentic, environmentally responsible

2002
DURING the International Year of Ecotourism, EAA convened its first international conference in Cairns, Queensland: Ecotourism – A World of Difference. More than 400 delegates from 20 countries participated.

1991
Ecotourism Australia founded

1993
First conference held in QLD

1995
Ecotourism accreditation developed

1996
World’s first National Ecotourism Accreditation Program launched

2000
EcoGuide certification launched

2002
EAA became Ecotourism Australia Limited (EA)
The cooperation focused on an annual mentoring program where EA and UNESCO jointly collaborate to host protected area managers from developing countries to Australia.


EA launched the Green Travel Guide to present Australia’s leading nature and ecotourism products, with a focus on consumer information.

EA launched the Climate Action certification program at the Inaugural Conference on Green Travel, Climate Change and Ecotourism. It had three levels of certification: Climate Action – ‘Business’, ‘Innovator’ and ‘Leader’.

On EA’s 20th birthday, 56 operators were awarded Green Travel Leader status for their commitment to greening the tourism industry by maintaining eco-certification for 10 years or more.

EA implemented its ‘Certification Coach’ program to help new applicants become certified.
2013

Geotourism Forum launched

EA launched the Geotourism Forum at the 2013 Global Eco Asia-Pacific Conference to add value to Australia’s nature-based tourism by promoting tourism that focuses on geology and landscapes.

Certified ecotourism annual turnover passes $1 billion

The combined annual turnover of all EA certified tour operators exceeded $1 billion, demonstrating how ecotourism has moved from niche to mainstream.

Conservation Volunteers Australia auditing partnership launched

EA and Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) launched a national audit program in which CVA independently audits ECO applicants.

EA becomes administrator of the National Landscapes Program

EA was nominated to administer the National Landscapes Program, furthering its role in showcasing Australia’s best of nature to the world.

First international ECO certification

CapeNature’s Koegelberg, Goukamma and Robberg Nature Reserves in South Africa received ECO certification through EA’s partnership arrangement with Eco-Tourism Africa.

EA signed an MOU with Vanuatu’s Department of Tourism

EA signed an MOU to assist Vanuatu in developing ecotourism in their country and introducing ECO Certification.

2014

Geotourism Forum launched

EA sponsored the Ecotourism Category

EA sponsored the Ecotourism Category at the 2014 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards where over 40% of all eligible finalists were ECO certified and EA certified operators took home a third of all awards.

Conservation Volunteers Australia auditing partnership launched

EA formed a partnership formed with COMET Corporation to introduce ECO certification into Southern Africa under a license agreement.

2015

GreenLeaders program launched in partnership with TripAdvisor

EA partnered with TripAdvisor to develop and introduce the ‘Green Leaders’ program. The program aims to help travellers plan greener trips by highlighting accommodation providers with environmentally-friendly practices.

EA partners to introduce ECO Certification in Southern Africa

EA gained Global Sustainable Tourism Council approval

EA’s ECO certification program became one of the first tourism certification programs in the world to be approved by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), gaining global recognition for

2016

EA partners to introduce ECO Certification in Southern Africa

EA and SATIC partner to grow sustainable tourism in South Australia

The South Australian Tourism Industry Council (SATIC) and EA signed a partnership agreement to drive the growth of sustainable tourism in South Australia, granting all ECO-certified operators in South Australia full accredited membership of SATIC at no additional cost.

EA signs a Memorandum of Understanding with Taiwan

EA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Taiwan
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