“Protect our Parks

Involve our Operators

Invest in the Future

Incentivise Quality”

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Image: Capricorn Caves  
Advanced Ecotourism  
Rockhampton QLD
Ecotourism in Australia is growing in size, in relevance and in importance. The combined annual revenue of Ecotourism Australia (EA) members has grown to $1.12B and this is just a fraction of the broader nature based tourism industry throughout regional Australia.

In many towns and regions the role of tourism is well understood, being either the main, or a major, direct and indirect employer and brings new people and ideas at a time when the ‘boom and bust’ of the resource sector continues. Ecotourism businesses bring sustainable growth to the regions, provide meaningful employment and opportunities for the local young people, and value the knowledge of those who understand the land and its culture.

As an industry we often undervalue our role and fail to come together as a single voice to highlight the importance of our joint contribution. At a time when governments are seeking tools to bring growth and sustainability to regions we have a proven method to contribute. EA will continue pushing its case for investment and long term planning to encourage opportunities for ecotourism to make its contribution to regional development.

2014/15 has been a year of change and development for EA, with major initiatives such as undertaking the administration of the ‘National Landscapes’ program and gaining ‘Approved’ status from GSTC for our ECO certification program. Such initiatives have demonstrated to our members and stakeholders our adaptability and continuing desire to bring meaningful benefits to our members.

I want to thank my fellow Board members who, again, have made significant contributions to the success of EA. Our Board reflects our industry with the majority of its members being current or previous ecotourism operators, plus a combination of current and previous senior government decision makers providing a balance of operations and policy expertise.

My thanks also to the EA office for another year of hard work and achievement.

This year, the Board will maintain its focus on bringing value to our members and building partnerships to increase the relevance and importance of the ‘ecotourism story’ to key decision makers. In our twenty-fifth year we will continue to state the obvious – ecotourism works!

Mr. Rick Murray
Chairman
This year Ecotourism Australia has taken large steps forward in working more closely with our members and in the broader sphere of National tourism. There has been many firsts including:

- Sponsorship of the National Tourism Awards – Ecotourism Category
- Introduction of the Conservation Volunteers Australia auditing partnership
- Administrative support to the National Landscape program
- Partnering with the World Parks Congress to bring tourism onto the agenda
- Membership of the National Tourism Alliance
- Partnering with Trip Advisor to introduce the ‘Green Leaders’ program
- Combined annual revenue of EA certified members tops $1.12B!!

Whilst these new activities have been taken on we have retained our focus on delivering value to our members by working closely with the protected area managers, STOs and Tourism Australia to ensure our member’s hard work in delivering high quality ecotourism experiences is recognised and acknowledged.

The year ahead presents opportunities and challenges to our industry. Tourism Australia and the STOs are doing many things well, but the overwhelming feedback we are receiving is that the broad based marketing of ‘Nature Australia’ has gone missing. The focus on Restaurants, and now Coasts and Islands, is welcome but there remains a need to maintain and build the broader marketing collateral for the diversity of nature based experiences throughout Australia. Ecotourism Australia will work hard with our members and partners to push strongly the case to build a co-ordinated marketing strategy that promotes Australia’s greatest asset – the nature experiences.

High quality ecotourism is an international product and we will continue to partner with international opportunities to bring our member’s products to a larger market. The TripAdvisor partnership to introduce GreenLeaders into Australia is the start and our gaining of ‘Approved’ status with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), which means most of our members can display the international GSTC brand throughout their collateral, brings further market recognition to our members.

The GSTC is working with the large travel websites to gain priority listings for their certified member’s products and is currently piloting a project with Expedia. If successful this will bring real and tangible benefit to our members by directing more business through the sites and giving wholesalers, agents and visitors more confidence in your products. Stay tuned!

I want to thank our members for their support over another year as we head into our 25th anniversary in 2016! Many of you have been with us for most of this journey and we really appreciate and respect your support.

In closing, I want to thank our Board for the tremendous support, direction and commitment they donate to keep your organisation moving forward and representing your interests. I also want to thank our great team in the office, who I can assure you are tireless in their commitment to deliver the best they can.

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Mr. Rod Hillman
Chief Executive
Key Achievements

- Produced a modest financial surplus for the year
- Ecotourism Australia Certified Businesses generate $1.12B P/Year in revenue
- Maintained a strong advocacy and representational presence at the state and federal government level meeting with Federal and State Ministers
- 80% of all Australian Protected Area Management Agencies are now Members with formal MOUs
- Co-ordinated the Tourism in Australia’s Protected Areas (TAPAF) Dinner at the World Parks Congress
- Developed our Policy for the sustainable development of the Ecotourism Industry in Australia (See pages 9 & 10)

- Membership grew by 4%
- Implemented the ‘Certification Coach’ program to aid new applicants
- Undertook two ‘secret shopper’ interpretation reviews with The Great Barrier Reef Marine Parks Authority
- Ecotourism and Advanced Ecotourism certified operators to gain Global Sustainable Tourism Council “Approved” status

- Global Eco Conference ran alongside World Parks Congress in Sydney
- Announced the 2015 Global Eco conference to be on Rottnest Island, 15 – 17 November.

- Partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia was launched
- National audit program commenced in January, since then 75 properties have been successfully audited

Image: 41° South Salmon & Ginseng Farm
Ecotourism
Deloraine TAS
Key Achievements

Progressed Global Sustainable Tourism Council ‘Approved Status’ application – Attained in July 2015

Ecotourism Australia became the Administrator of the ‘National Landscapes Program’
- Re-engaged all Landscapes
- Secured short term funding for the program
- Restructured the program to be ‘owned’ by the Landscapes
- Developed Terms of Reference and strategic direction for the program

- Ecotourism Australia sponsored Ecotourism Category at 2014 Australian Tourism Awards
- Over 40% of all eligible finalists were ECO certified for the 2014 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards
- Ecotourism Australia certified operators took home a third of all awards at the 2014 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards

Ecotourism Australia partnered with TripAdvisor to launch GreenLeaders Programme in Australia

COMET Corp license agreement underway, with Australian operators receiving free web listings on the COMET Corp consumer website, exposing them to South African market
We have the first full year of statistics for our website, having been launched in May 2014. Over the financial year 2014/15, www.ecotourism.org.au received:

- Over 206,500 page views over almost 66,000 interactive sessions, by over 48,000 users
- The most visited pages on our website are:
  - www.ecotourism.org.au (Our homepage)

Ecotourism Australia exhibited at the Australian Tourism Exchange 2015 in Melbourne, where our members made up 20% of all the Sellers present
- Buyers showed great interest in EA’s online Green Travel Guide as a tool for finding new sustainable tourism products
- Ecotourism was most popular with the European, Canadian and US markets
- There was great popularity for product that took guests off the beaten track and offered hands-on experiences

**Key Achievements**

**Ecotourism Australia**
- Facebook following increased by 20%
- Followers on 30 June 2015: 2,774

**@EcotourismAus**
- Twitter following increased by 23%
- Followers on 30 June 2015: 2,565

**@EcotourismAustralia**
Instagram following increased by 88%
- Followers on 30 June 2015: 561

Image: Matthew Evans
Paronella Park
Advanced Ecotourism & Climate Action
Mena Creek QLD
Importance of ecotourism to Australia

- Tourism contributes over $100 billion to the Australian economy (2014) and is expected to grow by 1.6% annually for the next ten years (TRA).
- Tourism supports nearly 1 million jobs throughout Australia (ABS).
- Growth in international visitation is the key driver for Australia’s tourism industry’s growth to achieve its 2020 goals.
- Australia’s natural environment is the most important attraction for international visitors in all our major source markets (TA).
- Recent research (Deloittes, CSIRO, TA) clearly shows that Australia’s Natural Advantage is, and will increasingly be, the major attractant for international visitors.
- Maintaining Australia’s brand and reputation in these markets is vital to the future growth and success of the tourism industry with the ecotourism industry providing authentic, memorable and safe visitor experiences.
- Visitor and market interest in indigenous culture provides a significant opportunity for employment and business development for indigenous Australians.
- Protecting Australia’s environmental and cultural assets is vital to underpin the diversity and quality of visitor experiences that Australia is well known for.
- Ecotourism is a large, and growing, sector of the broader tourism experience.
- Geotourism is a well established tourism form globally, and particularly in China.
- The Geotourism Forum has been established within Ecotourism Australia to promote awareness and the growth of geotourism within Australia, as well as to build closer relationships within dedicated land areas such as geoparks, national landscapes and protected areas.

Importance of ecotourism to our regions

- Ecotourism is a major economic generator to rural and remote communities, generating greater community benefit and resilience.
- Ecotourism provides sustainable employment opportunities that can replace declining labour markets in agriculture and the resource sectors.
- Many ecotourism businesses are small to medium sized enterprises supporting regional economies and providing strong social outcomes through developing local pride, supporting festivals and events.
- Ecotourism businesses actively work toward conservation of the natural areas central to their operations.

Value of eco-certification

- Ecotourism Australia has designed and manages a range of tourism certification programs that are used by 500 tour operators around Australia.
- Eco-certification provides a valuable product development tool, a clear customer choice and links to international standards and recognition.
- Consistent high industry standards, supported and communicated by transparent and evidence-based certification are essential to meet market expectations. Many buyers of ecotourism products will preferentially purchase or only buy certified products.
- Internationally, accreditation is being increasingly applied by governments and preferentially selected by wholesalers and package tourism.
- Delivers on the “Tourism 2020” Strategic Area—“Building Industry Resilience, Productivity and Quality”.
- Eco-certification benefits government by reducing risk and compliance costs whilst promoting high quality visitor experiences.

Tourism’s impacts on Climate Change are significant and Ecotourism Australia will continue to work with Governments, operators and the broader community to mitigate the impacts.

Ecotourism Australia (EA) is Australia’s peak Industry body, representing over 500 ecotourism operators and members since 1991. EA’s product development tool - ECO certification - is a world-recognised program with a Memorandum of Co-operation with UNESCO World Heritage Centre, recognition by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and winner of the ‘Tourism for Tomorrow’ Award issued by the World Travel & Tourism Council. Ecotourism Australia has broad Membership in every state and Territory with our members representing 25% of all 2014 national tourism award winners. EA is self-funded and managed by active participants in the ecotourism industry whose 2014 membership’s annual turnover was $1.2B. Ecotourism Australia’s ECO certification is recognised and incentivised by all Australian Protected Area Management agencies, reducing their risk and compliance costs whilst promoting high quality visitor experiences.
Ecotourism in Australia
Building regions, creating jobs, inspiring visitors & protecting the environment

**Protect our Parks**

1. Consistent and increased resourcing for natural and cultural heritage management.
   National Parks and other protected areas are the key ecotourism asset. For the industry to thrive, Governments need to invest wisely and sustainably to protect and enhance the National Parks, and other protected areas’, values and potential.

2. All commercial development within protected areas should meet National minimum standards.
   The recent trend to promote tourism development within Parks needs to ensure the values are protected in the long term. All developments should follow "Best Practice Guidelines for Eco-Opportunities in Protected and Natural Areas", TAPAF 2012.

**Involve the Operators**

3. Major development applications to include tour operator input.
   Major Resource, and other, development proponents with proposals that impact on tourism assets and experiences should be required to:
   3.1. Consult and engage with tour operators in preparing their applications.
   3.2. Include independently prepared tourism impact assessments in major development applications.
   3.3. Acknowledge the Cultural landscape and destination character in development decisions.

4. Embed tourism in National Parks Planning.
   National Parks Agencies to create tourism reference groups of licensed tour operators and industry associations to provide estate wide input to park planning and issue management.

**Invest in the Future**

5. Support product development.
   Realign the current policy direction of many levels of government to include and strengthen tourism agencies’ product and destination development functions/programs.
   5.1. Initiatives such as “Australia’s National Landscapes” and “Indigenous Tourism Champions” are valued and resourced by all levels of government and strongly supported by industry.

   National, State and Territory governments to have developed, resourced and implemented Ecotourism/Nature based tourism plans.

   Tourism Research Australia develops and reports on key nature based tourism outcomes and indicators.

**Incentivise Quality**

8. Reduce risk and improve visitor experience by incentivising quality operations.
   Tour operators who have committed to Independently Audited Quality Assurance Programs (IAQAP), such as Ecotourism Australia’s ECO certification, to be given preferential listings and treatment.
   8.1. National and State Tourism organisation provide preferential marketing and public relations opportunities to IAQAP operators.
   8.2. National and State Protected Area Managers to continue providing incentives to IAQAP operators.
   8.3. State and National Ecotourism or Nature Based Tourism Awards require entrants to hold IAQAP ecotourism certification.
Robert Pennicott—Pennicott Wilderness Journeys
(Advanced Ecotourism certified)
Robert Pennicott was named an Australian Tourism Legend at the 2014 Qantas Australian Tourism

EcoTreasures
(Advanced Ecotourism & Respecting Our Culture certified)
EcoTreasures conducted tours dedicated to cleaning up marine debris from Little Penguin habitats at Collins Beach in Sydney Harbour National Park

Big4 Atherton Woodlands Tourist Park
(Nature Tourism certified)
Big4 Atherton Woodlands Tourist Park sponsored ongoing rehabilitation for an injured juvenile Hawksbill turtle through the Cairns Turtle Rehabilitation Centre. They named him ‘Woody’, after their local Woodlands Park
**Jungle Adventures Cape Tribulation**  
(Advanced Ecotourism certified & Climate Action Leader)  
Jungle Adventures Cape Tribulation opened to the public the world’s first "Human Hamster Wheel" interactive cable lift as part of their Jungle Surfing Canopy Tour. The innovative and sustainable cable lift acts as a treadmill, using man-power to winch guests into the treetops for their Jungle Surfing adventure.

**Taronga Zoo**  
(Advanced Ecotourism certified)  
Taronga Zoo and partners the Zoo and Aquarium Association (ZAA) and TRAFFIC were awarded a $25,000 Google Grant for development of The Wildlife Witness app to help combat the illegal wildlife trade.

**Venus Bay Eco Retreat**  
(Advanced Ecotourism certified & Climate Action Business)  
Mae Adams, covenator and owner of Venus Bay Eco Retreat in West Gippsland was recognised for her efforts in conservation, having placed a Trust for Nature conservation covenant over her 5.6 ha of native bush on the Venus Bay Peninsula.
Member Achievements

Flyboard Cairns
(Advanced Ecotourism certified)
Flyboard Cairns became sponsors of Cairns Turtle Rehabilitation Centre patient, ‘Barbarella’

Treetops (Treetops Adventure Park Central Coast)
(Ecotourism certified)
Treetops Adventure Park Central Coast took rollercoasters to the next level with their latest attraction, the EcoZip by Ecoline, which was showcased at the IAAPA Attractions Expo 2014 in Orlando, Florida. This flying-fox style rollercoaster is the world’s longest zip-line, at a length of one kilometre, and is even wheelchair accessible.

Leisure Solutions® & EcoGuide
Barry Davies
(Ecotourism certified)
Ecotourism Australia, supported by EA member Leisure Solutions® and award-winning EcoGuide, Barry Davies from Gondwana Guides facilitated a group study tour to assist the Forest Bureau and representatives of the Taiwan Ecotourism Association in better understanding the development and system of ecotourism in Australia.

Great Ocean Road Surf Tours
(Advanced Ecotourism certified)
Surf instructors from, rescued three people, including two young girls, from drowning in a dangerous rip at Urquharts Bluff, near Anglesea Victoria.
Member Achievements

**Tri State Safaris**  
(Advanced Ecotourism certified & Climate Action Leader)  
Tri State Safaris’ “Glasses for Vinaka Fiji” campaign saw outstanding generosity with hundreds of pairs of second-hand prescription and reading glasses collected and donated from all across the country and sent to Vinaka Fiji to be passed on to the local people of the Yasawa Islands.

**Oz Whale Watching**  
(Advanced Ecotourism)  
Oz Whale Watching, based in Sydney Harbour, reported on the positive progress of ‘Jude’ their green sea turtle sponsored through Cairns Turtle Rehabilitation Centre.

**Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat**  
(Ecotourism certified)  
Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat was recognised for their ongoing efforts in environmental activity, habitat restoration and regeneration having been awarded full registration for their "Land for Wildlife" program by the Gold Coast City Council.