"Protect our parks
Involve our operators
Invest in the future
Incentivise quality"

Image: Roaring 40ºs Kayaking

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Dear Fellow EA Member,

2018 has been a busy year for Ecotourism Australia Ltd with the usual need to balance and prioritise our use of scarce resources. We operate entirely on a combination of membership & certification fees and fees for services provided within Australia and in some of the developing countries that are our near neighbours. We receive no government subsidies. This year our team, staff, interns, and Directors have been carrying out a complete review of our certification programs to ensure that the criteria we apply represent the highest standards in each aspect of a member’s ecotourism business. We have also worked hard to ensure that the process of getting certified is as simple as possible without cutting any corners on standards. Our auditing policy and process have also been revised and a team of part-time auditors has been engaged and trained. They are experienced professionals in their fields and are located out where you are doing your work, whether it in one of the cities or way out in the Kimberley or on an offshore island. The revised programs and this network will ensure that we remain the undisputed leader in what we do in these competitive times. These programs are the very basis of what we do for our industry operator members and are used as tools by other members, such as protected area managers, to assist in the selection of operators to be granted special privileges.

One of our directors, Ms. Shelley Lavender, of Victoria, has been notable in her leadership on overseeing these programs throughout her ten years on our Board. She is standing down at this AGM. I sincerely thank her for her service and support and, on behalf of all of you, wish her the very best for the future.

Our membership is diverse and covers a variety of stakeholders across the breadth of our industry including all the Protected Area Managers and many leaders in marketing, regional development, research and other aspects of tourism, in Australia and overseas.

We bring together all these groups to interact with the backbone of the industry, our actual ecotourism operators out there on the ground. In our annual review of the organisation and of our strategic directions earlier this year we recognised the need to be well engaged across all the matters that influence and drive ecotourism in this country so that we provide the obvious link between governments and our industry.

Other than providing the certification programs and assisting with the marketing of members’ products, these networks and our use of them to advocate is one of the benefits valued by our ecotourism operators. I was elected to the Board in 2006 when I was representing a tour operation based out of Darwin, and it was very important to us to have an effective organisation whose people understood and represented our interests well at a national level.

Over my 12 years on the Board, several as Deputy Chairman and Chairman, I have been particularly focussed on this aspect of EA’s role as well as our fundamental programs.

This has been my final year as Chairman; I won’t be contesting for the position at this election, but I shall offer my services as Deputy for a year to support the new Chair in their work. My two-year term as Director still has a year to run.

In conclusion, I thank you, our loyal members, for your ongoing support. I thank all my fellow Directors and especially, Deputy Chair, Dr. Claire Ellis of Tasmania, for their hard work and support throughout the year. Last but by no means least, I thank our CEO, Mr. Rod Hillman, for his hard work and untiring devotion to EA and our goals through another year. Without the work of Rod and his dedicated team in the office, we could not achieve all the things we have. I thank you, one and all, and wish you the best for the coming year.

Rick Murray
Chairman
Ecotourism Australia Ltd
2017-18 was another year of solid growth and activity, fantastic success by our operators and expansion into new programs that bring benefit to our members. This year saw 19 members win big at the National Tourism Awards, 25% of all winners, reinforcing the fact that "ECO certified tourism" is Australia's true brand of quality. It was also another busy year at the Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE), where well over 100 Ecotourism Australia members were selling their products directly to the international market. For eight years we've had a booth at ATE, talking to international buyers about our members' products and what the ECO certified tourism brand means and stands for. We also attended as a buyer, so we could meet up with our members and see how their year has gone and how we can help – always an enjoyable experience.

This year our ECO Certification Program turns twenty-one! It was the first in the world and remains the global standard for tour operators seeking to verify their ecotourism credentials. Our congratulations, and enormous thanks, to these trailblazers who have been with us from the start:

Binna Burra Canopy Rainforest Tree Houses & Wildlife Sanctuary
Exceptional Kangaroo Island Gecko Canoeing and Trekking
Gippsland High Country Tours Kingfisher Bay Resort
Ocean Rafting O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat
Quicksilver Connection Silky Oaks Lodge & Healing Waters Spa
Skyrail Rainforest Cableway Tour Gold Coast
Wavelength Reef Cruises Wildlife Habitat

We believe one of the best ways to support our members is to support our regions. By working with local councils, RTOs and communities, we can assist in creating an environment in which visitors and guests will have a true ecotourism experience. To reinforce this, we are piloting a project in Douglas Shire, where we aim to create the world’s first certified ecotourism destination in which the local council aims to satisfy all requirements of the Global Sustainable Tourism Destination criteria plus the ecotourism criteria developed by Ecotourism Australia with the assistance of the University of Queensland. We are very excited by the project and are sure the benefits will flow to our members, the business community and residents. Lord Howe Island has also signed up with very strong interest from other areas.

I want to genuinely thank my fantastic team at Ecotourism Australia. They do awesome work, with passion and do amazing things. I’d also like to thank my Board for all their support, commitment, and strategic direction. In closing, I want to thank and applaud my retiring Chair (not retiring from the Board), Rick Murray. He is a unique man who defines the words integrity and commitment and it has been a pleasure to work with him seeking his advice, support, and friendship.

Rod Hillman
Chief Executive
Ecotourism Australia works hard to deliver on our promise to provide recognition and credibility and provide value to our members. We do this through our sponsorship of the 'Ecotourism' category at the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards, representing our members at the Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE), acting as the secretariat for Australia’s Tourism and Parks Agencies’ Forum (TAPAF), hosting the Global Eco Asia Pacific Tourism Conference (the world's longest-running ecotourism conference) every year and maintaining strong relationships with national and state tourism agencies.

2017/ 2018 Membership Summary:

• Certified membership grew by 7%
• More than 40% have been members for over 10 years
• Total annual revenue of EA certified members is $1.4B
• All State and National Government Protected Area Management Agencies are now financial members

Did you know?
Our members employ more than 11,000 people in sustainable, regionally based jobs

Audit Revamp:
After a comprehensive review of our auditing program in 2017/18, we have completely redesigned our auditor training process and brought on board five new, regionally based independent auditors. All of these new auditors have strong backgrounds in tourism and/or environmental management. They are in their final stages of training and look forward to meeting their region’s operators in the near future.
DELIVERING ON OUR PROMISE

2017 QANTAS Tourism Awards:
• 21% of all finalists were Ecotourism Australia certified
• 25% of all awards were won by Ecotourism Australia members
• EA certified operators won 24% of all gold, 32% of all silver and 20% of all bronze awards

Australian Tourism Exchange
This year’s Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE) was held in Adelaide and brought together over 2,200 attendees for the nation’s most important annual business-to-business travel and tourism event. Ecotourism Australia represented as both a buyer and a seller, enabling us to interact with as many people as possible. This was a fantastic opportunity for us to build our relationships with current members and meet with both international and domestic buyers.
We were fortunate to share our booth with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority which drew many international buyers who wanted to know more about our iconic Great Barrier Reef. We felt the day was hugely successful and were pleased with the amount of support and interest we received.

ATE Highlights:
• Over 140 of our certified operators were represented
• 26% of all sellers were EA certified operators
• Our certified operators were officially allowed to display their certification logos on their panels, strengthening our brand recognition

25th Global Eco Conference:
We hosted our 25th Global Eco Conference in Adelaide from 27-29 November 2017. This is the longest running ecotourism conference in the world and as usual, was well represented by international and domestic tourism professionals and experts.

SATIC Conference:
Our Communications and Audit Manager Lina Cronin and Director Michele Bain attended the 2018 SATIC Tourism Conference and presented a workshop titled: ‘Flaunt your assets: positioning yourself for the new nature tourism movement through ecotourism.’ This conference was attended by a record-breaking number of delegates for two full days of professional development and networking.
Since January 2018, we have taken a more targeted marketing approach to our news and social media. This is to ensure we focus on different aspects of ecotourism and give our members ample opportunity to participate and be showcased. The themes that have been running this year include The Bucket List (January – May), Celebrating our Culture (June – July), Nature Sleeps (August) and now Year of the Reef (September – November). To get involved in these campaigns, please contact our Communications Manager, Lina at lina@ecotourism.org.au and keep an eye on our monthly EcoBytes e-newsletter.

**Instagram**

Our most popular Instagram post was from Kingfisher Bay Resort with 114 likes

**News**

Our most popular article had 296 reads

**Facebook**

Our most popular Facebook Post featured Blue Dolphin Marine Tours and reached 4.1k people

**Did you know?**

We have featured 51 of our operators in articles over the financial year.

**In the past financial year...**

- Facebook followers grew 22%
- Facebook likes grew 19%
- Instagram followers grew 19%
- Twitter followers grew 27%
- 229,712 EA website views

**We have:**

- **4.6k** Facebook followers
- **2.4k** Instagram followers
- **3.6k** Twitter followers
- **2.3k** LinkedIn followers
CELEBRATING 21 YEARS!

ECO Certification comes of age
celebrating 21 years of quality ecotourism

Ecotourism Australia’s ECO certification was launched 1996, as the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program – NEAP, and had eighteen certified members by February 1997. The certification was the world's first, and it remains the global standard for ecotourism. Now, more than twenty years have passed, and fourteen of our original members are still with us! This is a tremendous testament not only to the quality and benefits of ECO certification but more to the ongoing commitment of these pioneers. We appreciate, value and applaud these tour operators and can’t thank them enough for their ongoing support.

- Binna Burra
- Canopy Rainforest Tree Houses & Wildlife Sanctuary
- Exceptional Kangaroo Island
- Gecko Canoeing and Trekking
- Gippsland High Country Tours
- Kingfisher Bay Resort
- Ocean Rafting
- O’Reilly’s Rainforest Retreat
- Quicksilver Connection
- Silky Oaks Lodge & Healing Waters Spa
- Skyrail Rainforest Cableway
- Tour Gold Coast
- Wavelength Reef Cruises
- Wildlife Habitat

Congratulations and a special thank you to all of these members!

We are also pleased to see 40% of our members are Green Travel Leaders - members who have been certified for more than 10 years.

Images left to right: Ocean Rafting, Exceptional Kangaroo Island, Silky Oaks Lodge, Quicksilver Connection, Skyrail Rainforest Cableway
Advanced Ecotourism NSW

My Green Buttler was created by Christopher and Sophie Warren of Crystal Creek Meadows as a means to encourage sustainable tourism. Their project was featured in the 2017 United Nations World Tourism Organisation magazine, a great achievement for the small company! Additionally, their creative thinking earnt them an award at the World Responsible Tourism Awards in October 2017. They are the first accommodation provider from Australia or New Zealand to receive this award and have earnt their status as a recognised world leader in tourism. My Green Butler is currently being trialed in 3 different countries with hopes to expand in the near future.

Tasmanian Walking Company

Advanced Ecotourism TAS

The Tasmanian Walking Company was awarded gold at this year’s Australian Tourism Awards in the 'Ecotourism' category. Receiving this award for the 3rd consecutive year has earnt them a spot in the prestigious Hall of Fame and put them amongst other the elite tourism award winners. It’s great to see that their commitment to demonstrating best environmental practice is recognised and appreciated by many. We wish them luck at the next round of Australian Tourism Awards.
MEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS

Conservation Ecology Centre

Advanced Ecotourism VIC
In January the Conservation Ecology Centre was deservedly awarded $2 million in federal government funding for their latest project, Wildlife Wonders. This project will draw ecotourism to the Otways area by offering visitors exclusive opportunities to join qualified conservationist guides in observing iconic fauna in a predator-free setting. The development is expected to generate approximately 35 new full-time positions in ecotourism and conservation in addition to local jobs during its construction. We look forward to the completion of this project later in the year and congratulate them on their hard work and achievement!

Ecotourism QLD
This iconic bright pink amphibian vessel of 1770 LARC! Tours is well known for giving its customers an unforgettable journey around Bustard Bay and the Town of 1770. With tours that showcase the nature, culture and heritage value of the historical area, it's no surprise that 1770 LARC! Tours has been honored into the Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence Hall of Fame for achieving Trip Advisor’s Certificate of Excellence for 5 consecutive years. These unique, low impact vehicles can take on virtually any terrain, making them the perfect form of transport to experience the picturesque coastline of the Southern Great Barrier Reef region. Keep up the good work guys!
MEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS

Kakadu National Park

National Park, NT

Taking out gold for the category of Major Tourism Attraction at the Australian Tourism Awards was the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park. This achievement is a huge tribute to all the Traditional Owners, Parks Australia staff and ecotourism operators who work hard to ensure the natural and cultural beauty of the site is preserved and maintained. Drawing over 180,000 tourists a year, Kakadu National Park is a truly wondrous place that deserves to hold this title.

Araucaria Ecotours

Advanced Ecotourism QLD

Ronda Green, the owner of Araucaria Ecotours, played a major role in organising the very first bioblitz in the Scenic Rim region. Over a 48 hour period, the flora, fauna, and fungi of the area were extensively surveyed by all types of nature lovers who were willing to face the rain and contribute to this wonderful citizen science project. Results of the survey will contribute enormously to future research and conservation studies and were added to databases that can be accessed across the globe. Ronda’s commitment to the project is admirable and its success will no doubt contribute to many future research projects.
**MEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS**

**Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary**

*Advanced Ecotourism & ROC QLD*

Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary opened their new Ngulli Nyeumba Amphitheatre which they launched on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Children’s Day. The amphitheatre was designed to be an area where visitors could learn about the local Indigenous culture of the Yugambeh people and now holds a daily Aboriginal dance show. The Ngulli Nyeumba Amphitheatre is a tribute to the local Indigenous people and is a beautiful place to hold future Indigenous education events.

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**Coodlie Park Farm Retreat**

*Advanced Ecotourism, CA & ROC, SA*

Coodlie Park Farm Retreat have made outstanding contributions to combating climate change, including:

- Becoming a 100% carbon neutral business
- Setting aside 2,000 acres of their property for environmental rehabilitation
- Returning 70% of their energy back to the national grid through a solar grid system
- Seeding 250 acres of native trees
- The Educational School & Special Interest Group Programs giving school groups hands-on experience and knowledge about the practical application of carbon reduction initiatives

We applaud their efforts!
MEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS

Thala Beach Nature Reserve

Advanced Ecotourism QLD
Thala Beach Nature Reserve joined the exclusive list of accommodation operators who make up the National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World. Set on 145 acres of World Heritage Listed rainforest and with its own private beach, this family owned and run business has put conservation and regeneration of the surrounding area as a top priority. The pristine rainforest is the ultimate environment for guests to spot wildlife, join a free nature tour, stargaze at its very own observatory or simply relax in the 5 star accommodation and enjoy nature at its finest.

Cape to Cape Explorer Tours

Advanced Ecotourism WA
Cape to Cape Explorer Tours won gold for the Ecotourism category at the Western Australia Tourism Awards. Their walking tours showcase the beautiful coast of WA which they are passionate about protecting. Their outstanding efforts include:

• Buying local and choosing minimal or recycled packaging
• Partnering with Leave No Trace
• Being an active member of the ‘Friends of the Cape to Cape Track’ committee

We are proud to see their efforts recognised and congratulate them for their win.
MEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS

Rod Quartermain
Honorary Lifetime Member

In November, Rod was presented with Honorary Lifetime Membership of Ecotourism Australia. Rod is only the third recipient of this award, a reflection of how much work he has contributed both to EA directly and to the ecotourism industry in general. We consider ourselves lucky to have had Rod on our board of directors for four years and his advanced knowledge of the industry has been greatly appreciated. Rod will remain engaged with us as one of our newly appointed Independent Auditors.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Ecotourism Destination Certification

In 2016, we launched Ecotourism Destination Certification specifically designed for national parks and other protected areas.

Feedback highlighted the need for a Regional Ecotourism Destination Certification where the whole region could be assessed and verified as an authenticated ecotourism destination. This regional approach brings support to our certified members by ensuring the visiting public see the destination as an ecotourism destination and the authorising body – council – becomes a strong supporter.

Douglas Shire saw this vision and has agreed to pilot a new approach where Ecotourism Australia has partnered with the GSTC Accredited Green Destinations program to establish this unique, world first scheme.

Lord Howe Island has also signed up for the program with Christmas Island showing very strong interest. Once the program is established, we will formally launch it throughout Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific.
A membership survey was conducted in August 2018 to guide and inform Ecotourism Australia’s decision making and strategic approach. This builds on our annual surveys and helps us to ensure we are focused on the issues that are important to you as members.

Key learnings from the survey included:

The key value members seek from Ecotourism Australia are:
- Credibility and recognition
- Access to National Park permits and licenses
- Access to the ECO certified tourism branding
- Overall competitive advantage to attract more customers
- Aligning your business and personal values with a globally recognised brand

Strong support for Ecotourism Australia to continue:
- Attending ATE to promote the ECO certified tourism brand to international buyers
- Sponsoring the Ecotourism category at the National Tourism Awards
- The Global Eco conference, and
- Masterclasses in regional areas

Members are asking us to do more in:
- Promoting smaller businesses
- Raising general awareness of ecotourism in the community
- Overall marketing support

The key issues members want Ecotourism Australia to be strong advocates for are:
- Encouraging sustainable tourism
- Digital connectivity
- Climate change
- The Great Barrier Reef
- Promotion of Indigenous tourism

Members have a positive outlook, with 68% saying their business performed better than the previous year and 60% noting that their business performed better than they had expected.

We thank all who participated in the survey.
2018 MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Of 98* respondents...

94% are satisfied that our products and services add value to their business

76% value the overall competitive advantage from their membership

90% found their auditor experienced and helpful

Our members have a POSITIVE OUTLOOK for Australia's ecotourism industry

66% found their business performed better than last year

58% found their business performed better than expected

Top issues raised by our members that EA should address

Research on ecological impacts of tourism

Masstourism Economic impact model

Promotion of indigenous tourism

Digital connectivity

Encourage sustainable tourism

Climate change

Great Barrier Reef Conservation

"We are a small organisation and ecotourism is just a part of what we do - the cost of attending ATE is prohibitive for us. Representation by EA is therefore extremely valuable. Your current approach is working very well for us."

*that's >20% of our certified operators