

# Ecotourism Australia—Blueprint for a Sustainable Future

## 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 (Deloitte, 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.

**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.

## 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.**





# 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.

### **6. Develop Ecotourism Plans.**

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

### **7. Boost Tourism Research.**

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.