
ECOTOURISM AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL REPORT

2018 / 2019





” PROTECT OUR PARKS
INVOLVE OUR OPERATORS
INVEST IN THE FUTURE
INCENTIVISE QUALITY ”

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CHAIR'S REPORT

Globally, tourism continues to grow and this creates challenges and opportunities for both ourselves and our members. Global media highlights the issues of overtourism, and many of our competitor destinations continue to invest heavily in infrastructure, product development and marketing, considerably improving their tourism offers. Australia's clear unique selling point and point of difference continues to be our nature/culture and the quality of our tour operations. These both motivate and reward our domestic and international visitors. As Ecotourism Australia, we seek opportunities to build on these USPs by adopting a commitment to constant improvement. Broadly, our work assists in driving more sustainable tourism – helping to ensure that the environment is well managed and protected and that tourism delivers real benefits to our communities. Our systems encourage operators and destinations to strive for excellence and to flourish, reaping the benefits of their improvements.

Ecotourism Australia works with businesses, destinations, academics and all levels of government to provide frameworks and scaffolding so that desired outcomes can be realised. We continue to improve our certification programs to ensure they set best practice standards. We work closely with protected area managers to create programs where businesses who follow best practice are rewarded and encouraged. Recent major global partnerships have enabled us to now certify and support destinations. These new systems will help us better support the industry and more clearly drive sustainable outcomes that, in turn, deliver more success. It has been a year of hard work and major change for us. Our investment in research with our partners at The University of Queensland and our work at the highest levels globally are assisting us to implement further improvements for our members' benefit.

The past year has also been another tremendous year for our members. We have celebrated our first 20-year Hall of Fame memberships; nearly 25% of all winners at the Australian Tourism Awards were Ecotourism Australia members; more than 20% of all sellers at the Australian Tourism Exchange displayed their ECO certified branding and the significant interest by destinations to become part of the Ecotourism Australia community has been exciting.

This success by our members demonstrates their hard work in maintaining best practice standards and commitment to the visitor experience. On my regular travels across Australia, particularly to regional Australia, it is always a pleasure to see our members, many committing to leadership roles in their community and tourism associations, working hard to make their community a better place to live in as well as visit.

Next year, our focus continues to be on bringing benefits to our members and creating real outcomes through ecotourism. Many exciting opportunities await!

I was elected Chair in October 2018 and I want to thank my fellow Board members for their unstinting support and hours of committee work. You are a great team and a pleasure to work with. I'd also like to acknowledge the work of our office - Rod, Nadine, Lina, Alyssa, Fay and Eloise – developing new programs and implementing our system improvements while running the core business is not easy - and I thank them for their commitment and passion to our organisation and members.



CLAIRE ELLIS
CHAIR

ECOTOURISM AUSTRALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CEO'S REPORT

The past year has been a year of product development at Ecotourism Australia. We have made a concerted effort to improve and expand our offerings to our members and the broader tourism industry.

This year, a clear Board decision was made for management to focus on: (i) better serving our members through ensuring our certification applications and programs are 100% online, (ii) leading and facilitating the ecotourism industry's transition to a low carbon future, (iii) increasing our value to protected area managers (PAMs), government and non-government agencies through an increase in programs and services (such as the Parks Peer Review), (iv) creating positive business environments for ecotourism to thrive (ECO Destination Certification and High Standard Tour Operator programs with PAMs), and (v) being a well-managed and sustainable organisation. I'm pleased to advise we have either achieved or are well progressed on all these tasks.

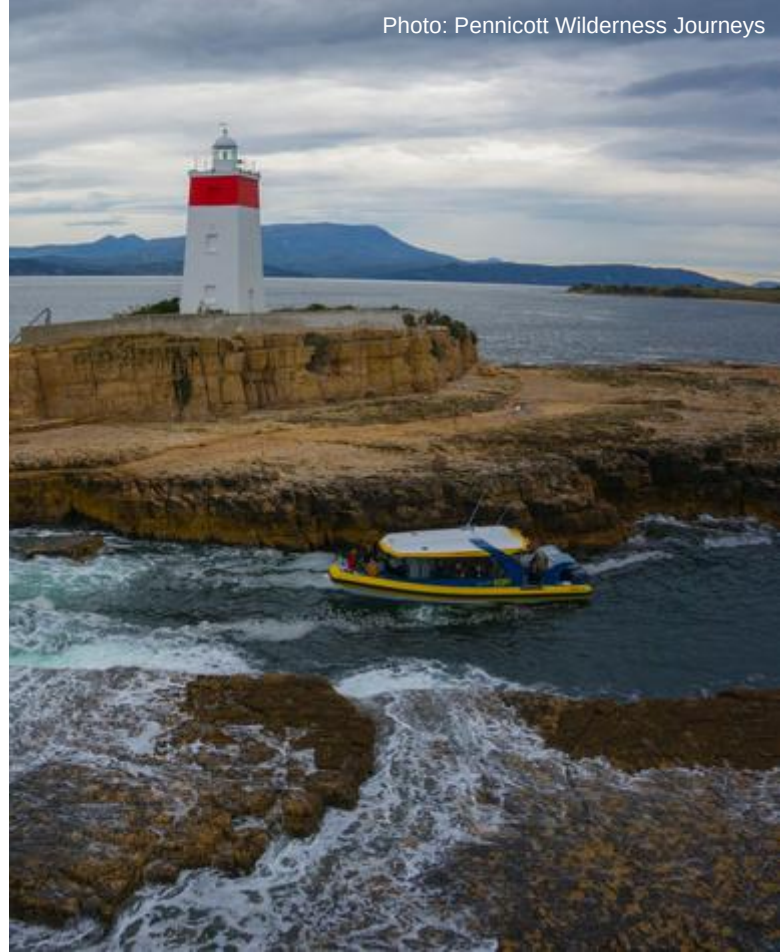
Our ECO Certification application process is now 100% online and we will transition all members' files over to the portal where they can be easily accessed and maintained by members and the office alike. This has been an enormous undertaking and our first batch of applicants has provided very positive feedback.

Our new independent auditing program is fully implemented and for those of you who have been audited we hope it has been a beneficial experience. We have engaged a highly qualified, regionally-based and experienced team to deliver our audits.

Another exciting development is that ecotourists are making decisions on who and where to visit based on how the destination and tour operators manage their impacts. More and more, we are seeing that travellers do their research and want to see evidence, for example, that destinations and operators are measuring, reducing, offsetting, reporting and auditing their emissions. We have spent significant time and effort in sourcing and modifying a fit-for-purpose carbon calculator for our members to do this. This has proven to be a challenging task, but we expect to pilot the tool shortly before rolling out the program in 2020.

The Parks Peer Review (PPR) program has been developed and is ready for implementation after a series of trials in New Zealand. We hope to announce shortly the venue for the first PPR.

Business thrives when the surrounding environment is supportive. We have seen the evidence of this where PAMs who strongly support High Standard Tour Operators see the results, with tour operators choosing to follow the high standard and high quality pathway.



To enhance this we have developed, in partnership with a globally accredited program, ECO Destination Certification. In this, destinations (usually local councils and/or regional tourism organisations (RTOs) develop ecotourism and sustainable tourism policies, procedures and practices that encourage businesses to follow an ecotourism pathway through ECO certifying their region.

Douglas Shire will be our first ECO certified destination in November. They have clearly identified themselves as an ecotourism destination through targeted promotional campaigns, by providing discounts and marketing incentives for ECO certified operators and by ensuring their programs and policies are designed to encourage the sustainable growth of ecotourism in their region. We also have Mt Hotham, Townsville, Lord Howe Island and Bay of Plenty (NZ) in the program, with strong interest continuing from a range of other destinations.

I close with thanking our members for their support over the last year. In 2019 we have our second group of 20+ year members joining our Hall of Fame, which is a tremendous vote of confidence in the value they see in their membership and in being part of our Ecotourism Australia family. I also thank our office team who work extremely hard on your behalf, our pool of independent auditors who are out in the field as our eyes and ears and the expert leadership and commitment of our Board.

Thank you.

ROD HILLMAN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
ECOTOURISM AUSTRALIA LTD





“ The importance of ECO tourism certification is that it gives you credibility. If customers have heard of ECO tourism certification they will know that the company has been vetted carefully and they are likely to have the experience as stated and that eco credentials have been tested.

John and Jenny Edmonston, Wavelength Reef Cruises, 2018



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

2018/19



UNWTO PARTNERSHIP

This year saw Ecotourism Australia sign an historic partnership agreement with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The partnership, formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili and Ecotourism Australia Chair Dr Claire Ellis, cements Ecotourism Australia's position as a global leader in the field of sustainable and nature-based tourism. The partnership also sets the stage for increased collaboration between the two organisations and the creation of a stronger platform from which to promote nature-based tourism and ecotourism.



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PARTNERSHIP

In November 2018, at the 26th Global Eco Conference in Townsville, Ecotourism Australia signed an official partnership agreement with The University of Queensland to encourage collaboration, boost university level research and support Ecotourism Australia's members and the industry.



26TH GLOBAL ECO CONFERENCE



Held in Townsville (QLD), the 2018 Global Eco Conference once again brought together the nation's leading experts on nature-based tourism to discuss some of the industry's big issues – including overtourism, the state of the Great Barrier Reef and the best way to develop ecotourism opportunities in Australia's protected areas.

At this conference, we also recognised the first 14 certified operators to enter into our Ecotourism Australia Hall of Fame for being certified for 20+ years.



ECO CERTIFICATION CRITERIA REVIEW



Over the last 18 months, a comprehensive review of the ECO Certification program criteria was conducted to simplify the application process and ensure its criteria accurately reflected current global best practice standards for sustainable, minimal impact tourism.

Updates included changes in how guidance is integrated into the application process; stronger criteria around minimising carbon footprints; more inclusive criteria around accessibility and general updates on industry standards.

PARKS PEER REVIEW

Ecotourism Australia has partnered with New Zealand Parks Agencies Managers Group (PAMG), a special interest group of the New Zealand Society of Local Government Managers (SOLGM), to implement and manage the Parks Peer Review (PPR) program in Australia.

The PPR program involves bringing together representatives from parks agencies throughout Australia and New Zealand to provide support and advice on the management of protected areas within Australia. This offers valuable insight to management agencies in order to help them solve specific challenges, seek consultation or improve their existing practices.

2018 AUSTRALIAN TOURISM AWARDS

Ecotourism Australia certified operators once again cleaned up at this year's Qantas Australian Tourism Awards, taking home over a quarter of all awards including six gold, nine silver and six bronze.

"Our certified operators run amazing businesses. They're not just focused on sustainability – they're out there delivering exceptionally high-quality experiences that their visitors can't stop talking about." - Rod Hillman, Ecotourism Australia CEO

Well done everyone!



CAIRNS MASTERCLASS



Ecotourism Australia ran its first 1-day Ecotourism Masterclass in Cairns in September 2018. With seven high level speakers presenting on such diverse topics as ecotourism excellence, conservation and philanthropy, Indigenous tourism, citizen science and wearing your heart on your sleeve, attendees were given practical tips and inspiration on how to improve their business. Feedback from this workshop was resoundingly positive:

“If you're a new starter in the industry (like me) it's a must because you can meet amazing people and learn from so many different experiences.”
Kerim El Gabaili, participant

“[The masterclass gave me] great insight into other businesses and what happens in other states. [It] reconfirmed the need to keep the ecotourism flag held high.”
Abi Ralph, participant, Daintree Discovery Centre.



ECO CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP WITH MACKAY TOURISM

In May 2019, Mackay Tourism hosted a certification workshop for tourism operators in the region. Presented by Ecotourism Australia staff Eloise Touchot and Lina Cronin, this workshop gave operators the opportunity to learn about Ecotourism Australia's certification programs and processes, speak face-to-face with EA representatives and like-minded operators, and hear first-hand from a certified operator about their own experience obtaining certification.



2019 ONLINE PLATFORM LAUNCH

Ecotourism Australia's online platform (mycertification.eco) was finalised in 2018/19, ready for new certification applicants to complete their certification applications online in the new financial year. Designed with both new applicants and existing certified operators in mind, the new platform streamlines the application process through simple click-through criteria and more detailed guidance. It also makes it possible for multiple staff to work together on their application through a joint business login, and allows easier communication between applicants and their certification coach via a remarks tab.



"I would personally like to thank everyone at Ecotourism Australia. When initially attending the introductory meeting at Mossman Gorge I left feeling overwhelmed thinking this would be unachievable. 9 months down the track I could not commend the organisation enough on their understanding, patience, coaching, support and encouragement to help our 'farm' achieve its goal. Everyone I encountered at Ecotourism is amazing, professional and friendly - we only wish all organisations were as pleasurable to work with as you all are. Well done guys, we love everything you do!"

*Narda Reichl
Hook-A-Barra
19 July 2019*



ECO DESTINATION CERTIFICATION

Ecotourism Australia's newest certification program, ECO Destination Certification, was officially launched at last year's 26th Global Eco Conference.

Originally announced as a pilot for the project in 2018, the Douglas Shire Council has made incredible progress towards achieving their certification, entering into the application stage of the program and earning themselves a place in the 2018 Sustainable Destinations Top 100.

Their progress and growing interest in the program, led Ecotourism Australia to recruit a Programs Manager - Alyssa Sanders, to help review and finalise the certification process.

With Alyssa on board, the pilot has quickly transitioned into a full program, with 2018/19 seeing two additional destinations enter into the application stage: Lord Howe Island Management Board and Mt Hotham Alpine Resort. More recently, Townsville City Council and Tourism Bay of Plenty (NZ) have also been engaged. Ecotourism Australia looks forward to working with these destinations to help them to achieve their ECO Destination Certification.



HOTHAM





“ The company benefits greatly from doing the audits and from maintaining our eco certification. It is a really important element of our business that strongly supports the core values of the business and the adventures that we provide. ”

Justine Thompson, TreeTops, 2019

COMMUNICATIONS & SOCIAL MEDIA

SOME STAND-OUT CAMPAIGNS THAT RAN THIS YEAR:

Humans of the Reef | Everyday Ecotourism Heroes | Celebrating Language and Culture | August Adventures



If you are interested in getting involved with any future campaigns, email us at lina@ecotourism.org.au and keep an eye out for our monthly EcoBytes e-newsletter for information on how to get involved.

Instagram - most loved picture



Featuring: [@tasmaniaparks](#)
Photo Credit: [@elorunstheworld](#)

Facebook - most liked post



Article Link: nextshark.com/banana-leaves-asia-plastic-packaging/

Currently sharing our passion for ecotourism with over **20K** people!

6.8k via Facebook

3k via Instagram

3.8k via Twitter

4k via EcoBytes

2.8K via LinkedIn

HALL OF FAME



More than twenty years after the launch of Ecotourism Australia's ECO certification program, it still remains a global standard for ecotourism. The Ecotourism Australia Hall of Fame recognises and applauds Ecotourism Australia's longest-standing members - those who have held certification for 20 years or longer. This year, we welcomed another 12 certified operators to our Hall of Fame. We congratulate them on their efforts and thank them for their ongoing support.

Grampians
Personalised Tours
and Adventures



Tropic Wings Cairns
Tours



Paperbark Camp



Yelverton Brook
Eco Spa Retreat and
Conservation
Sanctuary



Billy Tea Safaris



Undara Experience



Billabong Sanctuary



Down Under Tours
(Australia)
Pty Ltd



Daintree
Discovery
Centre



Everglades Eco
Safaris



Far Out
Adventures



Cairns
Adventure
Group



MEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS

AUSTRALIAN TOURISM AWARDS

Ecotourism Australia certified operators took home over a quarter of all awards at the 2018 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards, including six gold, nine silver and six bronze. With 21 awards won overall, Ecotourism Australia would have come first in the awards tally if it were a state.

Congratulations to Busselton Jetty, Calypso Star Charters, Capricorn Caves, Cicada Lodge, Cobbold Village, Fun Over Fifty, Kimberley Quest, Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park, Mossman Gorge Centre, Nitmiluk Tours, Ocean Safari, Paronella Park, Pennicott Wilderness Journeys, Red Cat Adventures, Roaring 40's Kayaking, The Frames Luxury Accommodation, Three Capes Track, Tourism Central Australia, Whitsunday Escape and Willie Creek Pearls.



2018 ADVENTURE TOURISM AWARDS

Kanu Kapers won the Australian Green Award for Eco Tourism at the Adventure Tourism Awards in November 2018. Other certified winners included Drop Bear Adventures, Calypso Star Charters and Live Ningaloo. Congratulations!



THE FRAMES (SA)

The Frames entered the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards Hall of Fame this year in the category of Self-Contained Accommodation - a recognition of their commitment to sustainability and exceptional service. Congratulations!



PROFESSOR ROSS DOWLING

Member of the Order of Australia (AM) recipient, 2019

Life Member of Ecotourism Australia, Professor Ross Dowling, received a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in June 2019 for his significant service to higher education, tourism and conservation.



RICK MURRAY

NT Tourism Minister's Perpetual Award recipient, 2018

Rick Murray, Deputy Chair of Ecotourism Australia, was awarded the NT Tourism Minister's Perpetual Award in 2018 for his 30+ year contribution to the industry.



NEW MEMBERS 2018/19

In 2018/19, 34 operators achieved certification. Ecotourism Australia welcomed:

ABC Dive & Snorkel

Ecotourism | QLD

Australian Age of Dinosaurs

Nature Tourism | QLD

BIG4 Whitsundays Tropical Eco Resort

Ecotourism | QLD

Cape Tribulation Horse Rides

Ecotourism | QLD

Discovery Adventure Group

Advanced Ecotourism | QLD

Down Under Discoveries

Ecotourism | WA

Epic Ocean Adventures

Nature Tourism | QLD

Gilberton Outback Retreat

Nature Tourism | QLD

Hervey Bay Eco Marine Tours

Advanced Ecotourism, ROC | QLD

Hook-A-Barra

Ecotourism | QLD

Innamincka Hotel

Ecotourism | SA

Kanu Kapers

Advanced Ecotourism | QLD

Let's Go Surfing

Ecotourism | NSW

Margaret River Busselton Tourism Association

Advanced Ecotourism | WA

On the Wallaby Eco Lodge and Tours

Ecotourism | QLD

Outback Elite Tours

Ecotourism | NT

Rainforestation Nature Park

Ecotourism, ROC | QLD

Reefstar Cruises

Ecotourism | QLD

Right Foot Forward WA

Nature Tourism | WA

Southern Fire Wellness

Ecotourism | WA

Straddie Kingfisher Tours

Advanced Ecotourism, ROC | QLD

Surf Sessions

Nature Tourism | VIC

Sweet Farm Tours

Ecotourism | QLD

Swell Lodge

Advanced Ecotourism, Climate Action Business | WA

Sydney Harbour Boat Tours

Ecotourism | NSW

The Hike Collective

Nature Tourism | WA

The Shores Holiday Apartments

Nature Tourism | QLD

Uluru Camel Tours

Advanced Ecotourism, Climate Action Business | NT

Uralba Eco Cottages

Advanced Ecotourism | NSW

Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours

Ecotourism, ROC | NSW

Whitsunday Adventurer

Advanced Ecotourism | QLD

Whitsunday Segway Tours

Ecotourism | QLD

WSUP Stand Up Paddle Boarding

Nature Tourism | VIC

Yuraygir Walking Experiences

Advanced Ecotourism | NSW





“ In a world where ECO can be a deciding factor on whether guests choose us or someone else the importance of having a true ECO offering is of paramount importance. It gives guests the comfort in the knowledge that they are experiencing the best the industry has. Guests want to be safe in the view that they are enjoying their holiday while having little impact on the environment and surrounding region. ”

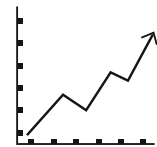
MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

We conduct an annual membership survey to guide and inform our decision making and strategic direction. This survey helps us to ensure we are focused on the issues important to our members.

KEY FINDINGS

73%

of members feel there is a growing consumer demand for certified, sustainable travel experiences.



83%

of members feel EA gives them a valuable competitive advantage.



71%

of members stated that their customers were predominantly domestic.



94%

of members have similar or higher expectations for their business in 2019/20.



91%

of members are satisfied with EAs' products and services overall.



MOST VALUED MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

90% of members find the EA certification logo valuable to their business.

88% of members find the credibility and recognition they get from being EA certified valuable.

82% of members find EAs' role as a positive influencer of change valuable to their business.

92% of members find aligning their values with a globally recognised brand valuable to their business.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2018/19 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ecotourism Australia is governed by a volunteer board of directors from around Australia. These directors share extensive experience in the industry, a passion for ecotourism and a demonstrated commitment to the principles, values and mission of Ecotourism Australia. Together they work to provide strategic direction for the organisation. We would like to thank all of our directors from 2018/19, without whose leadership and commitment we could not have achieved all we did.



CLAIRE ELLIS (CHAIR)
Director
Claire Ellis Consulting

RICK MURRAY (DEPUTY CHAIR)
Managing Director
Middle Star Pty Ltd - Tourism Business
Development Services

MICHELE BAIN
Owner/Manager
Yondah Beach House

**ALYSIA
BRANDENBURG**
Sector Specialist
Tourism and the Experience Economy

PETER COCHRANE
Councillor
International Union for Conservation of
Nature (IUCN)

WENDY HILLS
Manager: Visitor Services
Office of Environment and Heritage
(NSW)

PETER JOHNSON
Owner/Director
Diamond Waters Treehouse Retreat

INNES LARKIN
Owner
Mt Barney Lodge

STEVE WROE
CEO
Daylesford Macedon Tourism

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OUR TEAM

Thanks to our dedicated team:



Rod Hillman
CEO



Fay Dawson
Accounts Manager



Nadine Schramm
Membership
Coordinator



Lina Cronin
Communications &
Audit Manager



Eloïse Touchot
Certification & Policy
Manager



Alyssa Sanders
Programs Manager

With special thanks to:



Emily Ellis
Operations Manager
(2013-2019)



Younghee Choi
Deputy Director
Ministry of
Environment
South Korea
(On secondment)
(2018-2019)



Thank you to all of our 2018/19 interns:

Iñaki Maiztegui
Argentina, 2018
Eleina Antoniou
Australia, 2018
Joana Sponsel
Germany, 2018
Eloïse Touchot
France, 2018
Jenny Elliss
Australia, 2018

Jesper Danielsson
Sweden, 2019
Beile Zhang
China, 2019
Kyle Johnston
Australia, 2019
Mayra Avila
Colombia, 2019

