

# 2019**2020** ANNUAL REPORT





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We acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and elders past, present and future.

## CHAIR'S MESSAGE

### Claire Ellis



As our industry continues to work through this crisis, it is becoming clear that ecotourism will be in an ideal position to support our communities and wider visitors into the future, providing experiences that deliver on the needs and expectations of re-emerging local, national and international travellers. These travellers will be seeking safe but transformational experiences that mentally and physically help them to 'recharge' and connect with what really matters in life – experiences embedded in sustainability; destinations whose communities are engaged and welcoming because their tourism experiences have been designed with respect to community needs; places where the environment and culture are valued by those who live there and experiences which enable meaningful engagement with and contributions to the destination.

The travellers of the future will want to engage with nature to improve their own personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. We have already seen a growing trend in the need for people to reconnect with families and friends as well as nature itself. Tomorrow's travellers will want their travel to make a difference at a personal and wider level.

These are high expectations for the future of travel, but in our eyes, the new world will be a world in which ecotourism will flourish.

The past year has been traumatic for all, but it has also opened our eyes to new opportunities. Ecotourism Australia has partnered with the World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF-Australia) to deliver bushfire recovery programs; our ECO Destination Certification program has grown from strength to strength, our annual Global Eco Conference is likely to be delivered (mostly) via online streaming and applications for ECO Certification have been higher than in any other year. A year ago, none of this was expected.

Powerful voices like Tourism Australia are talking about sustainability for the first time. South Australia's further implementation of its 'Nature Like Nowhere Else' program is impressive. Queensland is near completion of its Nature Based Tourism campaign and nearly every state and territory is really focusing on its nature-based tourism programs and assets.

The time is right for ecotourism and we look forward to working closely with our operators, destinations and stakeholders to realise this promise and see those communities hard hit in recent times prosper again.

In closing, I would like to pass on my thanks to Rod and our staff and also the whole EA Board for their support and hard work over the past year. I'd also like to make special mention of two retiring Board members, Rick Murray and Peter Cochrane, both of whom have made enormous contributions to EA and will be sadly missed.

“

Our ECO Certification gives us a moment of pride to know that our efforts in an eco approach to tourism are acknowledged.

”

Julia Burke  
Pyndan Camel Tracks, NT  
Nature Tourism certified





## CEO'S REPORT Rod Hillman

The challenges of the past year are well known and continuing. COVID has buried its teeth into us and is reluctant to let go whilst the traumas of bushfires, droughts and floods remain. Through all this, the tenacity and resilience shown by the broader industry and EA members has been nothing short of inspirational and has provided solace and support to their communities and staff. We applaud the Federal Government's support through JobKeeper as this is the main reason why many of us have been able to keep our doors open. The State Governments have also helped through waiving fees and charges and introducing a range of grants and support programs that has been needed and appreciated. Obviously, there is more, much more, that will need to come as the shadow of COVID slowly recedes.

The bushfires started in August last year, building on the extensive droughts plaguing our inland regions. The fires rolled on until February causing devastation to huge areas around Australia, but the impact was national. The imagery transmitted around the globe portrayed the whole country to be on fire, stalling international visitors.

After the fires came the floods, then COVID. We're beginning to ask what could possibly come next?

But through all this EA members continued working for their business, their staff and their communities. Members such as Craig Wickham (Exceptional Kangaroo Island) hitting the talkback circuit in the US, Peter Gash (Lady Elliot Island) telling anyone who would listen 'we're open for business' and Kristie Kearney (Wolgan Valley Eco Tours) staying positive through bushfires and COVID and creating new tours. The EA Board and staff thank you all.

We've been busy too, 'building back better'. Since COVID began we have spent considerable time lobbying on behalf of our members and working in a constructive manner with other organisations to present a coordinated voice to governments for the support of tourism needs. A benefit of this crisis is how the range of tourism organisations have rallied and worked together to provide a consistent and powerful message to those in power with great success.

We've also focused on engaging regions with our ECO Destinations program which will bring an increased support regime from local governments and LTO/RTOs to ecotourism operators. During the COVID crisis, we've engaged a further eight (8) regions, increasing our number to 12 committed with a further six expected to join the program before the end of 2020. This means we now have close to 20% of our members within a region applying for ECO Destination certification with the aim of having 50% by the end of 2021.

Another major initiative has been our partnership with the World Wildlife Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF-Australia) where we are working closely with six bushfire impacted regions in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland to assist them in their recovery efforts through sustainable and ecotourism programs.

We are rapidly moving towards a 100% online delivery model for our certification programs making gaining and maintaining certification easier.

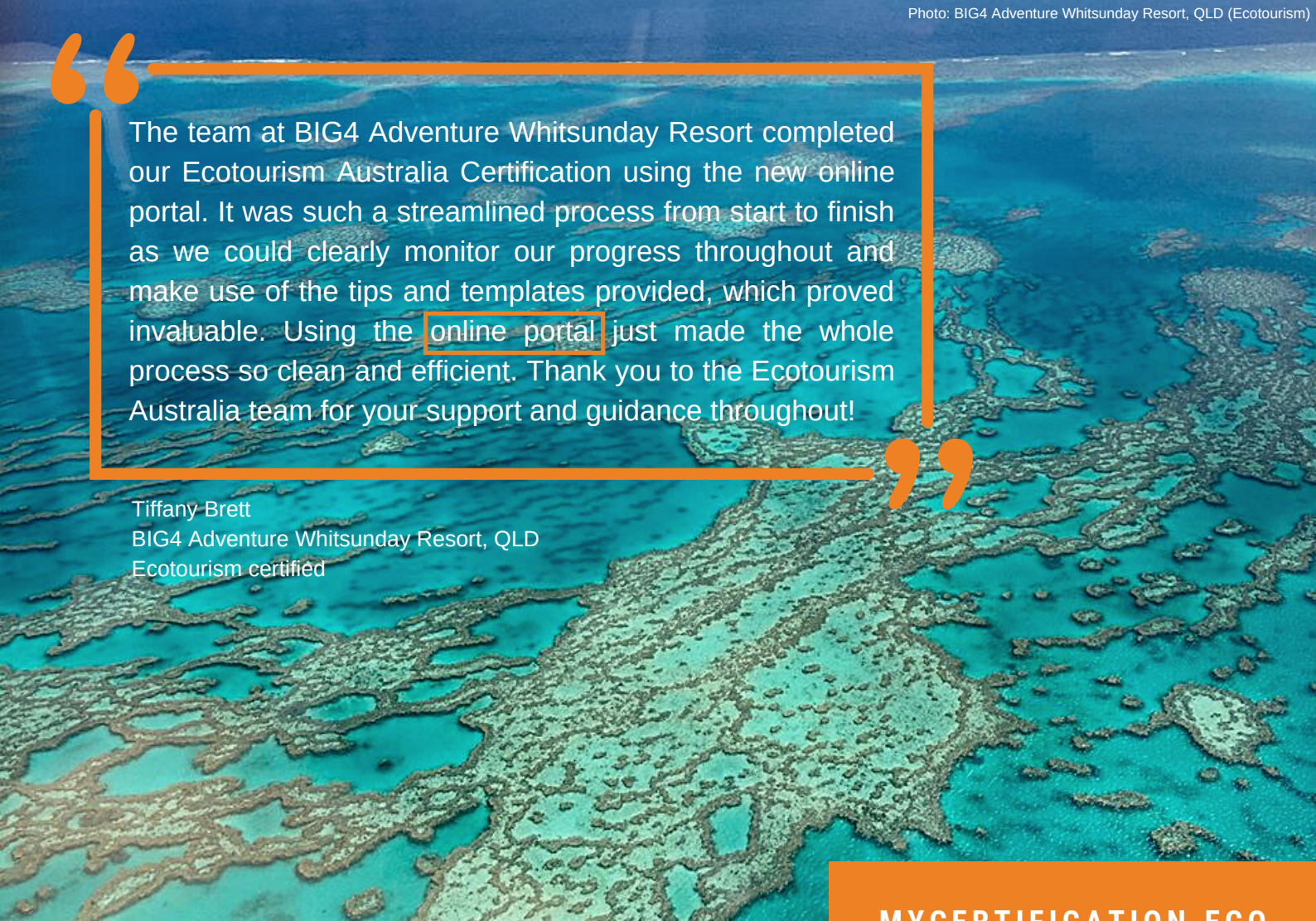
In closing I want to give my personal thanks to you, our incredible members who provide inspiration and support, my dedicated staff who endlessly give more than they are asked and the Board's leadership and strength – especially in these extraordinary times.



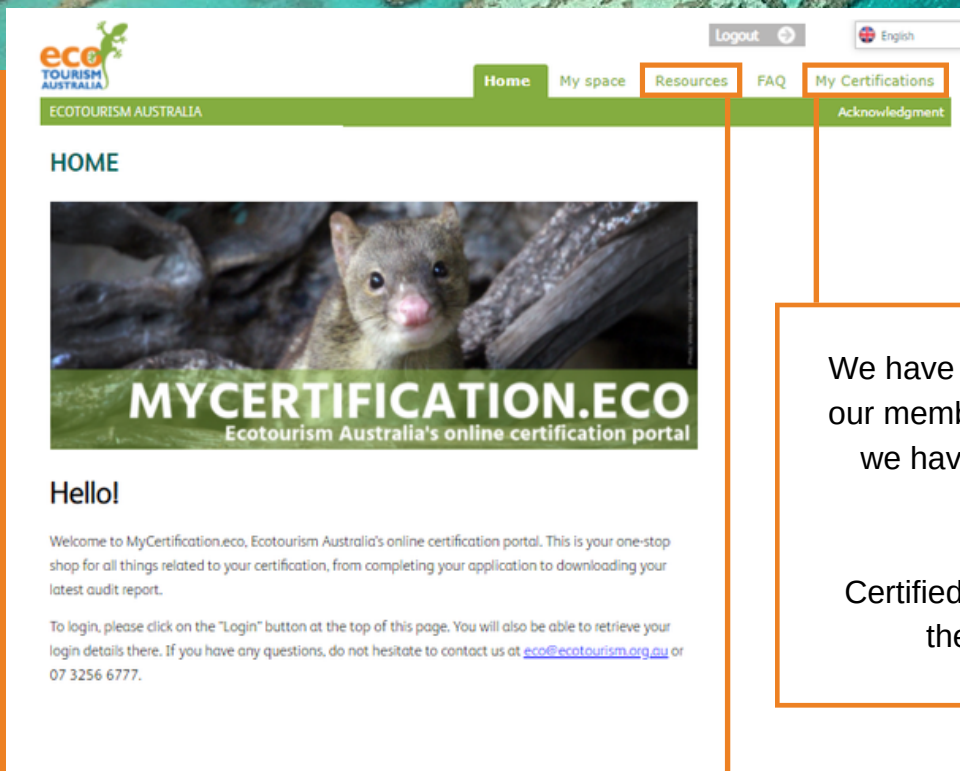
The team at BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort completed our Ecotourism Australia Certification using the new online portal. It was such a streamlined process from start to finish as we could clearly monitor our progress throughout and make use of the tips and templates provided, which proved invaluable. Using the **online portal** just made the whole process so clean and efficient. Thank you to the Ecotourism Australia team for your support and guidance throughout!



Tiffany Brett  
BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort, QLD  
Ecotourism certified



## MYCERTIFICATION.ECO ECOTOURISM AUSTRALIA'S ONLINE CERTIFICATION PORTAL



We have received positive feedback from our members about the online portal, and we have now 100% of our applicants using it.

Certified operators can also upgrade to the ECO V standard online.

Ecotourism Australia has templates, factsheets and best practice examples from other operators available in our Resources section to assist applicants and certified operators improving their operations and meeting the certification standard.

One of the most exciting developments for Ecotourism Australia (EA) over the past 12 months has been the growth in uptake of the ECO Destination Certification Program. At the 2019 Global Eco Asia Pacific Tourism Conference in Cairns, Port Douglas Daintree (QLD) was awarded the title of world's First ECO Certified Destination following months of hard work on their application and the passing of their first onsite audit.

Since then, many other destinations have followed in their footsteps, solidifying their commitment to building a business environment in which ecotourism thrives; ensuring internal and external destination management practices are in line with international best practice sustainability standards; encouraging high yield visitation by offering visitors an easy way of determining where genuine and authentic ecotourism experiences are found; joining an established global network of like-minded destinations striving for ecotourism excellence and demonstrating that their sustainable and ecotourism credentials have been verified by a third-party independent auditor.

According to Tara Bennett, CEO of Tourism Port Douglas Daintree, the certification process was not only tailored to their specific environmental and economic constraints, but also helped them to identify and consolidate their initiatives in a holistic and structured manner:

“The process provided a valuable opportunity to identify and consolidate many of the government, not for profit, commercial actions and initiatives that were in place and bring them together in a structured way. The process importantly allowed us to identify future opportunities to pursue on our process of continuous improvement in sustainable tourism and living,” she said.

Through the program's online platform, council staff who are working on the destination's application can access relevant documents and criteria easily. Topics covered throughout the criteria include destination management, nature and scenery, environment and climate, culture and tradition, social wellbeing and business and hospitality.

**Destinations currently engaged in the program include:**

**Port Douglas Daintree, QLD -  
NATURE DESTINATION CERTIFIED**

- Quandamooka Country, QLD - applying
- Scenic Rim, QLD - applying
- Townsville, QLD - applying
- Wunambal Gaambera Country, WA - applying
- Coastal Bay of Plenty, NZ - applying
- Niue Island - applying

- Augusta-Margaret River, WA - applying
- Bundaberg, QLD - applying
- East Gippsland, VIC - applying
- Lord Howe Island, NSW - applying
- Mount Hotham, VIC - applying





# WWF-AUSTRALIA PARTNERSHIP

Following the 2019/20 bushfires, Ecotourism Australia partnered with the World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF-Australia), with generous funding from the conservation charity assigned to help boost the recovery of Australia's nature-based tourism sector. As part of this new partnership, six bushfire-affected regions were added to the ECO Destination Certification program, including Quandamooka Country (QLD), East Gippsland Shire Council (VIC), Scenic Rim Regional Council (QLD) and Kangaroo Island Council (SA), with the last two still to be decided.

The ECO Destination Certification program combines EA's ecotourism criteria with the Green Destinations Standard for sustainable tourism, which are accredited by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). To find out more about the program, visit [www.ecotourism.org.au/our-certification-programs/eco-destination-certification/](http://www.ecotourism.org.au/our-certification-programs/eco-destination-certification/).



“

The benefit of the program is it acknowledges the individual efforts of the community, businesses and local government helping to unify everyone on a common goal.

”

Tara Bennett  
Chief Executive Officer  
Tourism Port Douglas Daintree, QLD  
ECO Destination certified (Nature Tourism)


# EA'S SUPPORT TO INDUSTRY

As the peak national body in Australia for eco and nature-based tourism, Ecotourism Australia helps our industry to face these challenges and re-emerge from this crisis as a stronger, more resilient and more sustainable sector.

Beyond our certification programs, this year we partnered with WWF-Australia, published supporting articles, including bushfire-affected communities' stories, resources for businesses and tourism destinations.

The Bushfire and Emergency and COVID-19 Information for Industry pages unfold multiple links and references from Federal and State Government bodies. Also, our team released EA's Bushfire and COVID-19 Recovery Position Statements and a supporting document to help businesses to make the most of their downtime and look at ways in which they can improve their current conditions.





Kangaroo Island Odysseys is proud to hold Ecotourism and Climate Action Certification as well as holding Green Travel Leader status.

We stand for all that Ecotourism Australia stands for including nature, quality, credibility, passion, leadership and community, which allows us to consistently offer a true ECO experience to our guests.

Julie-Anne Briscoe  
Kangaroo Island Odysseys, SA  
Advanced Ecotourism & Climate Action  
Business certified

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

## GLOBAL ECO CONFERENCE: THE LONGEST-RUNNING ECOTOURISM CONFERENCE IN THE WORLD

Once again, Ecotourism Australia (EA) hosted the Global Eco Conference in December 2019. This time, the 27th Global Eco Conference was held in Cairns, bringing together Australia's leading ecotourism experts to discuss the industry's main issues. Surrounded by two World Heritage Areas, The Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics Rainforest, Port Douglas Daintree (QLD) was awarded the title of world's First ECO Certified Destination and the event was featured across multiple media platforms. Ecotourism Australia also held a networking event where members could catch up with other certified operators and the EA team, get an update from EA and the benefits of ECO certification, and meet some of our Global Eco attendees.



## ECOTOURISM AUSTRALIA PARTNERS WITH WWF-AUSTRALIA

World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF-Australia) signed a partnership with Ecotourism Australia as a recovery package for the bushfire-affected tourism regions and businesses. This will help six new destinations to embark on the journey to become certified ECO Destinations. Funding from WWF-Australia also supports the development of a bushfire interpretation toolkit for ecotourism operators and a proposed bushfire recovery symposium. The forum will invite different stakeholders from bushfire-affected regions to share their learnings and is built on EA's existing Bushfire Recovery Position Statement,



## A TEAM OF PHD CANDIDATES APPOINTED TO RESEARCH PRESSING ISSUES FACING TOURISM

Four students from a diverse set of backgrounds were selected to conduct research into four crucial topics, taking into account the future needs and current challenges of the industry: transitioning to a low carbon future, sustainable tourism destinations, overtourism in national parks and researching the social licence of conducting commercial tourism into National Parks.

PhD placements and securing of scholarship funds were made possible through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by University of Queensland and Ecotourism Australia at the Global Eco Conference in Townsville in 2018. Regular updates as to the progressing research will be displayed through Ecotourism Australia's communications channels over the relevant period.



Csilla Demeter



Ximena Alvis



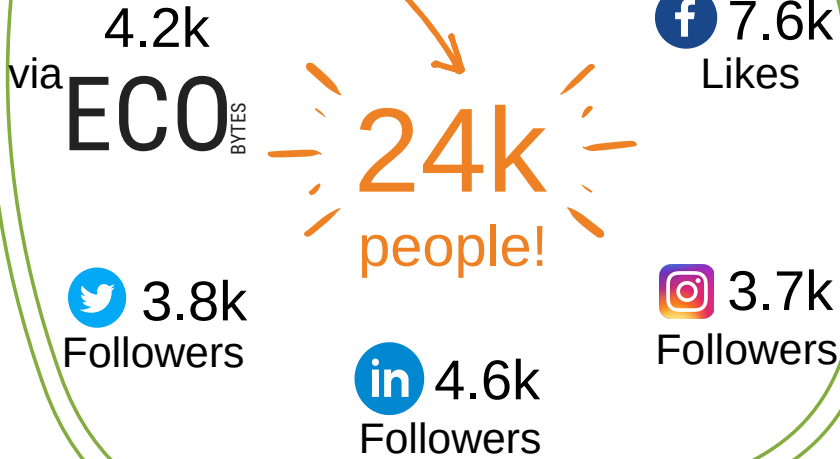
Sonya Underdahl



Thi Hieu Nguyen

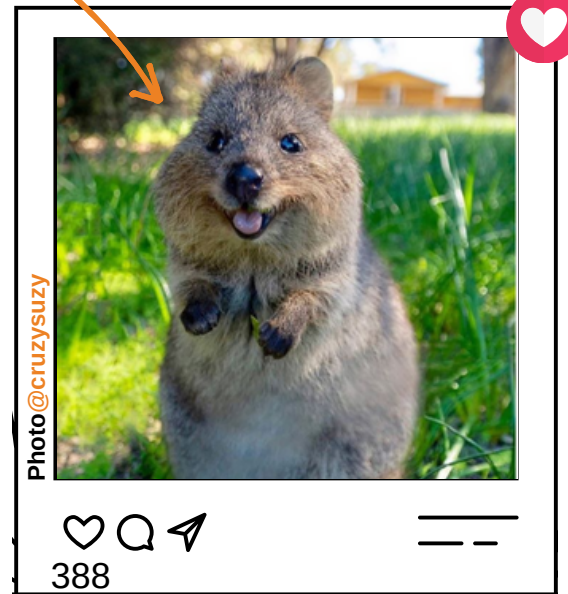
# COMMUNICATIONS & SOCIAL MEDIA

Sharing our passion for ecotourism with almost



Instagram - most loved picture

Featuring @triple\_j @rotnestexpress



## SOME BIG MEMBER STORIES THAT RAN THIS YEAR

Fun Over Fifty



The Joy of Running a Business Sustainably

Skytrek Willow Springs Station



A Family of Overcomers

Calypso Star Charters



From Sharks and Sea Lions to Reducing Energy Use in a Local Gymnastics Club

Venture North Safaris



Venturing to the Top: Eco Certified Operator's Secrets of Success

Diamond Waters Treehouse Retreat



From Eco Treehouses to Eco Destination Events

25 October 2019 · 🌐

A historical day for Uluru.

"There are a whole range of cultural activities in the park that they can participate in. The more they learn, the better they will understand."



ABC.NET.AU

Uluru is now officially closed to climbers

👍❤️👎 219

10 comments 42 shares

Facebook - most liked post

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



“ ECO Certification has made it easier to get national park licences. It also makes customers aware of our commitment to sustainable tourism and the environment. ”

Simon & Lorraine Freeden  
Byron Bay Eco Cruises & Kayaks, NSW  
Advanced Ecotourism certified

# HALL OF FAME

## 2019/20's New entrants to EA's

SAILAWAY (QLD)



DAINTREE RIVER CRUISE CENTRE (QLD)



TREAD LIGHTLY ECO TOURS (NSW)



ARAUCARIA ECOTOURS (QLD)



IMAGINE CRUISES - PORT STEPHENS (NSW)



MOONSHADOW CRUISES - TQC (NSW)



CRUISE MAROOCHY ECO TOURS (QLD)



CAPRICORN CAVES (QLD)



BROKEN RIVER MOUNTAIN RESORT (QLD)



KINGFISHER CRUISES (VIC)



# Celebrating

# 20

# years with us

# MEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS



## 45% of Ecotourism Australia members certified for 10 years

Along with the above operators added to our Hall of Fame for being certified for 20 years, we are proud to announce that 31 Ecotourism Australia certified operators were added as Green Travel Leaders in 2019, joining the 213 existing 10 year + members.

## National Geographic features Phillip Island Nature Parks

Phillip Island Nature Parks is one of our Advanced Ecotourism and ROC certified members and their success has been noticed. The not-for-profit conservation organisation was featured on National Geographic's 'Eco Traveler' program. Check out the episode [here](#).



## Orpheus Island is now 100% solar powered!

When Orpheus Island Lodge installed 810 gleaming solar panels on the hill behind the lodge in May 2019, they hoped the 300kW array would be able to provide up to 80% of their electricity needs. Not to be underestimated, the Advanced Ecotourism certified resort now runs on 100% renewable energy. No more background hum of a generator on the island!

## Australia's first glass bridge at Cobbold Gorge

With funding from the Outback Queensland Tourism Infrastructure Fund, Advanced Ecotourism certified Cobbold Gorge Tours now has Australia's first glass bridge. Located in the Gulf Savannah region of Outback Queensland, the bridge spans an 11m gap over the 10m high sandstone walls of Cobbold Gorge, allowing visitors to not only travel from one side to the other, but fight their fears at the same time.







“Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service has been a long term supporter of ECO Certification – The iconic logo and brand is trusted by travellers, who look for quality sustainable tourism experiences. Having ECO Certification (...) informs consumer choice and advocates sustainable practice in the industry.”

Ami Alexis  
Overland Track | Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service, TAS  
Advanced Ecotourism certified



Photo: Overland Track, TAS (Advanced Ecotourism)



Photo: Tasmanian Walking Company, TAS (Advanced Ecotourism)

## Ecotourism Australia certified winners – Qantas Australian Tourism Awards 2019



Congratulations to Adventure Bay Charters, Calypso Star Charters, Cobbold Gorge, Habitat Noosa, Kimberley Quest, Lady Elliot Island, Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park, Nitmiluk Tours, Pennicott Wilderness Journeys, Rainforestation Nature Park, Red Cat Adventures, Roaring 40's Kayaking, Tasman Venture and Venture North Australia.

## Fun Over Fifty Banksia Sustainability Awards



Multi-award-winning tour company Fun Over Fifty have won the 2019 Banksia Sustainability Awards for the Medium Business category.

## Wolgan Valley Eco Tours win Ecotourism Gold Award



Wolgan Valley Eco Tours, an Advanced Ecotourism certified operator, took home the Gold award for the second consecutive year in the Ecotourism category at the NSW Country & Outback Regional Tourism Awards at Dubbo in July 2019.

## Order of Australia Medals



We are proud to announce that Lizzie Corke and Peter Gash, two former directors of Ecotourism Australia, were recognised with Medals of the Order of Australia (OAM), which were presented as part of the 2020 Australia Day Honours.

## Douglas Shire win Communities and Culture Award at Sustainable Destination Awards

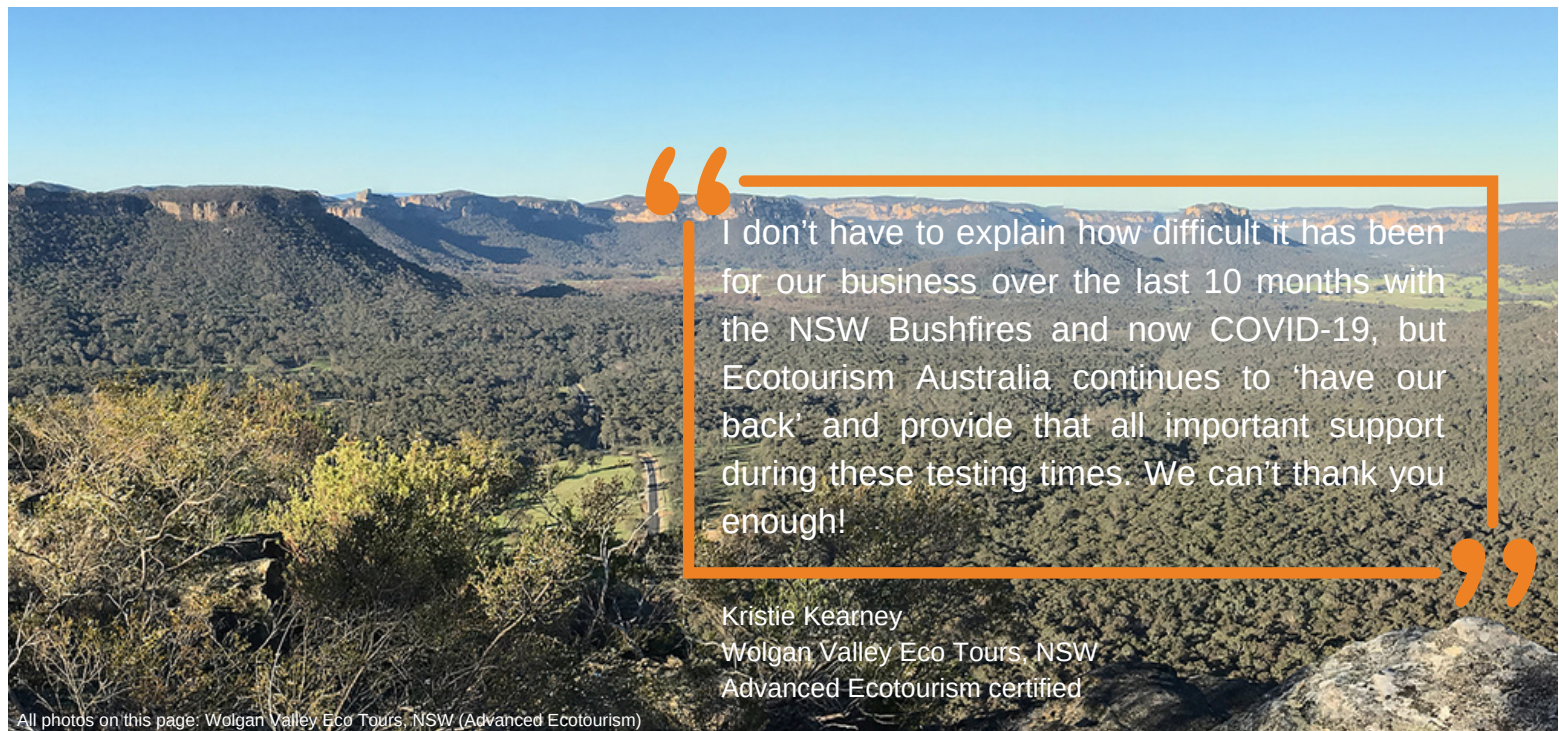


A few months after being Australia's first certified ECO destination, Douglas Shire took home the Communities and Culture Award at the Sustainable Destination Awards announced at ITB Berlin.

## Busselton Jetty awarded Best Grey Nomad Attraction



Busselton Jetty was awarded Best Grey Nomad Attraction in November 2019. The Grey Nomad Awards recognise government, private and not-for-profit organisations that welcome mature age travellers within Australia, making their lives healthier, happier and safer



“ I don't have to explain how difficult it has been for our business over the last 10 months with the NSW Bushfires and now COVID-19, but Ecotourism Australia continues to 'have our back' and provide that all important support during these testing times. We can't thank you enough! ”

Kristie Kearney  
Wolgan Valley Eco Tours, NSW  
Advanced Ecotourism certified

## Peninsula Hot Springs: World's Best Mineral Spring Spa



Nature Tourism certified Peninsula Hot Springs was announced as the global winner in the Luxury Mineral Spring Spa category at the World Luxury Spa Awards in St Petersburg in July 2019.

## Live Ningaloo Snags two Adventure Tourism Awards



Live Ningaloo took home two awards at the Adventure Tourism Awards in Queensland, for Best Tour/Activity WA and Best Activity AUSTRALIA (One Day).

## Parks Victoria Finalist in Sustainability Awards



Parks Victoria was announced as a finalist in the new Environmental Volunteering category in 2019 Premier's Sustainability Awards for their Volunteer Parks Guides program.

## Not Your Average Garden Shed



The Shed at Broger's End Kangaroo Valley was awarded Silver in the Unique Accommodation category in the 2019 Stayz Awards.

## Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary Tourism Award



Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary won the Gold Coast Business Excellence Award for Tourism, Hospitality and Events, recognising its position as one of the leading tourism attractions in the region.

## Waterfall Wanderers Wins Get Your Guide Award



Cairns Adventure Group's Waterfall Wanderers was named the winner in the Water Adventure category in the Oceania Region in the second annual Get Your Guide Awards.

WELCOME



PORTLAND ROADS - SAILING THE WHITSUNDAYS, QLD  
ADVENTURE TOURS AUSTRALIA, VIC  
BAREFOOT TOURS, QLD



CENTRAL COAST MARINE DISCOVERY CENTRE, NSW



VISION WALKS - ECO TOURS, NSW  
BIG DUCK BOAT TOURS, SA  
BOOBOOK ECOTOURS, QLD  
SEA WORLD WHALE WATCH, QLD



CITY TERRACES APARTMENTS CAIRNS, QLD



WOMEN WANT ADVENTURE, NSW  
WALTZING MATILDA CHARTERS, QLD  
PEAK POTENTIAL ADVENTURES, NSW  
WHITSUNDAY LUXURY SAILING HOLIDAYS, QLD  
DAYDREAM ISLAND, QLD  
KEPPEL DIVE, QLD  
FRASER EXPERIENCE TOURS, QLD  
BARRA2BILLFISH, QLD



MELBOURNE PRIVATE TOURS, VIC  
OUTBACK AUSSIE TOURS, QLD  
SANDYTOWN RIVER CRUISES, QLD  
KILCUNDA OCEANVIEW HOLIDAY RETREAT, VIC  
KING LEOPOLD AIR, WA  
WAKARLA GLASS GORGE, SA

During these extraordinary times we are pleased to see that 57 tourism operators have started their journey towards certification in 2019/20 and are using this time to 'build back better'.

This is the highest number of new applicants we ever had in one year which clearly demonstrates the growing demand for sustainability and ecotourism.

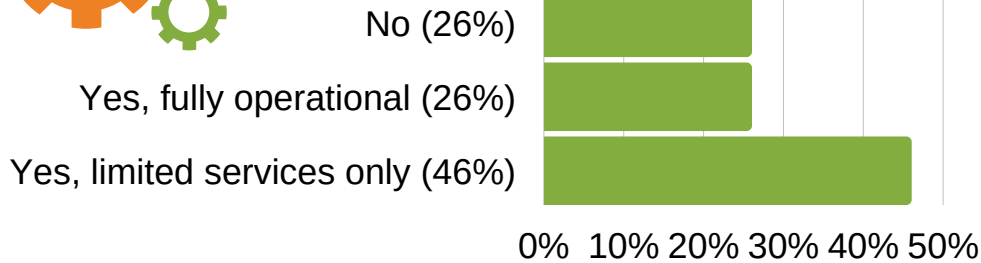


# MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Findings of Ecotourism Australia's first ever 'State of the Industry Survey' to its 500+ members around Australia with 104 responses analysed.



Is your business/organisation currently operating?



Reopening of borders (international and state) and ongoing government financial support for tourism operators are the two most important issues facing the tourism sector currently?



*The elimination of COVID-19. Borders should remain closed & intrastate travel promoted more to encourage increased local tourism to 'fill the gaps' until COVID-19 is either eliminated or fully suppressed domestically.*

**YES**  
68%

**NO**  
32%

*WA tourism is enjoying a boom as residents travel to regional areas. The challenge has been finding local staff who are willing to work.*

What innovations or changes to your business/organisation have you introduced over the past 12 months?



Have you experienced any of the positive outcomes listed below during the challenges of 2019/20?

Increased contact free experiences such as the E-Bike hire.



71%

Of our respondents said they had time to invest in other things, such as upgrading their business/organisation's website or renovating their product offering.



New regional destinations and social media campaigns.

59%

Took the downtime as an opportunity to reach out for themselves and their family, reviewing and improving their operations and pursuing funding/grant opportunities.



# MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

When we speak to government ministers to advocate on your behalf, how important are each of these issues to you?



Respondents answered **Very Important** to the following issues:



- **Maintaining JobKeeper (and similar) payments (74%),**
- **Building demand and destinations and reassuring the market (72%)**

What is the biggest lesson you've learnt over the past 12 months that will change the way you operate in the 'new normal'?



Concentrate on domestic and interstate tourism rather than relying on international tourism.



Resilience & remaining positive whilst adjusting to unprecedented change.



Clear communication with guests, easily accessible online booking systems.

We want to know how we can best support your business / organisation during this time. How helpful would each of the below be to you in the current situation?



Feature your business/destination on social media or in our other marketing activities (60%).



Information about available grants and recovery programs for tourism businesses and organisations (62%)

**Feel free to download the full State of the Industry Report 2019-2020 version here**







Photo: Sail Ningaloo, WA (Advanced Ecotourism & Climate Action Business)

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Board of Directors

### CHAIR

Claire Ellis  
Director,  
Claire Ellis Consulting



### DEPUTY CHAIR

Innes Larkin  
Owner,  
Mt Barney Lodge



Alysia Brandenburg  
Sector Specialist,  
Tourism and the Experience Economy



Noreen Breakey, PhD  
Lecturer & Researcher,  
The University of Queensland



Rick Murray  
Managing Director,  
Middle Star Pty Ltd



Peter Cochrane  
Councillor,  
IUCN



Rosie Sandover  
Director,  
Kingfisher Tours



Michael Collins  
Principal,  
CF Global



Peter Johnson  
Owner/Director,  
Diamond Waters  
Treehouse Retreat



Wendy Hills  
Manager,  
NSW National Parks and  
Wildlife Service

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Our Team



**Lina Cronin**  
Communications &  
Audit Manager



**Rod Hillman**  
CEO



**Fay Dawson**  
Accounts Manager



**Alyssa Sanders**  
Programs Manager



**Eloïse Touchot**  
Certification & Policy  
Manager



**Nadine Schramm**  
Membership  
Coordinator

## Thank you to all of our 2019/20 interns

- Eliza Chalmers - Australia
- Ximena Alvis Gonzales – Bolivia
- Georgina Golling – Australia
- Naseema Mustapha – Australia
- Demi-Rose Walter – Australia
- Shea Wittig – Australia
- Tessa Kemmerling – Germany



Photo: Skytrek Willow Springs Station, SA (Nature Tourism)