

ECO



Annual Report
2021/22



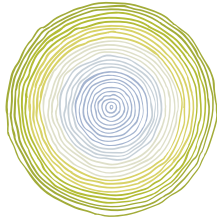
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An aerial photograph of a river delta system. A large, circular island covered in dense green forest is the central focus. The river channels are light-colored, likely due to sand or silt, and branch out from the island into a vast, flat expanse of water. The water in the main channels is a deep green color. The overall scene is a complex network of water and land, showing the natural beauty and ecological diversity of the region.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing custodianship of the land, waters and culture for over 60,000 years. We pay our respects to them and their elders past and present. We are privileged to learn from them in the way we care for and share Australia's diverse nature and culture, and we strive to walk humbly in the footsteps of those who have walked these paths before us.

Ecotourism Australia snapshot



More than 1,700 certified experiences including accommodations, tours and experiences



36 new certified operators in 2021/22



20 operators hold certification across all three business certification programs

More than 46% of certified businesses are Advanced Ecotourism certified



74 operators are Respecting Our Culture certified



76 operators hold Climate Action Certification



20 destinations are in the ECO Destination Certification program and three achieved certification in 2021/22



More than half of members have been certified for 10 years or longer



50 businesses have been certified for 20 years or longer



We're 100% committed to supporting eco and sustainable tourism

Ecotourism Australia (EA) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation, established in 1991. We promote and support the ecotourism industry in Australia through capacity building and actively encouraging sustainable tourism operations and systems. Our key program – ECO Certification – was the world's first national ecotourism certification program. Ecotourism Australia is acknowledged globally for our industry standards and is recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). We are renowned as a credible, national peak body for sustainable and nature-based tourism.

We have 500 certified operators and over 1,700 certified experiences in our ECO, Climate Action, and Respecting Our Culture Certifications. In 2018 Ecotourism Australia launched the ECO Destination Certification program where operators, tourism organisations and government work together to demonstrate a community-wide and entire regions' commitment to sustainable tourism management practices. Ecotourism Australia and our certified operators and destinations are committed to sustainable destination management, respect for culture, supporting local communities, protecting the natural environment, and bridging the gap between tourism and conservation.

Our Vision

Leading tourism to be a catalyst for positive change.

Our Mission

As the peak body for ecotourism and sustainable tourism we connect, champion, inspire and inform through strategic partnerships and global best practice standards.

HELLO

Message from the Chair

Dr Claire Ellis



Ecotourism Australia has undergone a significant journey of change that began a few years ago, driven by our desire and capacity to lead constant improvement in our industry and we are now seeing positive and significant outcomes. Growing stronger relationships with international organisations that share our vision, we have elevated our impact and are contributing to building a global network of sustainable tourism stakeholders striving for excellence. The ECO Destination Certification program certifies global best practice standards of sustainable management in nature-based destinations, helping to raise the profile of Australia's ecotourism and sustainable tourism industry.

The uncertainty and chaos of the last few years, marked by the devastating bushfires of 2019/20 and exacerbated by the COVID-19 health crisis and record-breaking flood events, has meant our industry has entered a state of ongoing crisis management. We worked closely with our members hearing the stress and difficulties experienced by our valued operators as they navigated the changing travel environment. We are proud to have provided financial relief to certified operators by pausing certification fees during widespread economic stress. We also sourced further financial support through our partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF-Australia), which allowed 10 regions affected by bushfires to pursue ECO Destination Certification in order to build back better. Two of these regions have already achieved ECO Destination Certification.

A clear shift in consumer sentiment favouring nature-based and sustainable tourism experiences is now evident and confirmed through multiple research studies. The COVID-19 pandemic's effect on our values and how we seek to travel has meant that more and more travellers are choosing operators and destinations that do not just claim to be sustainable but implement genuine impactful changes for a sustainable future.

Early 2022 saw our organisation experience a major change with the appointment of Elissa Keenan as the new Chief Executive to replace Rod Hillman, who stepped down from the role. I acknowledge Rod's hard work and dedication over his nine-year term as CEO and prior as a Director of Ecotourism Australia. Elissa's wealth of experience has already supported our strategic changes that continue to see us innovate for the wider tourism industry's success as we emerge from several global crises.

I am very pleased with the strength of our staff who have taken up the Board's directive for significant organisational changes, I thank the Board for their dedication and hard work over the last year. I am confident our organisation will continue to expand our capacity to directly work, as well as partner with others, to drive a responsible tourism industry in Australia and the Asia-Pacific.

Message from the CEO

Elissa Keenan



In March 2022 I was honoured to be named Chief Executive of Ecotourism Australia, following Rod Hillman's resignation in late 2021. I recognise Rod's commitment to Ecotourism Australia and I look forward to continuing our important work as an advocate for our certified operators and members and elevating the profile of the country's tourism industry through genuine sustainability and high-quality tourism experiences.

The past 12 months have seen the continued growth and strengthening of Ecotourism Australia in the face of ongoing challenges from the global pandemic and natural disasters that continue to impact our industry. There is a continued and renewed positive energy now around the recovering visitor economy and the significant opportunity for eco, nature-based and responsible tourism experiences.

We were pleased to welcome 36 new certified operators to our community and congratulate them on their commitment to providing authentically sustainable experiences. We were also pleased to certify three new destinations – Coffs Coast, Central Coast and Augusta-Margaret River – in our ECO Destination program. Travellers, operators, destination managers and local communities alike are increasingly recognising the need for sustainable experiences. Our range of certification programs provides assurance that tourism experiences meet international best practice sustainability standards. Recognising the continued impact of the last few years on our industry, we continued to provide financial support to operators most significantly impacted by international border closures and natural disasters.

At Ecotourism Australia, we're reimagining what the future of tourism looks like and our soon to be released Corporate Strategy reflects our continued commitment to global best practice and supporting industry capacity and capability development. We're here to connect, champion, inspire and inform a world that values travel for good. As industry leaders, we recognise that sustainable tourism is not only the pathway to responsible travel but, when conducted with global best practice sustainability standards, can be the catalyst for greater environmental, cultural and social change. We believe in the ripple effect of sustainable tourism, as our founders did 30 years ago. To reflect our belief in the power of positive change, we launched our new brand in November 2021. This included a new 'ripple' element that visually represents our purpose and the ripple effect of 'doing good' to create change for a more sustainable tourism industry. Everything we do at Ecotourism Australia aims to make positive change and extraordinary opportunities and I am fortunate to lead a team of passionate staff who are committed to our vision and mission.

As the peak body for sustainable and ecotourism, we continue to advocate for a sustainable tourism approach as the industry builds back stronger. Through participation in tourism roundtables and industry forums as well as providing submissions to government, we have demonstrated our commitment to improving the landscape of Australia's tourism industry through the wider inclusion of sustainability practices and ecotourism. Our advocacy work is essential to creating an adaptable and resilient industry where sustainable and ecotourism can thrive and to ensure Australia's nature-based tourism experiences exceed visitor expectations.

Message from the CEO

Elissa Keenan

Our partnerships with key organisations across Australia and internationally are vital to building a stronger sustainable tourism industry across the country. Thanks to generous grant funding provided by World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF-Australia), two of the ten sponsored regions achieved ECO Destination Certification in the last year. Through our partnership with WWF-Australia, we also hosted our inaugural ECO Think Destination forum on Gumbaynggirr Country in the Coffs Coast region of New South Wales.

We are pleased to see the increasing display of sustainable and nature-based tourism to promote Australia and value our relationships with Tourism Australia and the Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC). Ongoing partnership with Protected Area Managers (PAMs) is essential to ensure the sustainable development of tourism throughout Australia's national parks and natural areas, while continuing partnerships with Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and Green Destinations ensure our certifications continue to meet international best practice sustainability standards.

I look forward to continuing to work with and for you, our certified operators, destinations and members of the Ecotourism Australia community and our staff team to create a more sustainable and responsible Australian tourism industry.

Elissa Keenan, CEO, present at the Visitor Economy Roundtable hosted by Austrade in Canberra. (Image credit: Austrade)



The Ecotourism Australia team

Our Board

Chair | Dr Claire Ellis | Claire Ellis Consulting
Alysia Brandenburg | AbPs Consulting Services
Nat Burke | World Wide Fund for Nature
Caroline Densley | Diverse Travel Australia
Peter Johnson | Diamond Waters Treehouse Retreat

Deputy Chair | Innes Larkin | Mt Barney Lodge
Dr Noreen Breakey | The University of Queensland
Michael Collins | CF Global (Australia)
Wendy Hills | NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
Janet Mackay | TRC Tourism

Our staff



Chief Executive
Elissa Keenan



Certification Manager
Nadine Schramm



Certification Coordinator
Shannon Scullion



Membership Coordinator
Amelia Trickey



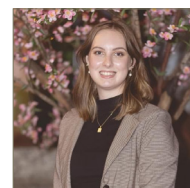
Communications and Marketing
Coordinator
Katie Heilbronn



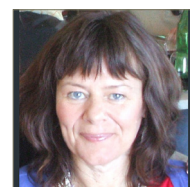
Relationships Manager
Alyssa Sanders



Certification Coordinator
Shea Wittig



Membership Coordinator
Georgie Snare



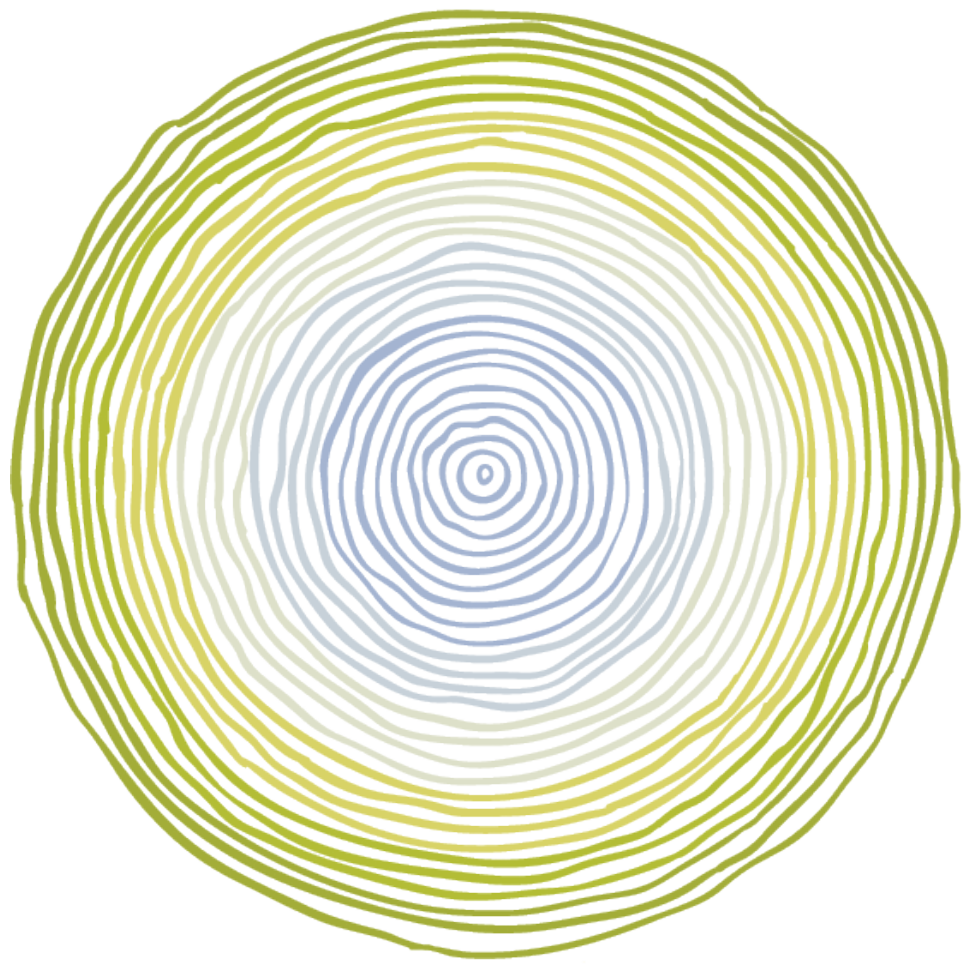
Accounts Manager
Fay Dawson

We farewelled staff members

CEO, Rod Hillman | Communications Manager, Lina Cronin

Thank you to our interns

Honoka Takahashi | Jithmi Gammanpila | Olivia Lam



Our new brand

Ecotourism Australia celebrates its 30 year anniversary

In 2021, Ecotourism Australia celebrated its 30th anniversary, taking the opportunity to reflect on the vast changes the ecotourism industry has undergone, and with it our organisation. Founded in 1991, the Ecotourism Association of the Indo Pacific Region formed in response to the strong need for an organisation to lead the conversation around the growing ecotourism industry for Australia. In 1996, the world's first national ecotourism certification program was created, setting the global standard for the sustainable operation of ecotourism businesses.

Last year, we launched a new look to represent our renewed direction including a new brand identity with a 'ripple' design, organically flowing outward, encompassing the ripple effect of our purpose to 'do good' and create greater change. As leaders in eco and nature-based tourism, we work to create positive tourism futures and extraordinary opportunities, which flow out to our certified operators, destinations and travellers, to make the world a better place environmentally, socially and culturally.

In developing our 2022-2025 Corporate Strategy, we voiced our mission: **As the peak body for ecotourism and sustainable tourism we connect, champion, inspire and inform through strategic partnerships and global best practice standards.** This renewed mission statement reflects our strategic direction and how we best serve our members, certified operators, destinations and community.

BRAND

Our history

We are proud to be a driving force inspiring sustainable ecotourism across the country, and now into the Pacific through our ECO Destination Certification program.

Here is the history that began our ripple effect on ecotourism in Australia.

1991	Ecotourism Association of the Indo Pacific Region is formed and later renamed the Ecotourism Association of Australia in 1992.
1996	The world's first National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) was launched.
2000	EcoGuide Certification is launched to certify high-quality guides across Australia.
2002	The organisation is renamed Ecotourism Australia Limited (EA) in the International Year of Ecotourism designated by the United Nations General Assembly.
2003	ECO Certification replaces NEAP
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ecotourism Australia wins the Conservation Award at the World Tourism and Travel Council Tourism for Tomorrow Awards.• Respecting Our Culture Certification is adopted from Aboriginal Tourism Australia recognising high-quality, authentic Indigenous cultural experiences.• Climate Action Certification is launched focusing on operator actions toward mitigating their emissions.
2011	56 operators awarded the first Green Travel Leader Certification for their commitment to greening the tourism industry by maintaining ECO Certification for 10 years or more as Ecotourism Australia celebrated 20 years of operation.
2013-14	The combined annual turnover of all Ecotourism Australia certified tour operators exceeded \$1 billion, demonstrating how ecotourism is no longer a niche but has become mainstream.
2018	Ecotourism Australia launches the ECO Destination Certification program.
2021	Ecotourism Australia celebrates its 30th birthday and replaces the gecko with the launch of a new suite of logos featuring the 'ripple'. If you look closely, you may still be able to spot the gecko on our Green Travel Guide.



Elissa Keenan, CEO, (third from left) with fellow peak body representatives of the newly formed Queensland Conservation Alliance in April 2022.

Advocacy

One of our key priorities to drive a stronger sustainable tourism industry is advocacy. We continue to showcase to industry and government that travellers are increasingly seeking opportunities to engage with destinations, local communities, and the environment in a sustainable manner. The need to rapidly pivot government policy on sustainable tourism is more important than ever to create a dynamic and proactive industry where ecotourism and sustainable tourism thrive and Australia's experiences meet and exceed visitor expectations. As the peak body for ecotourism and sustainable tourism in Australia, Ecotourism Australia advocates for our certified operators and has engaged in a number of targeted advocacy projects over the past year.

We attended numerous forums and roundtables to support and promote the agenda of ecotourism.

Reimagining the Visitor Economy Discussion Paper (May 2021) and THRIVE 2030 Submission (December 2021)

We provided a submission as part of Austrade's 'THRIVE 2030: The Re-Imagined Visitor Economy Strategy' in May 2021, demonstrating how ecotourism and Ecotourism Australia's Certification programs build a stronger visitor economy through high-quality products focused on sustainability and business resilience. We advocated with Austrade, Tourism Australia and State Tourism Organisations to expand tourism recovery performance measurements from just economic indicators, asking these organisations to implement high standard operator programs that showcase best practice, support National Parks to rebuild visitation, and to engage local communities in tourism recovery efforts to maximise outcomes.

The THRIVE 2030 Strategy made it clear that sustainability and sustainable growth of tourism recovery are front of mind not only for travellers and tourism operators, but also in tourism development and policy. THRIVE 2030 recognises the need for greater environmental sustainability practices across the tourism industry to meet consumer demand and Australia's climate targets. Priority 4: 'Embrace leading-edge business practices' recognised the role of sustainability accreditation as a key driver in industry development and tourism recovery. Ecotourism Australia has aligned our new Corporate Strategy with key elements of THRIVE 2030.

Support for the Tourism Industry Letter (August 2021)

In August 2021, Ecotourism Australia addressed the issue of snap COVID-19 lockdowns and their devastating impact on regional and nature-based tourism operators in a letter to former Prime Minister, Scott Morrison. The threat of snap lockdowns was a significant deterrent to interstate travel and tourism business operations, resulting in a 'boom or bust' industry. In order to protect the tourism industry from collapse, we called on the federal government to provide wage subsidies and cash flow boosts to tourism businesses until 80% of the population were vaccinated against COVID-19.

Queensland Conservation Alliance (April 2022)

Queensland peak tourism and conservation bodies united with Ecotourism Australia in a joint alliance to call on the Queensland Government to significantly increase management funding and the size of the state's protected areas. The Queensland Conservation Alliance, comprised of the Queensland Tourism Industry Council, Queensland First Nations Tourism Council, Queensland Conservation Council, Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Parks Association Queensland and Ecotourism Australia, is a major step forward in the advancement of nature-based and ecotourism in the state. The main objectives of the Alliance are to increase the land within Queensland's protected areas to 17%, grow opportunities for Indigenous-led conservation and cultural tourism, improve the management of natural and cultural heritage within protected areas, and support the development of exceptional visitor experiences within protected areas. Environmental and cultural conservation through responsible and sustainable tourism is at the core of Ecotourism Australia's activities and this Conservation Alliance is a continuation of this objective. We hope to work with other State conservation and industry councils to extend this initiative further.

Our Partners

Ecotourism Australia's partnerships with government, industry bodies and conservation organisations are crucial to building a stronger sustainable tourism network across the country. The past 12 months saw the continual strengthening of these key relationships and the development of new affiliations.



PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY
**Australian Wildlife and
Nature Recovery Fund**

WWF-Australia

The partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF-Australia), which began following the 2019/2020 summer bushfires, was extended through a second agreement to assist a further three destinations to join the ECO Destination program to support the local tourism industry's recovery; Great Ocean Road, Bellingen, and Barrington Coast. WWF-Australia also provided funds to support the inaugural ECO Think Destination Forum held in March 2022 in Coffs Coast and attended by over 60 delegates from local government, state agencies, key tourism organisations and local tourism operations. The generosity of and relationship with WWF-Australia is of great importance and demonstrates the breadth of Ecotourism Australia's work, not only to the strengthening of the ECO Destination program but also for the recovery of tourism in disaster-affected areas across the country.



Protected Area Managers (PAMs) and TAPAF

Ecotourism Australia's ongoing partnership with the Protected Area Managers (PAMs) and state tourism organisations is essential to continuing the sustainable growth of tourism in Australia's natural environment. The Tourism and Parks Agencies Forum (TAPAF) is an important initiative where state tourism organisations and state and federal parks agencies meet quarterly to collaborate on a national level. Ecotourism Australia provides executive services to TAPAF.



Australian Government
**Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority**

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Our collaboration with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has seen the recognition of ECO Certification program as a determinant of high-standard tour operators (HSTOs). Over 70 per cent of visitors travel to the Great Barrier Reef with ECO certified HSTOs showing the value of our partnership for our members. Employees of HSTOs are also eligible for the Master Reef Guides (MRG) program, of which over 75% of MRGs work for ECO certified businesses. The continuation of our partnership with GBRMPA partnership is of great value not only to our members but crucial for the delivery of sustainability in the broader tourism industry in Tropical North and coastal Queensland regions.



Australia Tourism Export Council

In 2021, Ecotourism Australia, in partnership with the Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC), launched the three-part webinar series, 'How to make sustainability your business'. This webinar series covered two learning modules on the topics of environmental sustainability and economic and socio-cultural sustainability and a live Q&A session. An extension of this partnership is shown in ATEC's Trade Ready Checklist where international buyers and wholesalers can quickly and easily identify ECO certified operators and are educated on the importance of this certification.



University of Queensland

Through our ongoing research partnership with the University of Queensland, Ecotourism Australia has supported four PhD candidates exploring topics of social licence to operate commercial activities in protected areas, overtourism in natural areas, green destinations and transitioning to a low carbon future. These research areas are helping to provide valuable insights and a strong research base to better understand these challenges, inform management options and further Ecotourism Australia's thought leadership.



International Partners

Our ongoing relationships with international bodies, Green Destinations, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), and Travelife, are of great significance to ensure we continue to meet best-practice sustainability standards.



Our ECO Destination Certification program was created in partnership with Green Destinations, a global leader in destination sustainability best practice standards. Ecotourism Australia regularly attends Green Destinations representative meetings connecting representatives from around the world to ensure our ECO Destination program remains competitive and meets best practice standards for holistic sustainability.



The GSTC serves as the global body for creating and managing standards for sustainable tourism. Our flagship ECO Certification program is GSTC recognised, meaning that our standards align with GSTC criteria for sustainable tourism and remain among the best in the world. As a result of our partnership with GSTC, Google and Booking.com recognise accommodations certified by Ecotourism Australia's ECO Certification program as meeting their sustainability standards.

PARTNERS



**QUEENSLAND
TOURISM INDUSTRY
COUNCIL**

Queensland Tourism Industry Council

An innovative partnership with the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) enables eligible Queensland-based ECO certified operators to gain Quality Tourism Accredited Business (QTAB) recognition at no additional cost. This agreement gives over 200 businesses in Queensland the chance to receive cross recognition.



Geotourism

Ecotourism Australia's ongoing partnership with Geotourism has seen both the launch of the annual Geotourism Forum and the continuation of a shared membership agreement where Ecotourism Australia members obtain free membership to the Geotourism Forum.



EcoGuides

The EcoGuides Certification recognises guides who deliver sustainable interpretive experiences to tourists and is a program owned by Ecotourism Australia and operated in Australia by Savannah Guides and in Greater China by International Sustainability Consultancy Limited. The continuation of this program ensures tour guides in Australia and Asia-Pacific are meeting genuine sustainability standards and delivering high-quality nature-based interpretive experiences.



Auditors

Our independent auditing program has expanded with outstanding results and feedback from auditors and operators alike over the past year. While there was some disruption to the audit program due to the pandemic, we are pleased to have conducted audits around Australia this year. Our audit activity ensures certified members receive detailed feedback around certification criteria and their application to their business. Our partnership with the team of independent auditors ensures we continue to deliver the highest standard of certification backed by best-practice globally recognised sustainability standards.

PARTNERS

Building capacity in sustainable and ecotourism

By forming valuable local and international partnerships, we connected ecotourism professionals in accessibility services, marketing, and destination management with the Ecotourism Australia community through ECO Think, a webinar series available free to our members, certified operators and destinations. Drawing on a wealth of experience, our key speakers provided operational advice, practical take home tips, information on best practice standards and ongoing support beyond each ECO Think webinar.

Building capacity among ecotourism businesses and destinations is part of our promise to support members during the certification application process and beyond. We recognise that sustainability is not an endpoint, but a step-by-step journey of constant improvement, to strengthen ecotourism values and spread innovative ideas that make travel more sustainable.

Destination Tourism Strategy

Key speaker: Tina Zakonjšek, Green Destinations (Slovenia)

Guest speaker: Tara Bennett, Tourism Port Douglas Daintree (Ecotourism certified ECO Destination)

Accessibility in Ecotourism

Key speaker: Clair Crowley, Push Adventures (Australia)

Guest speakers: Andrew Wright, Calypso Star Charters (Advanced Ecotourism certified, Climate Action Leader certified, Green Travel Leader) and Peter Johnson, Diamond Waters Treehouse Retreat (Advanced Ecotourism certified, Climate Action Business certified)

Responsible Marketing

Key speaker: Melanie Grevis-James, Planet Marketing (Australia)

Guest speakers: Iolanthe Fitzgerald, Kingfisher Tours (Ecotourism certified, Respecting Our Culture certified) and Kristie Kearney, Wolgan Valley Eco Tours (Advanced Ecotourism certified)

Case Study: Andrew Wright, Calypso Star Charters

Andrew and the team at Calypso Star Charters recognise that, while immersive shark swimming tours make up their day-to-day operations, marine encounters are truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience for their guests. To make their tours more inclusive, Calypso Star Charters installed a ramp onto their expedition boat and ensured there was sufficient space for guests to navigate the boat in a wheelchair. The results: a memorable experience for all. The latest research indicates that the accessible tourism market could be worth up to \$8 billion, making inclusivity a clear step toward business success and vital inclusivity that underpins ecotourism values.



Our inaugural ECO Think Destination Forum

Through our partnership with WWF-Australia and support from Destination North Coast NSW, Ecotourism Australia held its inaugural ECO Think Destination Forum located on Gumbayngirr Country in the Coffs Coast, an Ecotourism certified ECO Destination, and the Bellingen Shire, currently an applicant for ECO Destination Certification. Destination representatives from Port Douglas and Daintree to Kangaroo Island participated in our ECO Destination Certification program came together to share and learn about sustainable tourism destinations. Speakers from Tourism Australia, WWF-Australia, TRC Tourism, National Parks Authorities, regional councils, and ECO certified operators inspired delegates with stories delving into the forum's four topics:

- 1 Nature and tourism as allies | How tourism and nature collaborate to work toward the same sustainable goals. Ecotourism is the bridge between the two.
- 2 Ecotourism, community and culture | The cultural and community elements of ecotourism in our destinations and the importance of including community and culture in tourism.
- 3 A business environment where ecotourism thrives | The demand for sustainable travel is growing. We uncovered how to rise to the occasion, collaborate with your local community and effectively communicate eco messaging to incoming travellers.
- 4 Sustainability is in demand, now what? | Ecotourism is not just about destination-wide planning, but on-the-ground action and support for the entire visitor economy.

NETWORK

ECO Community

Officially launched in 2022, the ECO Community is a convenient platform for all Ecotourism Australia members to connect and network, share knowledge, and discuss important industry news. By keeping members informed and connected, the ECO Community will help to facilitate a stronger network for sustainable tourism in Australia. ECO Community allows members to access ECO Think webinars and courses, network with like-minded ecotourism professionals, work together to find solutions to common industry issues, and continue to strengthen tourism sustainability across the country. We look forward to seeing the ECO Community grow and continue to be a useful tool for our members into the future.



Relationships Manager, Alyssa Sanders (right), with Liz Price from Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism (centre) and Leia Howes from Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (left), ECO Destination applicant.



Presenting to tourism operators in Bellingen Shire (ECO Destination applicant).



Meeting with community representatives from East Gippsland (ECO Destination applicant).



Certification Coordinator, Shannon Scullion, with Coffs Coast ECO certified operator Mount Browne Cottage.

Delivering a framework for a **sustainable Australia**

In April 2022, travel giant Expedia found that 90% of travellers say they now look for sustainable travel options when travelling. 74% of consumers would choose a destination that is committed to the local community and culture, even if it was more expensive. We know that tourists are seeking more genuinely sustainable options than ever. Our certification programs assure travellers that our certified operators and destinations maintain international best practice sustainability standards as well as create a network in which sustainable tourism thrives.

ECO Destination program

Ecotourism Australia's ECO Destination program assures travellers that destinations are backed by a strong, well-managed commitment to ongoing sustainable practices and provide high-quality tourism experiences within the region. The ECO Destination program uses a holistic approach and community engagement to deliver region-wide sustainability. Three new destinations became certified ECO Destinations in 2021-22, joining Port Douglas Daintree, certified in 2019. Additionally, there are 16 regions currently completing their ECO Destination application.

Certified ECO Destinations 2021/22

In addition to Port Douglas and Daintree, the first certified ECO Destination, we welcomed three new certified ECO Destinations:



Coffs Coast, New South Wales

Certified at Ecotourism level, Coffs Coast became the first ECO Destination in New South Wales in 2021. The region is home to 7 ECO certified operators as well as a community passionate about the region and dedicated to sustainability. The destination has implemented a number of projects that emphasise holistic sustainability in the area, including:

- Powering Ahead project – investment in and instalment of 5B solar arrays in various council sites in the region and to stimulate the local green economy
- Living Lightly – a sustainable living program in partnership with local resident Trash Girl, including educational videos of simple solutions to waste-free living
- Freedom School – the Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School is the first bilingual school of an Aboriginal language to open in NSW

Augusta-Margaret River, Western Australia

Augusta-Margaret River achieved ECO Destination Ecotourism Certification in June 2022, making it the first ECO Destination in Western Australia. 12 ECO Certified operators call the Augusta-Margaret River region home, with a variety of coastal and bush activities available. The shire's council is committed to inspiring both local residents and visitors to engage with the region sustainably through initiatives such as:

- Climate Action Plan – 11 key actions for climate action such as tree planting projects, installation of solar panels and creation of a zero-interest fund for renewable energy projects
- Local business engagement – funding programs to support local sustainable initiatives and running the Local-Is-More campaign to encourage buying local
- Indigenous culture – strong collaboration with Wadandi Traditional Owners to promote Aboriginal tourism, cultural respect, and employment

Central Coast, New South Wales

Supported by WWF-Australia funding, the Central Coast region achieved ECO Destination Certification at Nature Tourism level in June 2022, joining Coffs Coast as the second ECO certified Destination in NSW. The region is home to 8 passionate ECO certified operators and a community of individuals dedicated to the region's sustainability journey. The Central Coast has implemented numerous initiatives to promote sustainability in the region including:

- Green Caffein – 27 local businesses are supplying reusable coffee cups available to trade at participating locations around the country to cut down on single-use plastic
- Beach matting – beach matting is provided at 4 beaches and beach wheelchairs are available at 13 beaches to facilitate greater accessibility and inclusion
- Ground Swell – Central Coast based organisation, Take 3 for the Sea, is encouraging local tourism businesses to reduce litter in the region



Member achievements

The last 12 months have been a time of rapid change and regeneration as we emerge out of the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of our operators have remained hopeful and determined despite the challenges still facing the tourism industry. The accomplishments of our certified operators are a testament to both their resilience and the community of Australia's tourism industry. We are proud to see our members receive recognition for their incredible work in bettering the future of the sustainable tourism industry.

Qantas Australian Tourism Awards 2021



Pennicott Wilderness Journeys win gold at the 2021 Qantas Australia Tourism Awards

Ecotourism Australia certified operators comprised more than 40 per cent of all finalists at the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards (QATA) held in March 2022. Represented across 10 of the 25 award categories, there were 32 nominations between the 26 ECO certified operators and 2 ECO Destination applicants named as finalists. Live Ningaloo was awarded gold in the ecotourism category while Murray River Trails and Tasmanian Walking Company were awarded silver and bronze, respectively. In total, 13 operators and one destination applicant were recognised on the night with a total of six gold, six silver and four bronze awards presented to Ecotourism Australia members. Taking away two awards each were Pennicott Wilderness Journeys (two gold awards) and Red Cat Adventures (one gold and one silver award).

Banksia National Sustainability Awards 2022



Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort win the Sustainable Tourism category at the National Banksia Awards 2022

The Banksia National Sustainability Awards recognise sustainable businesses across a wide range of industries that are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The sustainable tourism award acknowledges achievements by a business that champions the protection, conservation and regeneration of the environment while also supporting communities and culture, both Indigenous and local. Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort (Green Travel Leader) won the sustainable tourism award for their installation of the Hybrid Solar Power Station supplying 100 per cent renewable energy to all staff and guests at the resort. ECO certified members named as finalists included Passions of Paradise, Tasmanian Walking Company and Zoos Victoria.

Green Destinations Top 100



Celebrated each year at the world's largest travel trade show, ITB Berlin, Green Destinations' Top 100 Stories Competition highlights destinations around the world making progress towards more sustainable practices while maintaining a competitive tourism experience and a positive local community. Three ECO Destinations, Margaret River, Port Douglas-Daintree and Central Coast, and two ECO Destination applicants, Bundaberg and Townsville, were featured in the 2021 Top 100 Stories across three categories. Margaret River was awarded third place in the Environment & Climate category for their Climate Action Summit which spurred a community-led response to reduce carbon emissions to net zero.

Hall of Fame

Operators certified by Ecotourism Australia's certification programs for over 20 years are inducted into the Ecotourism Australia Hall of Fame. In 2022, we welcomed 10 new entrants into the Hall of Fame, making a total of 50, listed in alphabetical order below:

- 1770 LARC! Tours
- Aquila Eco Lodges
- Birds Australia Gluepot Reserve
- Hartley's Crocodile Adventures
- HeliSpirit
- Mt Barney Lodge
- Poseidon Outer Reef Cruises
- Sea Kayaking Whitsundays
- Under Down Under Tours
- Whitsunday Crocodile Safari

These new entrants join 40 other certified operators in Ecotourism Australia's Hall of Fame:

- Araucaria Ecotours
- Australian Luxury Escapes
- Billabong Sanctuary & Bungalow Bay Koala Village
- Billy Tea Safaris
- Binna Burra Mountain Lodge
- Broken River Mountain Resort
- Cairns Adventure Group
- Canopy Rainforest Tree Houses & Wildlife Sanctuary
- Capricorn Caves
- Cruise Maroochy Eco Tours
- Daintree Discovery Centre
- Daintree River Cruise Centre
- Down Under Tours (Australia) Pty Ltd
- Everglades Eco Safaris & Habitat Noosa
- Exceptional Kangaroo Island
- Far Out Adventures
- Gecko Canoeing and Trekking
- Gippsland High Country Tours
- Grampians Personalised Tours & Adventures
- Great Adventures - Green Island Resort
- Imagine Cruises - Port Stephens
- Kingfisher Bay Resort
- Kingfisher Cruises
- Moonraker Dolphin Swims
- Moonshadow Cruises - TQC
- Ocean Rafting
- O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat
- Paperbark Camp
- Phillip Island Nature Parks
- Quicksilver Connections
- Sailaway Port Douglas
- Skyrail Rainforest Cableway
- Tour Gold Coast
- Tread Lightly Eco Tours
- Tropic Wings Cairns Tours & Charters
- Undara Experience
- Wavedancer - Low Isles
- Wavelength Reef Cruises
- Wildlife Habitat
- Yelverton Brook Eco Spa Retreat & Conservation Sanctuary

10% of Ecotourism Australia certified operators have been certified for over 20 years and over 50% of operators have been certified for over 10 years.

Green Travel Leaders

Green Travel Leader status is awarded to operators certified with Ecotourism Australia for over 10 years. In 2022, 36 operators achieved Green Travel Leader recognition, the largest cohort of Green Travel Leaders in Ecotourism Australia's history. The 2022 Green Travel Leaders are listed in alphabetical order:

- Alice Springs Reptile Centre
- Calypso Star Charters
- Cape to Cape Explorer Tours
- Cradle Mountain Canyons
- Daintree Wilderness Lodge
- Discover Mildura
- Dolphin Discovery Centre
- Eldee Station
- Experience Daintree
- Fitzroy Island Adventures
- Fun Over Fifty Holidays
- Gawler Ranges Wilderness Safaris
- Go Sea Kayak Byron Bay
- Great Ocean Road Surf Tours
- Kalbarri Wago Beach Quad Bike Tours
- Kangaroo Island Outdoor Action
- Kellys Beach Resort
- Lady Douglas River Cruises
- Little Sahara Adventure Centre
- Nautilus Aviation Heli Pty Ltd
- Outback Spirit Tours
- Par Avion
- Riverlife Adventure Centre
- Rodney Fox Shark Expeditions
- Seastar Cruises
- Siesta Park Holiday Resort
- Skyhook Helicopters
- Southern Exposure
- Tangatours
- Tarkine Trails
- Tony's Tropical Tours
- Trek Larapinta
- Trek Tasmania
- Trek Tours Australia
- Unreel Adventure Safaris
- Wildlife Coast Cruises

We congratulate these operators on their incredible achievements and a strong commitment to sustainability. There are currently 50 operators around Australia who have achieved Hall of Fame status. 255 operators have been certified with Ecotourism Australia for over 10 years, which is more than half of all ECO certified operators.



Great Adventures Green Island Resort celebrates 20 years of ECO Certification

Our team on the ground

Our team attended the East Gippsland Nature Based Tourism Forum 2022 on Gunaikurnai Country as a key speaker exploring the region's growing eco and nature-based tourism industry. We connected with industry representatives across the country at Tourism Australia's Destination Australia conference and ATE event in Sydney, and attended the Tourism Trade Roundtable alongside other peak industry bodies to advocate for sustainable and nature-based tourism. We are proud to represent the operators and destinations across Australia as the peak body for eco and sustainable tourism on the national level to ensure we take collective action toward building a sustainable tourism industry.

The team took the opportunity to meet face to face with our operators and destination management representatives on their sustainability journey toward certification, travelling to Darkinjung Country on the Central Coast, Gumbaynggirr Country in Bellingen Shire, and Lord Howe Island, New South Wales, and to Gunaikurnai Country in East Gippsland, Victoria. It is incredible to see the progress made by these regions and their operators since their entry into the program, which, for some, is thanks to funding from our partners WWF-Australia. Certified ECO Destinations and applicants are a testament to how strong stakeholder relationships between council, regional tourism organisations, and operators can build up sustainable tourism on a destination scale, utilising certification to ensure management aligns with global best practice standards for the longevity of their responsible travel mission.

As Kangaroo Island also continues its sustainability journey toward ECO Destination Certification, the Kangaroo Island Tourism Alliance sought to strengthen support for local operators by developing businesses' capacity to create greater environmental change. Kangaroo Island Tourism Alliance engaged Ecotourism Australia to provide educational resources to operators on the island, compiling tools to bridge the gap between conservation and ecotourism as both entities work toward the same goals. Our team worked with operators on the Island to explore best practice cases of collaborative environmental protection, and developing valuable and immediately actionable tips that expanded into the Island Guardians Toolkit developed by Ecotourism Australia.



The team at ECO Think Destination Forum presenting Coffs Coast Region's ECO Destination Certification in March 2022

Communications and engagement

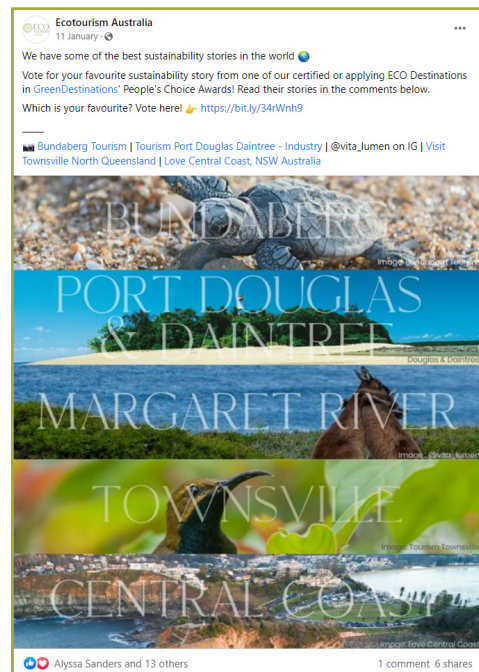
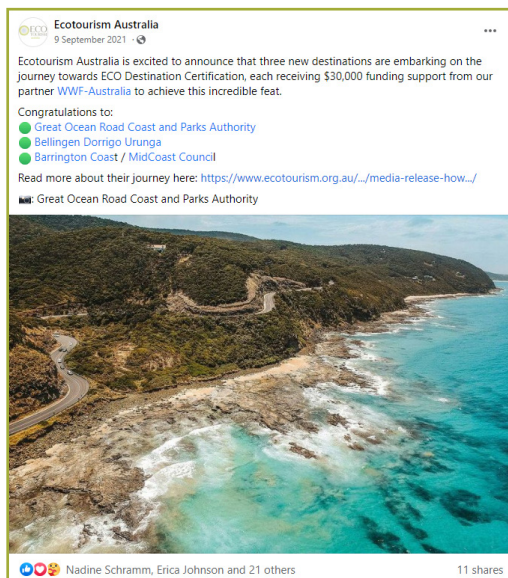
4,259 Subscribers to our ECO News

71.6K People reached with content from or about Ecotourism Australia on Facebook or Instagram

22.6K Followers on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn

21.4K Unique visitors to the Green Travel Guide this year

Post with the most reach of 11.6k



Post with second-most reach of 5.3K

Green Travel Guide

Since the new and improved Green Travel Guide launched in 2021, this consumer-facing platform has helped conscious travellers find ECO certified ecotourism and nature tourism experiences across Australia that align with their sustainability ethos and lifestyle. From tours to attractions and accommodations, travellers can plan the perfect eco getaway that doesn't compromise on their values, all in one place. Visit www.greentravelguide.org.



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