

# ECO



Pumpkin Island/Koey Ngurtai, Capricorn Coast, QLD  
2024 ECO Destination Certified  
Photo credit: Capricorn Enterprise

## Ecotourism Australia Annual Report 2023/24

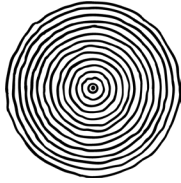


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**We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing custodianship of the land, waters and culture for over 60,000 years. We pay our respects to them and their Elders past and present. We are privileged 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.**





**2,000** certified experiences  
across 4 certification programs

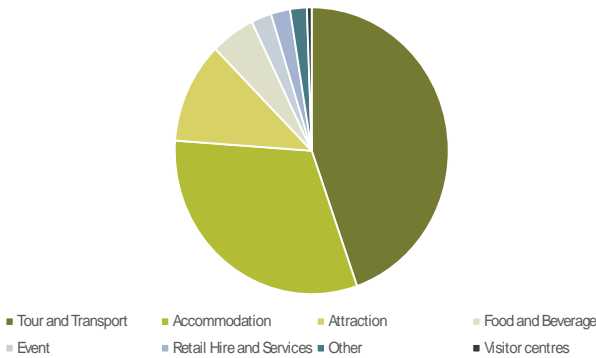


More than **500** certified operators  
total **36** new certified  
operators in 2023/24



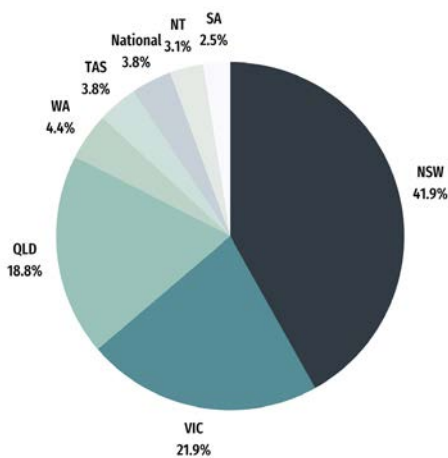
**11** certified destinations  
total **197** new  
sustainable tourism  
certification applicants  
in 2023/24

Certified operator by type

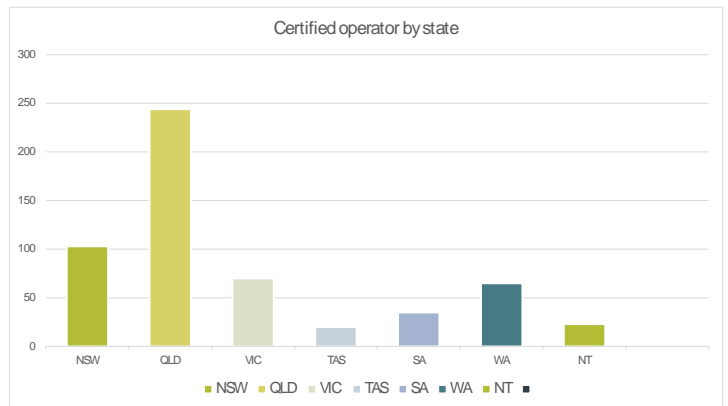


total **89** new eco  
certification applicants in  
2023/24 - 27% increase on  
last financial year

Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard by state



More than **500** Strive 4 Sustainability  
Scorecard registrations



## 2 New hall of fame entrants

64 businesses are now certified for 20 years or longer.

## 12 New green travel leader entrants

268 businesses are now certified for 10 years or longer, over half of our members.

## 2 New strategic partnerships

Accommodation Australia and Caravan Industry Association of Australia.

## 4 New certified destinations

Bellingen Shire, Townsville, Gladstone Region, and Capricorn Coast.



ibis Sydney Darling Harbour, NSW  
Accor property, Sustainable Tourism Certified  
Photo credit: Ibis Sydney Darling Harbour

## What We Do

We support visitor economy businesses on a pathway to sustainable practices and global best-practice certification for tourism operators and destinations.

## Our Purpose

Sustainable, nature-based tourism and ecotourism are growing in demand. Ecotourism is the lighthouse for growing sustainable tourism more broadly. We pave the way for our operators and destinations to stand out with highly appealing products that support their business viability and the social, cultural and environmental pillars in their regions. We partner with operators and destinations so they can be global best-practice leaders; and we enable the broader tourism industry to build a pathway to sustainability.

## 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.

## Our Values

### 1 Positive

We are proud of our legacy, we are optimistic and we continue to influence change as future-focused custodians for eco, regenerative and nature-based tourism.

### 2 Integrity

We work with trust, transparency and best-practice standards and we help our certified operators and members create better experiences through ethical and sustainable operations and destinations.

### 3 Respect

We respect and advocate for global best-practice standards and recognition of culture and we champion our operators, our team and our sector.

### 4 Collaborate

We are one team and value our partnerships that help us connect, champion, inspire and inform our industry.



Rawnsley Park Eco-Villas, Ikara-Flinders Ranges, SA  
Advanced Ecotourism, Nature Tourism and Climate Action certified, Green Travel Leader and Hall of Fame  
Photo credit: Rawnsley Park Station

## About **Ecotourism Australia**

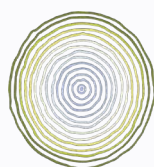
Ecotourism Australia is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation, established in 1991, that promotes and supports Australia’s visitor economy through building capacity and actively promoting sustainable tourism operations and systems. We are recognised as the credible, national peak body for sustainable and nature-based tourism in Australia.

Our foundational program – ECO Certification – was the world’s first national ecotourism certification program. We have almost 2,000 certified experiences in our ECO, Sustainable Tourism, Climate Action, and Respecting Our Culture Certifications. There are 11 destinations certified through the ECO Destination Certification program. Ecotourism Australia’s certification programs, including the Sustainable Tourism Certification, are acknowledged and recognised globally. We have a consumer-facing website that features every Sustainable Tourism Certified operator, ECO Certified operator, and ECO Certified Destination in Australia:

<https://greentravelguide.org>

In the last two years, a new Sustainable Tourism program was launched including a pre-certification benchmarking tool in the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard with founding partner Tourism Australia to support the broader tourism industry to demonstrate their commitment to, and be recognised for, the four pillars of sustainability: sustainable management, environmental, socio-economic and cultural impacts.

Ecotourism Australia has global partnerships, working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), UN Tourism (formerly UNWTO), Green Destinations (an international organisation for sustainable destination development); and key partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region including with WWF-Australia, Parks Australia and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPPA).



**GREEN**  
TRAVEL GUIDE

Our **Green Travel Guide** is a consumer-facing website that features every ECO, Respecting our Culture, Climate Action and Sustainable Tourism Certified operator and destination.



## Message from the Board Chair

### Dr Claire Ellis

Ecotourism Australia has had a stellar year in 2023-2024 as the increased demand for sustainable tourism continues and our ambition to inspire a more sustainable future for the tourism industry is creating real outcomes. We continue to deliver on our 2022-25 Corporate Strategy, with our vision to lead tourism to be a catalyst for positive change. We remain focused on mutually positive collaborations and partnerships with key industry bodies, recognising this expands our influence and impact. We continue to maintain internationally recognised certification standards to support our ecotourism and sustainable tourism sector, our operators and destinations and supporter members.

The tourism recovery continues after some years of uncertainty and domestic tourism has stabilised. There remain significant challenges for our operators in areas such as cost of living, insurance and housing availability and affordability, particularly in regional areas. We are proud to have continued to deliver our disaster relief policy for our members, affected by natural disasters including cyclones, floods and bushfires, providing crucial financial relief to those operators. While tourism return is improving, we know there is variance between source markets, traveller segments and regional dispersion.

As the national peak body for ecotourism and sustainable tourism, we advocate for improvements in our industry, and provide credible and relevant sustainability programs for tourism businesses. We continue to work with our partners to promote ecotourism and provide benefits to our certified operators. For instance, our partnership with Tourism Australia remains significant and promotes a pathway to improved sustainability outcomes through our benchmarking tool, the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard. We work with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) and online platform Big Red Group to magnify the promotion of ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified operators and destinations; partnered with Deloitte Access Economics and University of Queensland to support data analysis, research and knowledge-sharing; and we continue to work with our Protected Area Management partners to provide incentives and rewards for certified operators and continue the sustainable growth of tourism in Australia's natural areas.

Our ongoing partnership with World Wide Fund-Australia critically supports 10 regions in the ECO Destination Program, bringing together tourism and conservation in disaster-affected areas to 'build back better'. Our global partnership with Green Destinations ensures we continue to deliver the world's best-practice ECO Destination Certification with eleven destinations now certified and a further eight in the program.

We were proud to present the inaugural Global Sustainable Tourism Summit in Meanjin/Brisbane in June 2024. This event, building on the legacy of the Global Eco Conference and ECO Think Destination forums, marked a significant milestone in our commitment to elevating sustainable tourism and supporting our operators. With a theme of 'People, Planet, Place, Purpose,' we brought together more than 280 participants, including 62 speakers, more than half of whom were Certified operators. Attendees represented all Australian states and territories as well as five international countries, sharing insights and solutions for addressing sustainability, and highlighting common industry challenges and collaborative solutions.

After 13 years on the Board of Ecotourism Australia, including the last six years as Chair, I have recently stepped down. I have been proud to support Ecotourism Australia in its own journey of change and growth, building our focus around leading tourism to be a catalyst for positive change and it has been a privilege to see our members also grow and continue to innovate as they deliver global best-practice sustainable tourism practices.

I have been fortunate to work alongside many dedicated Directors over the years who are passionate advocates for Ecotourism Australia and again this year I would like to thank and express my gratitude to the Board for their unwavering dedication and vision. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to our staff team and interns and our CEO Elissa Keenan, whose commitment and hard work implementing the strategy set by the Board have been instrumental in our continued success. Together, the staff and Board through their passion and expertise have allowed Ecotourism Australia to navigate challenges and seize opportunities, propelling us towards our vision.

As I step down from the Ecotourism Australia Board, I take this opportunity to sincerely thank all our Ecotourism Australia Certified operators and destinations, members, fellow Board members and staff for your commitment to our vision; and to particularly thank Directors Caroline Densley and Nat Burke for nominating as our Chair and Deputy Chair until the AGM in October. I know the future is bright for Ecotourism Australia and I look forward to watching the continued success of our organisation.

We acknowledge the resignation this year of Director Dr Claire Ellis after 13 years of dedicated service on our board, including six years as Chair. On behalf of the Ecotourism Australia Board and staff, we extend our sincere thanks to Claire for her many years of dedication and significant contribution to Ecotourism Australia. Under her stewardship, Ecotourism Australia has successfully navigated numerous challenges and set a strong direction to keep our organisation at the forefront of our industry.



Great Ocean Walk, Twelve Apostles, Great Ocean Road/Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung, VIC  
Advanced Ecotourism and Respecting Our Culture Certified and Green Travel Leader  
Photo credit: Parks Victoria Walks, National Parks and Reserves



In November 2023, the Federal Minister for Trade and Tourism, Senator the Hon. Don Farrell released the Tourism Forecasts for Australia: 2023 to 2028 report showing international arrivals are expected to return to Australia more quickly than previously predicted. The report forecasts:

- **9.3 million in 2024, reaching 98 per cent of pre-pandemic levels**
- **10.2 million in 2025, surpassing pre-pandemic levels to set a new record**
- **12.1 million in 2028, an increase of 4.8 million or 65 per cent on this year.**

The report also forecasts record spending across Australia's tourism and travel industry, which delivers benefits for accommodation, hospitality, transport, experience and event providers, and retail. However, the report also confirmed what many of our operators are experiencing firsthand – that domestic tourism is being impacted by Australian's propensity for overseas travel with nearly 10 million overseas trips by Australians in 2023, reaching 88% of 2019 trip numbers. January 2024 data showed inbound visitors recovering to 83% of January 2019 levels.

Positively, Tourism Research Australia data from the national visitor survey released recently, reveals demand for nature-based tourism experiences has grown with visitors choosing to connect more with Australia's many unique natural and cultural assets. From 2014 to 2023, nature-based activities among Australians saw an overall growth of 47% in demand. Some activities grew by almost 85%, and around 50% more people are enjoying Australia's stunning great outdoors.

Research confirms what many of our members are seeing. Events of recent years have elevated the significance of travel for our visitors and particularly the desire to connect with nature, support local communities and recognise and value culture. People continue to seek transformative experiences and ensure their travel experience is as sustainable as possible. For more than 25 years, our core ECO Certification program has certified nature-based ecotourism experiences and assured travellers that they have selected businesses committed to the journey of sustainability. Our Sustainable Tourism Certification, launched in 2022, has proven extremely successful in supporting urban-based tourism accommodation, tours and attractions to achieve global best-practice recognition.

Moonraker Dolphin Swims, Mornington Peninsula/Burin'yong Bulluk, VIC  
Advanced Ecotourism Certified, Green Travel leader and Hall of fame.  
Photo credit: Moonraker Dolphin Swims



## Message from the CEO

### Elissa Keenan

Ecotourism Australia has experienced a period of significant growth over the past 12 months driven by renewed positivity across the tourism industry and the increasing desire for genuine sustainable and ecotourism experiences by our travellers. We continue to see a very strong number of new Certified operators and applicants to our programs demonstrating the 30-year plus legacy of Ecotourism Australia and remain credible and sought-after by the visitor economy. There continues to be growth in our foundational ECO Certification while our Sustainable Tourism Certification for urban-based businesses has gone from strength to strength.

We were pleased to welcome 36 new certified operators to our community (18 ECO Certified and 18 Sustainable Tourism Certified); and a further 89 new ECO and 197 Sustainable Tourism Certification applicants starting their journey. This year we celebrated two ECO Certified operators being awarded Hall of Fame status – Scenic World in Sydney's Blue Mountains and Paronella Park in Tropical North Queensland, recognising their 20 years of ECO Certification, joining 62 other ECO Certified businesses holding this status; and 12 operators achieving Green Travel Leader status for 10 years of certification with Ecotourism Australia. More than half of all our Certified operators have been certified for 10 or more years and 11% have achieved Hall of Fame status demonstrating a profound commitment to sustainability as a core component of their ecotourism businesses.

We have seen significant growth in urban-based businesses seeking certification and are proud to be one of three global providers competitively selected to support Accor in providing Sustainable Tourism Certification to their 400 hotels in the Australia-Pacific region. Accor has long demonstrated strong leadership in sustainability within the global hospitality and accommodation sector and their recent global commitment to international standard certification has set ambitious targets. Our strong partnership is helping Accor Australia cement its position as a global leader in this space and encouraging other organisations to undertake certification.

We celebrated the announcement of four new ECO Destinations achieving global best-practice sustainability recognition – Bellingen Shire (NSW), who were supported through Ecotourism Australia's partnership with WWF-Australia; and Townsville (Qld), Gladstone Region (Qld), and Capricorn Coast (Qld) who all received support from the Queensland State Government eco-certification grant program offered through the Department of Tourism, Sport and Innovation. Together we now have a cohort of eleven ECO Certified Destinations across New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland.

We sincerely thank and congratulate all our Certified tourism operators and destinations for their commitment to genuine best-practice sustainability standards. We look forward to their ongoing journey of improvement, as they continue to lead the way within the Australian tourism industry.

Our pre-certification pathway program, the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, continues to grow with more than 500 businesses registering to benchmark their sustainability efforts. Our partnership with Tourism Australia remains critical to promote and support tourism operators to start their journey.

Ecotourism Australia also continues to support government initiatives, including Austrade's Sustainable Tourism Framework and Toolkit that helps provide valuable insights and information on how tourism can be

more sustainable. Most significantly we are now seeing operators who undertook their Scorecard progressing on to complete ECO or Sustainable Tourism Certification – meeting the strategic intent of the program to provide a pathway for the tourism industry.

Our strategic local and international partnerships remain essential to delivering a stronger sustainable tourism industry across the country. Our partnerships with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (distribution partner), Big Red Group (key enablement partner), Deloitte Access Economics (data partner), Destination NSW and VisitCanberra (industry partners), and new partnerships announced with Accommodation Australia and the Caravan Industry Association of Australia help amplify our programs. We also received funding support from the Austrade Export Market Development Grant, helping raise the profile of sustainable tourism throughout the industry and ensuring our operators remain best-placed to export their tourism product to the world. We continued our valued partnership with the Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC) and participated in their annual Meeting Place; and through Tourism Australia's Australian Tourism Exchange engaged with operators, buyers and industry to continue to highlight the value of global best-practice certification.

We are committed to driving positive change across the tourism industry and work on behalf of our operators on key issues affecting our industry and to elevate the recognition of demonstrable, credible sustainability certification. We work with our Certified operators and destinations to understand the challenges they are facing, and engage with government on key topics, including post pandemic recovery; visas; the regional migration strategy challenges; opportunities for more sustainable tourism; the development of the Federal Government's Sustainable Oceans Plan and the Murray Darling Basin Review; and the value of certification in the tourism industry through regular roundtable meetings with the Federal Minister for Trade and Tourism, Senator the Hon. Don Farrell, Austrade and other tourism peak body representative groups. We remain actively committed to delivering actions in the THRIVE 2030 Strategy and will continue to engage and collaborate with Austrade to input into and deliver on the Phase 2 action plan.

As an organisation representing more than 500 members and some 2000 certified tours, attractions and accommodations, we remain committed to advancing sustainable tourism across Australia and providing world-class certifications and pathway programs to support the broader visitor economy. Ecotourism Australia is proud to work with our Certified operators, applicants, corporate, business and individual supporter members, and our corporate and industry partners. We look forward to seeing sustainable tourism and recognition of global best-practice standards continue to rise in the years ahead.



Alice Springs Desert Park, Alice Springs/Mparntwe, NT  
Advanced Ecotourism and Respecting Our Culture Certified  
Photo credit: Alice Springs Desert Park

## Corporate Plan 2022-2025 Update

In 2022, Ecotourism Australia released our new corporate plan to steer our strategic and operational efforts against six strategic priority areas and goals designed to support nature-based, eco and sustainable tourism, our operators, destinations and our industry:

### 1 LEGACY LEADER

**Goal:** Deliver globally recognised certification and recognition programs across Australia and the South Pacific.

**Status:** By continually aligning with international standards and collaborating with leading sustainable tourism agencies, we ensure our certification programs meet the growing global expectations for sustainable tourism. We maintain the credibility of our certification programs through an up-to-date audit schedule for our Certified operators and destinations, guaranteeing they consistently meet ever-increasing global standards. We actively contribute to the global conversation on best-practice sustainability standards and criteria; and continue to ensure our programs support all tourism businesses in the visitor economy.

### 2 STRENGTHENING INDUSTRY

**Goal:** Strengthen and promote our industry and recognise the contribution of ECO Certified operators and destinations to Australia and the South Pacific; generate value for our members; and deliver new products and services for the broader tourism industry.

**Status:** Building on the leadership legacy of the ECO Certification program, we introduced a Sustainable Tourism Certification for non-nature-based products, with 250 operators already applying for this global standard certification and almost 100 of these now being certified. We have also completed a comprehensive membership review to clarify expectations and enhance benefits for our Supporter Members. Our certification programs are accessible to businesses across the South Pacific, expanding beyond our initial focus on Australia-based locations.

### 3 ADVOCACY

**Goal:** Provide a credible and respected voice for ecotourism, nature-based tourism, and sustainable tourism across our region; focus on positive outcomes generated by quality tourism and play a strategic national role in identifying issues and solutions.

**Status:** Ecotourism Australia has elevated its positioning as the nation's peak body in eco and sustainable tourism and regularly participates at government and industry round tables to drive positive outcomes for quality tourism. We continue to support the delivery of THRIVE 2030 and have participated in shaping the next stages of the nation's tourism strategy. We collaborate with leading state and national agencies to recognise and promote ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified operators and destinations as high standard, best-practice tourism experiences.

## Corporate Plan 2022-2025 Update

### 4 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

**Goal:** Identify strategic partnerships for collaboration and program delivery, measuring and demonstrating value added to the World Tourism Organisation (UN Tourism) objectives for sustainable, nature-based and ecotourism.

**Status:** We actively engage in partnerships at an international, national, and regional level. Our collaboration with Tourism Australia on the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program highlights the importance of taking initial steps in sustainability. Accor's commitment to certifying its hotels under the Sustainable Tourism Certification demonstrates that sustainability can be implemented across all visitor economy sectors. We elevate ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified products as top-quality experiences through ongoing partnerships with Big Red Group, the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW), Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC), the Caravan Industry Association of Australia (CIAA), Accommodation Australia, and various state tourism organisations, and other industry peak bodies.

We continue to partner with government agencies and industry to develop consistent policies and incentives for best-practice management of national parks and protected areas with our Protected Area Manager members.

### 5 BRAND AWARENESS

**Goal:** Through effective communication, marketing and positioning, supported by key industry research and data, increase awareness of Ecotourism Australia, and the products, services and programs we deliver.

**Status:** A strategic partnership with Deloitte Access Economics has enabled Ecotourism Australia to build a measurement tool, which is initially being used to monitor and measure the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard and report against the criteria to benchmark our industry.

We have enhanced our brand design and delivery to create a more accessible and user-friendly identity. This improved branding helps operators demonstrate credible certification and their ongoing commitment to ecotourism. Industry understanding of ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification is growing among destination leaders and government officials, thanks to our presentations at various industry and trade events throughout the year and the successful delivery of our Global Sustainable Tourism Summit. These efforts have significantly elevated our brand's visibility and influence.

### 6 SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONS

**Goal:** Ensure Ecotourism Australia is a sustainable organisation with prosperous growth opportunities.

**Status:** Ecotourism Australia has worked to improve our governance, operational systems, policies and procedures to ensure long-term sustainable delivery of our products. We have made improvements to internal data management systems and improved efficiencies to better serve our Certified operators and destinations. We continue to 'walk the talk' at every opportunity with further refinement of our procurement, travel and sustainability policies, better communication of our efforts and improvement of our brand and websites to be more accessible and inclusive to all users.

## Advocacy

Ecotourism Australia leads the way in sustainable and ecotourism certification, earning global recognition for our programs and the high standards delivered by our operators and destinations. Our commitment to sustainable tourism drives us to actively represent Australia in government forums, working groups, and networks, ensuring we stay ahead of evolving regulations and consumer expectations.

Our participation in these events is crucial in elevating the voices of our members and the broader sustainable tourism industry. These platforms have allowed us to address key sector issues, raise awareness and enhance sustainability capacity across the visitor economy.

We regularly participate in Austrade's quarterly Visitor Economy Stakeholder Forums, collaborating with other peak bodies and government representatives to share insights and engage in initiatives aligned with THRIVE 2030's key objectives. This forum plays a crucial role in shaping the Consolidation Phase (2025-2027) of the THRIVE 2030 strategy and ensures actions are tangible for our industry.

Throughout these discussions, Ecotourism Australia champions global standard certifications and advocates for broader industry recognition, ensuring our certifications remain the benchmark for sustainable tourism on a global scale.

## Did you know?

**69% of international visitors engaged in at least one nature-based activity during their trip, Austrade Report: The rise of nature-based tourism in Australia, 22 July 2024.**



Margaret River Discovery Co, Margaret River/Wadandi Boodja, WA  
Nature Tourism Certified  
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

## THRIVE 2030: The Reimagined Visitor Economy

For the 2023-2024 financial year, THRIVE 2030 has made notable progress, while delivering on Phase 2, the Recovery Phase (2022-2024). The total visitor economy spend reached \$191.4 billion, surpassing the Phase 1 target of \$166 billion, with \$79.9 billion spent in regional Australia, exceeding the \$70 billion goal. This success aligns with the Recovery Phase's objectives, which focus on driving both domestic and targeted international visitation and addressing critical supply-side issues such as workforce shortages.

The re-released THRIVE 2030 Strategy sets an ambitious target of \$230 billion in visitor expenditure by 2030 and emphasises sustainable growth through the key themes of Collaborate, Modernise, and Diversify. In this context, Ecotourism Australia's certification programs including Respecting Our Culture (ROC) Certification and our pre-certification Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard are noted in the strategy.

These initiatives are integral to the strategy by promoting sustainable practices and enhancing the quality of visitor experiences. Ecotourism Australia contributed to the International Diversification Strategy for Australia's visitor economy, ensuring sustainability remains central to the recovery efforts, effectively balancing economic growth with sustainable management.



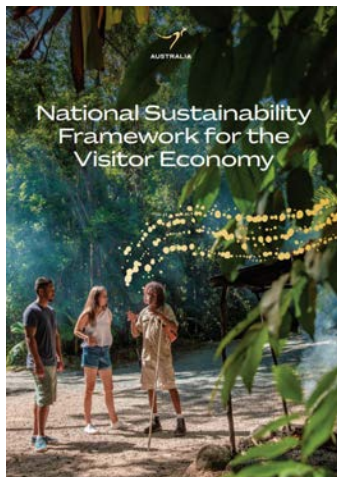
Australian Government

Australian Trade and Investment Commission



## National Sustainability Framework

With contribution and support from each state and territory, the Federal Government has demonstrated its commitment to sustainability with the release of the National Sustainability Framework and Sustainable Tourism Toolkit for the tourism industry. The first of its kind for Australia, the framework provides a universal understanding of sustainability principles. The toolkit guides the tourism industry towards sustainable growth and operations and supports the entire visitor economy to make a start on their sustainability journey. Our certification programs elevate the framework for operators who want to be recognised formally for their sustainability initiatives.



Ecotourism Australia is proud to support the industry's journey to achieve global best-practice in sustainability and play a key role in the implementation of the government's National Sustainability Framework. In line with this, we are pleased to endorse the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit, which enhances businesses' understanding of sustainability and the tools available to them. The toolkit is a great first step on a business's sustainability journey, laying strong foundations for their next step, the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, then global standard certification.

By supporting Austrade, the THRIVE 2030 Strategy, and the National Sustainability Framework and Toolkit, Ecotourism Australia remains committed to elevating the tourism industry's standards and fostering a deeper understanding of sustainability across all sectors.

## Climate Ready Australia

Ecotourism Australia continues its active role in the Climate Ready Australia 2030 initiative, an interdisciplinary alliance uniting partners from various sectors to drive climate action in Australia. Representing the visitor economy and tourism sector, we collaborate with peak bodies from industries such as engineering and accounting to address urgent climate challenges.

Together, we identify opportunities for climate action, co-designing and delivering on a shared agenda focused on four key areas: enabling policy, capacity building, accelerating decarbonisation, and adaptive resilience. Our efforts include quarterly meetings and dedicated working groups targeting specific actions and in November 2023, we contributed to the inaugural Climate Ready Australia National Summit.

Through our participation in Climate Ready Australia 2030, we contribute to enhancing the resilience of the environment, communities, and the economy against climate change, ensuring tourism remains a sustainable part of Australia's future.



**CLIMATE READY  
INITIATIVE**  
Shaping a climate ready future

## Murray Darling Basin Authority Peaks

We regularly participate in the Murray Darling Basin Authority Peaks Roundtable, as one of the few tourism representations. It is a forum to have open and constructive discussions on the sustainability of the basin moving forward, test ideas and share updates. Ecotourism Australia represents ECO Certified providers based across the entire Murray Darling Basin and ensures tourism is seen as a sustainable and future proof industry for communities and the environment. Ecotourism Australia provided a submission into the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation, advocating for stronger tourism representation, recognition of high-standard tourism operators, a balanced approach between agriculture and tourism, and continued water conservation for all to enjoy.

## Sustainable Ocean Plan

Ecotourism Australia remains actively involved in shaping the Sustainable Ocean Plan, led by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. This plan will establish a long-term vision for the sustainable management of Australia's oceans. Ecotourism Australia participated in the Shared Ocean Future Workshops, discussing the opportunities and challenges facing our oceans, and looked for solutions to support a healthy ocean and sustainable blue economy.



## Queensland Tourism and Conservation Alliance

Established in 2022, the Queensland Tourism and Conservation Alliance is a collaborative effort involving Ecotourism Australia, the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC), National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ), Queensland Conservation Council, Queensland First Nations Tourism Council, and Pew Charitable Trusts. This Alliance fosters a sustainable nature-based tourism industry, especially in preparation for the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Alliance continues to work to promote the expansion of National Park and protected area land across Queensland.

## QTIC Associations Network

As a formal member of QTIC's Associations Council, we contribute to advancing Queensland's tourism industry. Our involvement in the QTIC Associations Network allows us to contribute to discussions on tourism recovery and broader industry support, ensuring that conservation and tourism efforts are aligned for a sustainable future.

## Ongoing Advocacy

We have provided feedback and insights to support the development of several key Federal and State Government strategies; and sit on several advisory and consultation committees including:

- THRIVE 2030 Strategy – Consolidation Phase consultation
- Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade inquiry into the post COVID-19 recovery of Australia's tourism and international education sectors
- National Sustainability Framework and Sustainable Tourism Toolkit consultation
- Home Affairs Regional Migration Strategy
- Federal Inquiry into Australia's Tourism and International Education Sectors
- Austrade Discussion Paper: International Diversification Strategy for the Visitor Economy
- Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water: Sustainable Ocean Plan
- Queensland Tourism Industry Conservation Alliance
- Parks Australia Management Plans for Christmas Islands and Cocos (Keeling) Islands Marine Parks
- Australian Tourism Sustainability Advisory Committee
- Murray Darling Basin 2025 Basin Review and Peak Association Roundtable Forums
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority reviews
- Visitor Economy Stakeholder Forums
- Sustainable Tourism Advisory Committee
- National Environmental Biosecurity Advisory Group
- QTIC's Associations Network



Image: Elissa Keenan, Nadine Schramm and Corinne Lewis at the Australian Tourism Exchange 2024, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, VIC



Tasman Island Cruises, Tasman Peninsula/Pydairrme, TAS  
 Advanced Ecotourism and Ecotourism Certified, Green Travel Leader  
 Photo credit: Pennicott Wilderness Journeys

## Strategic Partnerships

Partnering with strategic allies is essential for advancing sustainability in the tourism industry and across the visitor economy to drive benefits for businesses committed to sustainable practices. By aligning with key strategic partners, we leverage collective expertise and resources to address complex challenges and drive positive change.

## Global Partners

### UN Tourism and UNESCO

Ecotourism Australia is at the forefront of global sustainable tourism trends. Through alignments with organisations like the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) through Memorandum of Understanding agreements, we maintain Australia’s representation on the world stage and bring international best-practice examples to the Australian tourism industry.



### Travelife

Ecotourism Australia plays a crucial role in providing global standard certification systems to the Australian tourism industry. By collaborating with international counterparts like Travelife, we integrate best-practice certification processes into our programs, ensuring the continuous improvement of tourism certifications worldwide.



### Green Destinations

We continued to deliver our ECO and Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification programs in partnership with Green Destinations, an international leader in destination sustainability certification. Our participation and engagement at Green Destinations forums ensures our destination certification programs remain competitive and continue to meet best-practice standards and extends our global reach. With the support of Green Destinations there are eleven destinations now certified and a further eight in the program. All destinations in our programs receive complimentary nomination in the annual Destinations Sustainability Stories Competition hosted by Green Destinations, which are presented on the world stage at ITB in Berlin.



## National Partners

### Tourism Australia

#### Founding Partner of the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard

This year, Ecotourism Australia and Tourism Australia continued their strategic partnership, significantly amplifying and driving completion of the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program across industry. Since its launch at the end of 2022, more than 500 tourism businesses have commenced their sustainability journey with the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard. To support operators, Ecotourism Australia held multiple scorecard webinars and in-person workshops at national and state level such as the National Caravan Industry Association of Australia conference.

This partnership has been instrumental in promoting sustainability practices across the tourism industry, with the Scorecard program expanding to all states and a great range of industry sectors. The ongoing collaboration underscores the commitment to fostering a sustainable tourism industry and meeting the expectations of travellers.

Tourism Australia also supported the Global Sustainable Tourism Summit as event Partner helping us deliver an outstanding conference.



### Australian Tourism Data Warehouse

#### Distribution Partner



Ecotourism Australia and Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) continue to ensure leading ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified businesses are showcased through the ATDW platform and various visitor facing websites. ATDW is currently developing a new platform and when live, this will include links for Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard outcomes. Highlighting operators with the highest scores is a key priority for ATDW. The inclusion of scorecard status on operators' listings enables them to demonstrate their commitment to starting their sustainability journey.

### Worldwide Fund for Nature-Australia

#### Industry Partner



As the peak body for eco and sustainable tourism it is integral for Ecotourism Australia to maintain ongoing collaboration with key conservation agencies like WWF Australia, to ensure high-quality outcomes for community and environment. In 2023/24 remaining funds from the Ecotourism Australia and WWF Australia bushfire recovery partnership were reallocated to support businesses progress through the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program. With up to 80 places exclusively available for businesses in ECO Destination regions, the program was well received. This initiative shows that leadership from local governments and tourism organisations can drive sustainable practices in the tourism industry. Programs like Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard provide destinations with a clear benchmark against global sustainable tourism standards and inform further capacity-building efforts. WWF provided support to 10 regions in the ECO Destination program in the past financial year with five achieving ECO Certification.



Image credit: Accor Pacific, ibis Styles East Perth, WA. Sustainable Tourism Certified



## ACCOR AUSTRALIA PACIFIC

Industry Partner

Accor hotel group has demonstrated strong progress towards their ambitious goal of achieving 100% global standard certification across its network by the end of 2025. Ecotourism Australia is one of only three providers selected globally to help meet this goal with our international best-practice ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification programs. This collaboration underscores the importance of our shared mission to elevate sustainable practices and set global standards for sustainable tourism. By working together, we are paving the way for a more sustainable future for the entire accommodation sector, benefiting the environment, communities, and travellers alike. As of 30 Jun 2024, 16 properties have received Sustainable Tourism Certification and an additional 150 properties from Australia and the Pacific are currently enrolled in the Sustainable Tourism Certification program.

## Big Red Group

Key Enablement Partner

In 2023, Big Red Group and Ecotourism Australia joined forces to advance sustainability in the tourism sector through our ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certifications and the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard. As a Key Enablement Partner, Big Red Group has played a crucial role in promoting sustainable practices among experience operators on their platform. Big Red Group's legacy of highlighting ECO Certified businesses was expanded to further elevate those with the Sustainable Tourism Certification and Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard. To date, 80 experience providers have enrolled in the program, leveraging the scorecard to begin their sustainability journey or progress towards certification. By showcasing their commitment through their listings, Big Red Group is helping these operators demonstrate their dedication to sustainable tourism and drive positive change within the industry.



# Protected Area Manager Partners

Ecotourism Australia collaborates with national park agencies across Australia, including Parks Australia, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions – Western Australia, National Parks South Australia, Parks Victoria, Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA). These partnerships drive recognition and reward programs, such as extended permit timeframes, for ECO Certified operators, celebrating and acknowledging businesses that meet global standards as high-standard tourism operators.



**Australian Government**  
**Parks Australia**

## Parks Australia

Parks Australia manages a variety of national parks ranging from Christmas and Cocos Keeling Islands in the Indian Ocean to Norfolk Island in the Pacific, Booderee on the NSW South Coast and World Heritage-listed Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Parks in the Northern Territory. Ecotourism Australia continues to collaborate with Parks Australia to ensure these highly visited and internationally renowned sites are supported by high quality ECO Certified sustainable tourism experiences.



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

## Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)

GBRMPA is known as Australia's reef management agency, leading a global effort to preserve and protect one of the planet's most significant natural wonders: the Great Barrier Reef. With almost 20% of our ECO Certified operators in Australia operating in or around the Great Barrier Reef; and together with ECO Certified Destinations Port Douglas, Townsville, Capricorn Coast, Bundaberg and Gladstone (with Cassowary Coast progressing their ECO Destination Certification currently), Ecotourism Australia plays a pivotal role in supporting appropriate tourism management in this World Heritage area. Ecotourism Australia continues to collaborate closely with the Reef Authority to maintain the standards required and the recognition of High Standard Tour Operators working on and around the Great Barrier Reef.

## High Standard Tourism Operators

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park recognise High Standard Tourism Operators who hold global standard certifications and demonstrate best-practise sustainable tourism principles. The operators are committed to protecting and preserving the reef while offering exceptional tours and are rewarded as such by receiving extended licence permits and opportunities such as the award-winning Master Reef Guide program for their staff.

***Passions of Paradise*** - Advanced Ecotourism and Climate Action Certified, Green Travel Leader

*Is deeply committed to sustainability through initiatives like the Coral Nurture Program, where they actively help restore coral at the Great Barrier Reef by growing and reattaching broken fragments. They also support carbon offsetting by planting 1,200 trees annually in the Daintree Rainforest and contribute to marine conservation by being a 100% AWARE partner with Project AWARE, focusing on shark protection and marine debris prevention.*

## Caravan Industry Association of Australia

### New Partner

In August 2023, Ecotourism Australia formed a strategic partnership with the Caravan Industry Association of Australia (CIAA) to enhance sustainability within the caravanning and camping sectors. Representing a broad spectrum of caravan parks, RV parks, and camping sites across Australia, CIAA is committed to supporting the industry's sustainability, with 9 parks currently holding ECO Certification.

This partnership ensures the sector grows responsibly while preserving Australia's natural beauty. As part of this initiative, 35 caravan park operators have engaged in the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program. At the CIAA conference, Ecotourism Australia delivered a workshop to 150 participants, advancing the adoption of sustainable practices within the sector.



## Accommodation Australia

### New Partner

In September 2023, Ecotourism Australia and Accommodation Australia partnered to advance sustainability in the accommodation sector and recognise properties taking steps along the sustainable tourism pathway. As Australia's leading industry body for accommodation, Accommodation Australia represents over 80% of the nation's accommodation providers, from backpacker hostels to luxury resorts, and major hotel groups.

This partnership underscores our shared commitment to fostering sustainable tourism practices and supporting the accommodation sector in meeting global best-practice standards. Together, Ecotourism Australia and Accommodation Australia are paving the way for a more sustainable future in tourism. To date, we have almost 140 accommodation providers who have achieved ECO or Sustainable Tourism Certification and a further 200 accommodations have engaged in the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program, demonstrating significant progress towards full certification.



## University Of Queensland

### Research Partner



The partnership between Ecotourism Australia and the University of Queensland fosters valuable knowledge exchange and builds a strong research foundation to address current tourism and sustainability challenges. Ecotourism Australia currently support four UQ PHD students in their research projects, with outcomes including sustainable destinations, emissions reduction and social licencing. The success of the sustainable and ecotourism industry depends on aligning leading sustainability research with the needs of the tourism industry.

## Deloitte Access Economics

### Data Analysis Partner



Ecotourism Australia partnered with Deloitte Access Economics as the Data Analytics Partner for the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program. Through this partnership, they provide critical statistical insights and data analysis. The resulting analysis will better inform the visitor economy and industry leaders about the sustainable tourism sector's strengths and weaknesses, guiding future capacity-building programs and sustainability research with the needs of the tourism industry.

## Shiji ReviewPro

### Industry Partner



Ecotourism Australia partners with Shiji ReviewPro to provide visitor satisfaction monitoring functionality to all ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified operators. The tool aggregates more than 100 million online reviews from 140+ online travel agencies (OTAs) and review sites in more than 45 languages with daily content updates.

## Grants Programs

### Austrade - Export Market Development Grant



We continued to refine and grow understanding of the Sustainable Tourism program thanks to vital support from the Austrade Export Market Development Grant. Through the grant and in collaboration with our partners, Ecotourism Australia is raising awareness about the importance of sustainable tourism among international buyers and the local industry. We have conducted information sessions, workshops, and training on sustainable tourism pre-certification and certification programs for Australian businesses. This initiative supports the growing expectations for high-quality sustainable tourism from international guests, ensuring that our operators can continue to promote sustainable practices as part of their export offerings.

### Department of Tourism and Sport (DTS) Grant



Ecotourism Australia is pleased to work with the Department of Tourism and Sport to enhance tourism capability and training through the Tourism Business Capability Subsidy. Launched in February 2024, this \$2 million initiative offered eligible businesses up to \$2,000 per applicant for tourism certification and training activities. The second round of the program was released in May 2024. This subsidy supports new applicants and certified operators in our scorecard and certification programs. Already, 93 Queensland operators have started the ECO or Sustainable Tourism Certification and 44 have opted to undertake the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard. It was also available to current certified businesses to use for their renewal and audit costs. Notably, this is the first grant of its kind in Australia, and we acknowledge the Queensland Government for their commitment to supporting tourism operators across the State. Ecotourism Australia recorded one of the highest application rates of any of the programs offered through the grant.

### Indian Ocean Territories Grant



In collaboration with the University of Queensland and Christmas Island Tourism Association, and thanks to funding from Parks Australia, we have made significant strides with the Indian Ocean Territories Marine Parks Grant, a multi-year grant program, which began in July 2023 and runs through until 31 May 2025. We have successfully completed stage two of the program for the 2023-24 period, supporting Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The project focuses on bolstering tourism capacity and sustainability in the Indian Ocean Territories by educating local operators on the four pillars of sustainability. We have developed a comprehensive toolkit that highlights local examples and provides practical guidance to inspire sustainable practices for local tourism operators.

Support and subsidies have been provided to operators on Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands to facilitate their participation in the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program and progress toward global standard certifications. To date, we have conducted on-the-ground workshops and one-on-one information sessions, directly assisting six operators with capacity building and mentoring efforts. This initiative aims to ensure responsible tourism growth and enhance the local economy through sustainable practices.

## State and Regional Collaboration to support pathway programs

State and regional partners are actively advancing sustainable tourism through the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard and certification programs. These initiatives support local operators by funding or reimbursing the cost of the scorecard, elevating those that have completed certification and are promoting responsible tourism practices. These efforts reflect a strong commitment to enhancing sustainability and fostering a culture of environmental stewardship across their regions.



Image Credit: Destination NSW, diners at Crystal Creek Meadows, Kangaroo Valley, NSW  
Advanced Ecotourism and Respecting Our Culture Certified and Green Travel Leader

### Destination NSW Industry Partner

Building on last year's collaboration, Destination NSW and Ecotourism Australia have advanced their efforts to drive sustainable tourism across the state. Through this partnership hundreds of eligible tourism businesses receive complimentary access to the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program. In 2023-24 financial year, more than 70% of places have been used and round two has been rolled out for the next year. Ecotourism Australia have supported Destination NSW to build on their efforts by working to recognise those that are ECO or Sustainable Tourism Certified on the Visit NSW platform and in their image gallery. This initiative not only addresses the increasing demand for sustainable tourism but also helps businesses meet evolving visitor expectations and industry standards.



### Visit Canberra

In September 2023, Visit Canberra joined forces with Ecotourism Australia to enhance sustainability within the ACT's tourism sector through the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program. This relationship supports local operators by providing complimentary access to the scorecard.

Visit Canberra's investment has enabled several ACT operators to engage with the program, with 50% of funded scorecards already subscribed. The partnership continues to drive sustainability in the ACT, aligning with broader industry goals and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility within the region.

### Tourism Mid-West, VIC

Funded 15 local operators to complete the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program and facilitated an in-person workshop to grow the industry's understanding of sustainable tourism practices.



## Augusta-Margeret River Region, WA

### ECO Destination Certified

The region's local council and regional tourism organisation supported 30 local operators to undertake the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program, with costs reimbursed upon completion and the opportunity for 1:1 mentoring in addition to group sessions. ECO Certified operators in the region were further elevated through the region's visitor facing channels and showcased as leaders in sustainable and ecotourism offerings.

## Central Coast, NSW

### ECO Destination Certified

Funded seven local operators to undertake the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program and have worked to elevate those that have taken steps along the sustainability path through their award-winning 'Eco Advocates' program. The program included marketing support and mentorship to increase best-practice and elevate the stories of ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified businesses in the region, including a dedicated campaign focusing on ecotourism experiences across the region.

## Capricorn Coast, QLD

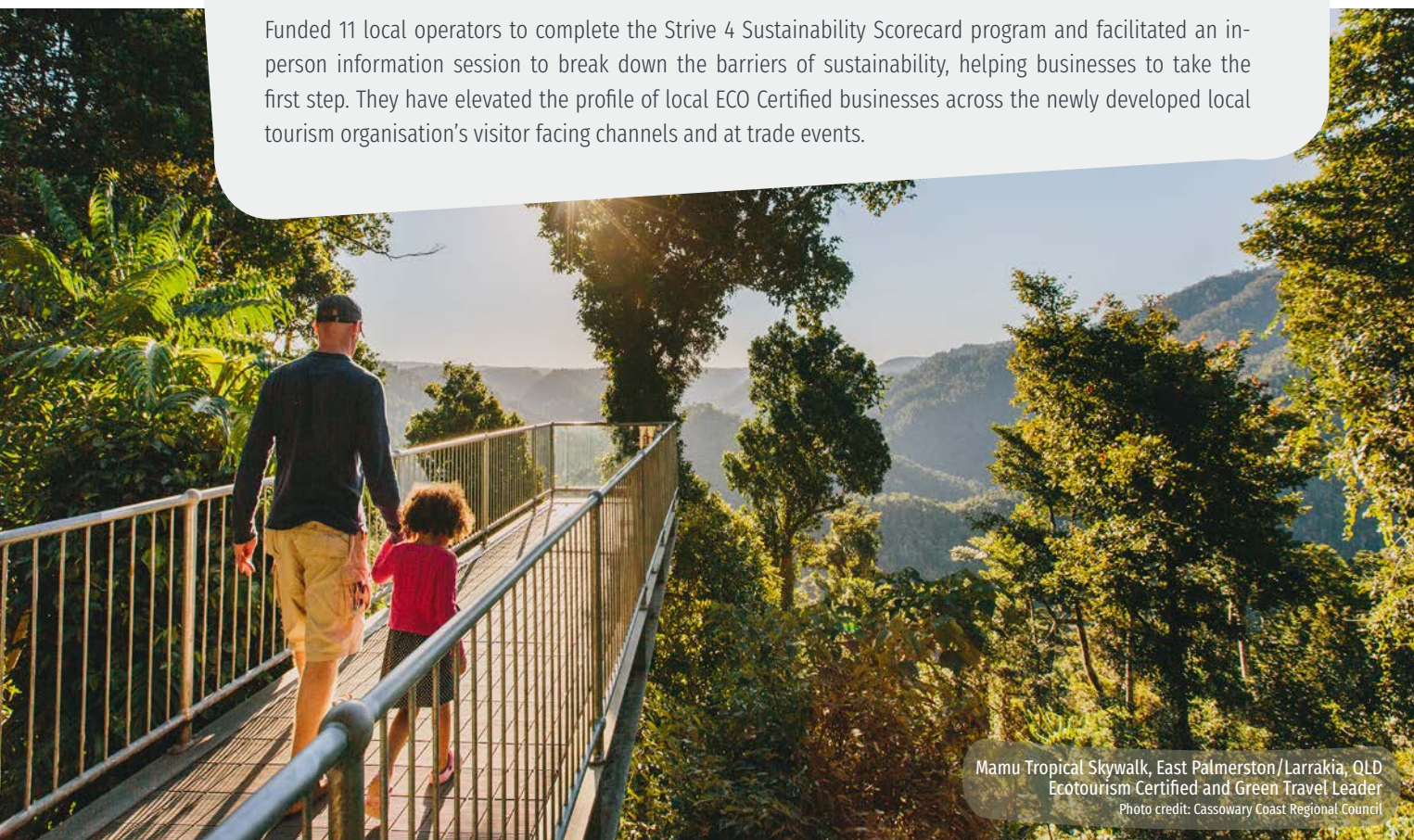
### ECO Destination Certified

The regional tourism organisation supported five local operators to complete the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program and provided membership incentives for those that have completed the scorecard or certification over the past year. They provide 1:1 mentoring and support to leading ecotourism businesses, whilst elevating them as high standard tourism operators to buyers and famil programs visiting the region.

## Cassowary Coast, QLD

### ECO Destination Certified

Funded 11 local operators to complete the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program and facilitated an in-person information session to break down the barriers of sustainability, helping businesses to take the first step. They have elevated the profile of local ECO Certified businesses across the newly developed local tourism organisation's visitor facing channels and at trade events.



Mamu Tropical Skywalk, East Palmerston/Larrakia, QLD  
Ecotourism Certified and Green Travel Leader  
Photo credit: Cassowary Coast Regional Council



Balloon Aloft, Hunter Valley/Wonnarua, NSW  
First company to progress from Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard to Certification in Australia  
Photo credit: Balloon Aloft

## Certification and program highlights

Through integral partnerships, international best-practice collaboration, strategic direction of the Ecotourism Australia Corporate Strategy and our ongoing support and leadership of the eco and sustainable tourism industry we have seen some incredible uptake and completion of our programs. These outcomes illustrate Australia's efforts to ensure we meet international best-practice expectations of sustainable tourism delivery.

### ECO Certification



In the past year, the demand for sustainable travel has surged, with 75% of global travellers expressing a desire to travel more sustainably (Booking.com Sustainable Travel Report 2024). Austrade's 2024 report: The rise of nature-based tourism in Australia, highlights a significant rise in nature-based tourism, with 69% of international visitors engaging in these activities. Ecotourism Australia's pioneering ECO Certification continues to set the benchmark in nature-based tourism, implementing responsible tourism practices across four pillars: sustainable management, environment, socio-economic and culture impacts. This year, we saw a 27% increase in new applicants, with 89 seeking certification, and welcomed 20 new certified operators, reinforcing our commitment to the highest sustainability standards in tourism.

### Sustainable Tourism Certification

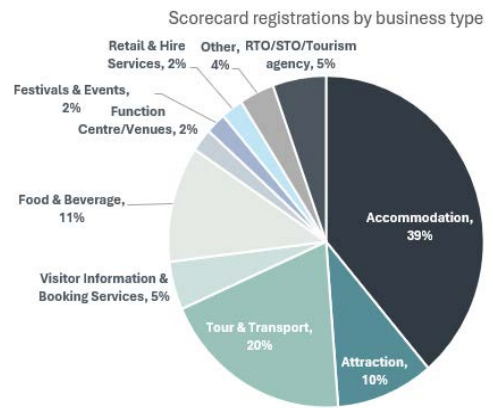


Our more recent Sustainable Tourism Certification program caters to non-nature-based businesses. This certification ensures these entities minimise their environmental impact while maximising benefits to the community and culture. This year, we saw 197 new applicants from urban and non-nature-based businesses, highlighting the growing interest in sustainability across various sectors. We also certified 16 new operators, underscoring our role in fostering responsible tourism practices beyond nature-based experiences.

## Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard

Ecotourism Australia continued the innovative Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard with founding partner Tourism Australia helping market the program.

In a survey of 180 travel and tourism businesses of all sizes, the World Travel and Tourism Council<sup>2</sup> found that the largest challenges to implementing sustainability for businesses were resourcing, cost, and a lack of clear targets or measurements of success.



### Top 5 business types to complete the scorecard

- 16% Self-contained accommodation
- 15% Serviced accommodation
- 9% Winery / Distillery / Brewery
- 9% Land-based tours
- 8% Marine / Water-based tours

## Pathway from Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard to Certification

Through integral partnerships, international best-practice collaboration, strategic direction of the Ecotourism Australia Corporate Strategy and our ongoing support and leadership of the eco and sustainable tourism industry we have seen some incredible uptake and completion of our programs. These outcomes illustrate Australia's efforts to ensure we meet international best-practice expectations of sustainable tourism delivery.

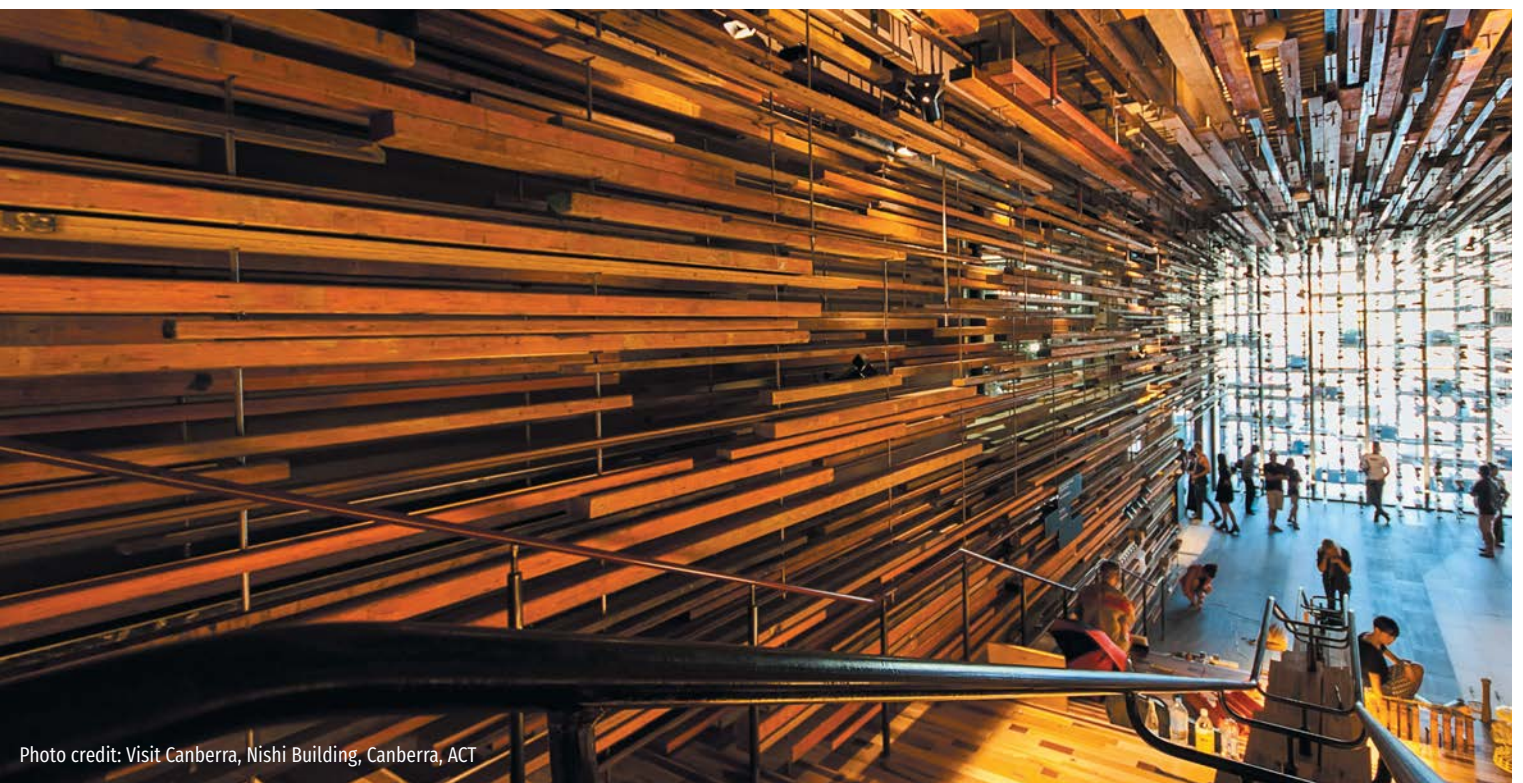


Photo credit: Visit Canberra, Nishi Building, Canberra, ACT



Photo: 2024 Sustainable Tourism Summit, Brisbane/Meanjin, QLD

## Global Sustainable Tourism Summit

Ecotourism Australia, in partnership with Tourism Australia and Accor, and with major sponsor Big Red Group, hosted the inaugural Global Sustainable Tourism Summit in Meanjin/Brisbane, June 2024. Building on the legacy of the Global Eco Conference and ECO Think Destination forums, the event marked a significant milestone in our commitment to elevating sustainable tourism and supporting our operators.

**The summit, themed 'People, Planet, Place, Purpose,' brought together**

More than **280** delegates, **62** speakers,  
representation from all Australian states  
and 5 international countries

Attendees shared insights and solutions for addressing sustainability's four pillars: sustainable management, environmental, socio-economic, and cultural impacts and highlighted common industry challenges and collaborative solutions.

The summit featured an impressive lineup of Australian and international sustainability experts who covered topics ranging from Indigenous Tourism and Engagement with Traditional Owners, to the Social Impact of Tourism, The Future of Aviation, and Cruise Travel, Wildlife Tourism, Food and Gastronomy Tourism and Best-Practice Ways to Drive Sustainable Management of Destinations.

The collective insights and collaborative spirit of the summit reaffirmed our shared commitment to advancing sustainable tourism practices that benefit our environment, communities, and future generations.

### 5 Key Takeaways

- 1** "Tourism can help us save what we cannot afford to lose." Tourism can be a powerful and inspirational mechanism for storytelling, conservation, and community-building, as long as we put People, Planet, Place and Purpose first.
- 2** Tell your story. Sharing your journey and experiences fosters greater connection and change.
- 3** "Look forward in the micro, look backward in the macro. Take your sustainability journey one step at a time, and suddenly you'll have walked a marathon."
- 4** Authentic engagement is about listening. Showing up is one thing, but being present, purposeful and listening is another.
- 5** Just start. Sustainability is not about perfection, it is a journey, but that journey cannot start without commitment. Start with what makes a difference to you. Even small steps can make an impact.

## Risks and opportunities

Risks and opportunities for sustainable tourism were at the heart of Ecotourism Australia's inaugural 2024 Global Sustainable Tourism Summit. Identifying and understanding these elements are crucial for shaping effective strategies and fostering growth in the tourism industry. At the summit, these discussions revealed significant insights that can drive our efforts forward. By scrutinising potential challenges and prospects, we can better position ourselves to influence positive change and advance sustainable practices.

### 5 risks and opportunities identified by delegates

- 1 Australian Standard Recognition:** Establishing a recognised Australian Standard to protect Australia's reputation and meet traveller expectations while combating greenwashing.
- 2 Global Best-Practice Standards:** Ensuring sustainability standards remain global best-practice and are accessible and affordable for all tourism operators.
- 3 Strategic Partnerships:** Forming strategic partnerships to achieve mutual benefits and opportunities for the tourism industry.
- 4 Government/Industry Program Alignment:** Aligning government and industry programs to support operators and eliminate duplication of efforts.
- 5 National Parks Expansion:** Expanding national parks and protected areas, involving high-standard tourism operators and providing opportunities for Traditional Owners.

By addressing these risks and seizing opportunities, Ecotourism Australia will continue to drive meaningful progress and contribute to a more resilient and sustainable tourism sector.

## Did you know?



Image credit: Mad Panda Media, International Guest Speaker, Chief Frank Antoine Chief of the Bonaparte First Nation in Canada holding up his nation's flag with Fraser Nai from Strait Experience.

- **More than 50% of our speakers were Certified operators**
- **1/4 of attendees were Certified operators**
- **We had delegates from Australia, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Canada, Saudi Arabia and South Africa**
- **Each delegate had a tree planted on their behalf to reduce their conference emissions**

## Connecting **with industry**

Throughout the year Ecotourism Australia has actively engaged with the tourism industry to promote and enhance sustainable practices. From our inaugural Global Sustainable Tourism Summit to numerous workshops and conferences, we have continually worked to drive the sustainability agenda forward. Here are some key events we contributed to this year:

- Global Sustainable Tourism Conference
- Tourism Australia's Australian Tourism Exchange
- Australian Tourism Export Council's Meeting Place
- Austrade Sustainability Forum
- Destination Australia and Regional Tourism Organisation Forum
- Australian Regional Tourism Convention
- Climate Ready Australia National Summit
- NoVacancy Accommodation Conference
- Asia Pacific Cities Summit
- Zoo and Aquarium Association Conference
- Cruise360 Australasia
- Australian Festival Industry Conference
- Australian Amusement Leisure Recreation Association Conference and Trade Show
- TTF Green Summit
- Tourism Training Australia Jobs Summit
- South by South West Sydney (SXS)
- QLD Department of Tourism – Business Capability Workshop
- Destination IQ and Q
- Victoria Tourism Industry Council Vision Summit
- NSW Visitor Services Summit
- ECO Destination in region industry workshops
- IOT (Christmas and Cocos Keeling Island) Industry workshop
- Caravan Industry Association of Australia National Conference

**4** webinars

**4** workshops

**16** presentations and panels

**9,821+** direct engagements with operators

**135+** meetings directly with operators

**1,268+** visitor economy stakeholders reached

**5000+** direct communications contacts



Photo Credit: Tourism Western Australia  
Lake Ballard, Kalgoorlie and Goldfields, WA

# ECO Destination Certification

Our Destination certification program has recorded a significant milestone with 11 destinations across Australia now certified in the program.

Destination certifications apply to a specific region with a clearly defined boundary. It requires one organisation, such as the local council or tourism body, to be responsible for managing the certification. However, the assessment encompasses the entire region's tourism destination management practices. Destination certification goes beyond the tourism sector, illustrating an all-encompassing approach to environmental sustainability that involves the entire community.

The ECO Destination Certification not only recognises the region's sustainability initiatives but also enhances its leadership in the tourism industry, ensuring strong support programs and opportunities for operators to advance their own sustainability efforts.



Image credit: Bellingen ECO Destination announcement at Urunga Foreshore, Coffs Coast, NSW.

## Bellingen Shire Newly Certified

Bellingen Shire has proudly become the fourth ECO Destination (Ecotourism level) in New South Wales. This achievement was possible through a partnership with Ecotourism Australia and WWF-Australia to help fund certification as part of the recovery process from the devastating summer bushfires of 2019-2020, allowing Bellingen Shire Council to pursue certification to implement sustainable tourism recovery.

Renowned for its stunning coastal landscapes, dramatic waterfalls, and World Heritage-listed rainforest scenery, Bellingen Shire also boasts a vibrant food and cultural scene. The region features ECO Certified Bongil Bongil Park and a further 17 businesses progressing through the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard program, including Waterfall Way Visitor Centre and Stylish Camping Co.



Image credit: Greg Bruce, Chief Sustainability Officer, City of Townsville accepting the ECO Destination Certification at the announcement in Jezzine Park, Townsville, QLD.

## Townsville Newly Certified

The Townsville region achieved globally recognised ECO Destination Certification (Nature Tourism level) in April 2024. Located in North Queensland, Townsville boasts diverse natural attractions, including the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and Magnetic Island.

This certification, spearheaded by Townsville City Council and supported by Townsville Enterprise Ltd and the broader tourism industry, highlights the region-wide dedication to environmental management and sustainable tourism. There are 12 ECO Certified operators across the Townsville region including Big Mama Sailing, Townsville Eco Resort, SeaLink Queensland and Mungalla Aboriginal Tours.



Image credit: Capricorn Enterprise: Ecotourism Australia CEO, Elissa Keenan with the Mayor of Livingstone, Adam Belot at the ECO Destination announcement in Yeppoon, QLD

## Capricorn Coast

### Newly Certified

After longstanding goals to be ECO Certified as a destination, Capricorn Coast achieved this recognition at the Ecotourism level in June 2024. Led by Livingstone Shire Council and Capricorn Enterprise in a partnership approach, this certification is a natural fit for this eco-minded community. This ECO Destination Certification has ensured the trifecta of councils in the Southern Great Barrier Reef including Capricorn Coast, Bundaberg and Gladstone Region are committed to global best-practice standards.

Capricorn Coast boasts unparalleled marine and reef experiences. In addition, the region offers beautiful beaches, lush national parks, and charming coastal towns. Visitors can enjoy activities such as snorkeling, diving, and fishing in the pristine waters. There are seven ECO Certified operators in the Capricorn Coast region including Pumpkin Island, Capricorn Caves, Great Keppel Island Hideaway and High Valley Dawn Permaculture Farm.

## State Government Leadership

The rollout of the Queensland Government Department of Tourism and Sport's eco-certified tourism destination grant program which supported regions across the state to participate in the ECO Destination program had real and meaningful impacts for the regions and their operators on the ground. This program supported Gladstone, Townsville, and Capricorn Coast to achieve certification by the end of the 2023-2024 financial year and a further two regions who achieved grant funding are close to completion.



Image credit: Gladstone Region Council Chairperson Robert Gibb, Ecotourism Australia Head of Destination and Member Services, Alyssa Sanders and Gladstone Region CEO, Nicola Smith at the ECO Destination announcement in Gladstone, QLD

## Gladstone Region

### Newly Certified

The Gladstone region earned ECO Destination Certification (Nature Tourism level) in June 2024. Situated along the stunning coastline of Central Queensland and including townships of 1770 and Agnes Waters, Gladstone region serves as a gateway to the Southern Great Barrier Reef and the pristine waterways of Gladstone Harbour.

This achievement, led by Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Ltd and supported by the Gladstone Regional Council, underscores their commitment to sustainable tourism and adherence to global best practices. Notably, Hall of Fame businesses 1770 LARC! Tours and Lady Elliott Island, both with over 20 years of continuous ECO Certification, exemplify leadership in sustainability within the region. There are seven ECO Certified operators in the Gladstone Region including Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort, Heron Island Resort, 1770 LARC! Tours and Traveller's Rest 1770.





Image Credit: Fun over 50 Holidays, Sunset Katherine Gorge Cruise, NT

## Certified Member **Achievements**

Our Certified operators and ECO Destinations have continued to lead the way in sustainable tourism, exemplifying the highest standards of environmental and social responsibility. Their achievements reflect a deep commitment to positive change and innovation in the industry. The dedication and hard work of our members not only elevate their own operations but also set a benchmark for others to follow. We celebrate their remarkable accomplishments, which underscore their role as industry leaders and their significant contributions to the future of sustainable tourism in Australia.

### Qantas Australian Tourism Awards 2023

Ecotourism Australia is proud to celebrate the outstanding achievements of our certified operators at the 2023 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards. Across five states, 11 Ecotourism Australia Certified operators won 13 awards, showcasing their commitment to tourism excellence. Among 28 Certified finalists, our winners secured four gold, eight silver, and one bronze award in categories such as Ecotourism, Major Tour and Transport Operators, Major Tourist Attractions, Adventure Tourism, and Accommodation categories. In addition to national success, many of our operators have also been recognised for their excellence in State and Regional Tourism Awards.

#### Gold

**Fun Over 50 Holidays** (Advanced Ecotourism, Climate Action and ROC Certified + Green Travel Leader) – Ecotourism  
**Pennicott Wilderness Journeys** (Advanced Ecotourism Certified + Green Travel Leader) – Major Tour and Transport Operators  
**Ocean Rafting** (Advanced Ecotourism and Climate Action certified + Green Travel Leader and Hall of Fame) – Adventure Tourism  
**BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort** (Ecotourism Certified) – Caravan & Holiday Parks

#### Silver

**Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary** (Advanced Ecotourism and ROC Certified + Green Travel Leader) – Major Tourist Attractions  
**Bundaberg Rum Distillery Visitor Experience** (Sustainable Tourism Certified) – Tourist Attractions  
**Sydney by Kayak** (Ecotourism Certified) – Ecotourism  
**Fun Over 50 Holidays** (Advanced Ecotourism, Climate Action and ROC Certified + Green Travel Leader) – Cultural Tourism  
**Ocean Rafting** (Advanced Ecotourism and Climate Action Certified + Green Travel Leader and Hall of Fame) – Major Tour and Transport Operators  
**Bendleby Ranges** (Advanced Ecotourism Certified + Green Travel Leader) – Adventure Tourism  
**Narrows Escape Rainforest Retreat** (Advanced Ecotourism and ROC Certified + Green Travel Leader) – Hosted Accommodation  
**Tree Chalets** (Nature Tourism Certified) – Self-contained Accommodation

#### Bronze

**Magnums Accommodation Airlie Beach** (Nature Tourism Certified) – 3-3.5 Star Accommodation

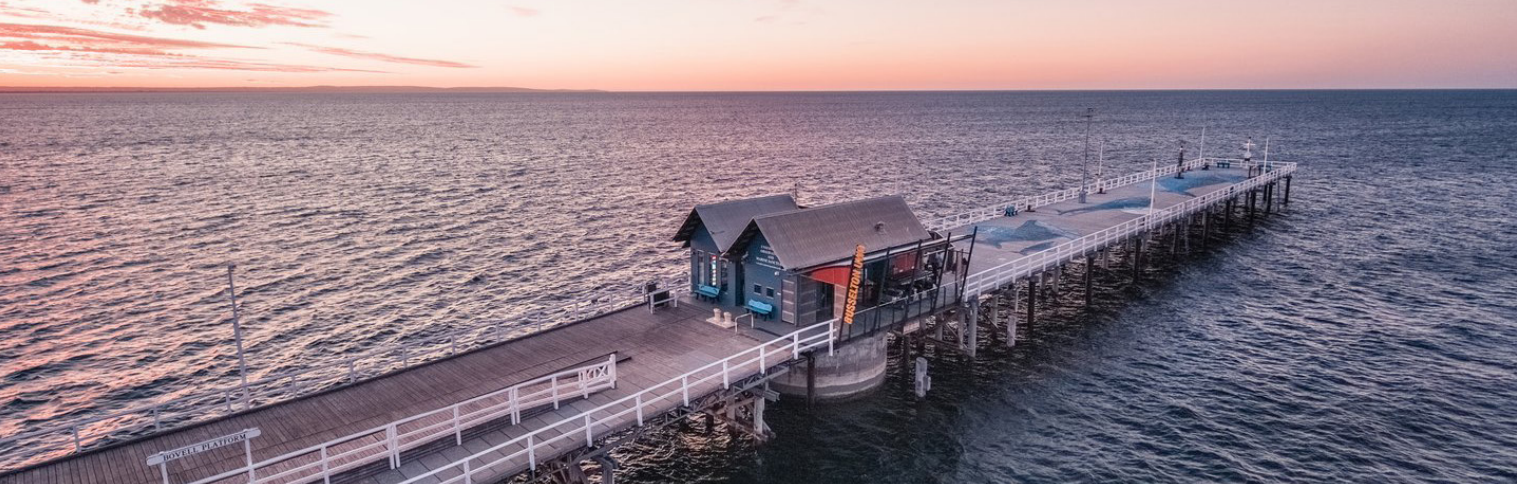


Image Credit: Busselton Jetty, Busselton, WA

## Banksia National Sustainability Awards 2024

Ecotourism Australia Certified businesses received significant recognition at the 2024 Banksia Foundation National Sustainability Awards. Busselton Jetty (Advanced Ecotourism, Climate Action Certified, and Green Travel Leader) was a finalist for the SME Sustainable Leadership Award, while Wild Adventures Melbourne (Advanced Ecotourism and Climate Action Certified) and Fun Over 50 Holidays (Advanced Ecotourism, Climate Action, ROC Certified, and Green Travel Leader) were finalists for the Sustainable Tourism Award. These accolades highlight their exemplary leadership in sustainable tourism, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in areas such as environmental protection, community support, and cultural preservation. Additionally, Ecotourism Australia's partner, WWF-Australia, won the Marketing and Communications for Impact category and was a finalist in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion category.

## NSW Central Coast Wins Global Green Award

The New South Wales Central Coast were honoured with the Green Destinations Story Awards in the Destination Management category at the ITB Berlin Convention. This prestigious award recognises the region's commitment to fostering a sustainable tourism industry through incentive and reward programs. The Central Coast's success showcases the positive impact of Ecotourism Australia's Certification programs, as they continue to lead the way in promoting sustainable tourism practices globally. This competition forms part of our partnership with Green Destinations and we continue to contribute to these awards by judging a non-Australian category.



Rocky Trail Entertainment, Central Coast, NSW  
Nature Tourism Certified  
Photo credit: Rocky Trail Entertainment



Scenic World Skyway, Blue Mountains, NSW  
Advanced Ecotourism Certified, Green Travel Leader and Hall of fame entrant 2024  
Photo credit: Scenic World

## 2024 Hall of Fame Entrants

Two of Australia's leading nature-based tourism businesses Scenic World in Sydney's Blue Mountains and Paronella Park in tropical North Queensland, have been inducted into Ecotourism Australia's Hall of Fame in 2024, recognised for maintaining ECO Certification for 20 years. The new inductees join an esteemed group of 62 other ECO Certified businesses in the Hall of Fame.

- **Paronella Park**
- **Scenic World**

## 2024 New Green Travel Leaders

This year, a further 12 other ECO Certified tourism businesses have been honoured as 'Green Travel Leaders' for their 10 years of certification.

- **Big Mama Sailing**
- **Catninga**
- **Charter 1**
- **Kingfisher Tours**
- **Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary**
- **Mount Nancar Wilderness Retreat**
- **Narrows Escape Rainforest Retreat**
- **Ningaloo Discovery**
- **North Marine**
- **Pindan Tours and 4WD Training**
- **Tree Top Challenge**
- **Tweed Eco Cruises**

We congratulate these operators on their dedication to sustainability and ongoing global best-practice standards. Ecotourism Australia has certified some 2,000 tours, attractions and accommodation experiences across the country. While more than half our Australian members have been certified for over 10 years, only 11% have achieved Hall of Fame status demonstrating a profound commitment to sustainability as a core component of their ecotourism businesses.

## Communications and engagement

To boost awareness of Ecotourism Australia global standard programs and leading eco and sustainable tourism providers, we have focused on effective communication, marketing, and strategic positioning, underpinned by key industry research and data. This approach has led us to enhance our brand design, making it more accessible and user-friendly, and has increased our visibility and influence within the industry.

**175,000 views** on the Ecotourism Australia website

**54,000 views** on the Green Travel Guide

**26,000+ followers** across LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram

**10,000+** interactions with our content across our social platforms

**5000+ subscribers** to our ECO News eDM operators

**350+** times our operators featured in our channels

**190+** national, state and regional media coverage through outlets: The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Australian Geographic, Nine News, The British Broadcasting Corporation, The Australian, Travel Daily and more.

### Our new corporate website went live in June



[Home](#) [About Us](#) [Your Sustainability Pathway](#) [Community & Resources](#) [News](#) [Summit](#) [Search](#)

[Subscribe](#)

#### Ecotourism Australia

Ecotourism Australia is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation, established in 1991, that promotes and supports the ecotourism industry in Australia through building capacity and actively promoting sustainable tourism operations and systems. As the peak body for ecotourism and sustainable tourism we connect, champion, inspire and inform through strategic partnerships and global best practice standards.

[Learn more about Ecotourism Australia](#)

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



2000

Certified Experiences

500

Members

10

Certified Destinations



#### Our Certification Programs





## Improving Accessibility

We have refined our brand and digital collateral to be more inclusive and accessible, incorporating feedback from our certified operators. Over the past six months we have focused on making our corporate website and the Green Travel Guide more accessible for individuals with visual impairments or learning difficulties.

Highlights of the improvements to date include:

### Branding Improvements

- Increased contrast in brand colours to meet AA Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0)
- Simplified, more accessible fonts and logos for better readability and ease of use in signage and uniform printing

### Website Enhancements

- Conducted a website accessibility audit and implemented improvements across both websites
- Incorporated simplistic language and detailed alt tags/captions for all images
- Ensured new websites meet AA success criteria of WCAG 2.0
- Installed UserWay accessibility plugin for personalised user adjustments
- Added an accessibility content section

### Social Media Upgrades

- Use camel case hashtags for readability
- Simplistic language and detailed alt tags for all images
- Add closed captions to all video content.

Our updated Green Travel Guide, featuring every certified operator and destination, is also now live. We are working with our certified operators to elevate their accessibility efforts on each of their listings, including a tick list of accessibility services and links to their access and inclusion statements.



Photo credit: Mad Panda Media

Board members at the Global Sustainable Tourism Summit 2024. L to R: Peter Johnson, Caroline Densley, Wendy Hills, Dr Claire Ellis, Janet Mackay, Alysia Brandenburg and Robert Taylor. Director Nat Burke is absent.

## Our board

Chair (to June 2024) | **Dr Claire Ellis** | Claire Ellis Consulting

Chair (June to present, Deputy Chair to June 2024) | **Caroline Densley** | Diverse Travel Australia

Deputy Chair (from June 2024) | **Nat Burke** | World Wide Fund for Nature Australia

**Alysia Brandenburg** | AbPs Consulting Services

**Peter Johnson** | Diamond Waters Treehouse Retreat

**Janet Mackay** | TRC Tourism

**Robert Taylor** | Western Australian indigenous Tourism Operations Council (WAITOC)

**Wendy Hills** | Hills Consulting

**Michael Collins** | CF Global Australia (Term completed October 2023)

## Our team



**Elissa Keenan**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Nadine Schramm**  
Head of Sustainability and Business Operations



**Alyssa Sanders**  
Head of Destinations and Member Services



**Shea Wittig**  
Sustainable and Ecotourism Specialist



**Corinne Lewis**  
Sustainable and Ecotourism Specialist



**Martin Lopez Behar**  
Sustainable and Ecotourism Specialist



**Annalina Fichtner**  
Program Co-ordinator



**Jillian Santry**  
Communications and Events Officer

We thank our former staff who left Ecotourism Australia this year for their wonderful contribution:

**Katie Heilbronn**

**Shannon Scullion**

**Elena Brivio**

**Georgie Snare**

## Thank you to our 2023-24 interns

We thank our interns who have worked with Ecotourism Australia this year. We are proud to support young professionals obtain experience to support their career goals.

**Yee Hang Yip (Josie) | July 23 to October 23**

**Tomoka Yanagisawa | October 23 to December 23**

**Wilma Onaga | October 23 to December 23**

**Annalina Fichtner | March 24 to June 24**

## Ecotourism Australia history

Since 1991, Ecotourism Australia has been at the forefront of the Australian responsible tourism industry and is proud to be the recognised national peak body for sustainable and ecotourism.

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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) is 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	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.
2019	Port Douglas Daintree (Kuku Yalanji and Yirrganydji Country) region achieves Australia's first ECO Destination Certification.
2020	Ecotourism Australia partners with WWF-Australia through the Bushfire Recovery Fund to support destinations around Australia to 'build back better' after the Black Summer Bushfires of 2019-20. To date, the program has supported 10 destinations and 53 local operators to undertake ECO Certification.

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2021 Ecotourism Australia celebrates its 30th birthday and launches a new brand with a 'ripple' design, organically flowing outward, encompassing the ripple effect of our purpose to 'do good' and create greater change. With a hint of nostalgia, our gecko can still be found on the Green Travel Guide.

An extra two destinations achieved ECO Destination Certification taking the total to four.

The inaugural ECO Think Destination Forum is held in the Coffs Coast and Bellingen regions.

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2022 Central Coast (Darkinjung Country) and Augusta-Margaret River (Wadandi and Pibelmen Boodja Country) achieve ECO Destination Certification.

Ecotourism Australia launches the new sustainable tourism pathway program with a pre-certification benchmarking tool, Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, and Sustainable Tourism Certification for non-nature focused operators and destinations.

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2023 A total of seven regions are now ECO Destination Certified.

Australia's first tourism business is awarded Sustainable Tourism Certification (Bundaberg Rum Visitor Experience Centre).

Accor selected Ecotourism Australia as one of three global providers to provide ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification to Hotels in Australia and the Pacific.

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2024 Ecotourism Australia has certified some 2000 tours, attractions and accommodation and reaches more than 500 Certified operators and 11 Certified Destinations.

With a focus on accessibility, Ecotourism Australia enhances their branding and launches a new corporate website. The new accessible Green Travel Guide will be live later this year.

Ecotourism Australia hosts the inaugural Global Sustainable Tourism Summit in Meanjin/ Brisbane in June with more than 280 delegates and 62 speakers. The event marks a continuation of Ecotourism Australia's proud legacy of hosting the world's longest running ecotourism conference, Global Eco.

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