



Ecotourism Australia Annual Report 2025/26

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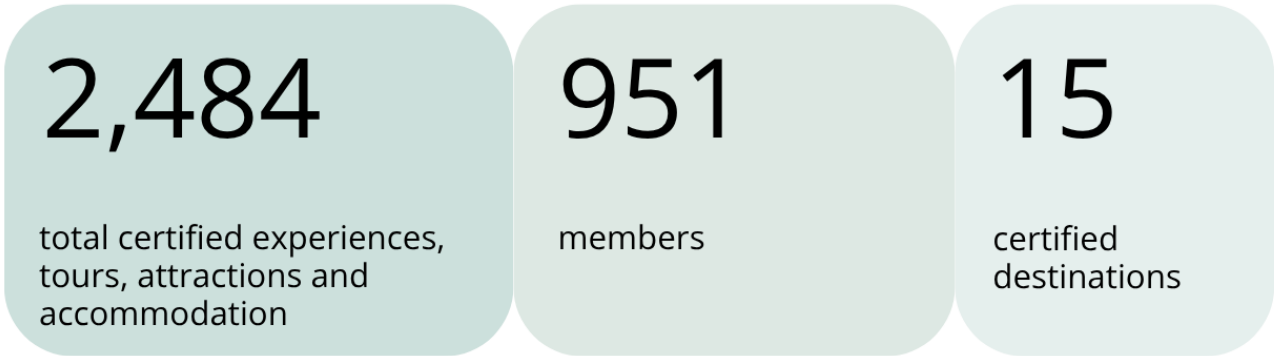
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An aerial photograph of a lush green mangrove forest. A narrow waterway winds through the dense trees. A small white boat with a red stripe is moving away from the viewer down the waterway. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

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.

2025-2026 by Numbers

Overall



New





Nitmiluk Tours, Katherine, NT
ECO Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

What We Do

We promote the development of tourism by supporting operators and destinations on a pathway to sustainable practices and global best-practice certification.

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.

Our Values

1 Positivity

We are proud of our legacy, we are optimistic, and we continue to influence change as future-focused custodians for eco, regenerative and sustainable 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 Collaboration

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



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 eco and sustainable tourism in Australia and the Pacific region.

Our foundational program – ECO Certification – was the world's first national ecotourism certification program. We have more than 2,480 certified accommodation, tours, attractions and experiences in our ECO, Sustainable Tourism, Climate Action, and Respecting Our Culture Certifications.

In 2018, we launched the ECO Destination program to support regions across Australia with their commitment to sustainable and responsible tourism management practices and there are now 15 certified destinations across Australia.

In 2022, we launched a new Sustainable Tourism Certification, recognised as global best practice, to support non-nature based tourism operators, and introduced a pre-certification benchmarking tool, the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, with founding partner Tourism Australia, to support and recognise the broader tourism industry for their commitment to sustainable tourism.

Ecotourism Australia's certification programs are acknowledged and recognised globally. Our Green Travel Guide is our consumer-facing website that features all our certified operators and destinations across Australia.

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

We are proud to be the delivery partner of ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification with major corporates partners including Accor Pacific, YHA, EVT, RACV and Marriott in the accommodation sector as well as major Australian tourism organisations including Journey Beyond, Quicksilver, CaPTA Group and Experience Co.



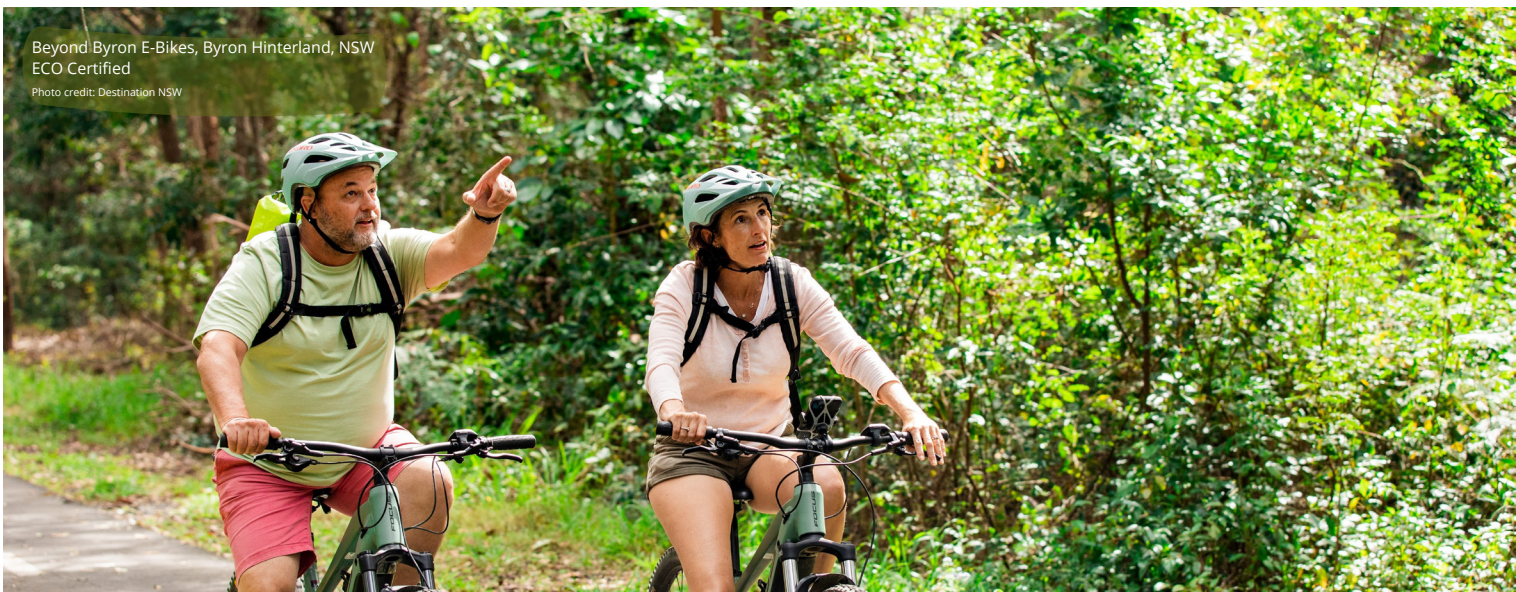
Ecotourism Australia is also a founding member of the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance (TSCA), a global association for sustainable tourism established in January 2025. TSCA members are responsible for certifying more than 19,000 travel and tourism enterprises, organisations, and destinations across the globe – representing the largest cohort of certified operators worldwide.



Our Green Travel Guide is our consumer-facing website that features every ECO Certified and Sustainable Tourism Certified operator and destination.

Beyond Byron E-Bikes, Byron Hinterland, NSW
ECO Certified

Photo credit: Destination NSW



Ecotourism Australia History

This year marks two significant milestones for Ecotourism Australia: 35 years since our founding in 1991, and 30 years since we introduced the world's first national ECO Certification program. From those early beginnings as the Ecotourism Association of the Indo Pacific Region, we have grown alongside the industry we set out to support, expanding our certification programs, broadening our reach, and helping shape what sustainable and regenerative tourism looks like in Australia and beyond.

1991	Ecotourism Association of the Indo Pacific Region is formed and later renamed the Ecotourism Association of Australia in 1992.
1996	Ecotourism Association of Australia introduces the world's first ECO Certification program.
1997	The first tourism operators in the world achieve ECO Certification.
2000	EcoGuide Certification is launched to certify high-quality guides across Australia.
2002	The organisation is renamed Ecotourism Australia Limited in the International Year of Ecotourism designated by the United Nations General Assembly.
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.

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. 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.
2022	Ecotourism Australia launches the new Sustainable Tourism Certification for non-nature focused operators and destinations, alongside the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, a precertification pathway benchmarking tool. Central Coast (Darkinjung Country) and Augusta-Margaret River (Wadandi and Pibelmen Boodja Country) achieve ECO Destination Certification.
2023	Accor selected Ecotourism Australia as one of three global providers to provide ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification to Hotels in Australia and the Pacific. 15 regions are now ECO Destination Certified. Australia's first tourism business is awarded Sustainable Tourism Certification (Bundaberg Rum Visitor Experience Centre).
2024	Ecotourism Australia has certified some 2000 tours, attractions and accommodation across more than 500 operators. Eleven destinations are now ECO Certified. Ecotourism Australia enhances their branding, corporate website and Green Travel Guide to be more accessible. 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.
2025	Ecotourism Australia becomes a founding member of the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance (TSCA), an international not for profit organisation established to ensure the continued high standards and in sustainable tourism certification and to enable travellers to make informed choices based on the highest sustainability standards. Three new destinations achieve ECO Destination Certification bringing the total to 14, and more than 2300 tours, attractions and accommodations across 664 operators now hold ECO or Sustainable Tourism Certification with Ecotourism Australia.
2026	Ecotourism Australia celebrates 35 years as an organisation and 30 years of ECO Certification. Surf Coast Shire (Wadawurrung, Gulidjan and Gadubanud Country) achieves ECO Destination Certification.



Message from the Board Chair

Nat Burke

This year, Ecotourism Australia marked two significant milestones: 35 years since our founding in 1991, and 30 years since we introduced the world's first national ECO Certification program. It is quite extraordinary to reflect on how much more widespread the principles of eco and sustainable tourism have become since that time; a movement in which Ecotourism Australia has played a defining role.

The past year has tested the resilience of our industry, with the Australian visitor economy navigating a difficult economic climate both from the disruption and uncertainty flowing from conflict in the Middle East, to the impact of Australia's fuel crisis on travel costs and consumer confidence. Despite these headwinds, Ecotourism Australia has continued to grow, speaking to a broader shift in the industry: one that increasingly prioritises environmental stewardship, cultural respect and community benefit, even when the operating environment is tough. We remain focused on delivering our 2024–2028 Corporate Strategy, with a mission to connect, champion, inspire and inform through strategic partnerships and globally recognised best-practice standards.

As the national peak body for eco and sustainable tourism, we've continued to deepen our engagement with government at state and federal levels, advocating for the policy settings and investment needed to help our industry operate more sustainably and build resilience in the face of a changing climate. These efforts reflect our belief that sustainability must be embedded not only in business operations, but in the policies and systems that shape our industry, and we're proud to represent our certified operators and destinations in forums that influence the future of tourism.

A highlight from the past year was our second Global Sustainable Tourism Summit, held in June 2026. The Summit brought together delegates from across Australia and around the world, reaffirming its place as one of the flagship events on the international sustainable tourism calendar, and a genuine platform for shaping where our industry goes next. The Summit also marked a deeply meaningful occasion for our organisation, with the presentation of Ecotourism Australia's first ever Lifetime Achievement Awards. Peter Gash OAM and Dr Claire Ellis were recognised for their outstanding contribution to the growth and advancement of ecotourism in Australia - two individuals whose influence, leadership and dedication have helped shape this industry and this organisation over many decades.

I want to thank Deputy Chair Sharon Raguse and all our Directors for their ongoing support, insight and commitment this year, and to acknowledge Wendy Hills, who stepped down from the Board in October 2025, for her contribution during her time with us. I also want to acknowledge the exceptional team at Ecotourism Australia, led by Chief Executive Officer Elissa Keenan. Their passion, professionalism and dedication are evident in everything they do, from supporting operators and destinations to achieve certification, to driving innovation and advocacy across the sector. They truly live and breathe our purpose and values.

As we mark 35 years, I'm proud of what this organisation has built, and I look forward to another year of supporting the growth of eco and sustainable tourism across Australia.

Nat Burke
Chair



Message from the CEO

Elissa Keenan

The 2025–2026 financial year has been a landmark year for Ecotourism Australia, celebrating 35 years since our founding and 30 years since we introduced the world's first ECO Certification program. These two significant milestones speak to the enduring relevance of what our organisation set out to do, and to how much the sustainable tourism movement has grown around us since.

Our numbers this year tell that growth story. We now support 665 certified operators and 15 certified destinations across Australia and New Zealand, with a total of more than 2,480 certified experiences nationally. We welcomed 22 new ECO Certified operators and 49 new Sustainable Tourism Certified operators, alongside a new ECO Certified Destination in the Surf Coast, six new Hall of Fame inductees recognising an outstanding 20 years of continuous Certification and eight new Green Travel Leaders. A particular highlight was seeing YHA Australia and RACV Resorts become the first accommodation brands to achieve certification across their entire portfolios, setting a benchmark for what whole-of-business commitment to sustainability can look like.

We were proud to host our second Global Sustainable Tourism Summit this year, bringing together more than 200 delegates from Australia and around the world to explore what's next for sustainable tourism. An NPS score of 82 was a strong endorsement of the event, cementing its place as one of the flagship gatherings on the international sustainable tourism calendar. Our partnerships also went from strength to strength. Our founding role in the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance continued to deepen, with the Alliance this year releasing its first TSCA Minimum Standards - a Tourism Business Standard and a Destination Standard, developed collaboratively by TSCA founding members to set the global minimum standard.

Ecotourism Australia was represented across a wide range of events and conferences throughout the year, engaging with operators, buyers, industry partners and government at both a national and international level. On the international stage, I had the privilege of speaking at the Taiwan Tourism Summit in Taipei and the Green Destinations Sustainable Destinations Forum in Dubai, promoting Australia's leadership in Indigenous-led and nature-based tourism to global audiences. Domestically, the team presented at the STRA Summit, the NABERS Assessor Forum, the Australian Regional Tourism Convention, NoVacancy, Meeting Place and the Caravan Industry Association National Conference. Our largest presence came at the Australian Tourism Exchange in Adelaide, where we held 86 meetings and more than 130 certified operators and destinations participated as sellers, representing around one in five sellers at the event. The year also included a Booking.com media famil in Port Douglas, showcasing our certified operators and our very first ECO Certified Destination, recognised by Booking.com as one of the top ten emerging global destinations.

I want to thank our staff for the professionalism, optimism and energy they bring to supporting operators and destinations on their certification journey every single day, and our Board, led by Chair Nat Burke, for their continued commitment and support. Most of all, thank you to our certified operators, destinations, members and partners – your commitment to eco and sustainable tourism is what makes our work meaningful. As we look ahead to the next 35 years, I'm extremely confident that Ecotourism Australia is well placed to keep leading tourism as a catalyst for positive change both in the Australia Pacific region, and as a global leader.

Elissa Keenan
Chief Executive Officer

Corporate Strategy 2024-2028 Update

Over the past year we have continued to implement our 2024-2028 Corporate Strategy, steering our strategic and operational efforts against six strategic priority areas and goals designed to support eco and sustainable tourism, our operators, destinations and our industry::

1 LEGACY LEADER

Goal: We deliver globally recognised certification and recognition programs to the tourism industry in Australia and across the world.

Status: In 2025–2026, Ecotourism Australia continued to strengthen our position as a global leader in sustainable tourism certification. Our ECO Certification and Sustainable Tourism Certification programs for operators are recognised internationally by organisations such as Booking.com and Travalyst, expanding our reach and impact. Most significantly we worked as a founding member of the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance to develop the new TSCA sustainability criteria and standard – a new minimum standard to set global best practice. Our founding role and ongoing dedication reinforces our commitment to transparency, credibility, and continuous improvement in tourism certification standards. TSCA members are responsible for certifying more than 19,000 travel and tourism enterprises, organisations, and destinations across the globe – representing the largest cohort of certified operators worldwide.

2 STRENGTHENING INDUSTRY

Goal: We strengthen and promote our industry and recognise the contribution of ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified operators and destinations in our region and globally; we generate value for our certified operators, destinations and members; and we deliver new products and services to support the broader tourism industry.

Status: In 2025–2026, we continued our support for certified operators and destinations by providing certification and pathways programs, with 665 individual operators (representing 2,484 certified accommodation, tours and attractions) and 15 destinations now certified. We were incredibly proud to see two accommodation brands achieve full certification across their entire portfolio – YHA Australia (16 properties) and RACV Resorts (10 properties). We also celebrated the achievements of our community of certified operators through targeted promotion and recognition, such as our Hall of Fame and Green Travel Leader award recognitions, which reinforces the value of certification and strengthens the visibility of sustainable tourism across Australia. This year we also awarded the inaugural Lifetime Achievements Awards to two of the nation's most influential tourism leaders, Peter Gash OAM and Dr Claire Ellis, in recognition of their outstanding contribution to the growth and advancement of ecotourism in Australia.

3 ADVOCACY

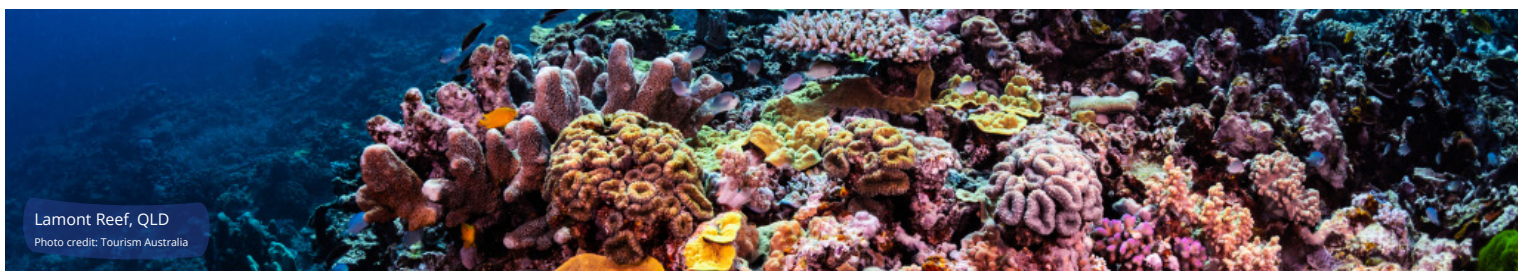
Goal: We provide a credible and respected voice for ecotourism, nature-based tourism, and sustainable tourism across our region; we focus on positive outcomes generated by quality tourism; and play a strategic international role in identifying issues and solutions. We work globally to promote Australia's commitment to sustainable tourism and Ecotourism Australia's leadership in this space.

Status: Ecotourism Australia continued to build on its role as a trusted advocate for sustainable tourism, working with government, industry stakeholders and international forums to influence policy and support positive change. Our advocacy continues to reflect the critical role tourism plays as a major employer and export earner in regional, rural and remote Australia, while recognising that the sector is predominantly made up of micro and small businesses facing rising compliance and insurance costs, a confusing certification landscape, and increasing climate-related shocks. Through our submissions, we have continued to call for measures that reduce confusion, duplication and greenwashing through a single, nationally recognised sustainability standard that meets international expectations; improve SME productivity and competitiveness through targeted, time-bound investment in sustainability capability; protect the high-value natural and cultural assets that underpin tourism demand and regional economies including support for First Nations led tourism; and strengthen industry resilience to climate-related disasters, reducing reliance on ad-hoc emergency assistance.

High Standard Tour Operators – a model for rewarding best practice

Our government and industry advocacy highlights the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's High Standard Tour Operator (HSTO) program as a best-practice model that could be replicated across other national parks and protected areas. The program links credible, independently verified certification with tangible incentives for operators, including longer-term permits, preferential marketing opportunities, access to specialist training and participation in Reef stewardship and monitoring initiatives. More than 70 per cent of visitors to the Great Barrier Reef travel with HSTO operators, demonstrating the scale at which recognised best-practice standards can influence tourism outcomes.

Ecotourism Australia advocated for this type of incentive-based approach to be more widely adopted, using credible certification to recognise and reward operators that demonstrate higher environmental and operational standards. This provides a mechanism for government and protected-area managers to encourage best practice, reduce unnecessary duplication for proven operators and strengthen conservation outcomes, while creating a clear commercial incentive for tourism businesses to continually improve their sustainability performance.



4 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

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

Status: This year Ecotourism Australia continued to advance our major partnership with the Tourism Sustainability Certification Alliance. Formed in January 2025, Ecotourism Australia is one of nine founding members of the Alliance, a collaborative certification platform for the tourism industry to ensure that travellers make informed choices based on reliable sustainability standards. We also continued to collaborate with both government and industry partners to enable the delivery of certification and pathway programs and other capacity-building initiatives. These partnerships not only extended our reach but also demonstrated measurable value in promoting eco and sustainable tourism more broadly.



5 BRAND AWARENESS

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

Status: Ecotourism Australia significantly grew our brand visibility and public engagement in 2025-2026 through hosting our second Global Sustainable Tourism Summit, attracting an audience of over 200 delegates from around Australia and across the world. With a Net Promoter Score (NPS) score of 82, the Summit is considered one of the flagship events on the international sustainable tourism calendar and drives increased awareness not just of the work we do at Ecotourism Australia, but Australia's overall positioning as a sustainable destination. Our newsletter, website and social channels, as well as attendance at a range of industry trade shows such as ATE, ATEC Meeting Place and NoVacancy reinforce Ecotourism Australia's peak body position for sustainable tourism, driving awareness and uptake of our programs across diverse audiences.

6 ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE AND GROWTH

Goal: A resilient organisation positioned for sustainable growth.

Status: Ecotourism Australia continued to build a resilient and future-focused organisation, underpinned by sound governance and strategic growth. In 2025–2026, we were pleased to present a new Constitution to members, for which support was unanimously received at the 2025 Annual General Meeting. We also maintained our strong governance with both Member-Elected Board Directors and Board-Elected Directors to help support our long term vision and strategy. we further invested in operational efficiencies and strengthened internal capabilities to support long-term sustainability. Our commitment to continuous improvement and financial stewardship ensures we remain well-positioned to deliver value to our members and lead the sustainable tourism movement into the future.



K7 Adventures, Thredbo, NSW
Advanced ECO Certified
Photo credit: K7 Adventures



Par Avion, Southwest National Park, TAS
ECO Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

Ecotourism Australia Sustainability Impact Summary 2025-2026

Walking the talk on sustainable tourism

Sustainability is central to our purpose, programs and organisational culture. In 2025-2026, we prepared our first public-facing Sustainability Impact Report, marking an important step in our own transparency, accountability and continuous improvement journey.

While we are not required to report under mandatory sustainability or climate disclosure frameworks, we recognise that credible leadership requires more than compliance. As a national peak body supporting tourism businesses, destinations and communities to strengthen sustainability practice, we have a responsibility to reflect openly on our own impacts, progress and opportunities for improvement.

This first report establishes a practical baseline for future annual reporting. It brings together our organisational operations, emissions profile, major event impacts, community and conservation contributions, cultural learning, governance practices and future priorities. It also reflects a broad understanding of sustainability – one that extends beyond climate action to include environmental stewardship, respect for culture and Country, community contribution, responsible business, economic resilience and strong governance.

Our commitment is grounded in 35 years of experience and sector leadership. Established in 1991, we pioneered what is now ECO Certification and have continued to support globally recognised pathways for tourism businesses and destinations to strengthen their sustainability practices. In 2025-2026, this included supporting operators and destinations through certification programs, applicant pathways, coaching, resources, independent audits and capacity-building initiatives.

Impact snapshot

In 2025–2026, we:

- Prepared our first public-facing Sustainability Impact Report, establishing a baseline for future annual reporting.
- Continued to build on 35 years of sustainable tourism leadership since our establishment in 1991.
- Supported tourism businesses and destinations through certification, destination programs, coaching and capacity-building.
- Coached and encouraged more than 300 businesses to strengthen their support for conservation and community initiatives.
- Offered assistance to 239 businesses impacted by natural and climate-related disasters across Australia.
- Reported that Scope 3 emissions accounted for 93.18% of our recorded emissions, identifying travel, commuting, accommodation and event-related activity as key focus areas.
- Delivered the Global Sustainable Tourism Summit 2026 in-house, with sustainability and environmental outcomes considered across venue selection, waste, transport, suppliers and community contribution.
- Planted one tree for every Summit delegate through Reforest, supporting restoration work at Doonan Creek Environment Reserve.



Environmental stewardship and emissions

Our organisational footprint is relatively small, but we recognise the importance of reducing resource use, limiting emissions, making responsible purchasing decisions and modelling the practices we encourage across the tourism sector.

Environmental sustainability considerations are integrated into our day-to-day office practices, staff-led improvement ideas and operational decision-making. Our whole staff team contributes to this work as our Green Team. “Walking the talk” is a standing agenda item at monthly team meetings, helping keep sustainability visible and practical across our organisation.

Key operational practices include reducing unnecessary energy and water use, maintaining a minimal-print approach, using 100% recycled paper, recycling ink cartridges, using electronic business cards, maintaining an e-waste and assets register, and purchasing second-hand or repurposed office furniture where suitable. Procurement decisions also seek to prioritise suppliers that demonstrate environmental and sustainability practices aligned with our procurement policies.

Travel remains one of our most significant impact areas. We prioritise online meetings where suitable, direct flights where air travel is necessary, lower-emissions transport options where practical, and ECO or Sustainable Tourism Certified accommodation where available. Audit trips are planned in regional clusters where feasible to reduce unnecessary travel, accommodation nights and non-audit days, while maintaining the integrity of onsite assessment.

For 2025–2026, we reported emissions through Climate Zero’s online software across Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3 categories. No Scope 1 emissions were reported, as we do not produce direct greenhouse gas emissions from sources we own or control. Scope 2 emissions were associated with purchased electricity. Scope 3 emissions made up the largest share of our reported footprint at 93.18%, reflecting the nature of our work and our reliance on travel, accommodation, employee commuting, contractor activity and event-related operations.

Top Emissions

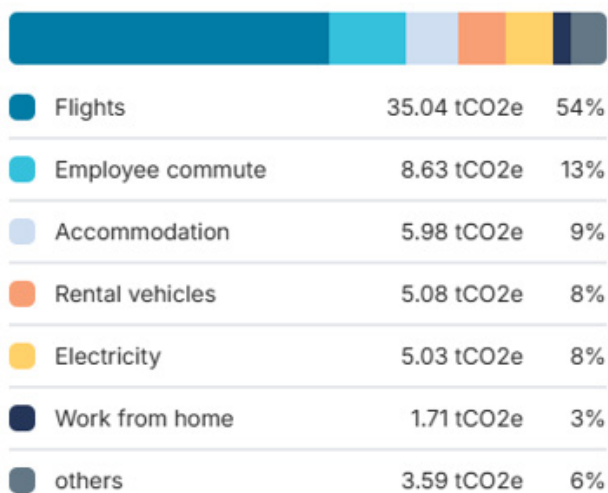


Figure 1: Ecotourism Australia's largest reported greenhouse gas emissions sources during FY 2025–26.

Flights were the largest reported emissions source, accounting for 54% of total emissions recorded through Climate Zero, followed by employee commuting at 13%, accommodation at 9%, and rental vehicles and electricity at 8% each. These results confirm that our greatest emissions-reduction opportunities sit within Scope 3, while also reflecting the nature of our role as a national peak body. Face-to-face engagement with operators, destinations, government and industry partners is essential to our advocacy, capacity-building and sector leadership work. Future priorities will therefore focus on making travel as purposeful and efficient as possible, improving emissions data quality, reviewing travel emissions management and any use of environmental contributions or carbon-credit initiatives, and assessing the feasibility of purchasing GreenPower or another accredited renewable electricity option.

Emission by month

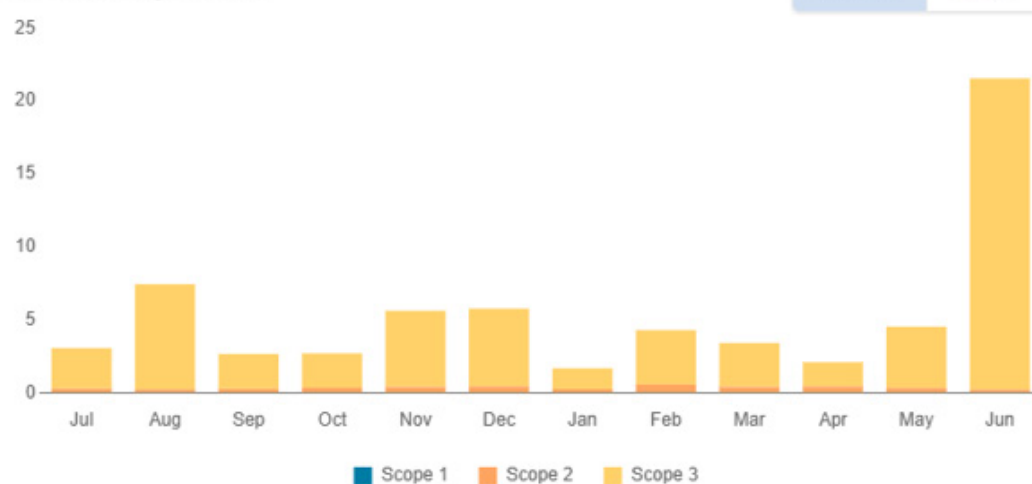


Figure 2: Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions by month



2-5 June | Gold Coast, QLD, Australia

Sustainability in event delivery

The Global Sustainable Tourism Summit 2026 was one of our most visible opportunities to demonstrate our sustainability principles in action. Held from 2 to 5 June 2026 at Mercure Gold Coast Resort, a Sustainable Tourism Certified property, the Summit was designed to reduce environmental impacts, support responsible suppliers, encourage connection and learning, and support community and environmental outcomes.

Selecting a certified venue was a deliberate decision to align the event with our values and expectations for the broader tourism sector. Venue sustainability initiatives included solar energy, onsite composting, biodiversity programs and reduced waste through the Clean for Green program.

Waste reduction was built into event design. Food and beverage service used reusable glassware, crockery and cutlery, and delegates were encouraged to bring reusable cups, notebooks or laptops, notepads and pens. Group transport was provided to and from networking events to reduce reliance on individual taxis and rideshare services.

We also used the Summit to contribute to broader environmental and social outcomes. Through a partnership with Reforest, one tree was planted for every delegate at Doonan Creek Environment Reserve on the Sunshine Coast. Reforest estimates that this contribution will support restoration of 170 m² of wildlife habitat and contribute to the removal of 6.2 tonnes of CO₂ over time. This initiative was a contribution to habitat restoration as a standalone environmental contribution, not as an offset of the Summit's operational or delegate travel emissions. Instead of traditional speaker gifts, we donated \$1,000 each to Country Needs People, WIRES and Paralympics Australia, supporting broader community outcomes through the Summit.

We delivered the Summit in-house through our team of 11, alongside our day-to-day member, certification and sector support work. It demonstrated that improving sustainability in event delivery depends on early planning, supplier engagement, clear delegate expectations and strong internal collaboration. It also highlighted opportunities to strengthen delegate emissions data collection, reduce event-related travel impacts and further embed local and responsible procurement in future events.



Supporting conservation, communities and culture

Our impact extends well beyond our own operations. Through our certification programs, destination programs, applicant pathways, coaching, resources and member support, we help tourism businesses and destinations embed sustainability into everyday practice.

This work supports environmental stewardship, cultural respect, community contribution, responsible business and good governance. It also contributes to economic sustainability by helping businesses build credibility, improve market readiness, strengthen operational resilience and demonstrate sustainability commitments to visitors, partners, destinations and government stakeholders.

Independent third-party audits are an important part of this impact. Beyond assessing compliance with certification requirements, audits provide operators and destinations with practical observations, improvement ideas and feedback that can support stronger sustainability performance over time. This helps ensure certification is not treated as a one-off achievement, but as part of an ongoing journey of learning, accountability and improvement.

In 2025–2026, we coached and encouraged more than 300 businesses to strengthen their support for conservation and community initiatives. We also developed a Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship resource to help tour guides embed sustainability and environmental stewardship into everyday guiding practice. The resource includes best-practice regenerative tourism examples from across Australia and was shared through the Queensland Guiding Community of Practice portal.



Ecotreasures, Manly, NSW
ECO Certified
Photo credit: Destination NSW

Respect for culture and Country is also an important part of our approach to sustainable tourism. Through certification, resources and sector engagement, we encourage tourism businesses and destinations to consider cultural respect, meaningful engagement and responsible visitor practices as part of their sustainability journey. Internally, our staff have access to cultural awareness opportunities, including AIATSIS Core Cultural Learning, to strengthen understanding, respect and confidence in engaging with First Nations perspectives, culture and Country.

We also support staff contribution through our paid Volunteer Leave Policy, which enables eligible staff to take up to two days of paid volunteer leave each year to support approved not-for-profit, conservation, cultural or community organisations. In 2025–2026, one staff member used this opportunity to participate in a revegetation project on Lady Elliot Island.



Governance, people and responsible operations

Strong governance is central to our credibility, impact and long-term sustainability. As a certification body and sustainable tourism leader, we recognise that responsible management is one of the ways we ensure decisions, systems and culture support positive outcomes for people, place and planet.

Our governance approach is supported by a policy framework covering areas such as professional conduct, people and culture, workplace health and safety, natural disasters, mental health, volunteer leave, parental leave and complaints management. These policies help ensure our internal practices are consistent, fair and aligned with our purpose.

Governance is particularly important because our work is built on credibility and trust. Certification programs rely on clear standards, consistent processes, independent assessment and ongoing assurance. Maintaining certification integrity requires program requirements to be applied fairly and transparently, auditors and contractors to be appropriately supported and managed, conflicts of interest to be identified and addressed, and complaints or appeals to be handled through clear processes.

Our Corporate Strategy 2024–28 provides the strategic foundation for organisational resilience and growth. One of the strategy's six pillars focuses on building a resilient, high-performing organisation positioned for sustainable growth. This includes maintaining strong governance and effective business processes, ensuring long-term financial sustainability, investing in staff and Board capability, creating pathways for staff development, remaining agile in response to opportunities and threats, and fostering a culture of connection, positivity and authenticity.

Staff wellbeing is also a core part of building a resilient, high-performing organisation. Our Mental Health Policy supports psychological health, wellbeing and respectful workplace practices. Since 2024, we have also provided paid access to an Employee Assistance Program, giving staff confidential external support when needed.

Financial sustainability is another important dimension of organisational impact. Our annual independent audit processes and reporting to members through the Annual General Meeting support accountability, transparency and effective governance.

Looking ahead

This first public-facing Sustainability Impact Report establishes an important baseline for us. It highlights areas of progress, confirms where our largest environmental impacts sit, and reinforces the importance of being transparent about the operational realities of our role as a national peak body. Our advocacy, certification and sector leadership work depends on strong relationships, practical engagement and trusted presence with operators, destinations, government and industry partners across Australia and internationally.

Priority improvement areas for the next reporting cycle include:

- Assessing renewable electricity options, including GreenPower or another accredited renewable electricity option.
- Continuing to use face-to-face engagement strategically where it strengthens advocacy, sector leadership, certification support, government relations and industry collaboration.
- Making travel as purposeful and efficient as possible through careful planning, regional clustering, online meetings where suitable, and lower-emissions travel choices where practical.
- Improving emissions data quality, reporting boundaries and data collection for events, contractor travel, advocacy activity and audit-related emissions.
- Strengthening procurement guidance for sustainable suppliers, recycled and repurposed materials, local purchasing and circular economy choices.
- Maintaining “Walking the talk” as a monthly team meeting item and continuing to support staff-led sustainability initiatives.
- Exploring opportunities to strengthen internal reconciliation approaches and cultural leadership over time.
- Continuing annual review of sustainability impacts, policies and management systems, and reporting progress publicly through future impact reports.

As our reporting matures, we will continue to share progress transparently, acknowledge where more work is needed and use our experience to strengthen both our own operations and the sustainable tourism sector we support. This includes balancing responsible management of our operational footprint with the face-to-face engagement needed to advocate effectively, build trust and support meaningful change across the visitor economy.



Sal Salis, Ningaloo, WA
ECO Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

Consumer trends shaping the future of sustainable travel

The case for sustainable tourism continues to strengthen, with global and domestic research reaffirming what our certified operators and destinations have long understood: sustainability is no longer a fringe consideration for travellers, but a central lens through which they evaluate the travel experience. Booking.com's ***Travel and Sustainability Report 2026***, drawing on insights from 32,500 travellers across 35 global markets, found that 85% now consider sustainable travel important or very important. Tourism Australia's Consumer Demand Project reinforces this domestically, with 77% of Australians considering sustainability important or very important in their everyday lives and 79% concerned about the environmental impact of their travel.

This shift is playing out in Australia's visitor economy in meaningful ways. Total visitor economy expenditure reached \$192.4 billion in 2025, up 6.5% on the previous year, with international arrivals growing 8% to 8.9 million. Demand for nature-based experiences has surged, with bushwalking and rainforest walks up 81% and national and state park visitation rising 73%. In 2025, 69.6% of international visitors to Australia engaged in nature-based experiences, continuing a sustained upward trend from 68.3% in 2018. Domestic overnight visitors engaging in nature-based experiences also grew to 27%. These figures point to a visitor economy that is not only recovering and growing, but increasingly oriented toward the kind of authentic, nature-connected and sustainability-focused experiences that Ecotourism Australia's certified community is uniquely positioned to deliver.

This shift is evident across all generations of travellers, who are increasingly seeking experiences that foster meaningful connections with culture and nature. Across the Asia Pacific region, 34% of Gen Z travellers and 31% of Millennials actively seek Indigenous cultural experiences, while interest in hands-on conservation activities continues to grow among travellers of all ages. Importantly, the appetite for certified sustainable experiences is remarkably consistent across generations - Booking.com's data shows that over a third of Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z alike plan to stay at a sustainability certified property in the next twelve months. As traveller expectations continue to evolve across all age groups, destinations and operators that invest in authentic cultural and nature-based experiences will be well positioned to meet growing demand.

Complementing this shift is a growing awareness of climate risk, which is increasingly influencing destination choice. Across the Asia Pacific region, 79% of travellers now factor climate risk into their itinerary planning, with many actively seeking destinations perceived as cooler, less crowded and more environmentally well-managed. For Australia, this represents a genuine opportunity. In 2025, international visitor spend rose to \$39.2 billion, up 19% on 2024, with average spend per trip reaching \$4,738, up 10%. Regional Australia attracted 2.4 million international trips, generating \$5.7 billion in spend, up 21%. These figures suggest that the visitors choosing Australia are increasingly high yield travellers — spending more per trip and seeking quality, nature-based and authentic experiences of the kind our certified operators and destinations deliver.

In response to these changing conditions, travellers are increasingly expecting tourism businesses to play a leading role in delivering sustainable solutions. Asked who should drive sustainable solutions, 77% of Australians pointed to tourism businesses (up 4%), while 76% expect government leadership. This is reflected in purchasing behaviour, with 62% expecting to pay more for sustainable tourism and 55% willing to do so.

As climate risk continues to reshape travel behaviours and values-driven travellers across all generations become an increasingly influential force in the market, the operators and destinations that embed sustainability into their core practices will be best positioned for long-term success. This shift is further reinforced by the introduction of the European Union's *Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive* in late September, which will increase the importance of clear, evidence-based sustainability claims and strengthen the need for credible verification. Ecotourism Australia remains committed to supporting the tourism industry through trusted certification programs that recognise operators demonstrating genuine environmental stewardship, meaningful cultural engagement and a commitment to continuous improvement.



Wild Adventures Melbourne, Mornington Peninsula, VIC
ECO Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

Global engagement

Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance (TSCA)



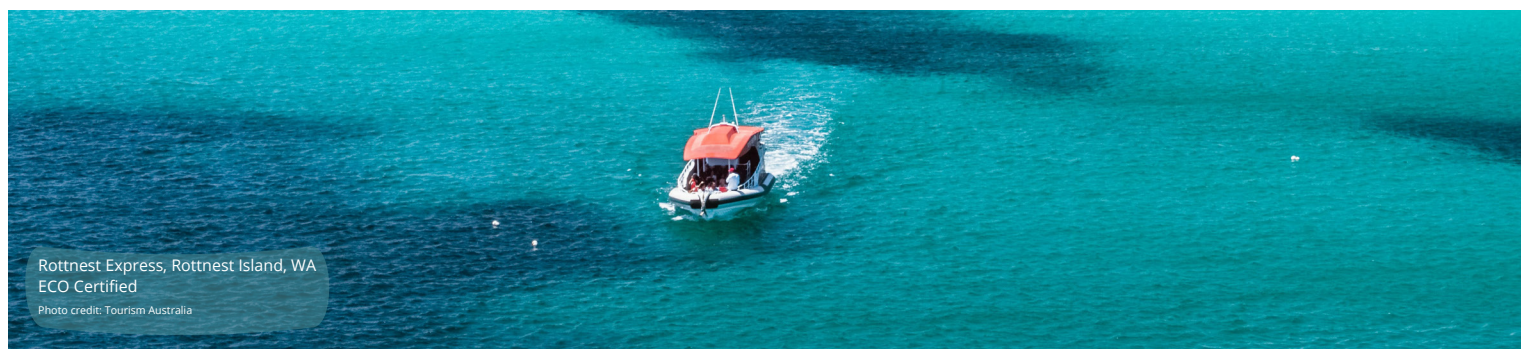
Ecotourism Australia holds the inaugural chairmanship of the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance, a global coalition of leading sustainable tourism certification bodies established in 2024. Together, TSCA members collectively certify more than 19,000 travel and tourism businesses, organisations and destinations worldwide, representing the largest cohort of certified operators in the global tourism industry.

The Alliance was formed to harmonise sustainability criteria and standards across the world's leading certification programs, creating a common, internationally recognised baseline for what credible sustainable tourism certification looks like in practice. For Ecotourism Australia, membership and leadership of the TSCA strengthens the global credibility and recognition of our ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification programs, ensuring they remain aligned with the highest international standards and are recognised by regulators, booking platforms and consumers around the world.

A significant milestone this year was the development and launch of the TSCA Minimum Standards - a set of baseline requirements collaboratively developed by all member organisations following an extensive global stakeholder consultation process. Two standards were established: one for the certification of tourism businesses including hotels and tour operators, and one for the certification of destinations. These standards establish a consistent global baseline for credible sustainability certification, driving continuous improvement and strengthening consumer confidence in verified sustainability claims worldwide. Ecotourism Australia's certification programs already meet and exceed these minimum standards.

The TSCA also made a formal submission to the European Union this year, urging policymakers to introduce sector-specific implementation frameworks for tourism and hospitality as part of the EU's broader sustainability regulatory agenda. The submission reinforced the critical role that third-party certification plays in supporting tourism businesses - particularly small and medium enterprises - to communicate responsibly, meet evidence-based sustainability requirements and build consumer trust in a tightening regulatory environment.

As founding Chair of the TSCA, Ecotourism Australia continues to play a leading role in shaping the future of sustainable tourism certification on a global stage.



Changing International Regulation – European Union *Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive*

The European Union's *Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive* represents one of the most significant shifts in sustainability regulation in recent years. Applying across EU markets from 27 September 2026, the Directive strengthens protections against vague or unsubstantiated environmental claims and introduces stricter requirements for environmental claims and sustainability labels, including requirements relating to substantiation, independent verification and credible governance.

While it is EU legislation, its influence extends well beyond Europe. Tourism businesses marketing to EU consumers will need to understand how the new requirements may apply to their environmental claims and sustainability communications. The changes are also influencing international expectations around credible and transparent sustainability communication.

For Ecotourism Australia, the Directive reinforces the importance of the approach we have long taken to credible certification. Our certification programs are built on many of the principles reinforced by the Directive: transparent, publicly available standards assessed across more than 300 criteria, independent verification through third-party auditors, mandatory re-audits and ongoing compliance monitoring. These established assurance practices provide a strong foundation as regulatory expectations continue to evolve globally and help certified operators substantiate relevant sustainability claims with credible evidence.

Preparing our members and the broader industry for this shift has been a priority well ahead of the September 2026 commencement date. Over the past two years, we have closely monitored the Directive's development, engaged with our global partners through the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance and continued to review our certification framework against emerging international regulatory requirements and good practice.

Throughout this year, we took that preparation directly to market. At the Australian Tourism Exchange in Adelaide, we provided trade-ready fact sheets to help operators and international buyers understand the Directive's implications and the role credible, independently verified certification can play in supporting substantiated sustainability communication. This information reached an important international trade audience at a critical time, reinforcing the value of certification in global markets and helping our certified community prepare for evolving international regulatory expectations.

Quicksilver Cruises, Port Douglas, QLD
Advanced ECO Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia





Publication of new EU Directive Member Toolkit

With the European Union's *Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive* with new rules applying from 27 September 2026 in EU markets, this year we developed and released a dedicated Member Toolkit to help our certified operators and destinations prepare.

The Directive sets a new international benchmark for sustainability communication, strengthening requirements for environmental claims to be clear, specific and appropriately substantiated, and introducing stricter requirements for sustainability labels. The changes will be particularly relevant to Australian tourism businesses marketing to consumers in EU markets, including through international distribution channels.

The Toolkit shows certified operators and destinations how their ECO or Sustainable Tourism Certification can provide credible, independently verified evidence to support relevant sustainability claims, and provides practical guidance on communicating those claims confidently and with credible substantiation, reducing greenwashing risk while avoiding unnecessary greenhushing. It's a clear example of how our certification continues to deliver real, tangible value for operators navigating an increasingly complex global regulatory landscape.



Murray River Trails, Riverland, SA
Advanced ECO Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

International Recognition

Travalyst

Ecotourism Australia's ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification programs are recognised through Travalyst's Certifications Initiative, a global initiative helping to bring consistent, credible sustainability information into mainstream travel platforms. Our inclusion in the first iteration of Travalyst's recognised certifications list followed a substantive application process to verify the credibility and rigour of our certification programs. The second and current iteration is a self-declaration list linked to the *European Union's Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive* requirements, supporting greater transparency around credible sustainability certifications. Through this recognition, ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified operators are highlighted across global platforms including Booking.com, Google, Expedia, Trip.com, Tripadvisor, Amadeus, Sabre, Skyscanner, Travelport, Visa and Mastercard. This increases the visibility of our certified operators in international markets, supports consumer trust in verified sustainability claims and helps travellers make more responsible, informed choices when planning and booking travel.

Global Destination Sustainability Index

Ecotourism Australia's certification programs are also recognised through the Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) Index. The Global Destination Sustainability Index benchmarks how sustainably destinations manage tourism and events, with certified hotels and operators able to contribute directly to their city or region's GDS-Index performance by demonstrating credible, independently verified sustainability practices. This recognition helps strengthen the profile of certified operators and destinations as contributors to better destination management and more sustainable visitor economies.

Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA)

Ecotourism Australia's certification programs are also included in ABTA's list of certification schemes and labels that share its ambitions for a more sustainable travel industry, alongside schemes already accredited or committed to achieving accreditation. As a leading trade association for UK travel agents, tour operators and the wider travel industry, ABTA works with its members to raise and maintain standards and support more responsible travel. Inclusion in this list strengthens the international credibility of ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification and supports certified operators in demonstrating their contribution to more responsible tourism markets.



Advocacy to the Australian Government

Over the past year, Ecotourism Australia has continued to represent the eco and sustainable tourism sector directly to the Australian Government, making the case for the policy settings and investment needed to protect the natural and cultural assets our industry depends on, and to help operators build genuine, verifiable sustainability into their businesses. This included submissions addressing the Federal Budget, a parliamentary inquiry into regional economic growth, the review of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, the Parks Australia Marine Park Management Plan, and various state government submissions.

Summary of policy recommendations

Ecotourism Australia's Federal Government advocacy, including to the federal budget process, and various portfolio submissions, focused consistently on four key themes, calling for targeted government action to strengthen the sustainability, competitiveness and resilience of Australia's visitor economy. Our submissions focus on reducing duplication and greenwashing, supporting tourism SMEs to invest in sustainability, protecting the natural and cultural assets that underpin tourism, and improving preparedness for climate-related impacts.

Key recommendations included:

- **Establish a nationally recognised sustainability standard for tourism** – setting a clear benchmark aligned with international best practice, supported by independent third-party verification and transparent assurance, while allowing different certification and pathway programs to continue to serve different industry needs.
- **Invest in tourism business sustainability** – establish a \$10 million Sustainability Grants Program to help SMEs implement practical initiatives including energy efficiency, renewables, water and waste reduction, low-emissions transport and accessibility, complemented by \$2 million for emissions measurement, training and implementation support.
- **Increase investment in Australia's natural and cultural assets** – including national parks, Indigenous Protected Areas, Indigenous Rangers and co-management with Traditional Owners, alongside greater support for First Nations tourism enterprises and adoption of incentive-based best-practice tourism standards in protected areas.
- **Establish a national tourism resilience and recovery fund** – providing a coordinated mechanism to respond to climate-related disasters, support businesses to rebuild to higher resilience and sustainability standards, and reduce reliance on ad-hoc emergency assistance.

Collectively, the submissions positioned sustainability investment as an economic and productivity priority – supporting stronger tourism businesses and regional economies while protecting the environmental and cultural assets on which Australia's visitor economy depends.

Submissions to the Australian Government and State Governments

- Submission to the 2026–2027 Federal Pre-Budget
- Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth: Inquiry into Creating Sustainable Economic Growth in Rural and Regional Australia
- Submission to the 2026 Murray–Darling Basin Plan Review
- Ministerial consultation on Marine Park Management
- GBRMPA High Standard Tour Operator Review
- Joint submission with entities such as ACCI on key tourism policy priorities
- THRIVE 2030 Plan Review
- Victorian Government Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)'s Public Land Tour Operator and Activity Provider Licensing Review
- Destination 2025 (QLD Government)

Navigate Expeditions, Tathra, NSW
Advanced ECO Certified
Photo credit: Navigate Expeditions



Working with destinations to support their sustainable tourism journey

This year, Ecotourism Australia delivered a range of interactive workshops and webinars in partnership with destinations to support tourism businesses in progressing along their sustainability journey. These sessions provided practical guidance on the four pillars of sustainable tourism, achievable actions to improve business operations, and the ways sustainability can help attract customers, reduce costs and build long-term resilience. Participants also benefited from real-world insights from certified operators, who shared their experiences and demonstrated how sustainability can become a practical business advantage.



In the Gladstone Region, workshops delivered in partnership with Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Limited (GAPDL) brought tourism operators together to explore sustainability risks and opportunities across the region. The sessions highlighted the importance of collaboration and shared learning, with certified operators including 1770 LARC! Tours, Traveller's Rest 1770 and Dive Spear and Sport @1770 sharing their experiences.

centralcoast



On the Central Coast, Ecotourism Australia partnered with Destination Central Coast to deliver dedicated workshops on Sustainable Tourism and ECO Certification. Hosted at ECO Certified operator Noonaweena Lodge, the sessions helped local businesses understand how the four pillars of sustainability apply to their operations, respond to evolving traveller expectations, and identify practical ways to reduce their environmental impact, while connecting them with certified businesses such as the ibis Styles The Entrance.



Ecotourism Australia also partnered with Great Ocean Road Tourism to host a webinar promoting the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, giving local operators an accessible introduction to the program and helping them assess their sustainability performance, identify opportunities for improvement, and get involved in this supported regional initiative.

We were pleased to partner with a range of tourism organisations willing to sponsor the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard for operators in their region. The Scorecard is a practical, easy-to-use benchmark tool designed to help tourism businesses understand sustainable tourism criteria and identify priority areas for improvement, making it an accessible entry point for any operator at the beginning of their sustainability journey. Thanks to the following organisations for supporting businesses in their region to get started:



We were also pleased to work with some of our certified destinations to support operators in their region by subsidising certification with Ecotourism Australia, including ECO Certification, the world's first national ecotourism program for nature-based operators, and Sustainable Tourism Certification, designed for non-nature-based businesses to verify their sustainability practices. Thank you to the following organisations for supporting businesses in their region on their sustainability journey:

centralcoast



Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation Subsidy Program

Queensland's Tourism Business Capability Subsidy provides eligible sole traders and micro, small and medium-sized tourism and event businesses with up to \$2,000 towards targeted training and certification, including Ecotourism Australia's ECO Certification, Sustainable Tourism Certification and Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard. Following advocacy from Ecotourism Australia, the Queensland Government subsequently expanded the subsidy to include certification renewals, recognising the importance of maintaining certification and supporting businesses to uphold the standards and ongoing commitment it represents.

Industry Engagement – Events and Trade Shows

NoVacancy

17-18 September | Sydney/Warrane

Ecotourism Australia connected with leaders from across the accommodation sector at NoVacancy 2025, using the event to make the case for credible sustainability certification within the industry. CEO Elissa Keenan joined the panel discussion The Hidden Revenue Drivers of Eco-Certified Hotels, exploring how certification can support operational efficiencies, strengthen guest trust and deliver long-term business value. The event reinforced that sustainability is increasingly seen not only as an environmental responsibility, but as a strategic opportunity for accommodation providers.



Image: Martin Lopez Behar and Shea Wittig at No Vacancy 2025

Taiwan Tourism Summit 3 October 2025 | Taipei

CEO Elissa Keenan represented Australia as a guest speaker at the Taiwan Tourism Summit, hosted by the Taiwan Tourism Administration. Drawing on ECO Certified operators including Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre and experiences within Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, she presented Indigenous tourism as a model for combining cultural stewardship with sustainable visitor experience and community benefit. The Summit also opened dialogue with Taiwan's tourism leaders on regenerative and ecosystem restoration initiatives, extending Ecotourism Australia's profile to an international audience.



Image: Elissa Keenan at the Taiwan Tourism Summit

Australian Regional Tourism Convention & National Agritourism Forum 14-17 October 2025 | Adelaide Hills

Ecotourism Australia joined regional operators and industry professionals in the Adelaide Hills for the National Agritourism Forum and ART Convention. Two ECO Certified operators, Louise Freckelton (Kestrel Nest EcoHut) and Paul Birch (Willie Creek Pearls), shared how immersive agritourism connects visitors to place, produce and community. CEO Elissa Keenan facilitated a panel on destination management best practice with Bianca Gilmore (Central Coast Council), Madeleine Sawyer (Tourism MidWest) and Dave Hockly (DataStory, Queenstown), while Board Member Alysia Brandenburg contributed through ART's Ask an Expert session.



Image: Elissa Keenan speaking on panel at the National Agritourism Forum and ART Convention

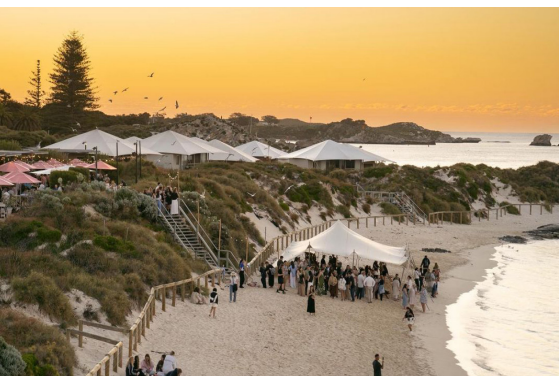


Image credit: Welcome function at Pinky's Rottnest Island, Australian Tourism Export Council

Meeting Place

27-29 October 2025 | Perth/Boorloo

At ATEC's Meeting Place 2025, Certification Manager Shea Wittig joined a panel on how ESG principles are shaping the future of Australian tourism, underscoring the role of evidence-based certification in building consumer trust. Ecotourism Australia had 50+ appointments with operators and international buyers throughout the event, reinforcing growing demand for verified sustainability credentials as a tool for export readiness and market differentiation.



Image: Elissa Keenan presents keynote at the Green Destinations Sustainable Destinations Forum

Green Destinations Sustainable Destinations Forum

28-29 October 2025 | Dubai

CEO Elissa Keenan represented Australia as an international guest speaker at the Green Destinations Sustainable Destinations Forum, joining the Building Sustainable Destinations panel to highlight Indigenous-led tourism as a model for community, cultural and conservation outcomes. Her keynote featured ECO Certified operator Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, based within Australia's first ECO Certified Destination, Tourism Port Douglas Daintree. The Forum reinforced sustainability as a foundation for destination resilience worldwide and supported Ecotourism Australia's ongoing partnership with Green Destinations.



Image: Martin Lopez Behar and Garrett Tyler-Parker at the STRA Summit

STRA Summit 2026

4-6 March 2026 | Adelaide/Tarntanya

ECO and Sustainable Tourism Specialist Martin Lopez Behar presented at the STRA Summit, hosted by the Short Term Accommodation Association Australia, on the *European Union's Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive* (EmpCo) and its implications for Australian tourism businesses. The session provided insights into the changing global landscape around sustainability claims, outlining what the Directive means for operators marketing to European travellers and the increasing importance of transparent, evidence-based communication. The engagement also reinforced the relevance of credible certification across the broader accommodation sector, including short-term rental providers.

NABERS Assessor Forum 4 March 2026 | Brisbane/Meenjin

Certification Manager Shea Wittig addressed more than 150 attendees at the NABERS Assessor Forum, sharing insights into the collaboration between Ecotourism Australia and NABERS and how hotels with a NABERS energy rating can streamline their pathway to Sustainable Tourism Certification. The session highlighted the value of aligning recognised building performance data with broader sustainability frameworks, helping accommodation providers demonstrate measurable progress across key sustainability areas. Strong engagement in Q&A and networking sessions pointed to an emerging opportunity to connect energy efficiency measurement with broader sustainability certification across the hotel sector.



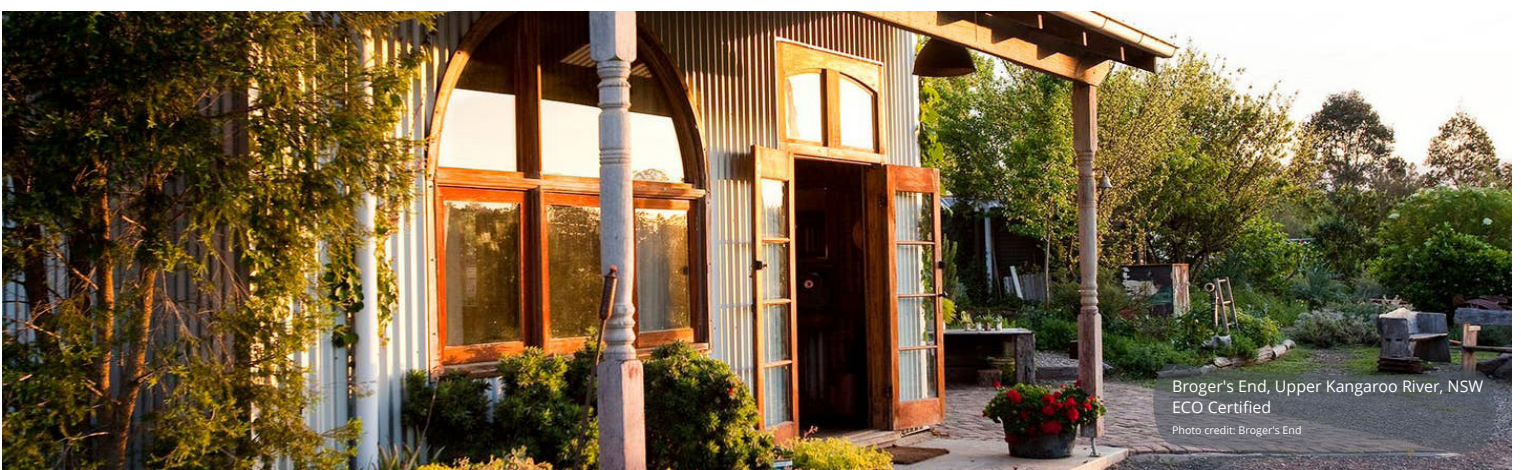
Image: Shea Wittig addresses NABERS Assessor Forum

Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE26) 10–14 May 2026 | Adelaide/Tarntanya

Ecotourism Australia attended Australian Tourism Exchange, connecting with global buyers, certified operators, destinations and tourism organisations. The team held 86 meetings, sharing insights into the value of credible certification and engaging with businesses at different stages of their sustainability journeys. More than 130 ECO Certified and Sustainable Tourism Certified operators and destinations participated in ATE26, representing around one in five sellers at the event and highlighting the growing presence of sustainability-focused businesses in Australia's export tourism market. Conversations with international buyers reinforced increasing demand for independently verified sustainability credentials, with certification recognised as an important tool for building trust, demonstrating responsible practices and helping Australian tourism experiences stand out in a competitive global marketplace.



Image: Smoking Ceremony at ATE26



Caravan Industry Association of Australia National Conference

13-15 May 2026 | Gold Coast

ECO and Sustainable Tourism Specialist, Martin Lopez Behar, joined a panel at the Caravan Industry Association National Conference exploring the future of Australian tourism, with a focus on environmental stewardship, regenerative tourism practices and the role of sustainability in shaping the visitor economy. Martin shared insights into how credible certification can support tourism businesses in embedding sustainable practices, demonstrating positive outcomes and responding to growing visitor expectations. Strong engagement from attendees highlighted the increasing importance of sustainability across the caravan and camping sector, as well as the opportunity for greater collaboration between industries to support a more resilient and responsible tourism future.



Image: Welcome address at the Caravan Industry Association National Conference 2026

Our team were also pleased to attend a large range of other industry events and forums, including:

- Austrade Roundtables with Federal Minister for Trade and Tourism Senator the Hon Don Farrell
- Austrade Visitor Economy Stakeholder Forums
- Destination Australia and Regional RTO Forum
- Women in Travel Awards
- WomenTHAT events
- TTF Friends of Parliament
- NAIDOC Week Celebration
- ACCI Tourism Working Group
- ACCI Tourism Sustainability Working Group
- Griffith University - Better Tourism, Brighter Future
- QTIC Friends of Parliament
- A Seat at the Table: 25 years of QTIC Advocacy
- Destination Q and IQ
- Queensland Tourism Awards
- VTIC Vision Summit



Davidsons Arnhemland Safaris, West Arnhem Land, NT
ECO Certified

Photo credit: Tourism Australia



Hall of Fame and Green Travel Leaders 2026

Hall of Fame Entrants

This year we welcome five of Australia's leading ecotourism operators into Ecotourism Australia's Hall of Fame, recognised for maintaining ECO Certification for an incredible 20 years. These industry leaders join 67 other operators previously honoured for their consistent commitment to world-class sustainability standards, bringing our Hall of Fame community to 73 operators across Australia.

APT Kimberley Wilderness Adventures, WA

Holding both Advanced Ecotourism Certification and Respecting Our Culture Certification, APT Kimberley Wilderness Adventures has been welcoming guests into one of Australia's last great wilderness frontiers for over 45 years. From 4WD expeditions along the Gibb River Road to small ship cruises along the Kimberley coast, every journey is designed to bring guests closer to country. Their exclusive wilderness lodges at Bungle Bungle, Mitchell Falls and Bell Gorge are purpose-built for minimal environmental impact and powered by solar energy. Central to their operation are long-standing partnerships with Traditional Owners, creating sustainable employment and directly supporting local communities across the Kimberley region.

Cape York Motorcycle Adventures, QLD

Family owned and operated since 1990, Cape York Motorcycle Adventures has spent over three decades taking riders deep into one of Australia's most extraordinary landscapes, from World Heritage rainforest trails to the remote tip of the Australian continent. In 2006, they became the world's first motorcycle tour company to achieve ECO Certification, a pioneering achievement that set the tone for everything that followed. Today, their sustainability practices include ongoing emissions reduction across their fleet, fuel-efficient vehicle upgrades, limited group sizes and guide training in low-impact riding techniques and responsible waste management. Every tour is built around a genuine respect for the country, culture and communities of Cape York.

Heron Island Resort, QLD

A protected coral cay on the Great Barrier Reef, Heron Island Resort is one of Australia's most iconic eco-destinations, recognised for 20 years of Advanced Ecotourism Certification. Guests snorkel directly from the beach, watch turtles nest and explore one of the world's most extraordinary marine environments. A 118kW solar energy system offsets daytime electricity needs, and a zero-single-use-plastic policy runs throughout the resort. Heron Island is also home to the University of Queensland's Heron Island Research Station, the oldest and largest marine research facility on the Great Barrier Reef, and actively supports turtle conservation, CoralWatch and Eye on the Reef citizen science programs.

Odyssey Expeditions, WA

A family-run business operating in the Kimberley since 1998, Odyssey Expeditions has spent over two decades taking small groups of up to 20 guests deep into one of Australia's most remote and extraordinary coastlines aboard their custom-built 24-metre catamaran, MV Odyssey. From hidden creeks and tributaries unreachable by larger vessels to the Rowley Shoals, one of the most remote dive destinations on earth, every journey is designed to bring guests as close to the wilderness as possible without leaving a trace on it. Marine waste is collected along the way, all on-board waste is responsibly managed, and every crew member is trained in minimal impact practices and cultural respect.



Heron Island Resort, QLD
Advanced ECO Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

Townsville City Council – Eco Catchment Tours, QLD

Running since 2006 and offered free of charge to schools, TAFE, university groups, businesses and the broader community, Townsville City Council's Eco Catchment Tours program is a genuinely unique Hall of Fame inductee. Following the water cycle from creek to coral, the tours bring participants face to face with Townsville's extraordinary ecosystems, helping them understand the connections between people, place and the natural world that often go unnoticed in everyday life. Over two decades, the program has reached thousands of residents, students and community groups, inspiring genuine environmental care and action. Townsville City Council also holds ECO Destination Certification.

2026 Green Travel Leaders

This year, an additional eight operators were acknowledged as Green Travel Leaders, honouring a decade of ECO Certification and their unwavering dedication to responsible tourism. They join 100 other operators as Green Travel Leaders.

- Whitsunday Jetski Tours
- Sunrover Tours
- Pacific Whale Foundation Australia
- Mungalla Station
- Mandingallbay Authentic Indigenous Tours
- Kangaroo Island Ocean Safari
- Down Under Cruise & Dive and The Adventure Company
- Brisbane Whale Watching



Brisbane Whale Watching, Moreton Bay, QLD
ECO Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

Qantas Australian Tourism Awards 2025

Ecotourism Australia celebrated another strong showing at the 2025 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards, with our certified operators securing 14 awards across 8 categories. Collectively, these results included 5 Gold, 4 Silver and 5 Bronze awards, reflecting the continued depth and quality of certified businesses competing at a national level.

A particular highlight was the sweep of both the Ecotourism and Major Tour and Transport Operators categories, with certified operators taking Gold, Silver and Bronze in each. Fun Over 50 Holidays also achieved the outstanding feat of placing across multiple categories, a testament to their leadership in sustainable touring experiences.

A further 15 certified operators were recognised as finalists across a wide range of categories, further reinforcing the strength and diversity of Ecotourism Australia's certified community at a national level.

Gold

- The Big Duck Boat Tours (ECO Certified) - Ecotourism
- Pennicott Wilderness Journeys (ECO Certified) - Major Tour & Transport Operators
- Spirit of the Coorong (ECO Certified; ROC Certified) - Tour & Transport Operators
- Novotel Cairns Oasis Resort (Sustainable Tourism Certified) - 4.5 Star Deluxe Accommodation
- Turtle Sands Nature Resort (ECO Certified) - New Tourism Business

Silver

- Wild Adventures Melbourne (WAM) (ECO Certified) - Ecotourism
- Willie Creek Pearls (ECO Certified) - Tourism Retail, Hire & Services
- Fun Over 50 Holidays (ECO Certified; ROC and Climate Action Certified) - Major Tour & Transport Operators
- All Seasons Houseboats (ECO Certified) - Unique Accommodation

Bronze

- Fun Over 50 Holidays (ECO Certified; ROC and Climate Action Certified) - Ecotourism
- HeliSpirit (ECO Certified) - Major Tour & Transport Operators
- Margaret River Discovery Co (ECO Certified) - Tour & Transport Operators
- Wooleen Station (ECO Certified) - Hosted Accommodation
- Peppers Silo Hotel (Sustainable Tourism Certified) - 4.5 Star Deluxe Accommodation

Pennicott Wilderness Journey, Hobart, TAS
Advanced ECO Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia



Ecotourism Australia Lifetime Achievement Awards

This year, Ecotourism Australia honoured two of the nation's most influential tourism leaders, Peter Gash OAM and Dr Claire Ellis, with Lifetime Achievement Awards in recognition of their outstanding contribution to the growth and advancement of ecotourism in Australia.

Presented at the Global Sustainable Tourism Summit on the Gold Coast, the awards recognise distinguished service and exceptional leadership in championing sustainability, advancing the mission and values of Ecotourism Australia, and promoting Australia as a world-leading destination for responsible and nature-based tourism.

Ecotourism Australia CEO Elissa Keenan said both recipients had made a profound and lasting contribution to the Australian tourism industry and had helped shape the evolution of sustainable tourism over many decades.

"These awards recognise individuals whose influence extends well beyond their own organisations and achievements," Ms Keenan said.

"Peter and Claire have each played a significant role in advancing ecotourism in Australia, helping demonstrate that tourism can be a force for environmental stewardship, community benefit and positive change."

"Both have dedicated their careers to protecting and showcasing Australia's natural and cultural assets while helping build the credibility and professionalism of our sector. Their contributions have helped position Australia as a global leader in responsible and sustainable tourism."



Peter Gash OAM

A pioneering ecotourism operator and conservation advocate, Peter Gash has spent more than four decades transforming Lady Elliot Island into one of Australia's most celebrated ecotourism destinations.

Under his leadership, Lady Elliot Island has become internationally recognised for environmental restoration, renewable energy innovation, reef conservation and sustainable visitor experiences. His work has demonstrated how tourism can actively contribute to the protection and regeneration of natural environments while creating meaningful visitor connections with nature.

"Peter's vision and commitment have inspired operators across Australia and around the world," Ms Keenan said.

"He has shown that environmental conservation and tourism success can go hand in hand and has become one of Australia's most respected ambassadors for sustainable tourism and reef stewardship."

Dr Claire Ellis

Former Ecotourism Australia Chair Dr Claire Ellis was recognised for her outstanding leadership and service to the organisation and the broader tourism sector. Over more than a decade on the Ecotourism Australia Board, including six years as Chair, Dr Ellis helped guide the organisation through a period of significant growth and increasing global recognition for its certification programs and sustainability leadership.

Ecotourism Australia, CEO, Elissa Keenan said Dr Ellis, as a highly respected tourism strategist and consultant has made a substantial contribution to destination development, sustainable tourism planning and industry advancement across Australia.

"Claire's leadership has had a lasting impact on both Ecotourism Australia and the wider tourism industry," Ms Keenan said.

"Her strategic vision, commitment to good governance and passion for sustainable tourism helped strengthen the organisation and position it for the future. She has been a tireless advocate for tourism that protects place, supports communities and delivers long-term value."



Key achievements in 2025-2026

YHA Australia first to certify entire portfolio with Ecotourism Australia

In 2026 YHA Australia became the first accommodation network in the world to achieve full-portfolio certification with Ecotourism Australia, with all 18 properties now holding either ECO or Sustainable Tourism Certification. The milestone caps a two-year partnership that began in 2024, building on the long-standing ECO Certification of YHA Apollo Bay and YHA Grampians (held since 2007). The remaining 16 properties – spanning Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Hobart, and regional locations such as Byron Bay, Cairns and Fremantle – have now achieved Certification.

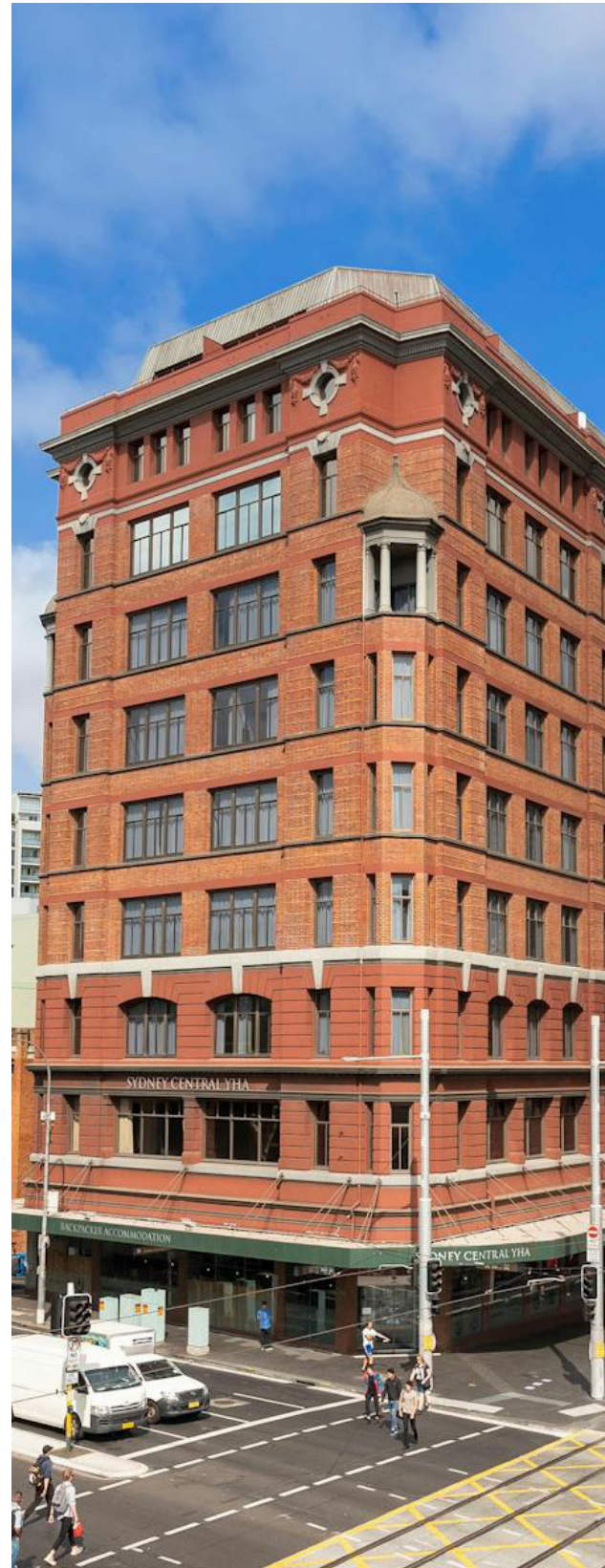
The achievement reflects a whole-of-portfolio approach to sustainability, supported by YHA's Sustainable Properties Fund, which backs renewable energy, solar hot water, smart building technology, and water conservation measures such as rainwater harvesting. Waste reduction efforts include comprehensive recycling, composting, and the elimination of plastic bottled water in favour of refill stations. These sit alongside community initiatives such as guest swap shelves and food sharing, and a genuine commitment to First Nations engagement through Indigenous-led experiences and cultural partnerships.

YHA Australia CEO Paul McGrath said the milestone reflects the organisation's 87-year history of affordable, community-focused accommodation, proving sustainability and accessibility aren't mutually exclusive.

"We are exceptionally proud that all 18 of our properties have now achieved certification, making us the first accommodation network in the country to reach 100% certification," Mr McGrath said.

"Increasingly, travellers want to know not just where they go but how the places they stay align with their values, and Ecotourism Australia's certification offers those travellers a clear and trustworthy answer. Ecotourism Australia's certification provides us with a globally recognised benchmark to apply consistently across our network."

We congratulate YHA Australia for setting the benchmark as the first network to certify their entire portfolio.

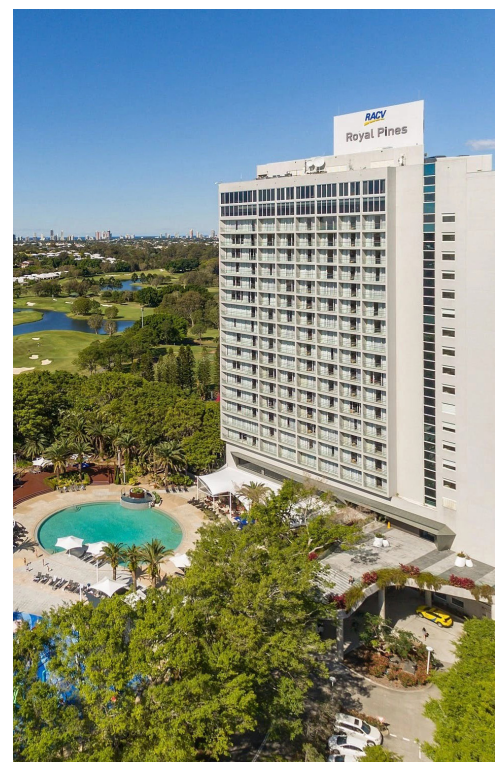


YHA Sydney Central, NSW | Sustainable Tourism Certified
Photo credit: YHA Australia

RACV first to achieve Advanced Sustainable Tourism Certification

In 2026 RACV marked a major step forward in their sustainability journey, achieving Sustainable Tourism Certification across its entire Resorts portfolio. All ten properties are now certified, with RACV Noosa Resort on the Sunshine Coast and RACV Royal Pines Resort on the Gold Coast becoming the first properties in Australia to attain the highest tier, Advanced Sustainable Tourism Certification. This milestone reflects a consistent, enterprise-wide commitment to sustainable tourism, with properties spanning Victoria, Queensland and regional Australia all reaching certification under a single, coordinated program.

The achievement was underpinned by a broad suite of sustainability initiatives implemented across the portfolio, including running on renewable electricity where possible, harvesting rainwater for irrigation, and a multi-year de-gasification program to reduce reliance on gas across resort operations. RACV Noosa Resort and RACV Royal Pines Resort implemented a particularly comprehensive range of these measures, resulting in both resorts being awarded Advanced Sustainable Tourism Certification.



RACV Royal Pines, QLD | Sustainable Tourism Certified
Photo credit: RACV Resorts



RACV Noosa Resort, QLD | Sustainable Tourism Certified
Photo credit: RACV Resorts

RACV Executive General Manager, Leisure, Craig Peachey said the milestone was a testament to the dedication of teams across the organisation:

"This certification is an independent check that what we're doing stands up to scrutiny and recognises the choices that add up to real change. To see that effort acknowledged across our entire portfolio is incredibly rewarding, and to have RACV Noosa Resort and RACV Royal Pines Resort become the first properties in Australia to achieve Advanced Sustainable Tourism Certification is something the whole team should be enormously proud of," Mr Peachey said.

Recognising RACV Noosa Resort's leadership in sustainable tourism, Resort Manager Darren McClenaghan was invited to share RACV's sustainability journey with the global tourism community as a panellist at the Global Sustainable Tourism Summit 2026. In the Green Skills Challenge session, Darren shared how RACV Noosa's achievement as one of Australia's first Advanced Sustainable Tourism certified operators has been underpinned by building a culture where sustainability is understood, embraced and actioned by teams across the business.

We congratulate RACV on its proactive and strategic approach, which sends a powerful message to the broader tourism industry that sustainability at scale is achievable and delivers real value for people, place, planet and purpose. By attaining Advanced Sustainable Tourism Certification across two flagship resorts and certifying its entire portfolio, RACV has demonstrated that large operators can be trailblazers, not just in adopting innovative practices, but in embedding them in a way that inspires others to follow.



W Sydney, NSW | Sustainable Tourism Certified
Photo credit: W Sydney, Marriott

First W Hotel Certification

This year W Sydney became the first W Hotels property in Australia to achieve Sustainable Tourism Certification.

Located in the heart of Darling Harbour, W Sydney demonstrates how luxury hospitality can evolve to meet growing traveller expectations for authentic, responsible and community-connected experiences. The hotel's sustainability initiatives include a 100,000-litre rainwater harvesting system supporting cooling and air-conditioning operations, complimentary electric vehicle charging stations, and in-room amenities sourced from B Corp-certified partners.

This operational approach is complemented by a strong focus on community connection and positive local impact. W Sydney partners with Foodbank in New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory to redistribute surplus food and supports local environmental initiatives, including the Glebe Bay oyster shell recycling and restoration program. Guided by Marriott International's Serve 360 platform and W Hotels STANCE passion point – which champions progress through community, culture and conscious impact – the team continues to reduce single-use plastics, strengthen local procurement and enhance transparency around sustainability performance.

Sustainability extends throughout the hotel's culinary operations, with menus showcasing seasonal NSW produce, Good Fish-certified seafood and ingredients sourced from regenerative farms and regional producers. Through its partnership with Veolia's food-to-biofuel program, kitchen waste is diverted from landfill and transformed into renewable energy, supporting a more circular approach to hospitality.

"At W Sydney, sustainability isn't a standalone initiative; it's part of how modern luxury should operate," said Titus Rosier, General Manager of W Sydney.

"Achieving Sustainable Tourism Certification reflects the work our team has done from day one to embed conscious practices across our operations, partnerships and guest experiences."

Surf Coast Shire Achieves ECO Destination Certification

In April 2026, Ecotourism Australia was proud to welcome the Surf Coast Shire as the newest addition to our growing cohort of ECO Certified Destinations, formally recognising the region's adherence to global best practice sustainable tourism and environmental management standards.

Located south-west of Melbourne, the Surf Coast marks the official start of the iconic Great Ocean Road. Comprising eleven distinct townships, the region is one of Victoria's fastest-growing municipalities and a premier destination for domestic and international travellers, drawing 2.6 million visitors each year.

Behind the milestone lies a comprehensive range of sustainability initiatives, delivered in partnership with Barwon Water, Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism and Parks Victoria. The region carefully monitors visitor numbers and behaviour to manage impacts on natural and cultural sites, while strict guidelines and licensing protect wildlife and sensitive ecosystems. Water conservation measures, low-impact transport options and climate adaptation strategies keep tourism infrastructure and practices resilient and environmentally responsible, while authentic cultural engagement ensures local communities benefit economically while preserving their traditions.

"We're absolutely rapt for the Surf Coast Shire to receive ECO Destination Certification, as it strengthens our status as a place where visitors can soak up nature-focused experiences," said Surf Coast Shire Mayor, Cr Libby Stapleton.

"Our world-class environment is a huge drawcard for the 2.6 million visitors to the Surf Coast each year — from internationals exploring the Great Ocean Road, to people from across Australia taking in our charming hinterland."

"One of our priorities is to foster slow and regenerative tourism that is respectful of the local environment, values local communities and maximises local yield and revenue. This certification will help us to achieve that," Cr Stapleton added.

"We also want tourism to deliver consistent economic and social benefits year-round. What better way to help achieve this than to welcome visitors who love the outdoors and care about the environment."

ECO Destination Certification assesses a region against more than 90 criteria across eight sections, including Destination Management, Environment and Climate, Culture and Tradition, and Social Wellbeing. Through Ecotourism Australia's partnership with Green Destinations, the Surf Coast Shire joins a distinguished network of some 200 certified destinations worldwide.



Surf Coast Shire, Torquay, VIC | ECO Certified Destination
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

Ecotourism Australia secures funding for landmark climate research

Ecotourism Australia secured funding under the Boundless Earth Epic program to deliver *Tourism's Climate Advantage: Unlocking Ambitious Action*, a landmark research and advocacy paper quantifying the economic, reputational and community value of ambitious climate action for Australia's tourism industry.

Boundless Earth is an Australian non-profit and philanthropic organisation founded by Atlassian co-founder Mike Cannon-Brookes to accelerate climate solutions at the scale and speed required for Australia to do its fair share in averting the climate crisis.

Deloitte was appointed as the research partner for the project and facilitated stakeholder workshops throughout its development.

Purpose of the Project

Tourism's Climate Advantage: Unlocking Ambitious Action will mobilise Australia's tourism industry as a champion for ambitious climate action. While tourism is highly exposed to climate risks, it is also a major economic driver and influencer of Australia's global image. However, its role in shaping political conditions for climate ambition remains under-utilised.

The key outcome of the project will be an evidence-based report that demonstrates the economic, reputational, and policy value of bold decarbonisation and climate leadership for the tourism sector, alongside the value of committing to sustainable practices. The report will also identify the risk to Australia's tourism industry if stronger climate action is not taken.

A key component of the project has been extensive stakeholder engagement across the tourism sector. Working with Deloitte, Ecotourism Australia convened a series of stakeholder workshops and targeted focus interviews with industry leaders, operators, destinations, government representatives and sustainability experts. These discussions have helped identify the opportunities, barriers and policy settings required to accelerate climate action across the visitor economy, ensuring the final report is grounded in real-world industry experience and reflects the perspectives of those at the forefront of sustainable tourism.

This report will be released in 2026 and will support an advocacy project to various levels of government.





Global Sustainable Tourism Summit 2026

Ecotourism Australia was proud to once again host our biennial Global Sustainable Tourism Summit from 2–5 June, a flagship event on the international sustainable tourism calendar. Over four days on the Gold Coast, the 2026 Summit brought together sustainability changemakers, innovators and industry leaders to share knowledge, foster collaboration and drive practical action towards a more sustainable tourism industry.

Supported by Summit Partner Tourism Australia and Host Sponsor the City of Gold Coast, this year's program explored global best practice at both destination and business level through keynote presentations, panel discussions and fireside conversations featuring leading voices from Australia and around the world. Discussions focused on the opportunities and challenges shaping the future of sustainable tourism, demonstrating how the industry can create meaningful value for people, place, planet and purpose. The Summit also provided an opportunity to celebrate two significant milestones for Ecotourism Australia: 30 years of ECO Certification and 35 years of leadership in sustainable tourism.

The event attracted strong representation from across Australia, with more than 200 delegates attending from every state and territory. Tourism businesses (27%) and representatives from national, state and local government (24%) made up the two largest stakeholder groups, followed by industry and peak bodies (16%), consultancy services (9%), regional tourism organisations (6%) and educational institutions (4%). The Summit also attracted a highly experienced audience, with 73% of delegates holding manager-level positions or above, including almost one-third (32%) at Corporate or Director level, highlighting the event's role as a key forum for decision-makers driving sustainable tourism.

The Summit concluded on Friday 5 June with a Destination Immersion Program held on World Environment Day, giving delegates the opportunity to experience the sustainability initiatives of certified tourism operators across the region. The program showcased the diverse ways tourism businesses contribute to conservation, wellbeing and connection with nature, including wellness experiences at ECO Certified Gwinganna Retreat & Spa and an insight into the conservation and wildlife rehabilitation work of Advanced ECO Certified Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary. Supported by Summit Supporter Southern Cross Tours, the program provided a fitting conclusion to the week by bringing the Summit's discussions to life through firsthand experiences of sustainable tourism in action.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Summit 2026 featured 43 speakers, bringing together a diverse mix of industry leaders, practitioners, researchers and policymakers from Australia and overseas. Of these, 38 speakers (88%) were Australian-based and five (12%) were international, ensuring a strong balance of local expertise and global perspectives.



Image: Christina Leala-Gale, Pacific Tourism Organisation

International Speakers

- Jana Apih, Good Place – *Slovenia*
- Aromica Bhattacharya, Travalyst – *India*
- Christina Leala-Gale, Pacific Tourism Organisation – *Fiji*
- Adam McEwan, Hero Experiences – *United Arab Emirates*
- Timothy Teo, Borneo Eco Tours – *Malaysia*

More than one-third (34%) of the Australian speakers represented ECO Certified or Sustainable Tourism Certified businesses and destinations, reinforcing the important role of certified operators in leading sustainable tourism. The speaker program also reflected Ecotourism Australia's commitment to diversity and inclusion, with an equitable gender balance of 24 female speakers (56%) and 19 male speakers (44%). Thirteen per cent of speakers identified as First Nations peoples, with 100% First Nations representation on the Indigenous tourism panel and First Nations voices featured across a range of sessions throughout the program, ensuring Indigenous perspectives were embedded across the Summit.

88%

were very satisfied with the mix of international and domestic speakers



85%

of delegates were very satisfied with the topics covered



100%

of attendees agreed or strongly agreed they would attend another Global Sustainable Tourism Summit, with 70% strongly agreeing



88%

were very satisfied with the summit format



82

Net Promoter Score



"This conference was one that will stay in my heart. Just coming to Australia was a dream. And the people I met and things I learned, wow! Just simply amazing. I think it doesn't always happen that everything falls into its place so easily and values align with so little effort. I couldn't be more happy and proud to add my little piece to the picture and get back so much."

– Jana Apih, Good Place [Slovenia]



205

delegates attended
the Global
Sustainable Tourism
Summit



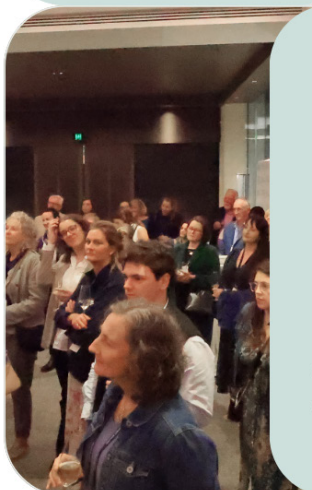
43

speakers
(including 5
international)



100%

of Australian states
and territories
represented



53%

of attendees
were at either a
senior manager
or corporate
director level



11

state and national sponsors



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



Booking.com partnership goes from strength to strength

This year, our partnership with Booking.com continued to strengthen the connection between credible sustainability action and travellers seeking more responsible ways to explore the world. Through the recognition of Ecotourism Australia's ECO Certification and Sustainable Tourism Certification programs on Booking.com's global platform, certified tourism businesses are able to showcase their verified sustainability commitments to an international audience of travellers increasingly seeking trusted sustainability credentials.

As one of the world's largest online travel platforms, Booking.com recognises the important role of independent, third-party certification in validating sustainability claims and building consumer confidence. Through this partnership, accommodation providers holding ECO Certification or Sustainable Tourism Certification can display a dedicated sustainability label on their Booking.com listing, enabling travellers to easily identify and filter for properties that meet independently verified environmental, social, cultural and management standards.

For Ecotourism Australia's certified operators, this partnership provides a valuable opportunity to communicate their sustainability achievements at the point where travel decisions are made. The certification label acts as a trusted indicator of responsible practice, helping travellers choose businesses that are actively contributing to positive outcomes for the environment, communities and destinations.

The partnership also provides an opportunity to showcase Australia's sustainable tourism leadership to an international audience. In June 2026, Ecotourism Australia CEO Elissa Keenan was invited by Booking.com to participate in a media fam in Port Douglas, recognised as one of Booking.com's Top 10 Trending Destinations for 2026. The program brought together Asia-Pacific media representatives to experience sustainable tourism in action, featuring visits to ECO Certified operators including Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, Wildlife Habitat and Sailaway Port Douglas, as well as Sustainable Tourism Certified Pullman Port Douglas Sea Temple Resort & Spa.

Ecotourism Australia values Booking.com's ongoing support and collaboration in advancing sustainable tourism and looks forward to continuing to work together to increase the visibility and impact of credible sustainability practices across the industry.



New partnership with NABERS

As Australia's leading benchmark for building performance, NABERS provides independent ratings across key areas including energy efficiency, water use, waste management and embodied carbon. When aligned with Ecotourism Australia's Sustainable Tourism Certification criteria, this trusted data enables hotel operators to demonstrate measurable sustainability performance while recognising the work and investment already taking place across their operations.

A key focus of the partnership has been mapping NABERS ratings and verification processes against relevant Sustainable Tourism Certification criteria, allowing hotels already engaged with NABERS to leverage existing assessments as part of their certification journey. This reduces unnecessary duplication, simplifies evidence gathering and helps operators focus their efforts on implementing meaningful sustainability improvements.

This practical alignment reflects a shared commitment from NABERS and Ecotourism Australia to make sustainability more achievable, transparent and impactful for the tourism and hospitality sector. By connecting robust building performance data with a comprehensive sustainability framework, the partnership supports hotels to demonstrate genuine progress while maintaining the rigour and integrity expected of independent certification.

The collaboration was showcased at the NABERS Assessor Forum, where our Certification Manager, Shea Wittig, joined more than 150 industry professionals to highlight how the two organisations are working together to support hotels on their sustainability journeys. The session prompted strong engagement, with attendees sharing insights, asking questions and exploring opportunities to further embed sustainability practices across the sector.

Ecotourism Australia sincerely thanks the NABERS team and assessor community for their ongoing collaboration and commitment to advancing credible sustainability practices across Australia's tourism and hospitality industry.



RACV Cape Schanck, VIC | Sustainable Tourism Certified
Photo credit: RACV Resorts



Ecotourism Australia Partners 2025-2026

It wouldn't be possible to do what we do without the support of our partners. We value the insights and contributions of all our partners to help us grow and broaden our impact in advancing sustainability within the tourism industry.

UN Tourism



The World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.

As the leading international organization in the field of tourism, UN Tourism promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide.

UNESCO



UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. It contributes to peace and security by promoting international cooperation in education, sciences, culture, communication and information.

Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance



The Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance is an association of leading sustainable travel and tourism certification organisations from around the world. Its founding members include Biosphere: Instituto de Turismo Responsable; Ecotourism Australia; Foundation for Environmental Education (Blue Flag and Green Key); Good Travel Seal; Green Globe Certification, TourCert; Travelife for Accommodation; and Travelife for Tour Operators.

For some 30 years, this group of leading internationally recognised certification organisations has been responsible for developing the industry's best practice standards in sustainable tourism. Together, these organisations certify more than 19,000 of the world's leading travel and tourism companies, organisations and destinations.

Green Destinations



Green Destinations is a global organisation that supports sustainable destinations, their businesses and their communities.

Our ECO Destination Certification program was established in partnership with Green Destinations, a leader in destination sustainability certification. Our participation and engagement at international Green Destinations forums ensures our Destination Certification programs remain competitive and continue to meet best practice standards and extends our global reach.

Travelife



Travelife Sustainability System is an initiative dedicated to promoting sustainable practices within the travel and tourism industry. It is based on the central role of tour operators and travel agents in the tourism supply chain. Travelife aims to offer companies the knowledge, solutions, and tools to implement positive change within their businesses and their supply chain.

Shiji ReviewPro



An integrated platform that offers the tools and processes you need to increase guest satisfaction and revenue, ReviewPro 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.

Ecotourism Australia certified operators get access to ReviewPro for their business as part of their certification renewal fees.



National Partners

Tourism Australia



Tourism Australia (TA) is the Australian Government agency responsible for growing demand for Australia as a tourism destination through its consumer and trade marketing activities. The organisation's purpose is to grow demand and foster a competitive and sustainable tourism industry.

As founding partner of the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, Tourism Australia provides vital industry insights and ongoing marketing support of the program. Through Tourism Australia's support the Scorecard continues to gain momentum as a credible program for tourism operators to begin and benchmark their sustainability journey.

World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF)



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

The World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia is one of Australia's most trusted conservation organisations. For more than 40 years, WWF-Australia has worked to protect threatened species and habitats, meet the challenge of climate change, and build a world where people live in harmony with nature.

Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW)



The Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) is Australia's online marketplace for tourism information. The ever-evolving ATDW-Online platform is a content tool for tourism operators and businesses to use to improve their digital presence.

ATDW collaborates closely with state and territory tourism organisations and Tourism Australia, capitalising on mutual projects, harnessing resources, leveraging expertise, and gathering insights.

Big Red Group



Big Red Group is the largest marketplace of experiences in Australia and New Zealand, and home to leading brands including Adrenaline, Experience Oz, Experience Oz Local Agent, and RedBalloon. Offering 14,000+ experiences across its brands, Big Red Group remains steadfast on its mission to shift the way people experience life, having served more than five million experiences to date.



Accor

Accor is a world leading hospitality group offering experiences across more than 110 countries in 5 400 properties, 10 000 food and beverage venues, wellness facilities or flexible workspaces. Accor is committed to taking positive action in terms of business ethics and integrity, responsible tourism, sustainable development, community outreach, and diversity and inclusion.

Ecotourism Australia and Accor Pacific have entered a strategic partnership to see the independent certification of all Accor hotels, apartments and resorts across Australia and the Pacific as Sustainable Tourism certified through Ecotourism Australia's [Sustainable Tourism Certification](#) program.



Caravan Industry Association of Australia

Caravan Industry Association of Australia Ltd is the peak national body representing the Caravanning and Camping Industry in Australia.

Industry partner Caravan Industry Association of Australia will collaborate to promote a pathway to sustainability for caravanning and camping tourism enterprises in Australia through the [Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard](#), [ECO Certification](#) and [Sustainable Tourism Certification](#) programs.



Accommodation Australia

Accommodation Australia is the peak industry group and is the largest representative association for the Accommodation Sector in Australia.

Accommodation Australia have entered an Industry partnership with Ecotourism Australia to create a pathway to sustainability for their members by promoting the [Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard](#) and encouraging accommodation providers to achieve [ECO Certification](#) or [Sustainable Tourism Certification](#).



Australian Tourism Export Council

ATEC is the only national body that connects and grows the commercial networks of members engaged in the international tourism industry. ATEC brings together the industry's buyers and sellers via commercially focused industry events and deliver structured development pathways which grow Australia's offering of internationally-ready, distribution-ready, trade-ready products.



Novotel Canberra, ACT
Sustainable Tourism Certified
Photo credit: Novotel Canberra

National Australian Built Environment Rating System (NABERS)



NABERS is a simple, reliable sustainability rating across building sectors such as offices, hotels, shopping centres, apartment buildings, and data centres. The program is managed by the NSW Government and overseen by a National Steering Committee representing all states and territories.

Like the star ratings on household appliances, NABERS uses a one-to-six-star scale to help people understand the energy and water efficiency, waste management practices, and indoor environment quality of buildings. By assessing operational performance, NABERS ratings encourage better building outcomes with lower costs and fewer carbon emissions.

Partnerships with Protected Area Managers (PAMs)

Ecotourism Australia maintains robust and strategic collaborations with Protected Area Managers (PAMs) across every state and territory to uphold high standards of sustainable tourism within Australia's national parks and marine reserves. Our key partners include :

- Parks Australia
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)
- Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (Western Australia)
- National Parks and Wildlife Service South Australia
- Parks Victoria
- Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service
- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

Through these partnerships, ECO Certified operators are recognised with concrete benefits, such as extended permit durations or reduced licence fees, tailored to state-specific guidelines.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority — High Standard Tourism Operators

In collaboration with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), Ecotourism Australia champions "High Standard Tourism Operators," - those holding recognised global-standard certifications and embedding best-practice sustainable tourism principles. These operators are essential stewards of the Reef, with benefits including extended permits of up to 20 years, as well as access to professional development opportunities such as the Master Reef Guide program and the Tourism Industry Activation and Reef Protection Initiative (TRIPI), which supports operators in enhancing reef stewardship through targeted funding, training, and conservation partnerships.

Tourism and Parks Agencies Forum (TAPAF)

A cornerstone of our national-level engagement, Ecotourism Australia continues to provide secretariat services to the Tourism and Parks Agencies Forum (TAPAF). This quarterly forum brings together state tourism organisations and both state and federal parks agencies to align approaches, share insights, and collectively promote responsible tourism practices across Australia's protected areas.

State Partners



The University of Queensland (UQ)

The University of Queensland (UQ) is one of Australia's leading research and teaching institutions.

The partnership between Ecotourism Australia and the University of Queensland creates mutual benefit by providing valuable knowledge sharing and forming a strong research base to understand current issues in tourism and sustainability to inform management options.



Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC)

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) is a not-for-profit, private sector, membership-based organisation representing the interests of the tourism and hospitality industry.

QTIC has previously agreed to formally recognise Ecotourism Australia's business criteria requirements for automatic eligibility to the Quality Tourism Framework Business Program.



Quobba Station and Red Bluff, Carnarvon, WA
ECO Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

Ecotourism Australia Supporters 2025-2026

Ecotourism Australia's Supporter Membership program provides a pathway for individuals, businesses and organisations that share our values and commitment to sustainable tourism, but may not be eligible for or ready to pursue one of our certification programs. We are grateful to those who have chosen to connect with and support our work throughout the 2025-26 financial year.

Corporate Supporter Members





Business Supporter Members



Individual Supporter Members

Ecotourism Australia would like to thank all of our 2025-26 Individual Supporters who continue to support our organisation. As a not-for-profit organisation, the support of members enables us to champion the ecotourism industry across Australia and carry out our vision of 'leading tourism to be a catalyst for change'.

Our Board and Team

Our board

Thank you to our voluntary Directors who served on the Ecotourism Australia Board during FY2025-2026.

Chair | Nat Burke | WWF- Australia

Deputy Chair | Sharon Raguse | Tourism Noosa Caroline Densley | Diverse Travel Australia

Alysia Brandenburg | AbPs Consulting Services

Amy Gash | Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort

Jeff Gillies | Coral Expeditions

Katherine Reid | Bundaberg Tourism

Robert Taylor | Western Australia Indigenous Tourism Operations Council (WAITOC)

Wendy Hills | Hills Consulting (to October 2025)

Our team

Elissa Keenan | Chief Executive Officer

Nadine Schramm | Head of Sustainability Assurance and Operations

Shea Wittig | Certification Manager

Myv Costelloe | Stakeholder Engagement Manager

Corinne Lewis | ECO and Sustainable Tourism Specialist

Martin Lopez Behar | ECO and Sustainable Tourism Specialist

Saw Yu Yu Nwe (Zinnia) | Certification Coordinator

Monique Collin | Membership Services Coordinator

Emily Flanagan | Communications and Engagement Specialist

Lexie Gillies | Communications Coordinator

Luis Ponce | Certification Programs Coordinator

A heartfelt thank you to our interns Monique Collin and Marioara D'Adamo who have worked with us this year. We're proud to support students and young professionals to pursue their career goals, with one of our interns gaining permanent employment with Ecotourism Australia this year.

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