

## MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF ECOTOURISM AUSTRALIA

11:30 am AEST / 12:30 pm AEDT Wednesday 16 October 2024

Ecotourism Australia Office – 816/3 Parkland Blvd, Brisbane, Queensland  
External participants online via Zoom.

### **Members present in person and/or online:**

Elissa Keenan (CEO), Caroline Densley (Deputy Chair, Director), Nat Burke (Individual Member, Director), Nadine Schramm (EA Staff), Shea Wittig (EA Staff), Robert Taylor (Director joined 11:58am) AEST, Paul Cripps – Helispirit (Certified Operator), Eleanor Ogston (Individual Supporter), Ian Solomon – Mercure Alice Springs Resort (Certified Business), Sue Johnson (Individual Supporter), Noreen Breakey (Individual Supporter), Wendy Hills (Individual Supporter), Amy Gash – Lady Elliot Island (Certified Operator), Tai Lennon (Individual Supporter), Claire Ellis (Individual Supporter), Fiona Nicholl (Business Supporter), Tammy Marshall - The B Hive (Certified Operator), Sharon Raguse (Corporate Supporter joined 11:38am)

### **Meeting Apologies and Proxys:**

- Apologies received from Janet Mackay and Rick Murray
- Rick Murray, nominated Dr Claire Ellis as his proxy
- Janet Mackay, nominated Wendy Hills as her proxy

**Chair:** N Burke

**Company Secretary:** E Keenan

**Minutes:** S Wittig

**Meeting opened:** 11:30am AEST

### 1) **Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country**

Deputy Chair – Nat Burke

N Burke welcomed all attendees and shared an Acknowledgement of Country, recognising the unceded Indigenous lands. He acknowledged that he is meeting from the lands of the Ngunnawal people and paid respect to elders past and present highlighting their enduring connection to country, sky and salt water. He extended this respect to any Indigenous peoples joining today.

Request for all attendees were then invited to add the Country they are joining from in the meeting chat function to extend this recognition and acknowledgment.

### 2) **Meeting apologies and proxys**

Deputy Chair – Nat Burke

Apologies and proxies as noted.

3) **Confirmation of minutes of 2023 AGM**

Deputy Chair – Nat Burke

a. Motion: that the minutes of the previous AGM 18 October 2023 be accepted

b. Mover and Seconder

N Burke tabled the previous AGM minutes from 2023 and asked if there were any questions or amendments to be noted. Nil were noted.

**Moved:** Claire Ellis

**Seconded:** Caroline Densley

**CARRIED:** All on the meeting

4) **Matters arising from 2023 Minutes**

Deputy Chair – N Burke

None noted.

5) **Report from the Chair – Tabling of Board report**

Deputy Chair – N Burke

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

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

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

knowledge-sharing; and we continue to work with our Protected Area Management partners to provide rewards for certified operators and continue the sustainable growth of tourism in Australia's natural areas.

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

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

After 13 years on the Board of Ecotourism Australia, including the last six years as Chair, we recognise the efforts of Dr Claire Ellis who has stepped down from the Board. We are deeply grateful to Claire for her passion, her integrity, and her commitment to Ecotourism Australia and our members and her ongoing engagement.

I also take the opportunity to thank the voluntary Board Directors who have served this year: Caroline Densley, Alysia Brandenburg, Robert Taylor, Wendy Hills, Janet Mackay, Peter Johnson and our former Chair Dr Claire Ellis.

#### 6) **Finance report – Tabling of audited statements**

Company Secretary – E Keenan

E Keenan began by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today. She is on Meanjin, the country of the Turrbal and Yuggera people. E Keenan paid her respects to their Elders past and present and extended that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today and thank them for their continued custodianship of land and sea country.

The continued impact of the global pandemic and multiple climate disaster events (floods, cyclones, bush fires) over the past four years has meant increased levels of volatility and uncertainties remain as the industry recovery continues. Domestic tourism figures continued to improve in 2022, with some softening in 2023 that has not seen significant increase in 2024. International tourism figures have continued to improve and Tourism Research Australia forecast continued growth in future years. Cost of living pressures, interest rates, and the high demand for Australians to travel overseas have all had an impact on the tourism industry in FY2023/2024. Future international visitor arrivals are not forecast to surpass pre-pandemic numbers until 2025 however forecasts, based on internal projections and international research, indicate that demand in sustainable tourism services will increase further in the next 12 months.

Despite the continued economic impacts of environmental events and economic uncertainty, Ecotourism Australia had a relatively stable membership base. There was a cancellation rate of 7% for

the year ended 30 June 2024, which is the same as 2023. The primary causes of this cancellation rate was the closure of a number of member businesses; and some business certifications were cancelled due to not meeting Ecotourism Australia's audit requirements. Ecotourism Australia maintains a natural disaster policy for membership which has seen a number of members supported through drought, fire, and pandemic over recent years. As of 30 June 2023, there were no members remaining in the 'on pause' program provided to support businesses who were significantly impacted by climate disasters and world events.

Ecotourism Australia applied a CPI increase of 5% increase on all membership fees and certification fees (effective 1 July 2024), to help protect the organisation against rising inflation. A review of individual and corporate membership was also undertaken with enhanced membership packages (for businesses/individuals unable to undertake certification) provided in FY 2023/2024. There was a small decline in individual and business membership renewals last financial year.

Throughout the period from July 2023 to June 2024, Ecotourism Australia experienced a steady inflow of new tourism operators in the core programs, ECO Certification and Sustainable Tourism Certification which was launched 2022. ECO Certification recorded 89 applicants, a 27% increase to the previous financial year. There were 197 new certification applicants recorded in the Sustainable Tourism Certification program compared to 11 in the previous financial year (a 1690% increase). The Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard has attracted strong registration numbers from across all sectors of the visitor economy across almost all states and territories in Australia. There are now more than 500 tourism business participating in this pre-certification program, who have either completed or currently completing the Scorecard.

A number of key partnerships were also maintained this year including a Year 2 Partnership Marketing Agreement with Tourism Australia; a preferred supplier agreement with Accor Australia Pacific, supply agreements with Destination New South Wales and Visit Canberra, a service agreement with Deloitte Access Economics; and several non-financial industry partnerships including with Caravan Industry Association of Australia and Accommodation Australia. Partnerships with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse and the Big Red Group continue to amplify and promote sustainable tourism support products.

We completed the financial year in a positive financial position. Ecotourism Australia has liabilities in the form of contracts with customers which is recognised as unearned revenue, expected to be recognised as revenue in this financial year ending 30 June 2025.

At 30 June 2024 the company recorded net current liabilities of \$46,422 (2023: \$242,080) and total net assets of \$81,582 (2023: \$174,057 net liabilities), and for the year ended 30 June 2024 recorded a surplus of \$255,639 (2023: \$16,541), and net cash inflows from operations of \$743,873 (2023: \$118,435).

Our audit was completed by Allen Audit and Advisory. A copy of the auditor's independence declaration as required under section 307C of the Corporations Act 2011 is set out in the financial statements.

- a) Motion: that the Financial Reports for 2023/24 be accepted
- b) Mover and Seconder



**Motion:** That the Finance report – Tabling of audited statements is accepted

**Moved:** Ian Solomon

**Seconded:** Wendy Hills

**CARRIED:** All on the meeting

**7) Election of Directors (electronic voting closed at 10.30 am, 16 October 2024)**

Company Secretary – E Keenan

(electronic voting closed at 10.30 am, 16 October 2024)

The electronic voting period for the 2024 Board of Director appointment was open from 10.30 am AEST Wednesday 9 October 2024 and closed on Wednesday 16 October 2024 at 10.30 am AEST.

All financial members of Ecotourism Australia were eligible to vote.

This year we had 13 nominations for 5 vacant board positions. We thank all members who nominated for the Board and thank our certified operators, certified destinations, individual supporter and corporate supporter members who voted in this year's election.

We congratulate:

Returning Board member Alysia Brandenburg of AbPs Consulting Services

And newly elected Board members Jeff Gillies of Coral Expeditions, Amy Gash of Lady Elliott Island, David Young of Accor Australia Pacific, and Sharon Raguse of Tourism Noosa on their appointment.

We sincerely thank outgoing Board members Caroline Densley of Diverse Travel and Janet Mackay of TRC Tourism for their incredible contribution to Ecotourism Australia and commitment to our principles and values.

And personally thank these Directors on behalf of Ecotourism Australia team members as their contribution has been invaluable. We also thank previous Board members Dr Claire Ellis and Peter Johnson who resigned this year.

**8) Appointment of Company Secretary**

**Motion:** Ecotourism Australia recommends the formal reappointment of the CEO as the Company Secretary as required under the Corporations Act.

**Moved:** C Ellis

**Seconded:** W Hills

**CARRIED:** All on the meeting

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9) **Discussion and questions**  
Nil

Company Secretary – E Keenan

**Meeting closed:** 11:55pm AEST

