



Queensland Ecotourism Plan

2013–2020

Foreword

The tourism industry remains one of the backbone economic sectors of our state. However the tourism industry is also one of the most competitive industries worldwide.

The Queensland Government has set an ambitious target to grow tourism, and especially visitor expenditure, in the state to \$30 billion by 2020.

Ecotourism, and its capitalisation on Queensland's huge diversity of landscapes and marine life, is a key competitive tourism advantage that has the potential to become an important driver to help us reach this ambitious target.

Already the visitation of national parks is one of the most popular activities for international and domestic visitors to Queensland. However more can be done to improve the experiences that these tourists can expect.

The development of the Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2013–2020 outlines the government's actions to make our state Australia's number one ecotourism destination.

At the core of this plan is a vision that ensures that the delivery of ecotourism experiences contribute to the conservation of our natural resources and our cultural heritage.

Through this plan we will focus on delivering new innovative ecotourism experiences across the varied landscapes that exist in this State. We will also ensure that we deliver value for money experiences that compete on quality for what is a relatively high cost destination like Australia.

Ultimately we will ensure that Queensland will become known worldwide as a leader in ecotourism.

Steve Dickson

Minister for National Parks, Recreation,
Sport and Racing



Jann Stuckey

Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Small Business
and the Commonwealth Games



Executive summary

World-class nature is the main motivator for international and domestic visitors to travel to Queensland. No longer a niche market, ecotourism is now one of Queensland's greatest competitive advantages. This Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2013–2020 (the plan) seeks to provide tourism operators, government, community and other stakeholders with clear direction on how Queensland will leverage its competitive advantage to become a bold, innovative, world leader in ecotourism.

The vision for ecotourism in Queensland

The vision to be achieved by 2020:

Queensland is Australia's number one ecotourism destination and recognised as a world leader in ecotourism, delivering best practice nature-based experiences that contribute to the conservation of our natural resources and cultural heritage.

This vision will be achieved through the implementation of the following strategic priorities:

1. Delivering world-class experiences
2. Facilitating best practice and innovation
3. Raising the profile of Queensland's ecotourism experiences
4. Fostering thriving operators
5. Embracing a partnership approach between the tourism industry, government, community and Traditional Owners.

The aim of the plan is to increase visitation, visitor expenditure and regional dispersal across Queensland's terrestrial and marine natural areas. The plan will focus on facilitating best practice, innovative ecotourism experiences that are sustainable and appropriate for the landscape setting. Five strategic priorities, with their suite of practical actions, set the direction for the Queensland Government, tourism industry and community stakeholders to jointly deliver on this aim and realise the vision for ecotourism in Queensland.

While this is a seven-year plan to 2020, it also includes a three-year action plan to provide immediate direction. Progress will be reviewed in three years and new actions needed to fulfil the vision will be identified.

Underpinning the plan is acknowledgement that world-leading ecotourism is wholly dependent upon the conservation of Queensland's rich biodiversity and environmental and cultural resources. The plan demonstrates the commitment the Queensland Government, tourism industry and the community is making to balance preservation with presentation by providing best-practice ecotourism.

*Picnicking near Toowoomba, Southern Queensland Country
Front cover image: Low Isles, Tropical North Queensland*



The plan seeks to enable ecotourism in Queensland to be responsive to global trends, environmental conditions, and changing needs and expectations of international and domestic visitors and local communities. A number of global megatrends present a valuable opportunity for Queensland as a world leader in ecotourism. They highlight the pressure on the world's natural areas and biodiversity; the shift in consumer expectations from products to enjoying more personalised, friendly experiences; and the implications of Asia's rapid economic growth and the intensifying competition for their travellers.

The increasing numbers of Chinese travellers, in particular, are bringing with them different needs and expectations on how they wish to participate in and enjoy nature. A responsive ecotourism industry is essential to capitalise on this growth and deliver benefits back into Queensland's natural and cultural assets.

Existing ecotourism experiences will be fostered and reinvigorated to appeal to ecotourism's traditional markets, including the domestic market, and emerging growth markets such as China and India.

Development of new, innovative ecotourism products will also be essential to satisfy these changing visitor expectations. Delivering value for money experiences that compete on quality, and not on price, is vital for a relatively high cost destination like Australia.

For the purpose of the plan, ecotourism encompasses activity on any public and private natural areas, but with a particular focus on national parks, marine parks and Indigenous lands including all protected areas managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and other government agencies. While the plan makes references to adventure and Indigenous ecotourism opportunities, it does not provide a detailed plan for either adventure tourism or Indigenous tourism.

The plan is a key initiative of the Queensland Government in partnership with the tourism industry, in response to the inaugural DestinationQ forum and partnership agreement. As a cross-agency strategic document, the plan aligns with the Drive Tourism Strategy and other strategies including the Tourism and Events Queensland's (TEQ) Hero Experiences and the Queensland destination tourism planning process.

It is the quality of Queensland's unique natural environment with its rich biodiversity and wildlife that is the foundation of the state's tourism competitive advantage. Visitors' experiences are enriched by the outstanding natural and cultural values they encounter. Recognition of this advantage is the first step in making Queensland a world leader in ecotourism by 2020. Through best practice ecotourism, Queensland can deliver world-class experiences that retain the inherent natural values upon which the tourism industry depends and contribute to the sustainability of the natural areas as well as socially and economically to local communities.

Bunya Mountains National Park, Southern Queensland Country



Introduction

Megatrends—our opportunity

Global megatrends will create significant shifts in environmental, economic and social conditions and have a substantial impact on the tourism sector in Queensland over the coming decades, according to the CSIRO.¹ The Queensland Government and tourism industry will respond to the trends as important opportunities for ecotourism and tourism broadly.

1 CSIRO, 2013, The Future of Tourism in Queensland

Figure 1: Global megatrends



All the megatrends will have varying degrees of influence on the development of ecotourism in Queensland, but five have particular relevance for ecotourism:

1. Natural advantage—this is the core of the Queensland tourism experience
2. Orient Express—because it’s about tailoring nature experiences to new markets like China and India
3. Bolts from the blue—highlights the need to adapt to the impacts of natural events like cyclones and floods
4. Lucky country—focuses on value for money through great ecotourism experiences
5. Great Expectations—is about ecotourism delivering authentic natural and cultural visitor experiences.

The Queensland Government has established an ambitious target to grow visitor expenditure to \$30 billion by 2020. With Queensland’s natural environment and cultural heritage assets as its strongest competitive advantage, ecotourism will play an important role in achieving the 2020 ambition.

Tourism is one of the most competitive industries globally as many countries vie to increase domestic and inbound visitation. As a long haul destination for most inbound travellers, Queensland has to work hard to attract visitors and increase its share of the market.

Through the delivery of quality ecotourism experiences, Queensland is extremely well positioned to increase its share of domestic and international visitor arrivals and expenditure. With world-class national parks and reserves, and a huge diversity of appealing landscapes—from islands and marine environments, to rainforest through to remote desert and iconic wildlife species and unique cultural assets—Queensland has a valuable competitive advantage. Queensland has 12.5 million hectares of protected areas, including five areas recognised on the World Heritage Register for their outstanding natural value, and three of the 16 nominated National Landscapes in Australia.

The implementation of previous Queensland ecotourism plans (1997–2002 and 2003–2008) has assisted the state in positioning itself as a potential global leader in ecotourism.

O’Reillys, Gold Coast hinterland



To realise this potential, ecotourism must continually develop and evolve in response to global trends and changing market demands while delivering environmental, economic and social sustainability outcomes.

The DestinationQ Partnership Agreement, established between the Queensland Government and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC), identified the demand for new, unique and low impact ecotourism facilities to attract domestic and international visitors to Queensland.

In response, the Queensland Government has already delivered a number of initiatives to support the growth of best practice ecotourism in national parks and adjacent areas in particular. The initiatives recognise the iconic nature of Queensland's national parks as the 'jewels in the crown' of Queensland's natural and cultural experiences. The initiatives include:

- Amending the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, broadening its objective to increase access to protected areas by providing for recreational and commercial outcomes in protected areas. This includes privately funded and operated ecotourism infrastructure where the use is in the public interest, is ecologically sustainable and provides for the preservation of the land's natural condition and protection of cultural values and resources.

- Developing the Ecotourism Facilities on National Parks Implementation Framework to provide a model for the assessment and approval of proposals for ecotourism facilities on national parks.
- Providing Best Practice Ecotourism Development Guidelines to ensure that new and expanded ecotourism opportunities on Queensland national parks achieve industry best practice.
- Inviting expressions of interest for development of best practice, ecologically sustainable ecotourism facilities on or adjacent to national parks.
- Releasing the Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism (QuEST) policy, replacing the former Tourism in Protected Areas policy as an action from DestinationQ.

More information on these initiatives is available at www.nprsr.qld.gov.au.

While significant achievements have been made, a number of critical challenges still need to be addressed. These challenges, together with opportunities for the industry, have informed the strategic priorities identified in this plan. They will be addressed through a cross-agency approach working in partnership with the tourism industry and community stakeholders.

Noosa National Park, Sunshine Coast



Ecotourism in Queensland

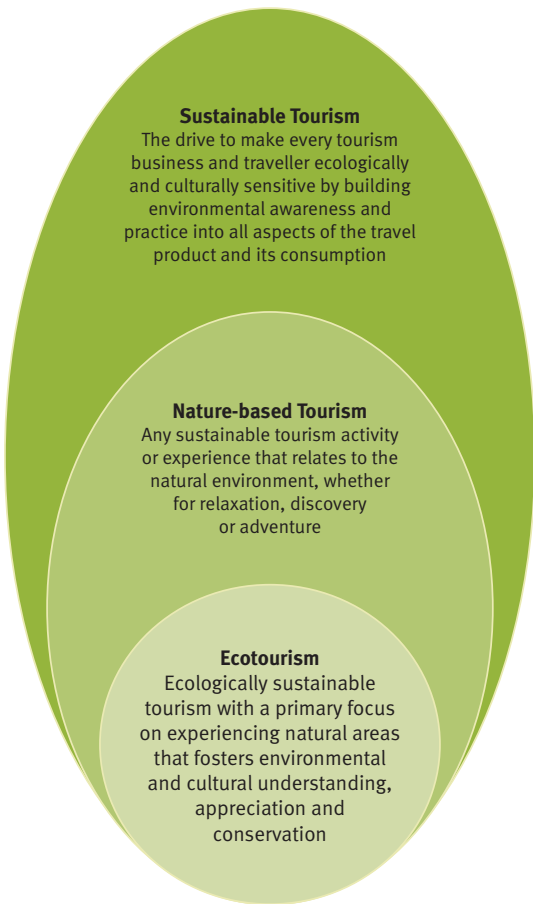
What is ecotourism?

Ecotourism encompasses a broad spectrum of environmentally responsible, nature-based activities that go beyond the sustainable operation of a tourism business or one that offers experiences in a natural environment. Ecotourism is an experience that increases visitor appreciation and understanding of natural and cultural heritage values. It engages and informs visitors and is managed to be ecologically, economically and socially sustainable by contributing to the wellbeing of the natural areas and local communities where they operate.

For the purposes of the plan, ecotourism is defined (by Ecotourism Australia) as “ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation”.

“The first and foremost priority for tourism in Queensland is to protect the unique selling proposition that is our natural landscape...” Innes Larkin, Mt Barney Lodge.

Figure 2: Defining sustainable, nature-based and ecotourism



Green Island, Tropical North Queensland



Importance of ecotourism for Queensland

Recent international visitor research reveals Australia's biggest strength is its 'world-class beauty' and natural environments, rated number one by visitor markets (see Figure 3). When it comes to selecting a holiday destination nature is a 'Top 5' consideration, as illustrated by Figure 4.²

Interest in nature is even higher amongst actual visitors to Australia, with 62% of international visitors engaging in nature-based activities.³ In the twelve months to December 2011, \$25.13 billion was the total holiday expenditure of international and domestic overnight visitors who participated in nature-based tourism during their visit.⁴ Nature-based activities include visiting national parks, botanical gardens, wildlife parks and zoos through to bushwalking, whale watching, scuba diving and snorkelling. Visiting a national park and bushwalking are the most common nature-based tourism activities engaged in by both international and domestic visitors.⁵

Numbers of international visitors undertaking nature-based activities have increased by 7.4% since the March 2011 quarter, after fluctuating over the past five years. Domestic nature-based visitors increased by 11.8% over the same period, although visitor numbers are yet to again reach the six-year high achieved in 2007.⁶

The economic contribution from nature-based tourism is also increasing for both domestic and international visitors. Spending by international nature-based visitors is up 24% from five years ago. Domestic visitor spend has risen 19% alone in the March 2012 quarter from 2011, though again is yet to reach the high of 2007.⁷



Whitsunday Islands National Park, Whitsundays

Figure 3: Rating of destinations for world-class beauty and natural environments

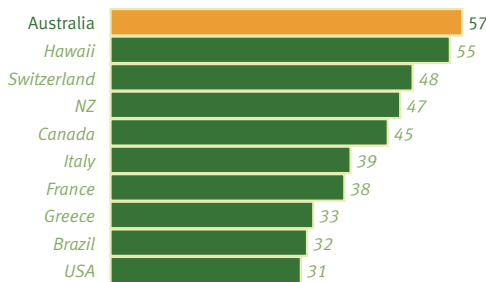
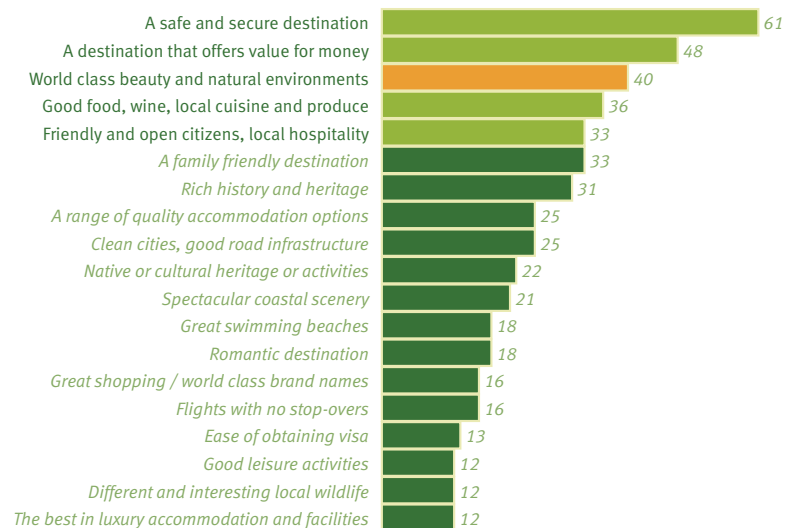


Figure 4: Rating of important factors in choosing a holiday destination



2 Tourism Australia, 2012 International Tourism Research Project
 3 Tourism and Transport Forum, Nature-based tourism report, September quarter 2012
 4 Tourism Australia, Australia's National Landscape Program 2012 Outcome Report, March 2011–June 2012
 5 Tourism Research Australia, National Visitor Survey 2011 and International Visitor Survey 2011
 6 Tourism and Transport Forum, 2012
 7 Tourism and Transport Forum, 2012

The strong interest of international and domestic visitors in nature-based activities highlights the value of ecotourism to the Queensland economy. With nature-based activities across Queensland, ecotourism is an important driver of regional dispersal and contributor to regional economies. The focus of ecotourism on delivering engaging experiences, in spectacular settings with highly qualified and accredited guides, also provides a lead for the wider tourism industry to focus on 'value-for-money' tourism experiences that compete on quality and not on price.

In addition, best practice ecotourism has the potential to positively influence visitors, the landscape, ecosystems, local communities and natural area management through the awareness it generates. Visitor access to natural areas can assist in raising public awareness of their critical importance, especially when the experiences are interpreted by a well-informed ecotourism operator. By educating and informing visitors as part of their nature-based experience, ecotourism plays an important role in protecting and conserving biodiversity and cultural heritage.

To increase the contribution of ecotourism to the state, the Queensland Government and tourism industry must be responsive to the changing needs and expectations of international and domestic visitors. The growing numbers of Chinese visitors are seeking to experience native wildlife and natural areas in a safe environment that allows them to learn something new. Some Chinese visitors may choose local zoos and botanical gardens for their nature-based experience. The way nature is presented and experienced will need to adapt and respond to different market needs.

The importance of national parks

National parks, with their unique environments and wildlife, play an important role in ecotourism and are a major driver for tourism in Australia. In 2011, 2.4 million international visitors and 10.4 million domestic travellers visited a national park in Australia. Domestic day-visitors also represented a significant proportion of visitors to national parks in Australia, with 8.6 million visitors.⁸

However, international visitor numbers to national parks in Australia have declined by 13% over the past five years, despite international visitation to Australia increasing by 7% over the same period. Globally, visitation to national parks in developed countries has been declining, particularly in the USA and Japan. Researchers have linked this decline with increasing wealth as national parks compete with alternative recreational activities at home as well as with natural areas interstate or abroad.⁹

International visitation to Queensland's national parks

Queensland's national parks receive around 7.9 million visits per annum by international travellers, including 6.2 million to terrestrial parks and 1.6 million to marine parks (Terrestrial park visits include national parks, State forests and other reserves managed by QPWS).¹⁰ This is illustrated by Figure 5.

Figure 5: Visits by international travellers to Queensland's national parks

Total (international)*	7.9 million visits
Terrestrial parks	6.2 million (78%)
Marine parks	1.6 million (22%)

**QPWS Community Survey 2012*



Carnarvon Gorge Wilderness Lodge, Outback

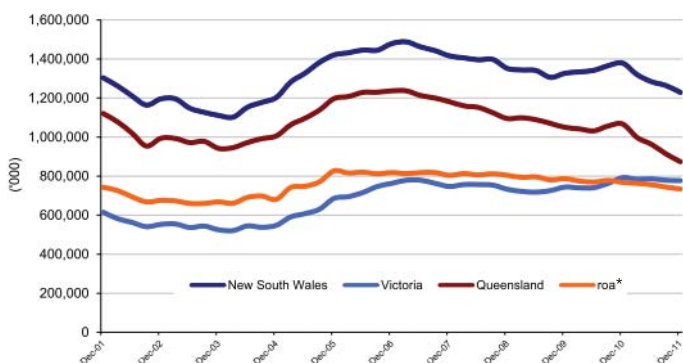
8 Tourism Research Australia, National Visitor Survey 2011 and International Visitor Survey 2011

9 Balmford A, Beresford J, Green J, Naidoo R, Walpole M, et al 2009, A Global Perspective on Trends in Nature-based Tourism

10 Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service Community Survey 2012

International visitation to national parks in Queensland has decreased by 26% over the past five years, reflecting international and national trends. Figure 6 provides a snapshot of the trend in visitation between December 2001 and 2011. There was a particularly marked decline for Queensland of almost 200,000 visitors in 2010–2011, similar to New South Wales. Catastrophic weather events in 2011 would have contributed to reduced visitor numbers in both states. In comparison, international visitation to Victoria’s national parks has remained relatively constant over the 2010–2011 period.

Figure 6: International overnight visitors—visited national parks or State parks



Source: Tourism Research Australia—International Visitor Survey, 2011
 Note: data is for visitors who visited a national or State park on their trip to Australia
 * Rest of Australia

Domestic visitation to national parks

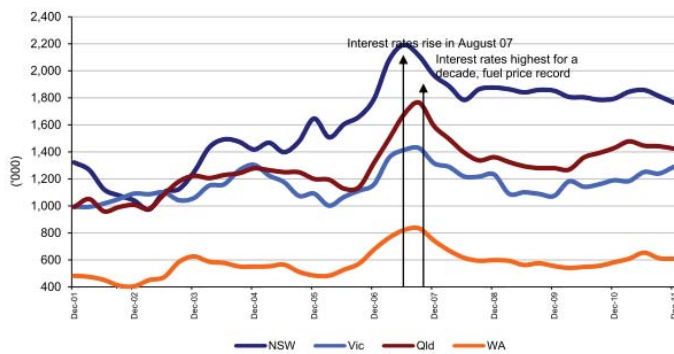
Queensland’s national parks receive 51 million visits per annum from domestic travellers, with 27 million to terrestrial parks and other reserves and 24 million to marine parks.¹ This is illustrated by Figure 7.

Unlike international visitor numbers, domestic visitation to Queensland’s national parks has increased over the 10-year period from 2001 to 2011, as illustrated by Figure 8. The growth can be attributed to those parks close to major population centres, such as Noosa, Bribie Island, Glass House Mountains, Burleigh Heads and D’Aguilar national parks. These parks have experienced regional population growth and increasing interest amongst the local population to visit parks closer to home.

Figure 7: Visits by domestic travellers to Queensland’s national parks

Total (domestic) 51 million visits	
Adults	42 million (82%)
Children	9 million (18%)
Terrestrial	27 million (53%)
Marine	24 million (47%)
Total camper nights*	1.23 million
*ParksQ camping data	

Figure 8: Domestic overnight visitors—visited national parks or State parks



Source: Tourism Research Australia—International Visitor Survey, 2011



1 Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service Community Survey 2012

Economic contribution of national parks

National parks are a significant contributor to the Queensland economy with research indicating that the total spend by visitors who include a visit to a national park in their holiday itinerary contributes \$4.43 billion to the state's economy. Further, it is estimated that direct spending by tourists which can be attributed exclusively to the existence of the national parks amounts to over \$749 million per annum, and contributes around \$345 million to gross state product per annum.¹¹

Visitation to Queensland's terrestrial national parks is concentrated in 30 key parks which attract 70% of all domestic park visitors. The state's top 10 terrestrial national parks attract close to 40% of all domestic visitors. Also, the top 10 parks for camping attract 75% of all camping trips across the state. Marine parks are particularly popular, receiving 47% of total national park visits.¹²

In the most popular national parks for international tourists, nearly one in three visitors travel with a commercial guide, e.g. Springbrook, Daintree, Noosa and Great Sandy (Fraser Island) national parks. In some parks more visitors arrive with a guide than travel independently, such as the Whitsundays and Barron Gorge National Park. This highlights the important role the tourism industry plays in making parks more accessible, interpreting the natural and cultural environment to visitors and managing the impacts of visitation.

More information on the QPWS Community Survey is available at www.nprsr.qld.gov.au.

Brand Queensland and ecotourism

Ecotourism, with Queensland's unique natural and cultural assets, is a cornerstone of Tourism and Event Queensland's Brand Queensland. The brand strategy positions Queensland as a place that enriches and transforms the lives of all visitors. The four key themes of the brand strongly feature ecotourism:

- Natural encounters
- Queensland lifestyle
- Adventure
- Islands and beaches

This was reinforced through the identification of 'hero experiences' for each of Queensland's 13 key tourism regions—a key deliverable of the 2012 DestinationQ forum. Hero experiences are those world-class iconic experiences that bring the Queensland brand themes to life in each destination by:

- providing a destination with a real competitive advantage over other destinations
- focusing on what is truly unique, memorable or engaging about a destination
- meeting the needs of identified target markets.

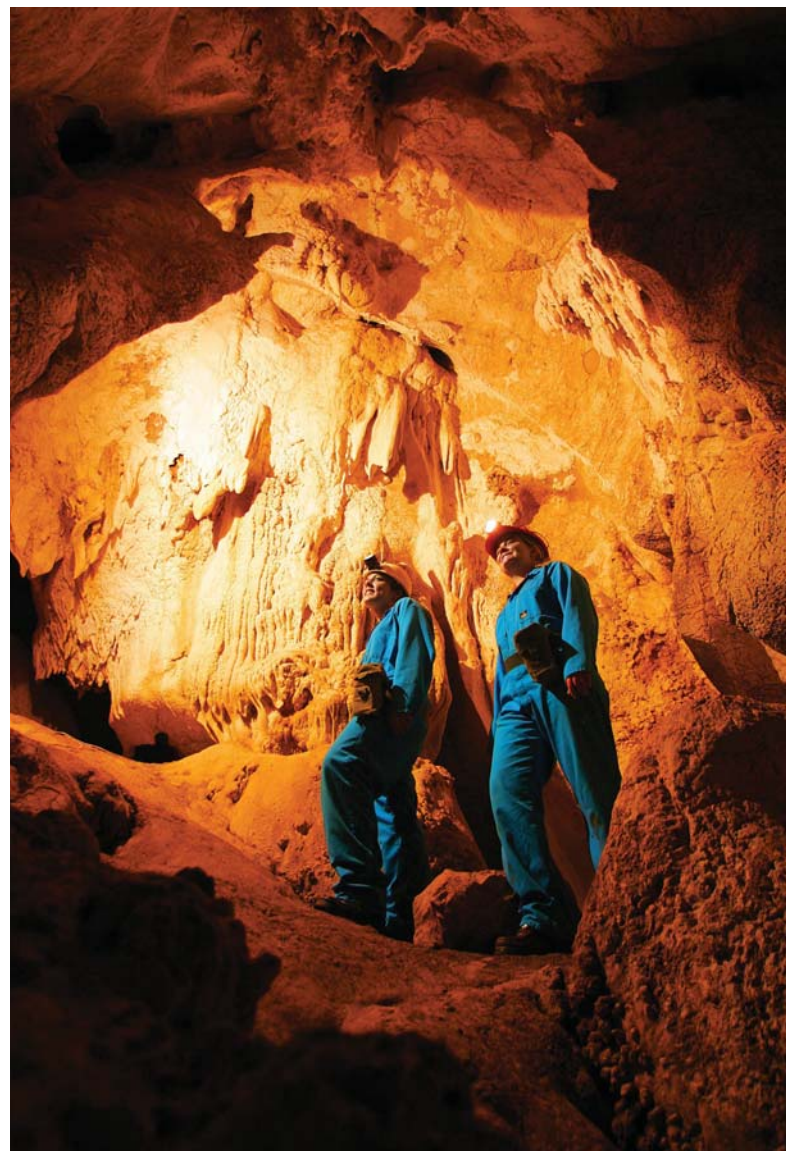
For more details refer to www.tq.com.au and search the tourism website for 'Queensland Destination Hero Experiences'.

"It is necessary for a strong and clear Queensland ecotourism brand to be developed that links in with state and regional tourism branding and takes a leading position for ecotourism in Australia, Asia, the Pacific and the rest of the world." Max Shepherd, Chair, Alliance for Sustainable Tourism.

Nature, nature-based tourism and ecotourism feature largely in the identified hero experiences of all Queensland destinations. The general aim is to encourage visitors to engage and connect with the unique natural and cultural environment of each destination. National parks together with other protected areas, Aboriginal lands and private natural areas play a critical role in delivering on Queensland's brand themes and the individual destination hero experiences.

Leveraging the promotion of the hero experiences will be important to Queensland becoming recognised as a world leader in ecotourism.

Capricorn Caves, Capricorn region



¹¹ Ballantyne R, Brown R, Pegg, S, Scott N, 2008, Valuing tourism spending arising from visitation to Queensland national parks, CRC for Sustainable Tourism

¹² Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service Community Survey 2012

Opportunities and challenges for ecotourism in Queensland

Opportunities

- Recent growth in the domestic visitor market
- Improving visitor access to Queensland's national parks and other natural assets through new and unique eco-experiences
- Developing new products and realigning existing experiences to remain relevant to traditional markets and engage new markets
- Developing value-for-money ecotourism experiences across the product range from premium camping through to boutique lodges
- Leveraging the attraction of nature for visitors to Queensland, particularly the growing number of overnight and day-trip visitors wanting to participate in nature-based activities
- Increasing Queensland's share of emerging visitor markets seeking world-class nature, in particular visitors from China and India
- Increased contribution by tourism to the conservation of natural assets through financial and in-kind support, including stewardship
- Identifying Queensland ecotourism's unique selling proposition and hero products to enable the state to position itself as a world-leading ecotourism destination
- Maximising the iconic 'must-see' tourism values of Queensland's World Heritage areas
- Capitalising on the increasing number of visitors seeking active engagement and improved wellbeing from their holidays
- Embracing new technology and adapting to rapidly changing consumer needs
- Providing stimulus for local and regional economies through the development of new and existing ecotourism products
- Leveraging Queensland's status as having the highest number of eco-certified tourism operators across Australia, and delivering world-leading protected area management
- Providing excellence in interpretation—drawing on science, research and storytelling to provide visitors with an enriching experience
- Meeting the needs of a growing international and domestic youth market who are seeking to actively engage in adventure-based activities
- Incorporating Indigenous elements in ecotourism experiences to create a unique point of difference and provide economic and social development opportunities for Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities
- Taking advantage of the increasing interest in voluntourism to attract visitors seeking holidays that contribute positively to the environment

- Capitalising on the global megatrends occurring, promoting Queensland as a world leader in ecotourism with opportunities to experience a huge diversity of areas with high natural values
- Leveraging Queensland's iconic bushwalking opportunities as key ecotourism experiences.

Challenges

- A decline in international visitors to national parks in Queensland and Australia
- Low-cost carriers make it easier for the domestic market to travel internationally
- Low-cost international destinations are offering similar ecotourism products at a much cheaper price
- South-east Asian destinations are growing their global share of the ecotourism market with high-end and 'once in a lifetime' wildlife and cultural experiences
- Competing international destinations that have lower costs for development and fewer barriers for innovation are in a position to respond more rapidly to market shifts
- Australia has to offer value-for-money as it cannot compete on price
- An unfavourable economic environment has restricted re-investment in ecotourism products
- Regulatory barriers are constraining private investment in ecotourism
- Natural events that can impact business operation and viability.

Moreton Island National Park, Brisbane region



Vision and strategic priorities

The vision for ecotourism in Queensland is that:

Queensland is Australia's number one ecotourism destination and recognised as a world leader in ecotourism, delivering best practice nature-based experiences that contribute to the conservation of our natural resources and cultural heritage.

This vision will be achieved through implementation of the following strategic priorities:

1. Delivering world-class experiences
2. Facilitating best practice and innovation
3. Raising the profile of Queensland's ecotourism experiences
4. Fostering thriving operators
5. Embracing a partnership approach between the tourism industry, government, community and Traditional Owners.

These strategic priorities will leverage the important competitive advantage Queensland's natural environment and cultural heritage assets provide the ecotourism industry.

1. Delivering world-class experiences

Fundamental to positioning Queensland as a global leader in ecotourism, is excellence in interpretation and experience delivery. This strategy includes actions to:

- encourage the delivery of best practice ecotourism experiences to set Queensland apart from competitors with world-class interpretation
- enrich the experience of the natural environment and wildlife for visitors
- encourage the conservation of the natural and cultural assets.

Accreditation plays an important role in contributing to the quality of ecotourism experiences and assuring visitors that ecotourism operators are committed to best practice and high quality nature-based experiences.

"In the global competitive tourism market, being able to differentiate ourselves is critical in maintaining and increasing our market share. We need to make sure our visitors have a consistently great experience that they tell their friends and family about. Industry certification is essential in achieving this. QTIC members have consistently argued for minimum best practice standards. We support the government in taking action to provide a cost efficient approach for operators, foster a sustainable approach for certification programs and maintain best practice standards. QTIC will be working closely with government to achieve this". Daniel Gschwind, Chief Executive, Queensland Tourism Industry Council.

Ensure a quality environment and visitor experience

- Increase awareness and use of the Best Practice Ecotourism Development Guidelines to assist new and existing ecotourism operators in achieving industry best practice and developing facilities and experiences that are in the public interest and environmentally sustainable
- Consider how to create natural opportunities for visitors to experience wildlife encounters in natural areas through wildlife management and protected area planning
- Consider tourism interests in future reviews of wildlife management regulations and processes.

Assist operators in achieving best practice

- Require compulsory Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing (NPRSR) endorsed certification of all commercial tourism operators in national parks (including marine parks) to recognise the importance of these protected areas
- Establish and promote tourism skills training programs for ecotourism operators focused on improving skills, raising standards and improving business practices, performance and staff retention
- Promote certified guide training and the employment of certified guides to raise ecotourism standards
- Establish a range of incentives that motivate operators to exceed minimum certification standards
- Promote certification programs that support a range of tourism activities and provide multiple entry points for industry with a view to promoting best practice and ensuring sustainable certification programs
- Support certification providers in providing programs that are financially sustainable, represent best practice in terms of administration for operators, and provide quality standards supported by auditing
- Investigate a coordinated and consistent approach to certification with a view to adopting an industry responsive approach.

Provide excellence in interpretation

- Foster a culture of quality interpretation through master-class training workshops that seek to enhance operator capabilities for the benefit of their business and product delivery
- Develop innovative interpretation mediums that harness new technologies to target new and existing audiences and enrich visitor experiences.

Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park, Outback



2. Facilitating best practice and innovation

This strategy is focused on positioning Queensland as a global leader in must-do, iconic ecotourism experiences. Through best practice, public–private partnerships, Queensland will offer ecologically sustainable visitor experiences that will inspire new and existing audiences.

A key focus is to facilitate investment in existing and new products and increase Indigenous ecotourism opportunities. Indigenous Australian’s cultural interpretation of Queensland’s ecotourism assets will add depth to the product offering and providing authentic engagement and more satisfying experiences for visitors seeking meaningful connections with Traditional Owners.

As there are a number of initiatives focused on developing and promoting Indigenous people’s participation in tourism and facilitating adventure tourism, this plan is limited to Indigenous cultural opportunities and improving visitor experiences as they relate to ecotourism.

“Limited or exclusive access by supervised groups to specific locations that are seen as sensitive can provide a high value opportunity and should be part of an incentives program for those operators who demonstrate their environmental credentials by exceeding minimum eco-certification standards.” Max Shepherd, Chair, Alliance for Sustainable Tourism.

Enhance existing experiences and identify new opportunities

- Implement the Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism (QuEST) policy
- Increase Queensland’s appeal to existing nature-based visitors and attract new visitors by investigating new opportunities for visitors of all ages to enjoy Queensland’s natural and cultural assets
- Create a suite of iconic, world-class, must-do visitor experiences in and around national parks that highlight regional points of difference
- Foster tourism industry forums which place experience development and innovation as a priority and maximise engagement between the tourism industry, state government agencies and community stakeholders
- Prioritise tourism development investment opportunities in the top 30 national parks which currently attract 70% of park visitors
- Review national park infrastructure and create a portfolio of key opportunities for adaptive reuse which will enhance the ecotourism experience
- Support appropriate events in national parks and other natural areas to provide new and enhanced visitor experiences, deliver economic benefits and encourage regional visitation.

Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism (QuEST)

QuEST replaces the previous Tourism in Protected Areas policy and continues existing essential policy elements. It also incorporates new policy to improve access and provide new opportunities in national parks for ecotourism operators; reduce administration and streamline processes; support authorised operators; and promote best practice tourism experiences.

QuEST provides:

- business certainty through providing 15-year terms and transferability
- best practice standards by requiring compulsory minimum standards of eco-certification and providing incentives for those who exceed minimum standards
- support for authorised operators through a strategic targeted compliance program and transparent and consistent management arrangements
- opportunities for growth by managing tourism access to ensure the full commercial opportunity is realised
- streamlined administration.

More information on QuEST is available at www.nprsr.qld.gov.au.

Support the tourism industry through research

- Support research into gaining a better understanding of ecotourism’s traditional markets and the new emerging visitor markets and the implications for ecotourism experience delivery
- Investigate changing consumer trends in ecotourism to ensure the industry remains competitive and delivering best practice
- Benchmark and monitor the perception of Queensland as an ecotourism destination
- Support research into visitor impacts at priority ecotourism sites
- Build on existing strategies that inform operators on the implications of environmental, social and economic trends on the tourism industry with a view to building resilience in ecotourism operators.

Facilitate investment into ecotourism products (new and existing)

- Identify and establish the feasibility of three priority ecotourism opportunities to be made available for investment to assist in elevating the status of Queensland as a world leader in ecotourism
- Invite expressions of interest for best practice ecotourism development in or adjacent to national parks that will enhance Queensland’s reputation as a world leading ecotourism destination, aligns with national park values and is ecologically sustainable

- Develop a portfolio of investment opportunities in national parks
- Encourage inclusion of nature-based tourism as a legitimate land use in Queensland planning provisions
- Convene regional forums between QPWS regional directors, regional tourism organisations, local government authorities and other key stakeholders to promote coordination and information sharing about ecotourism opportunities and emerging tourism trends and priorities with a view to informing regional investment priorities.

Grow Indigenous opportunities

- Identify and progress three new opportunities to expand Indigenous involvement in ecotourism, working with Traditional Owners to maximise Indigenous ecotourism opportunities, including but not limited to, national parks and jointly managed national parks
- Create a program for the development of more Indigenous ecotourism guides
- Develop a certification process with Traditional Owners for non-Indigenous and Indigenous guides to retell and share Indigenous stories with visitors
- Participate in industry forums and reference groups to advance the development of best practice Indigenous ecotourism operations with a focus on improving skills and business performance.

3. Raising the profile of Queensland’s ecotourism experiences

The focus of this strategy is to grow ecotourism visitation through innovative marketing and communication strategies. The actions seek to reinvigorate existing markets, develop new and underrepresented segments and capitalise on digital technology to excite and engage prospective visitors.

“The new Destination Tourism Plans will be essential in laying out the needs, priorities and actions that each Queensland destination needs to achieve their aspirations and contribute to the collective 2020 goal. It’s not just about marketing, it’s about how we develop product that enhances our own unique regional experiences. It could be improved facilities so that visitors can enjoy the spectacular views or workshops to assist operators to tell the story of their local environment.” Mary Carroll, Chair, Regional Tourism Organisation Network (Chief Executive Officer, Capricorn Enterprise).

Position ecotourism for maximum exposure

- Raise the profile of ecotourism and associated destination hero experiences in Brand Queensland through ecotourism media and trade familiarisations, imagery, social media and other marketing strategies
- Develop a strong ecotourism platform in relevant Destination Tourism Plans informed by the Queensland Ecotourism Plan and in line with identified hero experiences
- Develop a clear positioning for Queensland’s national parks within Brand Queensland and relevant destination brands supported by appropriate imagery, consistent messages and stories
- Develop a consumer-oriented, interactive national parks web presence and social media strategy that innovatively presents Queensland’s unique national park and wildlife experiences
- Partner with Tourism Australia and Parks Australia to leverage the National Landscapes program in developing and marketing world-leading nature experiences and develop Fraser Coast as a National Landscape.

*“The two very important actions of developing a national park brand and positioning together with a consumer website will do much to achieve the objective of ‘Raising the profile of Queensland’s ecotourism experiences’.”
Shane O’Reilly, Chair, Queensland Tourism Industry Council Board.*

National Landscapes
Managed by Tourism Australia and Parks Australia, the National Landscapes program focuses on the development and marketing of Australia’s 16 most significant, world-class natural areas. The program aims to provide visitors with new and engaging experiences to increase visitation, dispersal and length of stay within Australia’s most unique natural environments. Queensland’s three National Landscapes include the World Heritage listed Wet Tropics, the Great Barrier Reef and Australia’s Green Cauldron (more commonly known as the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia) on the Queensland and New South Wales border.

4. Fostering thriving operators

This strategy is focused on supporting existing operators to innovate and develop new products and attracting new operators that enhance Queensland's reputation as a world-leading ecotourism destination.

A range of regulatory reform has occurred and is underway by the Queensland Government to reduce red tape and costs for ecotourism operators and amend planning practices and legislation to support a commercially viable ecotourism industry and encourage best practice and sustainability.

Planning and approval system to support industry growth

- Continue planning reforms that deliver a coordinated and streamlined development approvals process, including:
 - the Queensland agency approval process— State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA)
 - recognising tourism as an important land use of state interest in the single State Planning Policy (SPP) to guide local planning and development
 - encouraging local government to support ecotourism development opportunities that can complement rural and conservation land uses
- Develop a set of tourism planning guidelines to assist local governments, Queensland planners and ecotourism proponents to more effectively manage development of new and expanded ecotourism projects.

Ecotourism Facilities on National Parks Implementation Framework

The framework provides a transparent model for assessing and approving proposals for ecotourism facilities on national parks. It recognises that any proposed ecotourism facilities will have environmental, social and financial benefits and costs that need to be considered, and assessment needs to occur in the context of the governing legislative provisions.

The framework explains how ecotourism facility proposals will be assessed, the matters that will be considered, and the approval and leasing arrangements for successful proposals.

Reduce administration for operators

- Identify strategies across jurisdictions that streamline access to national parks for tourism operators
- Monitor and review regulatory processes and procedures to ensure they are streamlined and meeting the needs of the tourism industry.

Streamlined permit systems

In recognition of the jurisdictional complexity between the Commonwealth and Queensland over boundaries within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (WHA), complementary legislation and cooperative administration has resulted in world's best practice joint Commonwealth/Queensland marine parks permitting. This arrangement has resulted in streamlined processes for both operators and government. Both governments are now looking to expand elements of that arrangement to include commercial activity permits for national park islands within the WHA. This would facilitate a single processing point and permit for commercial operations within the WHA.

Fishing, Russell River, Tropical North Queensland



5. Embracing a partnership approach between tourism, government, community and Traditional Owners

This strategy recognises the importance of creating and maintaining positive partnerships to achieve the ecotourism vision for Queensland. Shared ownership and responsibility is needed, with partnerships formed at local, regional and state, through to federal levels. This strong partnership approach will ensure Queensland becomes a bold and innovative world leader in ecotourism with positive outcomes for the environment, tourism industry, community and Traditional Owners.

Implementation of many actions will require consultation with a range of agencies, organisations and groups to deliver the outcomes required. These may include, but are not limited to local government and regional organisations of councils, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Savannah Guides Ltd, Wet Tropics Management Authority, Parks Australia, Wildlife Tourism Australia, National Trust of Queensland and other community stakeholders.

“If Queensland wants to become a global leader in ecotourism the number one priority is developing successful public–private partnerships. The truly iconic products will not be driven by government agencies. They will be driven by commercial operators, but it will be essential that government agencies work with operators to provide quality experiences.” Tony Baker, Managing Director, Quicksilver Group.

Develop priority partnerships

- Ensure the effective and timely implementation of this plan through a partnership approach across government and the tourism industry. The key partners include, but are not limited to (lead agency in bold):

Purpose	Partners
Improving the quality of presentation and information	Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) , Skills Training Queensland, Ecotourism Australia (EA), Savannah Guides Ltd (SGL), Department of Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games (DTEB), Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC), Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing (NPRSR), Traditional Owners, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs (DATSIMA), Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP)
Regular regional tourism forums to communicate ecotourism opportunities and integrate ecotourism stakeholders into mainstream destination development	NPRSR , Regional Tourism Organisations (RTO), TEQ
Product innovation and development specifically in relation to specialist and emerging markets, e.g. geotourism, voluntourism	TEQ , DTEB, EA, SGL, QTIC, industry representatives from special interest markets, DATSIMA
Researching and filling knowledge gaps in ecotourism	TEQ , QTIC, DTEB, EA, Universities, DATSIMA
Leveraging Commonwealth programs, including National Landscapes	TEQ , Tourism Australia (TA), DNPRSR
Facilitating consistency in cross-border regulations and joint marketing	NPRSR , DTEB, TEQ
National and international promotion and recognition of the importance of ecotourism	EA , TEQ, RTOs, QTIC
Facilitating investment in new and enhanced ecotourism experiences	DTEB , QTIC, TEQ, DNPRSR, Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (DSDIP)
Development of strategies that promote best practice and dialogue across sectors that have interdependence with ecotourism	DTEB , TEQ , EA, DNPRSR, QTIC

Three-year action plan

Action	Primary responsibility
Six months	
Strategic priority 1: Delivering world-class experiences	
Increase awareness and use of the Best Practice Ecotourism Development Guidelines to assist new and existing ecotourism operators in achieving industry best practice and developing facilities and experiences that are in the public interest and environmentally sustainable	NPRSR, TEQ, DTESB
Strategic priority 2: Facilitating best practice and innovation	
Convene regional forums between QPWS regional directors, regional tourism organisations and local government authorities and other key stakeholders, to promote coordination and information sharing about ecotourism opportunities and emerging tourism trends and priorities with a view to informing regional investment priorities	NPRSR, RTOs, TEQ, local government and regional organisations of councils
Invite expressions of interest for best practice ecotourism development in or adjacent to national parks that will enhance Queensland's reputation as a world leading ecotourism destination, aligns with national park values and is ecologically sustainable	NPRSR, TEQ, DTESB
Participate in industry forums and reference groups to advance the development of best practice Indigenous ecotourism operations with a focus on improving skills and business performance	TEQ, QTIC
Strategic priority 5: Embracing a partnership approach	
Establish priority partnerships, as identified in this plan	DTESB, NPRSR, TEQ, EA, SGL, local government and regional organisations of councils
12 months	
Strategic priority 1: Delivering world-class experiences	
Promote certified guide training and the employment of certified guides to raise ecotourism standards	QTIC, EA, SGL
Consider how to create natural opportunities for visitors to experience wildlife encounters in natural areas through wildlife management and protected area planning	EHP, NPRSR, TEQ
Require compulsory NPRSR endorsed certification of all commercial tourism operators in national parks (including marine parks) to recognise the importance of these protected areas	NPRSR
Establish a range of incentives that motivate operators to exceed minimum certification standards	QTIC, TEQ, NPRSR, DTESB
Promote certification programs that support a range of tourism activities and provide multiple entry points for industry with a view to promoting best practice and ensuring sustainable certification programs	QTIC, TEQ, NPRSR, DTESB
Support certification providers in providing programs that are financially sustainable, represent best practice in terms of administration for operators, and provide quality standards supported by auditing	QTIC, DTESB, TEQ, NPRSR
Investigate a coordinated and consistent approach to certification with a view to adopting an industry responsive approach	NPRSR, GBRMPA, QTIC

Action	Primary responsibility
Strategic priority 2: Facilitating best practice and innovation	
Implement the Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism (QuEST) policy	NPRSR, TEQ , QTIC, DTESB, RTOs
Increase Queensland's appeal to existing nature-based visitors and attract new visitors by investigating new opportunities for visitors of all ages to enjoy Queensland's natural and cultural assets	NPRSR, TEQ
Prioritise tourism development investment opportunities in the top 30 national parks which currently attract 70% of park visitors	NPRSR, TEQ , DTESB, QTIC
Support appropriate events in national parks and other natural areas to provide new and enhanced visitor experiences, deliver economic benefits and encourage regional visitation	NPRSR, TEQ
Support research into gaining a better understanding of ecotourism's traditional markets and the new emerging visitor markets and the implications for ecotourism experience delivery	TEQ, QTIC, EA
Investigate changing consumer trends in ecotourism to ensure the industry remains competitive and delivering best practice	TEQ, QTIC, EA
Support research into visitor impacts at priority ecotourism sites	TEQ, QTIC, EA, NPRSR
Build on existing strategies that inform operators on the implications of environmental, social and economic trends on the tourism industry with a view to building resilience in ecotourism operators	TEQ, QTIC, EA
Foster tourism industry forums which place experience development and innovation as a priority and maximise engagement between the tourism industry, state government agencies and community stakeholders	TEQ, DTESB, NPRSR, QTIC, DATSIMA, EA, SGL
Encourage inclusion of nature based tourism as a legitimate land use in Queensland planning provisions	DTESB, DSDIP
Strategic priority 3: Raising the profile of Queensland's ecotourism experiences	
Raise the profile of ecotourism and associated destination hero experiences in Brand Queensland through ecotourism media and trade familiarisations, imagery, social media and other marketing strategies	TEQ, EA
Develop a strong ecotourism platform in relevant Destination Tourism Plans informed by the Queensland Ecotourism Plan and in line with identified hero experiences	TEQ, DNPRSR
Develop a clear positioning for Queensland's national parks within Brand Queensland and relevant destination brands supported by appropriate imagery, consistent messages and stories	NPRSR, TEQ

Action	Primary responsibility
Strategic priority 4: Fostering thriving operators	
Continue planning reforms that deliver a coordinated and streamlined development approvals process, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Queensland agency approval process—State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA) recognising tourism as an important land use of state interest in the single State Planning Policy (SPP) to guide local planning and development encouraging local government to support ecotourism development opportunities that can complement rural and conservation land uses 	Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (DSDIP) , DTESB, TEQ
Identify strategies across jurisdictions that streamline access to national parks for tourism operators	NPRSR , TEQ, DTESB
Develop a set of tourism planning guidelines to assist local governments, Queensland planners and ecotourism proponents to more effectively manage development of new and expanded ecotourism projects	DTESB , DSDIP, NPRSR, TEQ, QTIC, local government and regional organisations of councils
Two years	
Strategic priority 1: Delivering world-class experiences	
Establish and promote tourism skills training programs for ecotourism operators focused on improving skills, raising standards and improving business practices, performance and staff retention	QTIC , TEQ, EA, SGL
Develop innovative interpretation mediums that harness new technologies to target new and existing audiences and enrich visitor experiences	TEQ , NPRSR
Strategic priority 2: Facilitating best practice and innovation	
Create a program for the development of more Indigenous ecotourism guides	QTIC , EA, SGL, DATSIMA, TEQ
Benchmark and monitor the perception of Queensland as an ecotourism destination	TEQ , EA
Review national park infrastructure and create a portfolio of key opportunities for adaptive reuse which will enhance the ecotourism experience	NPRSR , TEQ, DTESB
Develop a portfolio of investment opportunities in national parks	NPRSR , TEQ, DTESB
Create a suite of iconic, world class, must-do visitor experiences in and around national parks that highlight regional points of difference	TEQ , DNPRSR
Strategic priority 3: Raising the profile of Queensland's ecotourism experiences	
Develop a consumer-oriented, interactive national parks web presence and social media strategy that innovatively presents Queensland's unique national park and wildlife experiences	NPRSR , TEQ
Partner with Tourism Australia and Parks Australia to leverage the National Landscapes program in developing and marketing world-leading nature experiences and develop Fraser Coast as a National Landscape	TEQ , TA, NPRSR, Parks Australia (PA)

Action	Primary responsibility
Three years	
Strategic priority 1: Delivering world-class experiences	
Foster a culture of quality interpretation through master-class training workshops that seek to enhance operator capabilities for the benefit of their business and product delivery	TEQ, DATSIMA, EA
Consider tourism interests in future reviews of wildlife management regulations and processes	EHP, DTESB, NPRSR, TEQ
Strategic priority 2: Facilitating best practice and innovation	
Identify and establish the feasibility of three priority ecotourism opportunities to be made available for investment to assist in elevating the status of Queensland as a world leader in ecotourism	DTESB, NPRSR, TEQ,
Develop a certification process with Traditional Owners for non-Indigenous and Indigenous guides to retell and share Indigenous stories with visitors	TEQ, DATSIMA, DTSEB
Identify and progress three new opportunities to expand Indigenous involvement in ecotourism, working with Traditional Owners to maximise Indigenous ecotourism opportunities, including but not limited to, national parks and jointly managed national parks	TEQ, NPRSR, DATSIMA, DTESB
Strategic priority 4: Fostering thriving operators	
Monitor and review regulatory processes and procedures to ensure they are streamlined and meeting the needs of the tourism industry	NPRSR, DTSEB, TEQ, QTIC

Bp2002 July 2013

Photos: Tourism and Events Queensland

Horseriding, Little Mulgrave Valley, Tropical North Queensland

