

Queensland Ecotourism Plan

2015–2020

Draft for consultation





Nightfall Wilderness Camp luxury tent
Photo: © Nightfall Wilderness Camp



Prepared by: **Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service,
Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing.**

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Draft

Foreword

There is no doubt that Queensland's incredible natural wonders are among our greatest tourism drawcards.

World class national parks and marine parks, World Heritage areas and diverse landscapes and wildlife give Queensland tourism a competitive advantage.

The Queensland Government is committed to creating more opportunities to showcase Queensland's natural beauty while preserving these natural assets for future generations.

Conservation and tourism do not have to be at odds. We have a vision for ecotourism that brings people into contact with nature, not conflict with nature.

We will grow our \$23 billion tourism industry and ecotourism can help drive this growth.

The Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2015–2020 will help build a thriving ecotourism industry and deliver new ecotourism experiences. It will foster ecotourism opportunities that support sustainable growth, protect the environment and strengthen the economy.

The Government along with the tourism industry, Traditional Owners, conservation and research sectors and the community must work together to achieve these outcomes.

We welcome your feedback on this draft plan to help inform the future of ecotourism in the state.



Steven Miles MP

Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection
and Minister for National Parks
and the Great Barrier Reef



Kate Jones MP

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

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Photo: © Mossman Gorge Centre

Executive summary

Our vision for ecotourism in Queensland

Queensland is an internationally celebrated ecotourism destination, delivering world-class experiences that support the conservation of our special natural places and unique Indigenous and cultural heritage.

Our guiding principle

Queensland's treasured natural and cultural assets will be protected and conserved for current and future generations to enjoy.

Our promise to our 'guests'

Unforgettable ecotourism experiences that exceed our guests' expectations and create lasting memories of Queensland's outstanding natural and cultural areas and unique wildlife.

The aim of the Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2015–2020 (the plan) is to promote a fresh approach to ecotourism. At its core is a commitment to collaboration and partnerships to facilitate best practice ecotourism experiences that provide a positive contribution back to Queensland's natural areas and cultural heritage assets, community and economy.

Five new strategic directions outline the action that is required:

1. Driving innovation in ecotourism experiences.
2. Showcasing the world renowned Great Barrier Reef.
3. Stimulating investment in new and refurbished ecotourism opportunities.
4. Expanding authentic Indigenous ecotourism experiences.
5. Promoting Queensland's world-class ecotourism experiences.

A key priority is the development of tourism products that showcase and preserve Queensland's unique natural landscapes, cultural heritage, wildlife and special places such as the Great Barrier Reef. These developments will be required to meet the highest environmental standards and industry

practices demonstrating the government's commitment to conserving Queensland's natural assets. A cross-agency approach will be vital to ensure an environment conducive to attracting new investment.

Authentic cultural experiences present a unique prospect to extend Queensland's competitive advantage. Opportunities for Indigenous ecotourism will be supported and progressed in partnership with local Indigenous groups.

A further priority is to reach and effectively engage with visitors in a way that inspires them to visit and spend time in Queensland's national and marine parks and other natural areas. The focus will be on raising the profile of the World Heritage areas and other special places and the smart use of consumer-orientated technology and communication strategies.

With Queensland's natural environment as its strongest competitive advantage, and the concerted efforts of the Queensland Government and tourism industry, ecotourism will play an important role in achieving the 2020 ambition.



Photo: © Ben Blanche

Peak Trail, Girraween National Park

A fresh approach to ecotourism in Queensland

Proudly, Queensland has nine million hectares of terrestrial protected areas and 72,659 square kilometres of state marine parks encompassing world-class national parks, marine reserves, and a huge diversity of appealing landscapes—from reef, to rainforest through to remote desert, iconic wildlife species and unique cultural assets. These rich and diverse landscapes and habitats are a valuable competitive advantage for the tourism industry as experiencing nature is a primary motivator for domestic and international visitors' travel to Queensland.

Today's visitors want to explore and interact to find the hidden gems, connect with people and nature and create lasting memories. To attract these visitors who have the choice of many ecotourism destinations, this plan advances a fresh approach to ecotourism in Queensland; where the Queensland Government and ecotourism partners together ensure visitors have special experiences in Queensland's special places.

This fresh approach requires the dual focus of delivering world-class ecotourism experiences and the conservation of Queensland's natural and cultural assets. It also requires collaboration between the tourism industry, Traditional Owners, the conservation and research sectors, community and government. By working together it will be possible to enhance the quality of Queensland's special places and the visitor experiences they support.



Starfish, clownfish and anemone
Photo: Jemma Craig © Tourism & Events Queensland

The Great Barrier Reef

The iconic Great Barrier Reef (the Reef) is one of the most precious ecosystems on Earth and a significant part of Queensland's identity. Stretching more than 2,300 kilometres along the Queensland coast and covering an area of 348,000 square kilometres, it is the only living structure on earth visible from outer space. One of the seven natural wonders of the world, this majestic reef system is loved by Australians and more than 1.9 million visitors from across the globe who come to see it each year. It is also critical to the cultural, economic and social wellbeing of more than one million people who live in its catchment.

For Traditional Owners, the first nation peoples of the area, the Reef is a place of great significance. They maintain a unique and continuing connection to the Reef and adjacent coastal areas. This connection to their land and sea country has sustained Traditional Owners for millennia—spiritually, culturally, socially and economically.

Reef tourism plays a key role in shaping the experience and opportunities for ecotourism on the Great Barrier Reef. A cross-agency approach, working with industry, conservation and research sectors is essential to ensure ecotourism experiences showcase and protect the Reef's natural integrity and cultural values.

The recently developed Commonwealth and Queensland Government's Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (LTSP) provides a framework for protecting the values of the Great Barrier Reef to ensure its future health. The LTSP recognises the relationship between Reef health and the viability of Reef-dependent industries such as tourism and the ongoing economic benefits and community wellbeing the Reef affords.

Source: Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan

What is ecotourism

Ecotourism encompasses nature-based experiences that increase visitor appreciation and understanding of natural and cultural values. They are experiences that are managed to ensure they are ecologically, economically and socially sustainable, contributing to the wellbeing of the natural areas and local communities where they operate.

Ecotourism operators are both a partner and contributor to the conservation of Queensland's special places, by delivering best practice in ecotourism and visitor experiences that encourage a life-long commitment to caring for them.

Ecotourism Australia defines ecotourism as “ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation”.

The value of ecotourism

Tourism is a \$23 billion industry for Queensland, generating \$59 million a day in visitor expenditure across the state, both directly and indirectly employing 230,000¹ Queenslanders. Ecotourism is a key sector of the broader tourism experience in Queensland, contributing to domestic and international visitor arrivals and expenditure.

National parks alone 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 direct spending by visitors that can be attributed exclusively to the existence of the national parks amounts to over \$749 million per annum, adding around \$345 million to gross state product per annum².

Ecotourism plays an important role in rural and remote communities, generating economic and social benefits and creating resilience through sustainable employment opportunities and local pride. Visitor and market interest in Indigenous culture presents an important opportunity for employment and business development for Indigenous Australians.

¹ Tourism & Events Queensland, Tourism Economic Key Facts, June 2015

² Ballantyne R, Brown R, Pegg, S, Scott N, 2008, Valuing tourism spending arising from visitation to Queensland national parks, CRC for Sustainable Tourism



Photo: © Mossman Gorge Centre

A common ground

A fresh approach demands a common ground between tourism, government, Traditional Owners, conservation and research sectors and reaffirming a partnership approach. As pioneers in ecotourism, the Queensland Government, tourism industry and community stakeholders have a long history of involvement and collaboration in its growth and development. For many years, Queensland was considered a leader in ecotourism with a growing number of new and innovative visitor experiences, and then lost its footing. Significant effort has since focused on repositioning Queensland as Australia's number one ecotourism destination and a world leader in ecotourism. Through collaboration, the tourism industry and Queensland Government have achieved a number of positive outcomes. These include:

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Reef decision – UNESCO's World Heritage Committee has recognised the government's increased commitment and proactive approach to protecting the Great Barrier Reef with the recent decision not to apply the 'World Heritage in danger' listing. The additional investment in new reef management strategies and programs includes cutting-edge projects such as the 'eReefs Project' that gives people real-time information about the quality of water in the Great Barrier Reef. These initiatives demonstrate the partnership approach that has been taken between the government, research sectors and industry to work together for the future of the reef.

Destination Tourism Plans: Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) have worked with Queensland's 13 Regional Tourism Organisations (RTO) in developing their Destination Tourism Plans (DTP). The DTPs reflect a shared vision across tourism operators and government for sustainable and competitive tourism destinations. Through these plans, Queensland's RTOs are aligning strategies, available resources, and the efforts of industry and all levels of government toward the 2020 tourism goals. All DTPs are available on the TEQ website.

Queensland Tourism Awards (QTA) accreditation: The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) has developed and implemented a support model to ensure all entrants into 2016 QTA will be certified or accredited businesses. QTIC have produced new information and updates to all Awards criteria and coordinated communication with certification program owners and an entrant briefing on certification by the QTA judging team. The receipt of 207 nominations in 2014 indicates the new criteria have not caused a reduction in nominations from previous years. QTIC has and continues to provide

guidance and advice to all non-accredited businesses on the most relevant certification program for each business.

Skill development: QTIC continues to play a leading role in coordinating and promoting a coherent and quality-focused approach to skill development across all parts of the industry including ecotourism. Active engagement with training providers, funding agencies and industry has been critical to all activities, including:

- providing advice to the Queensland Department of Education and Training on skill and qualification needs and funding priorities to achieve quality industry standards
- producing and promoting a comprehensive Careers Guide for tourism and hospitality
- developing and disseminating a HR Best Practice Guide for tourism employers to improve employee attraction, recruitment and retention
- as a partner in the national Australian Tourism Accreditation Program (ATAP), providing this business improvement program as part of a full suite of tourism accreditation programs, including eco-certification across Queensland
- supporting the recognition of suitable accreditation programs in regulating access for tourism operators to natural areas, particularly national parks
- promoting the competitive raising of industry standards through QTA and national tourism awards, with the ecotourism category encouraging best practice and innovation.

National parks consumer website: The development of a consumer website is underway by the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (NPSR) with stage one featuring 34 Queensland national parks. The new, contemporary website will become the central hub for all digital marketing activities, providing a consumer-focused, interactive, best practice experience across all popular devices (desktop, mobile phones and tablets).

National parks social media: A social media strategy has been developed to extend and improve engagement with consumers about Queensland's national parks and wildlife experiences. Consumers can connect with 'Queensland National Parks' through Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Queensland National Parks' presence is ranked number one for national park organisations in Australia for both Facebook and Instagram, with 65,500 and 5,000 followers respectively (at July 2015).

Ecotourism investment: Since 2009, the Queensland Government has been developing strategies to facilitate low impact, sensitively designed ecotourism facilities on and off national parks. A number of expressions of interest are currently progressing with the first ecotourism lease issued for the commercial management of the renamed Mamu Tropical Skywalk. Best Practice Ecotourism Development Guidelines have been prepared to assist ecotourism investors to develop ecotourism facilities and experiences.

National Parks Gateway Visitor Centres rejuvenation: A key initiative for NPSR is to revitalise a number of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) visitor centres to help maximise their unique offerings and promote the national park estate. Master plan reports were developed for Walkabout Creek Visitor Centre, the Gap, Brisbane; the David Fleay Wildlife Park, Gold Coast; and Mon Repos Turtle Centre near Bundaberg. These plans were prepared in partnership with the tourism industry, local government and the community. QPWS is investing over four million dollars in a range of facilities and infrastructure that will both enable a greater appreciation of national parks and enhance visitor experiences at the sites.

Transitioning operators to long-term agreements: For many years industry and government have been working together to develop an efficient, industry-focused framework for the management of ecotourism in protected areas. As part of this process, ecotourism operators at selected sites around Queensland are transitioning to long-term Commercial Activity Agreements with mandatory eco-certification conditions. This change promotes best practice and will provide long-term security.



Mossman Gorge Centre Indigenous activities
Photos: © Mossman Gorge Centre

Award winning Indigenous ecotourism – the Mossman Gorge Centre

The Mossman Gorge Centre is an eco-certified Indigenous tourism business committed to the conservation of Mossman Gorge and Daintree National Park. The centre's vision is that of the Elders of Mossman Gorge, who wish to see visitor impacts on the natural and cultural environment minimised while creating employment and training for the local Indigenous community.

Fundamental to achieving the vision is a focus on guiding and enhancing the experience of approximately 400,000 visitors annually to Mossman Gorge. Visitors are offered a range of amenities at the centre and opportunities for authentic engagement with Indigenous Australia. Environmentally friendly shuttle buses operate to control access to the gorge, reducing emissions and pollutants. In addition, the facility has been designed to capture, store and re-use rainfall in and around the property.

The centre is "Respecting our Culture" certified which acknowledges the operation respects and reinforces Indigenous cultural heritage and protocols. Close working relationships with the Mossman Gorge Aboriginal Community and other Indigenous stakeholders ensure their active participation. The centre employs over 90% local Yalanji workers and since opening has hosted and trained more than 60 nationally accredited Indigenous trainee students in hospitality and cookery.

The Mossman Gorge Centre is a recognised leader in sustainable Indigenous tourism, achieving many awards for excellence and innovation, including in the 2014 Queensland Tourism Awards and the 2014 Australian Tourism Awards.

Meeting the challenges

Innovation and investment

Navigating the regulatory and planning

system: Multiple tenure types, multi – jurisdictional approval processes and native title requirements can create additional complexity and cost.

Support investors: Collaborate with private investors to provide the right opportunity, right information, right advice and targeted support to develop the right ecotourism product for the market and the location.

Higher start-up and operational costs:

The development of high quality Australian ecotourism opportunities is more expensive relative to countries with little or no human or environmental resource management policies.

Foster strong partnerships with Traditional Owners: Identify and progress new opportunities to expand Indigenous involvement in ecotourism.

Improve investment models: Work with the investment community and the tourism industry to identify ecotourism investment opportunities, ensure projects are 'investor ready' to attract private investors, and assist investors to meet the necessary project standards. Provide support for potential investors by connecting them with the right areas of government as potential commercial partners.

Prioritise development of ecotourism opportunities and investment on private and other state lands (off national park): Work with the tourism industry to investigate and identify viable ecotourism projects on tenure other than the protected area estate.

Foster innovation and excellence in ecotourism on national parks: Continue to facilitate low impact best practice private ecotourism investment opportunities in suitable locations within protected areas.

Prioritise innovation in regional ecotourism opportunities: Work with the industry to ensure new projects align with Destination Tourism Plans, include innovative product development and embrace technology and digital strategies to attract new markets.

Focus on visitor experience

Competitive positioning: Competition for the ecotourism dollar is very intense, both domestically and internationally.

Develop emerging markets in ecotourism: Leverage Queensland's position to develop new markets, host appropriate high profile events, and capitalise on emerging markets such as drive and cycle tourism.

Attracting high yielding visitors: In a globally competitive tourism market, Australia has to offer value-for-money visitor experiences as it cannot compete on price alone.

Expand and improve visitor experiences and tourism products: Work with the tourism industry to enhance the visitor experience and opportunities, product development and marketing.

Unique product offering: The Great Barrier Reef is world renowned and unique to Queensland and should be highlighted as a natural competitive advantage to other coastal and reef destinations.

Great Barrier Reef Opportunities: Facilitate investment in tourism products that showcase the Reef and address issues with existing unoccupied island resorts.

Indigenous ecotourism: Showcase the oldest living cultural history in the world by progressing opportunities for ecotourism in partnership with local Indigenous groups and relevant agencies.

Our vision, guiding principle and promise

Our vision for ecotourism in Queensland is:

Queensland is an internationally celebrated ecotourism destination, delivering world-class experiences that support the conservation of our special natural places and unique Indigenous and cultural heritage.

Underpinning this vision is the guiding principle:

Queensland's treasured natural and cultural assets will be protected and conserved for current and future generations to enjoy.

The guiding principle acknowledges that a healthy environment is fundamental to a healthy ecotourism industry. Queensland's natural heritage including our national parks, marine parks and World Heritage areas play a central role for ecotourism. They are some of the most highly protected areas in the state and the development of ecotourism experiences must achieve the right balance between the conservation of natural and cultural values and the aspirations of the tourism industry.

In the pursuit of the vision and in response to the guiding principle, the tourism industry, government and community stakeholders have made a promise to ecotourism 'guests':

Unforgettable ecotourism experiences that exceed our guests' expectations and create lasting memories of Queensland's outstanding natural and cultural areas and unique wildlife.

This promise embodies how we want ecotourism visitors as our 'guests' to feel and seeks to capture the essence of Queensland as an ecotourism destination.

Five new strategic directions outline the action required by the tourism industry, government and community stakeholders to achieve the vision and deliver this promise:

1. Driving innovation in ecotourism experiences.
2. Showcasing the world renowned Great Barrier Reef.
3. Stimulating investment in new and refurbished ecotourism opportunities.
4. Expanding authentic Indigenous ecotourism experiences.
5. Promoting Queensland's world-class ecotourism experiences.



Mamu Tropical Skywalk
Photo: © Queensland Government

1. Driving innovation in ecotourism experiences

Through the commitment and passion of tourism operators, ecotourism products showcase and help to conserve Queensland's unique natural landscapes, cultural heritage and wildlife. In support of operators, attention will be given to encouraging innovation and providing guidance in developing new products and achieving excellence in interpretation and experience delivery. Such initiatives will grow industry capacity and enhance Queensland's reputation as a world-class ecotourism destination.

- 1.1 Facilitate experience development programs that enhance the industry's capacity to deliver world-class ecotourism visitor experiences.
- 1.2 Provide a range of experience development tools for industry to further enhance ecotourism experience delivery.
- 1.3 Foster a culture of quality ecotourism interpretation and storytelling that seeks to enhance operator capabilities for the benefit of their business and product delivery.
- 1.4 Develop an events framework to foster appropriate events in national parks that provide new and enhanced visitor experiences, support conservation of national parks, deliver economic benefits and encourage regional visitation.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 Progress best practice, low impact ecotourism investment opportunities.
- 1.7 Accelerate the uptake of certification among ecotourism businesses and support a database of accredited businesses.
- 1.8 Undertake an evaluation of the outcomes and effectiveness of certification programs on ecotourism products.

2. Showcasing the world renowned Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef and its islands are an iconic part of the Queensland tourism industry and a significant contributor to the economy. In a highly competitive market where reef destinations around the world vie for visitors, Queensland tourism operators are a key partner in showcasing, protecting and managing the Reef. Innovation and investment in new reef tourism experiences and infrastructure that capitalise on the Great Barrier Reef's unique selling points will be vital to increase visitation and reinvigorate the established Queensland Great Barrier Reef tourism industry.

The Australian and Queensland Governments have outlined their commitment in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (LTSP) to protect the Reef's values, health and resilience while allowing ecologically sustainable development and use. UNESCO has recognised the recent work undertaken by the Queensland Government to address concerns and protect the Reef. This global attention has generated unprecedented cooperation and investment by government, industry and research sectors to develop and implement the LTSP for management of the Great Barrier Reef ensuring it remains a global icon into the future. When considering potential for reinvigorating reef island tourist resorts, the Queensland Government will develop a strategy to attract investment in existing aged or unoccupied facilities.

- 2.1 Develop a Great Barrier Reef Islands Strategy focused on creating world leading island visitor experiences that are commercially and environmentally sustainable.
- 2.2 Implement the ecotourism actions identified in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan.
- 2.3 Implement the Tourism and Events Queensland Great Barrier Reef Tourism Strategy (2015–2018).
- 2.4 Leverage Tourism Australia's Coastal and Aquatic campaign including the David Attenborough Great Barrier Reef television series.
- 2.5 Provide accurate information to the public on the health of the Great Barrier Reef and progress on the range of initiatives to reduce key threats such as catchment runoff and crown of thorns starfish.
- 2.6 Engage with industry and key Great Barrier Reef stakeholders, such as the Tourism Reef Advisory Committee (TRAC), in the consultation process for new ecotourism opportunities.
- 2.7 Actively engage in leveraging research opportunities through the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC) and other science and research organisations.

3. Stimulating investment in new and refurbished ecotourism opportunities

To support a thriving ecotourism industry, low impact, sustainable experiences are required that reflect the Queensland Government's conservation responsibilities, are constructed and operated to the highest environmental standards and industry practices, and provide a positive contribution back to the conservation of natural areas and the community. There are opportunities available for privately owned ecotourism experiences on and off protected areas. When considering investment in national parks, preference should be given to previously disturbed sites (brownfield sites) rather than intact natural areas (greenfield sites). To facilitate investment, the Queensland Government is committed to assisting prospective investors in navigating multiple tenures, regulatory approvals and best practice sustainability requirements.

- 3.1 Develop an investor toolkit to guide prospective investors and/or proponents through government planning and regulatory systems.
- 3.2 Attract and facilitate private investment into island tourism infrastructure.
- 3.3 Develop a portfolio of high quality ecotourism investment projects located on State and other freehold land that demonstrate strong business cases and local support.
- 3.4 Implement the Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism policy in the Moreton Island Recreation Area.
- 3.5 Implement best practice approaches and certification programs (where appropriate) to ensure protection and sustainable use of Queensland's special natural areas.
- 3.6 Ensure tourism interests are considered in future reviews of wildlife management regulations and processes.
- 3.7 Implement the Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism policy at Daintree National Park and in the Cooloola Recreation Area.



Crown of thorns starfish eradication
Photo: © Gempearl

Saving the Reef from crown of thorns starfish outbreaks

In a concerted effort to minimise coral loss on the Great Barrier Reef, the Queensland Government and the tourism industry have culled more than 370,000 crown of thorns starfish (COTS), predominately from tourism sites, over the last two years. While COTS are a native species, their outbreaks are a significant cause of coral loss alongside cyclones and coral bleaching and the only factor that can be directly controlled.

In 2012, researchers from the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies developed a new innovative single-injection method that uses a bile salts solution to kill COTS with no adverse effects on the reef ecosystem. Australia is a world leader in COTS control and research, sought after for training, materials and advice throughout the Asia and Pacific regions.

The success in reducing COTS numbers is due to a highly effective partnership between researchers, the tourism industry, the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO), government and the local community. Col McKenzie, Director of AMPTO, says aside from the large spawning numbers, one of the biggest challenges is the highly mobile nature of COTS. "Finding the aggregations is difficult and we rely on the tourism industry, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the public to tell us where they have seen them."

Visitors to the Reef can expect to experience coral in good condition across the majority of tourism sites. The Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan includes measures to improve the quality of water entering the Reef over the longer term, further supporting efforts to minimise COTS.

Source: www.diveplanit.com/2015/02/fight-crown-thorns-seastar/

4. Expanding authentic Indigenous ecotourism experiences

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are complex and diverse. The Indigenous cultures of Australia are the oldest living cultural history in the world – they go back at least 50,000 years and some argue closer to 65,000 years.

Australia's unique Indigenous heritage presents the opportunity for authentic cultural experiences that complement the environmental offering and create a distinctive point of difference from competitors. Cultural heritage interpretation adds depth to ecotourism experiences and provides visitors with meaningful connections with Traditional Owners. There is potential to develop additional Indigenous tourism experiences that draw on the knowledge, resources and skills of Indigenous people, including partnerships with established Indigenous operators to make these a 'must do' component of Queensland ecotourism itinerary.

Visitors are discerning about their cultural experiences, expecting authentic not contrived experiences and products, and contemporary rather than just traditional expressions of the culture. The Queensland Government is committed to working with Traditional Owners to maximise Indigenous ecotourism opportunities, including but not limited to national parks and jointly managed national parks. These opportunities extend beyond the land to the involvement of Indigenous people in all aspects of the tourism industry, for example, as rangers, guides, chefs, service staff and artists.

- 4.1 Work with existing and potential Indigenous ecotourism product to ensure long term sustainability.
- 4.2 Collaborate with members of the QTIC Tourism Indigenous Employment Champions Network to encourage participation of Indigenous Australians in ecotourism products.
- 4.3 Identify new Indigenous ecotourism opportunities in and adjacent to Queensland's national parks.
- 4.4 Investigate Indigenous 'Sea Country' ecotourism opportunities in particular on the Great Barrier Reef.
- 4.5 Work with the Quandamooka People and key stakeholders to develop a range of ecotourism opportunities on North Stradbroke Island to support local tourism and economic development.

Investment supporting best practice ecotourism – Nightfall Wilderness Camp

Nightfall Wilderness Camp is a low impact, environmentally sustainable ecotourism experience adjacent to Christmas Creek and Queensland's Lamington National Park section of the Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area in the Gold Coast hinterland. This award winning ecotourism facility demonstrates the success of encouraging private investment in ecotourism ventures adjacent to national parks.

The Queensland Government (through the Department of Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games) provided around \$20,000 in funding to the Nightfall Wilderness Camp project as part of the 2010 Tourism Projects Prefeasibility Grants Program. The proponent leveraged this grant to secure a \$100,000 T-QUAL federal grant and contributed private capital to construct three luxury tents.

The operation focuses on preserving and enhancing the environmental and cultural values of the area while sharing with guests the natural beauty, cultural history and high quality encounters with nature.

As a carbon-neutral facility, environmental practices include on-site wastewater treatment and waste minimisation through reduction, re-use, recycling and recovery with composting. A 5KW grid-connect solar power system generates the camp's electricity. Local bio-sequestration tree plantings are planned to offset the camp's residual carbon footprint. Conservation also extends to the restoration and rehabilitation of damaged parts of Nightfall's 257 acre site and monitoring of Christmas Creek and protected species.

An exemplar of environmentally sustainable tourism, Nightfall Wilderness Camp is soon to be internationally recognised with Advanced Eco Tourism Certification from Ecotourism Australia.

5. Promoting Queensland's world-class ecotourism experiences

Nature, wildlife and the special experiences they afford are a significant element of Queensland's visitor offering. Their importance is acknowledged with the inclusion of natural encounters as a theme of Queensland's tourism brand, *Queensland, Where Australia Shines*. Queensland's protected areas, including five World Heritage areas, showcase the state's precious natural and cultural heritage. Queensland Government departments will work closely with Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) in strengthening the association with the tourism industry and promoting nature within Brand Queensland. TEQ also has an important partnership to maintain with Tourism Australia in raising the profile of the World Heritage areas and other special places in international visitor markets.

Appropriate events in national parks and natural areas offer another opportunity for people to discover and enjoy nature and profile the National Parks brand. Within the digital space, fresh online content, a booking engine accessible across all popular devices and social media are essential to bring to life Queensland's special natural areas and encourage visitors to share their memories.

- 5.1 Deliver a streamlined and consumer-focused online experience for Queensland's protected areas including a new booking service, social media and new consumer website.
- 5.2 Partner with Tourism Australia to ensure there is a strong Queensland presence in any future Nature Australia initiatives.
- 5.3 Maximise the ecotourism marketing potential of Queensland's destinations and operators.
- 5.4 Promote and support the Queensland Tourism Awards which recognise and reward the outstanding achievements of ecotourism operators.
- 5.5 Foster a stronger focus on World Heritage Area brand marketing and promotion.



Cassowary
Photo: © Tourism and Events Queensland

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Have your say

Community, industry and stakeholder feedback on the draft Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2015–2020 (the plan) will be obtained through an online survey on the Queensland Government’s Get Involved website (links to www.npsr.qld.gov.au and <https://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au/>). The survey will take 10 to 15 minutes, depending on the amount of feedback provided, and will be open from 8 October to 20 November 2015.

Visit the department’s website at www.npsr.qld.gov.au (link to <http://www.npsr.qld.gov.au/>) for further information and to view the draft plan. The next steps in the consultation process are outlined in Figure 1.

Thank you for your input into this important plan for Queensland.

Figure 1: Next steps in consultation process



Lady Musgrave Island
Photo: © Tourism & Events Queensland

Three-year action plan

Action		Responsible agencies
12 MONTHS (including ongoing actions)		
Strategic direction 1: Driving innovation in ecotourism experiences		
1.1	Facilitate experience development programs that enhance the industry's capacity to deliver world-class ecotourism visitor experiences (ongoing)	TEQ, DTESB, NPSR, GBRMPA
1.2	Provide a range of experience development tools for industry to further enhance ecotourism experience delivery (ongoing)	TEQ, DTESB, NPSR
1.3	Foster a culture of quality ecotourism interpretation and storytelling that seeks to enhance operator capabilities for the benefit of their business and product delivery (ongoing)	TEQ, DATSIP, EA, GBRMPA
1.4	Develop an events framework to foster appropriate events in national parks that provide new and enhanced visitor experiences, support conservation of national parks, deliver economic benefits and encourage regional visitation	NPSR, TEQ
1.5	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, EA, TEQ, DTESB, NPSR
Strategic direction 2: Showcasing the world renowned Great Barrier Reef		
2.1	Develop a Great Barrier Reef Islands Strategy focused on creating world leading island visitor experiences that are commercially and environmentally sustainable	DTESB, NPSR, DNRM, QTIC
2.2	Implement the ecotourism actions identified in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (ongoing, see Appendix 1 for specific actions)	EHP
2.3	Implement the Tourism and Events Queensland Great Barrier Reef Tourism Strategy (2015–2018) (ongoing)	TEQ
2.4	Leverage Tourism Australia's Coastal and Aquatic campaign including the David Attenborough Great Barrier Reef television series	TEQ
2.5	Provide accurate information to the public on the health of the Great Barrier Reef and progress on the range of initiatives to reduce key threats such as catchment runoff and crown of thorns starfish	EHP, GBRMPA, AMPTO, TEQ
2.6	Engage with industry and key Great Barrier Reef stakeholders, such as the Tourism Reef Advisory Committee (TRAC), in the consultation process for new ecotourism opportunities (ongoing)	QTIC, DTESB, NPSR
2.7	Actively engage in leveraging research opportunities through the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC) and other science and research organisations (ongoing)	QTIC
Strategic direction 3: Stimulating investment in new and refurbished ecotourism opportunities		
3.1	Develop an investor toolkit to guide prospective investors and/or proponents through government planning and regulatory systems.	DTESB, NPSR, TEQ, DNRM
3.2	Attract and facilitate private investment into island tourism infrastructure (ongoing)	DTESB, TEQ, NPSR, GBRMPA, DNRM
3.3	Develop a portfolio of high quality ecotourism investment projects located on State and other freehold land that demonstrate strong business cases and local support (ongoing)	DTESB, TEQ, DNRM
3.4	Implement the Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism policy in the Moreton Island Recreation Area	NPSR
3.5	Implement best practice approaches and certification programs (where appropriate) to ensure protection and sustainable use of Queensland's special natural areas (ongoing)	NPSR, QTIC, GBRMPA, EA
3.6	Ensure tourism interests are considered in future reviews of wildlife management regulations and processes (ongoing)	EHP, DTESB, NPSR, TEQ

Three-year action plan (continued)

Action		Responsible agencies
12 MONTHS (including ongoing actions)		
Strategic direction 4: Expanding authentic Indigenous ecotourism experiences		
4.1	Work with existing and potential Indigenous ecotourism product to ensure long term sustainability (ongoing)	TEQ, NPSR, DATSIP, DTESB
4.2	Collaborate with members of the QTIC Tourism Indigenous Employment Champions Network to encourage participation of Indigenous Australians in ecotourism products (ongoing)	QTIC
Strategic direction 5: Promoting Queensland's world-class ecotourism experiences		
5.1	Deliver a streamlined and consumer-focused online experience for Queensland's protected areas including a new booking service, social media and new consumer website	NPSR, TEQ
5.2	Partner with Tourism Australia to ensure there is a strong Queensland presence in any future Nature Australia initiatives (ongoing)	TEQ, TA, NPSR
5.3	Maximise the ecotourism marketing potential of Queensland's destinations and operators (ongoing)	TEQ
5.4	Promote and support the Queensland Tourism Awards which recognise and reward the outstanding achievements of ecotourism operators (ongoing)	QTIC, NPSR
TWO YEARS		
Strategic direction 1: Driving innovation in ecotourism experiences		
1.6	Progress best practice, low impact ecotourism investment opportunities	NPSR, DTESB, TEQ, DNRM
1.7	Accelerate the uptake of certification among ecotourism businesses and support a database of accredited businesses	QTIC
Strategic direction 4: Expanding authentic Indigenous ecotourism experiences		
4.3	Identify new Indigenous ecotourism opportunities in and adjacent to Queensland's national parks	TEQ, NPSR, DATSIP, DTESB
Strategic direction 5: Promoting Queensland's world-class ecotourism experiences		
5.5	Foster a stronger focus on World Heritage Area brand marketing and promotion	TEQ
THREE YEARS		
Strategic direction 1: Driving innovation in ecotourism experiences		
1.8	Undertake an evaluation of the outcomes and effectiveness of certification programs on ecotourism products	QTIC, NPSR, DTESB
Strategic direction 3: Stimulating investment in new and refurbished ecotourism opportunities		
3.7	Implement the Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism policy at Daintree National Park and in the Cooloola Recreation Area	NPSR
Strategic direction 4: Expanding authentic Indigenous ecotourism experiences		
4.4	Investigate Indigenous 'Sea Country' ecotourism opportunities in particular on the Great Barrier Reef	TEQ, NPSR, GBRMPA, DATSIP, DTESB
4.5	Work with the Quandamooka People and key stakeholders to develop a range of ecotourism opportunities on North Stradbroke Island to support local tourism and economic development	DTESB, NPSR, TEQ, DATSIP

Appendix 1 – Actions from Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (LTSP)

The table below is an extract of ecotourism related actions from the LTSP. The timing for these actions are long term from 2015–2050.

Action	Lead Agency	Supporting Agencies
Community Benefits		
CBA7 – Ensure the aesthetic values of the reefs, islands and the coast are considered and protected through planning and development decisions.	DILGP	EHP GBRMPA <i>and contributing partners;</i> LGAQ, LG
CBA8 – Industry, community and governments work together to implement policies and programs that address tourism and recreational use of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that tourism and recreation activities are ecologically sustainable • maintain and apply a contemporary and adaptive set of management arrangements • implement best practice approaches and certification programs (where appropriate) to ensure protection and sustainable use of the Great Barrier Reef (e.g. High Standard Tourism Operators program) • maintain visitor satisfaction through high quality presentation and tourism services, including quality world heritage interpretation • maintain recreational opportunities for Reef visitors (e.g. recreational fishing, sailing and diving) • coordinate field management activities for Reef visitors • promote voluntary compliance and Reef-friendly behaviour • provide adequate and well-maintained visitor infrastructure such as public moorings, reef protection markers, island facilities and interpretive signs 	GBRMPA	NPSR DTESB OCG DTMR DAF <i>and contributing partners;</i> AMPTO, LGAQ, NRMs
Economic Benefits		
EBA14 – Implement the Queensland Ecotourism Plan: 2015-2020 in a manner that builds upon consistent and effective management of tourism in protected areas.	NPSR	DTESB <i>and contributing partners;</i> Industry
EBA15– Recognise tourism-related fishing, particularly charter fishing, as a distinct fishing activity through the development of an action plan which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies fisheries resources with tourism-related potential at a detailed regional level • develops mechanisms to enable charter fishing to operate on a sustainable basis 	DAF	NPSR EHP DTMR

Appendix 2 – Key to acronyms

AMPTO	Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators
DAF	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
DATSIP	Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnership
DILGP	Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning
DNRM	Department of Natural Resources and Mines
DTEBS	Department of Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and Commonwealth Games
DTMR	Department of Transport and Main Roads
EA	Ecotourism Australia
EHP	Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
GBRMPA	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
LG	Local Government
LGAQ	Local Government Association of Queensland
NRMs	Natural resource management organisations
NPSR	Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing
OCG	Office of Coordinator General
QTIC	Queensland Tourism Industry Council
TA	Tourism Australia
TEQ	Tourism and Events Queensland

Marlong Arch, Mt Moffatt National Park
Photo: © Geoff Adams



