



Identifying and Monitoring High Standard Tourism Operations

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) encourages best practice marine tourism in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The GBRMPA rewards high standard operations and provides incentives for other operations to improve their performance. High standard operations are helping to protect and present the Marine Park and are good ambassadors for the Marine Park, the industry and the certification scheme.

How do we identify the high standard operators?

Operations are identified as high standard by being certified with an approved external certification scheme. The GBRMPA has recognised the Eco Certification Program operated by Ecotourism Australia as a certification scheme for the Marine Park, at the Ecotourism and Advanced Ecotourism levels of certification. Other certification schemes may be approved in the future.

How did we choose the Eco Certification Program?

The GBRMPA chose the Eco Certification Program of Ecotourism Australia as an appropriate certification scheme for the Marine Park by assessing the Program against a comprehensive set of criteria. Important matters to consider included:

- Whether the Program addressed key best practice areas in the fields of protection, presentation and partnership
- The process for updating the set of best practices
- The process for monitoring and auditing operations
- The potential for long-term viability of the Program.

An expert Assessment Panel advised the GBRMPA on the suitability of the Eco Certification Program.

How does an operator become Eco Certified?

To become certified with the Eco Certification Program, a tourism operation must undergo a comprehensive assessment process. Each operator completes an extensive workbook to demonstrate that they meet high standards in the fields of:

- Business management and planning
- Business ethics
- Responsible marketing
- Customer satisfaction
- Natural area focus
- Environmental management
- Climate change action
- Interpretation and education
- Contribution to conservation
- Working with local communities
- Cultural respect and sensitivity.

The operator must also nominate two referees, one a protected area manager or government official and the other a professional who is familiar with the operation.

Ecotourism Australia then verifies and assesses the application, any supporting documents and information from the referees before deciding whether the operation deserves certification and at what level.

How are certified operations monitored?

Auditing of certified operations is crucial to the credibility of the Eco Certification Program. Through a Deed of Agreement between Ecotourism Australia and the GBRMPA, Ecotourism Australia is committed to auditing each certified Marine Park operation at least once every three years. The GBRMPA can also request that a particular operation be audited. Independent third party environmental auditors conduct the audits.

Ecotourism Australia also continually monitors its certified operations and investigates any complaints received. Depending on the information received, an on-site audit may be conducted to investigate a complaint.

Whenever an operator is found to be operating below the certification standards, Ecotourism Australia sends a corrective action letter, including a timeline for compliance. A written response and evidence of compliance is required from the operator in order to maintain certification. If they do not comply, their certification will be suspended.

Ecotourism Australia keeps the GBRMPA up-to-date with its auditing and complaints outcomes.

What if I am concerned about an operation?

If you are concerned that a certified Marine Park operation is not operating to the high standards required in the Eco Certification Program, please write to Ecotourism Australia detailing your concerns. They will thoroughly investigate your complaint and possibly contact you for further information.

For More Information

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