

Tourism Operators **RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE**



Certification
Recognising
Best Practice

"Working through the Climate Action Certification Program opened our eyes to where we can save money and do more for the environment."

Terry Hudson,
Southern Cross Sailing Adventures



Australian Government

**Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority**

Certification Recognising Best Practice



What is certification?

Certification is independent recognition that you are conducting your business to best practice standards.

There are a number of certification schemes available. For climate change action on the Great Barrier Reef, Ecotourism Australia offers two certification schemes: the ECO Certification Program and the Climate Action Certification Program.

The **ECO Certification Program** is designed for high quality nature-based tourism. The Program addresses climate change as part of a broad range of best practice standards which also include:

- business management and operational planning
- environmental management
- interpretation and education
- working with local communities
- cultural respect and sensitivity.

The three levels of achievement are Nature Tourism, Ecotourism and Advanced Ecotourism.

The **Climate Action Certification Program** is designed for all sectors of the tourism industry including tours, hotels and restaurants. The Program sets standards for climate change action to reduce greenhouse emissions, develop a risk assessment and implement adaptation measures. The three levels of achievement are Climate Action Business, Climate Action Innovator and Climate Action Leader.

Why should I care about becoming certified?

If you care about operating sustainably and protecting the Great Barrier Reef, then it makes sense to operate to the highest standard and to get recognition from others, especially future customers, for your efforts.



The process of meeting best practice criteria can trigger ideas on how to make your business more sustainable, how to market it in unique ways to an environmentally conscious public, and how to operate more efficiently – saving both time and money.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), as part of its High Standard Tourism Program, offers a range of benefits if you become ECO Certified at the Ecotourism or Advanced Ecotourism levels. These benefits include the opportunity to apply for a 15-year term for your Marine Parks permit and profiling at major trade events like the Australian Tourism Exchange.

How do I become certified?

Step 1. Familiarise yourself with the requirements
Determine which certification scheme best suits your business as you will make a commitment to operate your business and offer products at the standard set by the certification scheme.

Step 2. Work through the application process
The ECO Certification and Climate Action Certification programs involve a comprehensive online application process requiring you to:

- Become familiar with the criteria
- Collect relevant information about your business and its products

- Develop systems for recording and monitoring data
- Implement any business changes to meet the certification standards.

The GBRMPA has an online emissions calculator specifically for the marine tourism industry which will help you work through the certification process.

Step 3. Submit your application

When you are ready, submit your self-assessed application to Ecotourism Australia. This will be reviewed by qualified assessors and the quality of the actions you undertake will determine the level of certification your business is awarded.

An upfront fee is usually required for participating in a certification program. The ECO Certification and Climate Action Certification programs also involve annual membership fees, based on your business' annual turnover.

Step 4. Live and breathe best practice

Once you have been certified, use the logo so your visitors know you are certified.

Inspire and train your staff to be committed to the certification standards of your business and ensure these standards are embedded in the way everyone operates. It is what your customers will be looking for and it is the way to maintain your standards.

Step 5. Support auditing of your business

As you begin to implement changes, you will be asked to assess your progress. Conducting your own audits will allow you to track your improvement.

Ecotourism Australia conducts audits of its certified products to ensure the credibility of the certification program is maintained and demonstrate the integrity and quality of the certified operators.



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Where can I find out more?

- The GBRMPA's High Standard Tourism Program at www.gbrmpa.gov.au/onboard/home/high_standards/certification
- The ECO Certification Program at www.ecotourism.org.au/eco_certification.asp
- The Climate Action Certification Program at www.sustainabletourismaustralia.com/
- Responsible Reef Practices in Onboard - The Tourism Operator's Handbook for the Great Barrier Reef at www.gbrmpa.gov.au/onboard.
- GBRMPA Tourism Emissions Calculator www.emissionscalculator.gbrmpa.gov.au/resourcedb/

Checklist

- ✓ Review the available certification programs.
- ✓ Identify the certification scheme(s) you want to apply for.
- ✓ Apply online or obtain a workbook and complete your application.
- ✓ Submit your application to the appropriate certification body.
- ✓ Keep records of all your supporting evidence and a copy of your application as you will need this information when you are audited.
- ✓ Once you have successfully been certified, make sure you and your staff live up to your standards.
- ✓ Incorporate the logos into your marketing so clients know you are part of the club!
- ✓ Welcome auditing of your operation.

Case Study - ***Southern Cross Sailing Adventures*** **Whitsundays**

Southern Cross Sailing Adventures offers overnight charters and week-long excursions on seven different sailing vessels. They cruise around the Whitsunday Islands and one vessel goes to the outer reef. Southern Cross holds ECO Certification at the Ecotourism level and is a Climate Action Business.

Sailing ships have relatively low carbon emissions, yet *Southern Cross Sailing Adventures* proactively addressed climate change by becoming Climate Action Certified.

“The certification process has been really helpful in understanding and improving our business performance,” said Terry Hudson, Southern Cross Sailing’s Managing Director. “We are currently using GBRMPA’s carbon emission calculator to monitor our emissions and we will continue to make policy and operational improvements.”

Southern Cross Sailing Adventures nominated a ‘climate champion’ who has been key to encouraging personal involvement and ownership amongst all personnel.

Education has been an important component of Southern Cross Sailing’s journey to address climate change. Budget was allocated for training crew and educating passengers, including the development of interpretive material. “This material incorporates GBRMPA’s Responsible Reef Practices,” commented Allen Grundy, Marketing Manager.



Feedback forms from guests show that passengers appreciate that Southern Cross holds Ecotourism and Climate Action Business certification. There has been significant media coverage on the negative impact of climate change to the Great Barrier Reef and guests value the idea that operators are reducing their impact on the Reef. Terry tries to instil a sense of responsibility towards the environment into the behaviour of his passengers and hopes they carry this message home.

Southern Cross Sailing Adventures - top three benefits of becoming Climate Action Certified

- 1. Reduced fuel usage.** One engine refit has reduced fuel usage by about 40 per cent. The payback on this investment is estimated at 2.5 years.
- 2. Reduced costs and emissions.** Electricity costs for the office have been reduced by an average of 30 per cent, even including the additional cost of purchasing 100 per cent Green Power.
- 3. Improved customer satisfaction.** Based on feedback from guests, certification is an important factor in their decision to choose Southern Cross. Guests value that tourism operators are reducing their own impacts on the Reef.

Overall, *Southern Cross Sailing Adventures* found that Climate Action Certification goes hand in hand with ECO Certification and Terry remarks “We would not hesitate to recommend certification to other operators, and advise them to allow plenty of time to look at all aspects of their business and don’t be daunted by the task. Let the pieces fall together and you will improve your operation and services to guests in the process.”

More information about *Southern Cross Sailing Adventures* can be found on the internet at www.soxsail.com.au.