



Photo: Tourism Queensland

# Tourism in Protected Areas

## Eco-accreditation

## Fact sheet

Commercial tour operators are a key partner with the Department of Environment and Resource Management's Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) in presenting Queensland's iconic national parks to visitors. Tourism in Protected Areas (TIPA) is the framework developed by the Queensland Government, in partnership with the tourism sector, to foster sustainable tourism in these key protected areas.

TIPA promotes best practice, nature-based tourism in these parks. A vital step in this process is the requirement for all approved operators to obtain DERM-endorsed eco-accreditation as part of their commercial activity agreements.

### Why is QPWS introducing eco-accreditation?

Many operators currently working within key protected areas are eco-accredited and striving to achieve best practice business operations and minimal impact on the environment.

Requiring all operators that access TIPA areas to be eco-accredited will demonstrate the importance of these ambitions given that these areas are national parks of international renown, some with World Heritage listing.

Ensuring all tourism operations in TIPA areas are eco-accredited sends a strong sustainable tourism message to visitors that tourism activities at these premium sites are operated to world's best-practice standards.

“Accreditation has been a longstanding issue at both a state and national level. State and federal strategies, including the National Long-term Tourism Strategy, have supported greater recognition of accreditation programs. The tourism market is more competitive now than ever before both on an international and domestic level. For many years Queensland has been able to rest on its reputation in attracting visitors, but now other destinations are challenging that. Accreditation is a mechanism that will encourage high-quality and innovative tourism products and experiences and, importantly, customer-oriented service. The Queensland Tourism Industry Council supports eco-accreditation in Queensland's nature-based tourism sector as a critical strategy to make Queensland ‘the’ place for nature experiences.”

**Daniel Gschwind**

Chief Executive

Queensland Tourism Industry Council

# Key areas of best practice

## Protection

- Habitat protection
- Species conservation and interaction
- Waste minimisation and management
- Cultural heritage protection
- Good neighbour behaviour
- Environmental contingency arrangements

## Presentation

- Visitor information about natural and cultural values and world heritage status
- Delivery of visitor information
- Truth in marketing
- Client services and infrastructure

## Partnership

- Reporting suspected infringements, incidents and pollution.
- Monitoring the protected areas and their use.
- Supporting local and indigenous communities
- Training staff

## How will QPWS decide who will provide the eco-accreditation?

Criteria have been established that eco-accreditation programs will be required to meet to be endorsed by QPWS. Eco-accreditation programs may seek recognition from QPWS once they demonstrate that they meet the criteria.

## Must all operators conducting guided tours in TIPA areas seek eco-accreditation?

Yes. QPWS-endorsed eco-accreditation is an essential requirement for all operators conducting guided tours in TIPA areas and who wish to apply for commercial activity agreements.

## When do operators have to obtain eco-accreditation?

Operators must have commenced their accreditation process within 12 months of entering into a commercial activity agreement and must finalise certification within 18 months of entering into an agreement. Eco-accreditation must be maintained for the life of the agreement.

All existing operators who comply with QPWS applicant suitability guidelines will be eligible to apply for, or transition to, a commercial activity agreement when their permit expires, or earlier by agreement.

QPWS will work with accreditation providers to facilitate the accreditation of tourism product.

## What about operators who do not obtain eco-accreditation?

Operators who are not eco-accredited will not be permitted to enter into a long-term commercial activity agreement. They may continue normal operations until their current permit expires. Operators will only be able to conduct tours in TIPA areas if they are authorised by a commercial activity agreement.

## What eco-accreditation schemes will be recognised by QPWS?

QPWS has established criteria that eco-accreditation schemes must meet in order for them to be endorsed. The scheme must demonstrate:

1. recognition under the National Tourism Accreditation Framework
2. a set of best practices that effectively cover the nominated key areas of best practice
3. a requirement that tourism operators agree to adopt, comply with and publicise the best practices
4. a process for monitoring and auditing compliance with the best practices and other requirements
5. a system to issue a certificate to demonstrate compliance with the best practices
6. a mechanism to investigate alleged non-compliance with the best practices and, if necessary, to withdraw accreditation
7. an appeals process for tourism operators
8. a process and timeframe for reviewing the set of best practices
9. a process to identify and address conflicts and potential conflicts of interest
10. the potential for long-term viability.

## For further information contact:

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service  
Department of Environment and Resource Management  
<[www.derm.qld.gov.au](http://www.derm.qld.gov.au)>

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