

## IS YOUR HOLIDAY COSTING THE EARTH?

Holiday-makers and travellers will easily be able to judge the efforts being made by tourism operators to reduce or eliminate the carbon footprint of their operation with a new certification system being launched by Ecotourism Australia's new arm ***Climate Action Australia***.

***Climate Action Australia*** will be unveiled at the pre-eminent national *Tourism Futures* conference on the Gold Coast, 2 -4 June.

Ecotourism Australia has run the highly credible EcoCertification program specifically for the ecotourism sector for 12 years, and was recently awarded the prestigious *Tomorrow for Tomorrow* international award for conservation. It rates operators on a series of categories to reflect the environmental integrity of the operator.

In contrast, the **Climate Action Australia** scheme is dedicated to ranking efforts to neutralise carbon emission -from entry level through to 100 per cent off-set and extending to climate change adaptation.

It is designed for all sectors of the tourism industry, regardless of size and level of carbon reduction already undertaken. It will include the tourism hotels, attractions, tours, transport, restaurants, travel agents, tourism commissions and industry bodies.

The pre-conference industry survey by Roy Morgan Research ranked climate change as the number one concern for the tourism industry. Forecasters and consumer research also suggest environmental concern is the most influential consumer trend for a generation.

"People are looking for meaningful ways to reduce their environmental impact and this certification will give tourism businesses a clear way to act and to communicate their action, cutting through any greenwashing or confusion," says Alastair McCracken, Chair of Ecotourism Australia.

This certification scheme will be a user-friendly, online questionnaire with on line instant help desk, and automatic filtering so businesses only deal with relevant questions.

The pricing structure will be based on turnover, ensuring the many small businesses in the tourism sector will achieve and maintain certification for under \$500 per year.

The Australian tourism industry is straining in the highly competitive marketplace at present, with both domestic and international visitor numbers stagnating.

“Apart from being a practical, uncomplicated assessment, carrying the **Climate Action Australia** rating will give pro-active operators a competitive edge,” say Mr McCracken

“It is common practice for businesses in Europe and the US to have ‘sustainability charters’ and it is a practice being steadily adopted here in Australia. If tourism operators want to compete for business travel and events, they need to embrace meaningful and sustainable business practices, and this certification scheme gives them a credible vehicle to promote their business.

“It will also help restore Australia’s international reputation as a country that is serious about sustainable travel and climate change,” says Mr McCracken.

Three levels of certification will be available.

**Three star Climate Action Leader** for businesses that has undertaken a set of adaptation and emissions reduction actions but not measuring their carbon footprint.

**Four star Climate Action Leader** for businesses that have undertaken a set of adaptation and emissions reduction actions which have been benchmarked and are auditing and measuring their carbon footprint.

**Five star Climate Action Leader** is a business that has incorporated strategic climate change responses across all relevant levels of business planning and operations. They are measuring and auditing their carbon footprint via a

credible system, have undertaken an advanced level of adaptation and emissions reduction actions and are carbon neutral.

**Climate Action Australia** will provide businesses with:

- an understanding of climate change concepts and terminology;
- awareness of credible offsetting activities that can be undertaken;
- clear and practical ways of reducing their carbon footprint – reducing carbon emissions through design, equipment selection and changes in operational practices;
- best practice examples relevant to the business sector and operating environment;
- approaches to adaptation that will assist both the individual enterprise and the collective industry and community within its area of operation.

“We believe the overwhelming success of Ecotourism Australia in the area of ecotourism certification gives us the credibility to attract a significant proportion of the industry to this certification scheme,” says Mr McCracken.

The **Climate Action Australia** logo is attached.

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