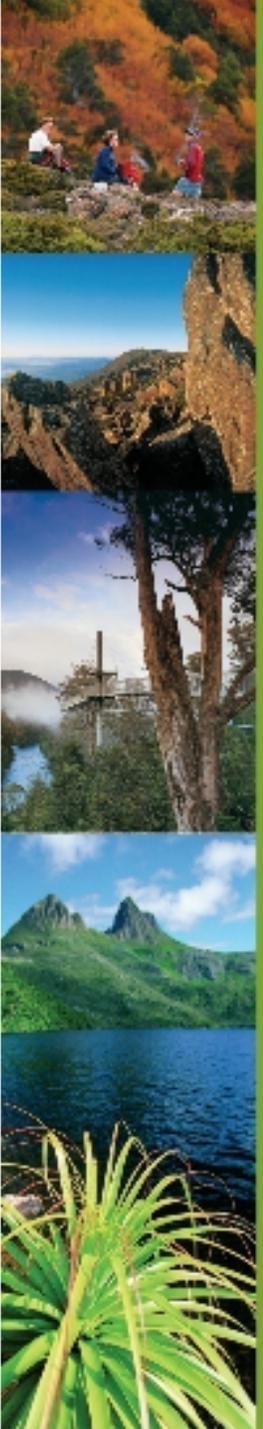


Climate Change Response— back to the future?

Tony Charters

Principal, Tony Charters and Associates
Director, The International Ecotourism Society
Director, Ecotourism Australia

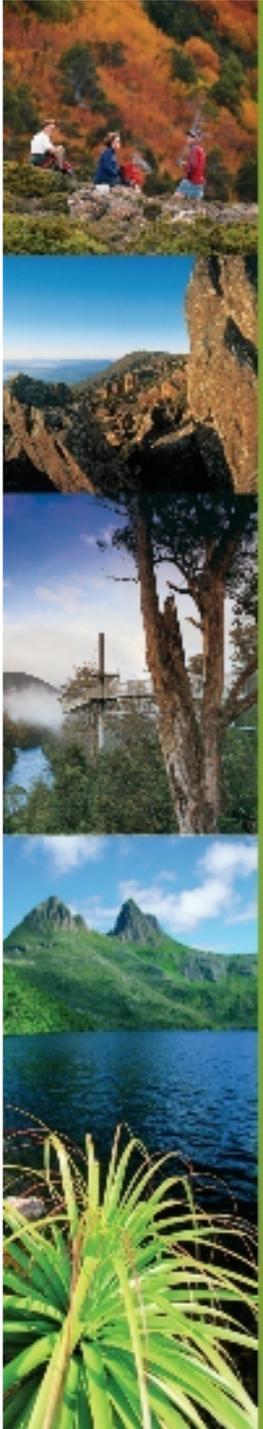




Road Map for Ecotourism

Ecotourism – some history

- 1990 The International Ecotourism Society est
 - 1991 Ecotourism Australia est
 - Many (lost) years of debating the definition
 - Calls to verify green and ecotourism claims led to certification – 1996 Australia's EcoCertification
 - Integration of triple bottom line approach into ecotourism - recognising the linkages between economic, environmental and social/cultural dimensions – so vital to ecotourism
 - Linkage of ecotourism to conservation and sustainable economies for communities
- 

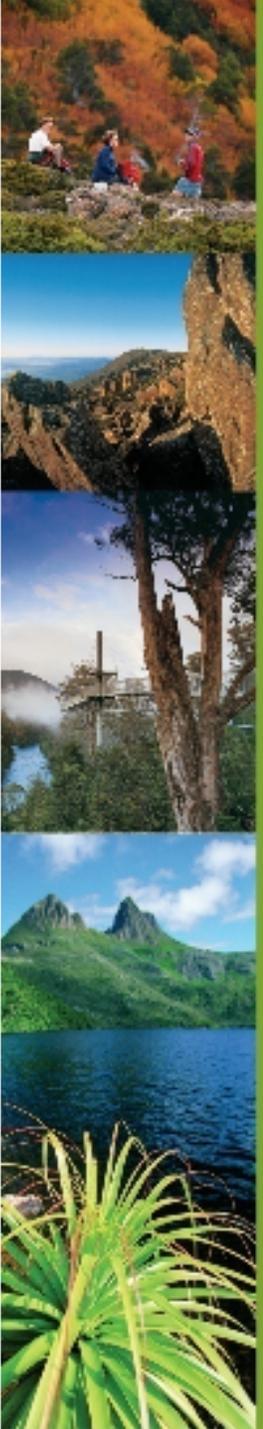


Road Map for Ecotourism

Ecotourism – some history

- This decade is reminiscent of the major oil crisis of the sixties and early seventies. Peak Oil, oil price rises and Climate Change working in unison and have created an enormous impetus for change. Hence – climate change back to the future
- Climate Change is for all intents and purposes the new name for sustainability.
- What does this mean for ecotourism?



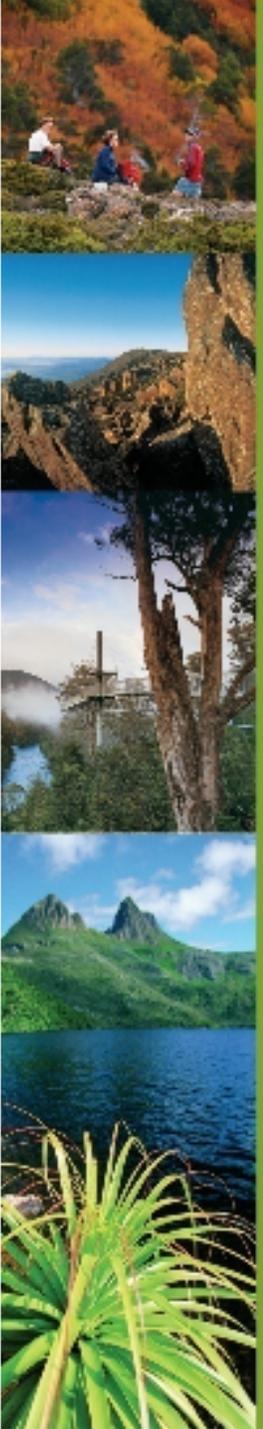


Road Map for Ecotourism

It Means New Energy for Ecotourism: here are ten reasons why.

1. Climate Change

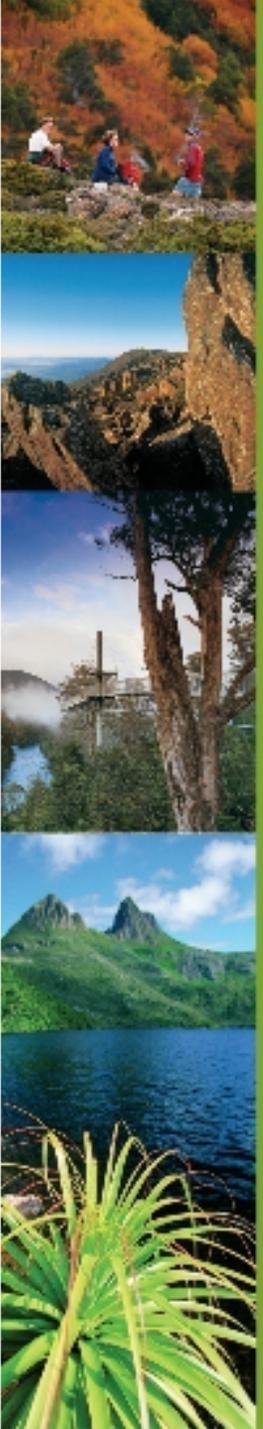
- Has breathed new air into ecotourism and sustainable tourism.
 - Climate Change response is supported by consumers, business and government – like a snowball, gathering mass and energy.
- 



Road Map for Ecotourism

2. Consumer Desire for Authenticity

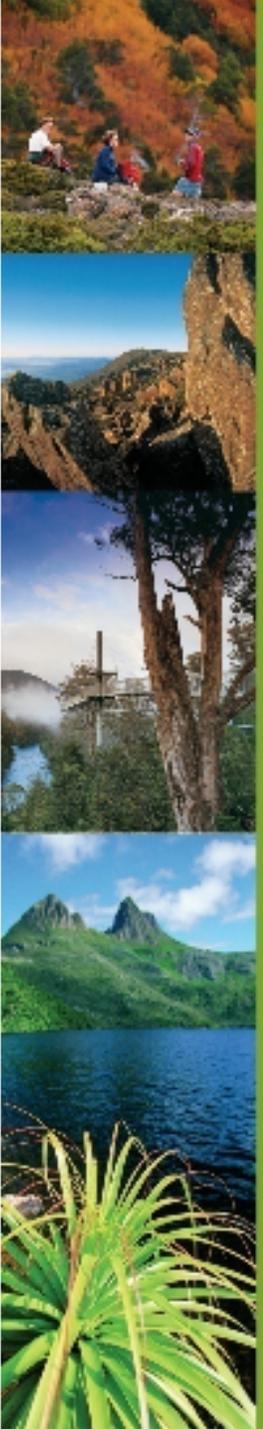
- Real exposure to culture – not manufactured or theme park equivalent
 - Natural environments – not manicured or exotic (imported)
 - Local architecture, local customs, local people
- 
- 



Road Map for Ecotourism

3. Desire for Experiences and Escape from Routine Pressures

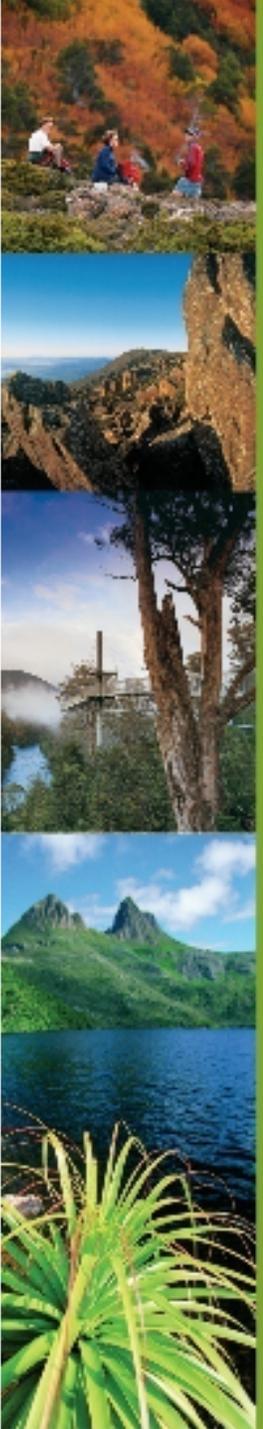
- Doing rather than looking
 - Hands on involvement eg building, habitat conservation
 - A desire to seek a complete change from normal life (eg job pressures, family pressures, stress situations)
 - Seeking a temporary escape with a holiday that represents a complete contrast to their normality
- 



Road Map for Ecotourism

4. Putting Something Back and Bragging Rights

- Volunteer tourism (conservation projects, community projects, philanthropy)
 - Looking for something their friends colleagues haven't done – creating new stories
 - Unusual, different, aspirational
- 

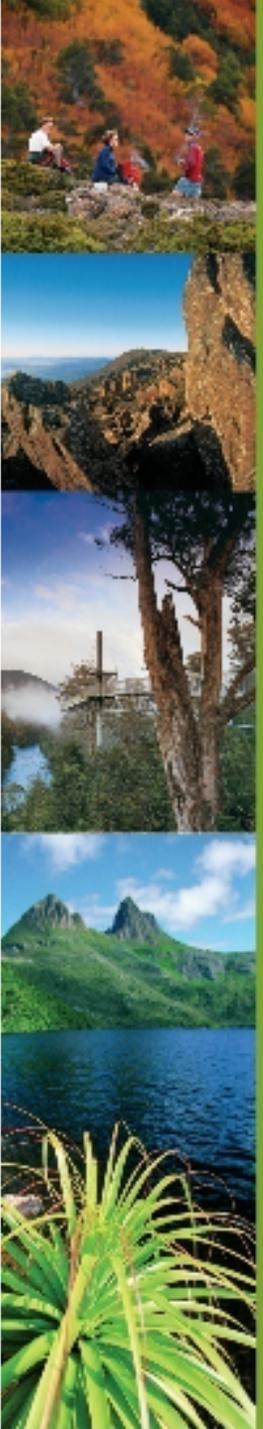


Road Map for Ecotourism

5. Ever Expanding Frontiers for Experienced Travellers

- Seasoned travellers – looking for more remote, less structured, more independent travel



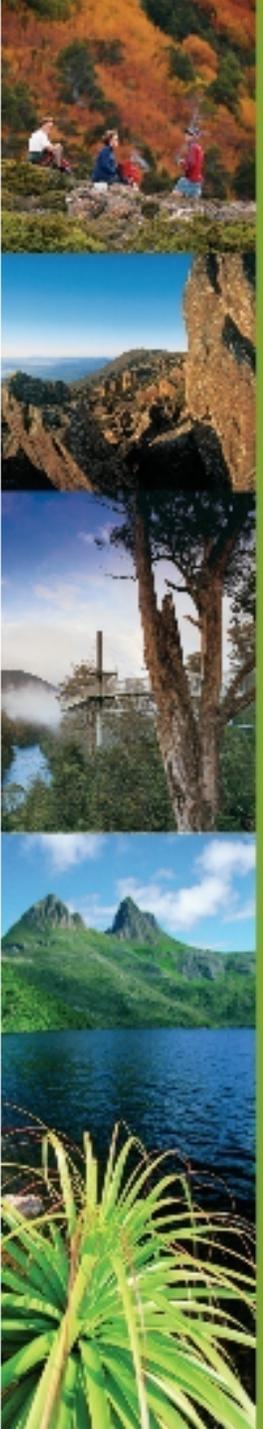


Road Map for Ecotourism

6. Experience Tied to Sustainability

- Increasingly Protected Area Managers demand higher standards of operators – good environmental practice is being linked to access permits – supply led
- Eg High Quality Tourism Program operated by the Great Barrier Reef Authority



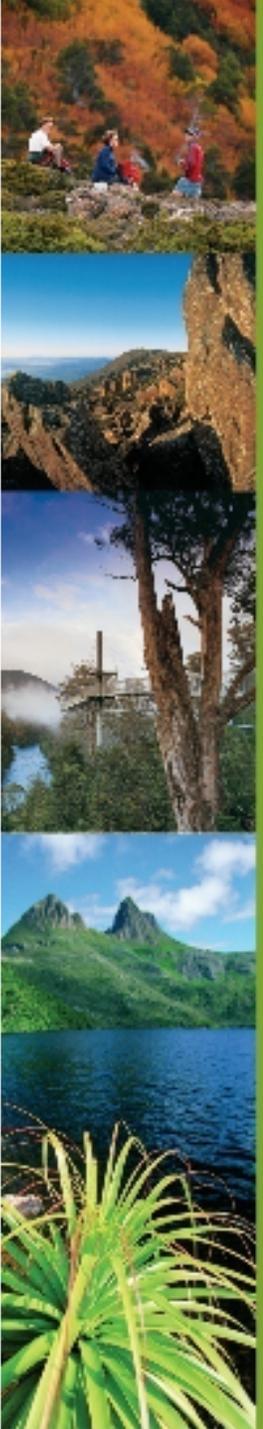


Road Map for Ecotourism

7. Ecotourism Features Unique Nature and Culture – can't be duplicated

- Small scale favours developing economies/communities
- Often countries with emerging tourism industry have more intact natural and cultural heritage – ideal for ecotourism

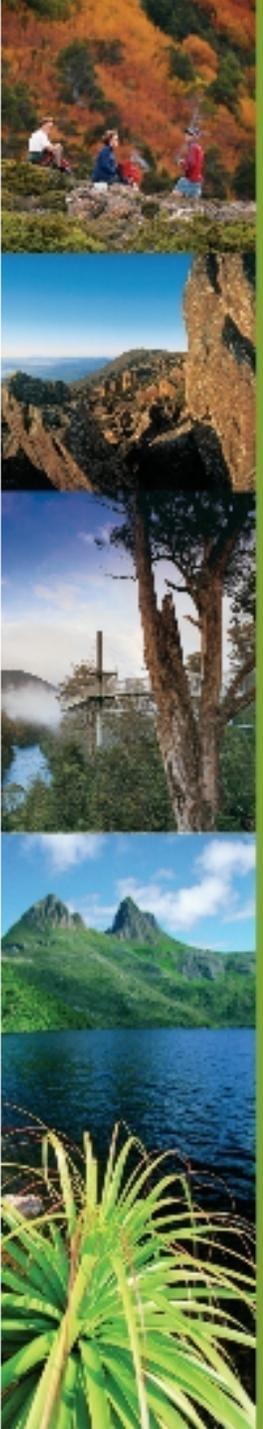




Road Map for Ecotourism

8. Ecotourism has Matured – not seen as a dirty word

- Has been around for 20 years – has earned its strips.
 - In Australia it now represents some 25% of the industry – no longer niche.
 - Eco has been very widely adopted as a term indicating ‘environmentally friendly’ – every day use is enormous and growing.
 - There are now some 45+ national and regional ecotourism societies/associations globally.
- 

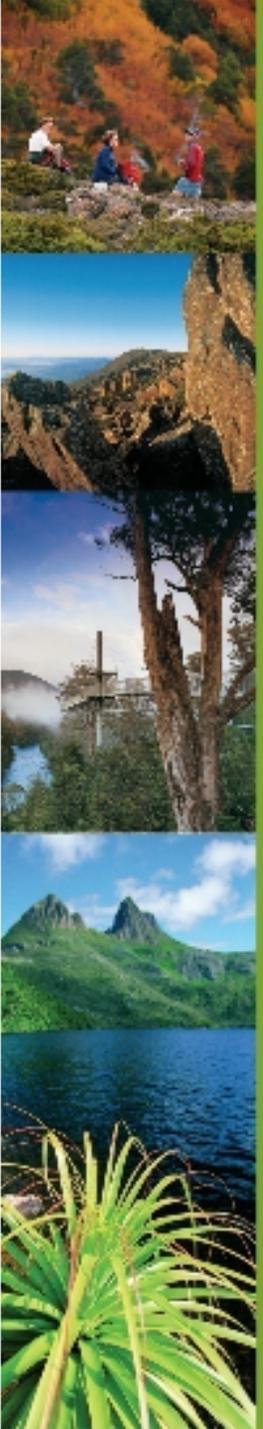


Road Map for Ecotourism

9. Online Research and Booking

- The Web (esp Web 2) is ideally suited to small and medium tourism products
- Strong correlation between ecotourists/experiential tourists and web research
- Credible website can generate significant direct bookings
- As web becomes more sophisticated the need for a good quality (doesn't equate to expensive) website becomes essential.





Road Map for Ecotourism

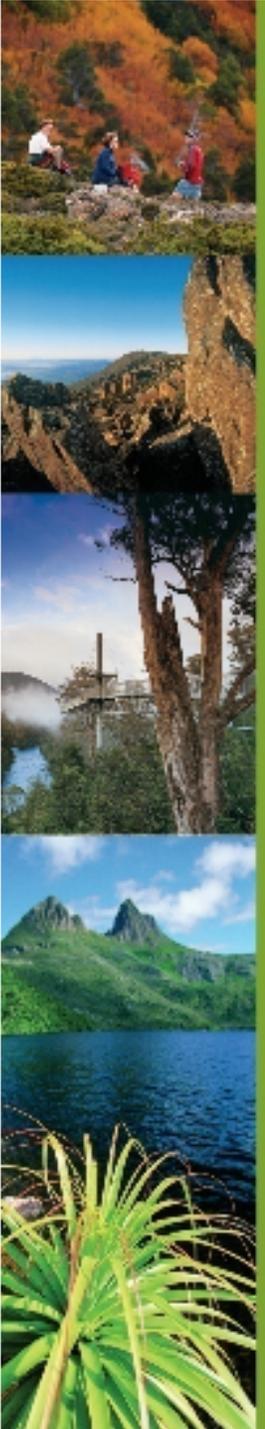
10. Social Networking

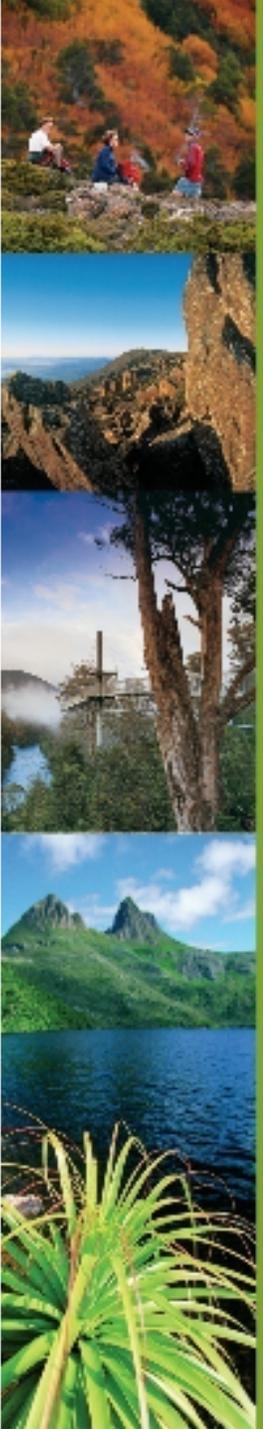
- Makes guest feedback surveys almost obsolete
- An instant source of reviews – essential part of holiday research eg tripadvisor
- Many properties aren't even aware that they are being reviewed
- Can give exponential growth compared to word of mouth (+ve or –ve)
- Word of Mouse



Road Map for Ecotourism

- Based on the ten reasons I just listed each and every exhibitor in the Green Tourism Exhibition has reason to be upbeat about ecotourism. Many of the ten reasons have been fuelled by a new focus on the environment - driven by Climate Change.
- Just as valid as it was in the early 90's though is the need to protect the credibility of ecotourism from those that adopt the concept in name only.
- There are 3 tools to respond to protecting the ecotourism 'brand' – regulate, the market, industry led certification. The best approach probably involves all 3.



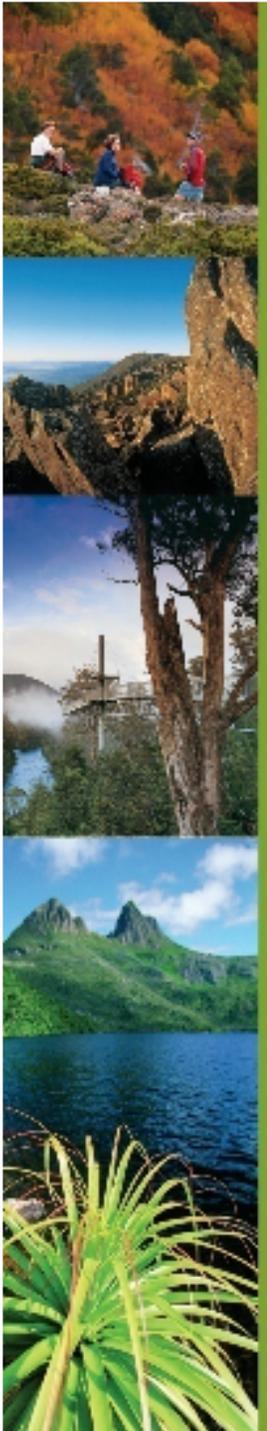


Road Map for Ecotourism

- Picking up on the role of certification, with Australia's 13 years experience of operating Eco Certification and some 1000 products certificated I would like to outline my thoughts on a roadmap for certification.
- First some background on EA's work in this field.



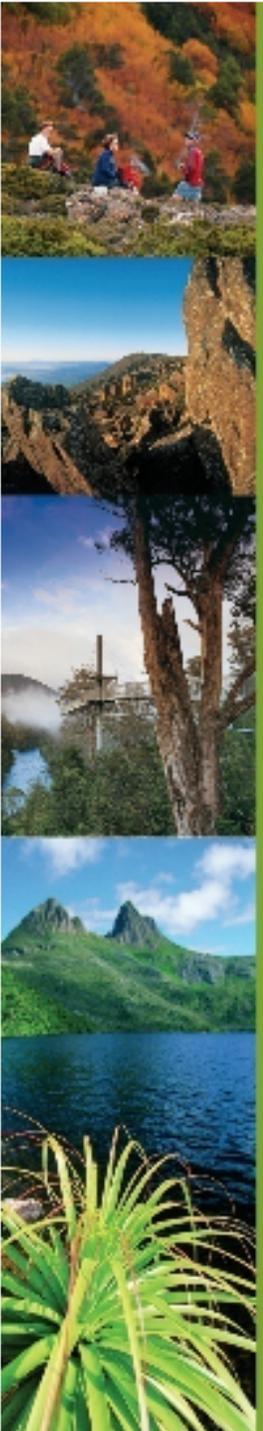
EA's Family of Certification Programs



EcoCertification contributing to sustainability



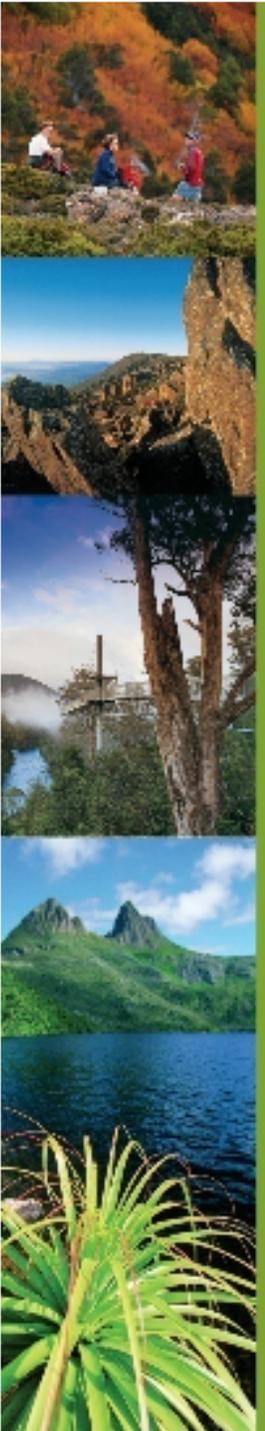
- Launched 13 years ago at Kangaroo Island – a world first;
- Identifies genuine nature and ecotourism products;
- Triple bottom line approach;
- Independently assessed and third party independent audit;
- Makes allowance for unique operating conditions (not one size fits all);
- Rewards innovation (innovative best practices) – also a tool in gathering new practices;
- Affordable – very low entry fees;

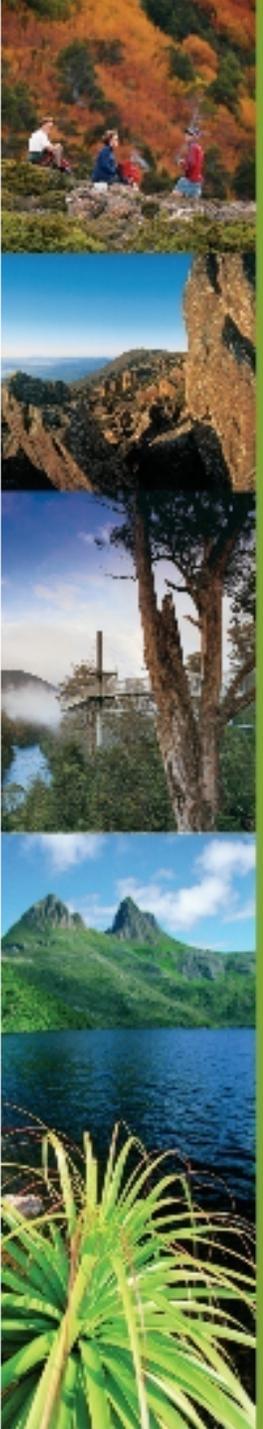


EcoCertification contributing to sustainability



- Primary focus on education and guidance for operators (**how to** guide);
- Certifies products not companies;
- Application on-line or hard copy;
- Upgraded continually, annual renewal acknowledges updates;
- Totally scaleable across tours, attractions and accommodation;
- Self help approach – product development.



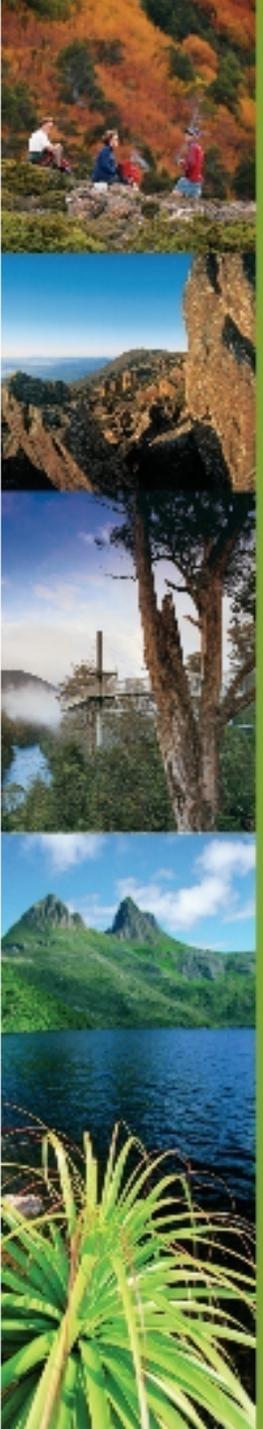


Road Map for Ecotourism Certification

Some Thoughts on the Direction for Ecotourism Certification into the Future

Differentiation will come down to nature, cultural elements and interaction with communities

- Over time the environmental performance of all operators will close up – based on a mix of mandated and consumer led demands. Good energy, water use and waste management will become standard practice.
 - In the long term practices such as the involvement of the local community, interpretation of the nature and cultural heritage values of the region, a commitment to corporate social responsibility will stand ecotourism operations apart from the rest of the industry.
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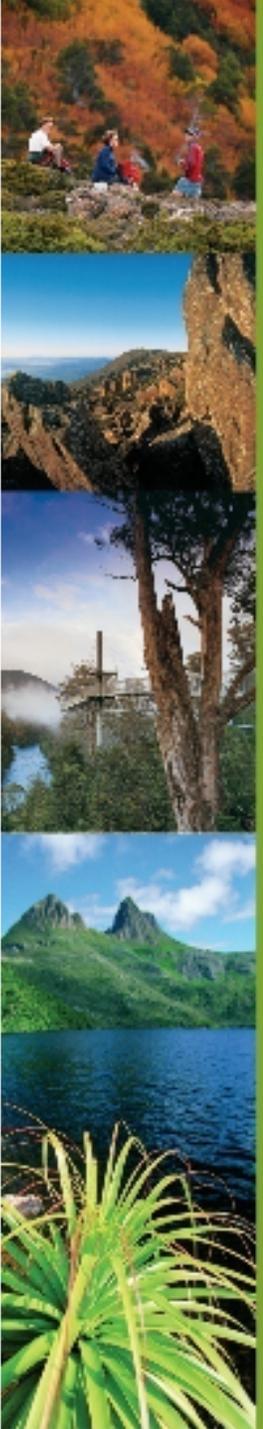


Road Map for Ecotourism Certification

Directions for Ecotourism Certification Certification schemes will continue to proliferate

- It is unrealistic to believe that a single international system will be achieved.





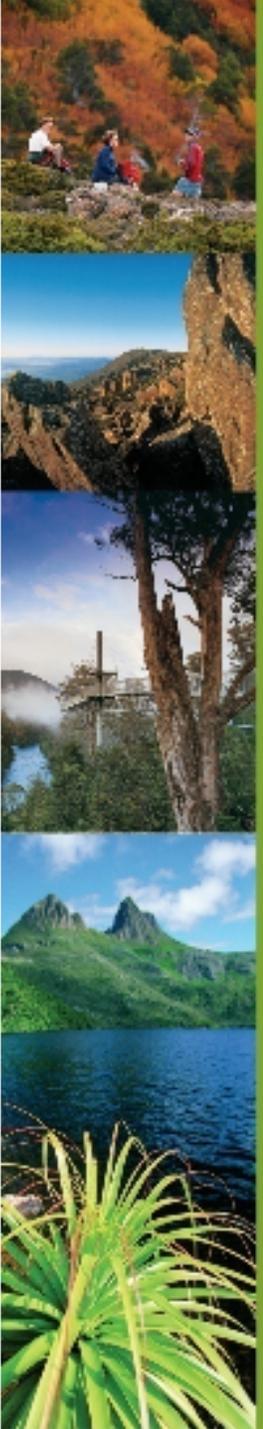
Road Map for Ecotourism Certification

Directions for Ecotourism Certification

Universal standards – certifying the certifiers.

- The most likely option is some agreement on universal standards – but even this is difficult to achieve.



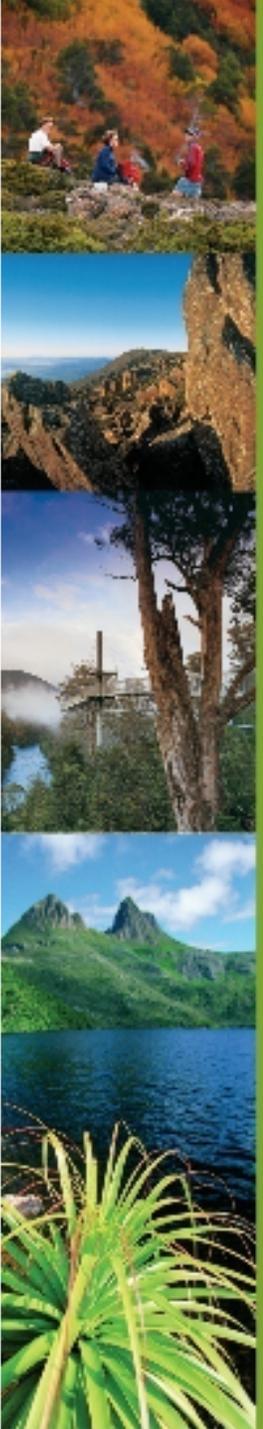


Road Map for Ecotourism Certification

Directions for Ecotourism Certification

More cost efficient ways of auditing

- While independent auditing is essential, up front auditing is very expensive and therefore out of the reach of small to medium enterprises.
 - Alternative systems will need to be developed – random audits, targeted audits, grouping of operators undergoing audits for efficiency.
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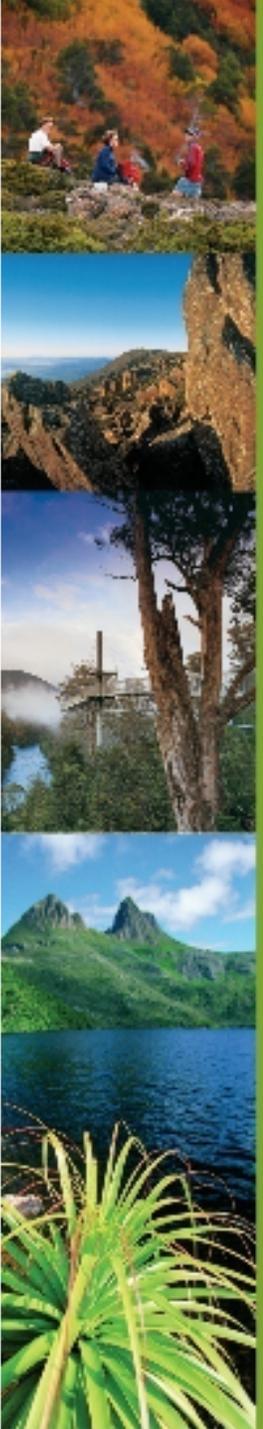
Road Map for Ecotourism Certification

Directions for Ecotourism Certification

The power of WEB 2 and social networking will be harnessed

- Certification schemes can now easily access an independent, consumer based, means of rating the performance of certified operators.





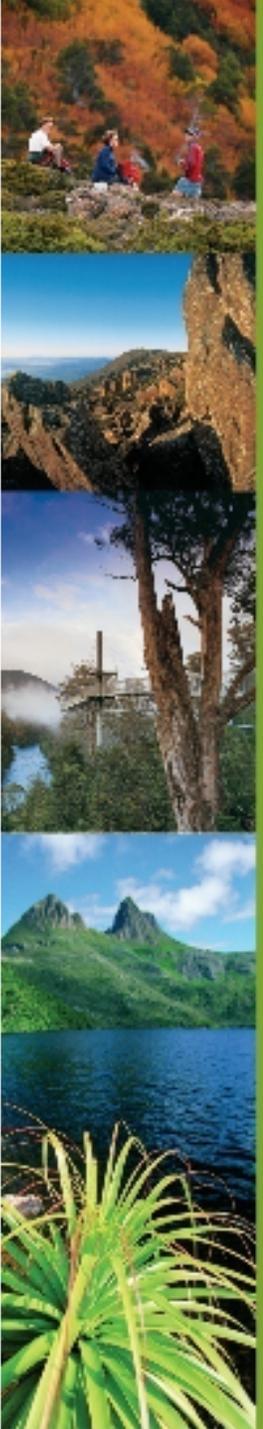
Road Map for Ecotourism Certification

Directions for Ecotourism Certification

Recognition that destinations are more in common than we think.

- The notion that each destination requires a unique certification scheme is largely false.
- Regional modifications will often be minor.



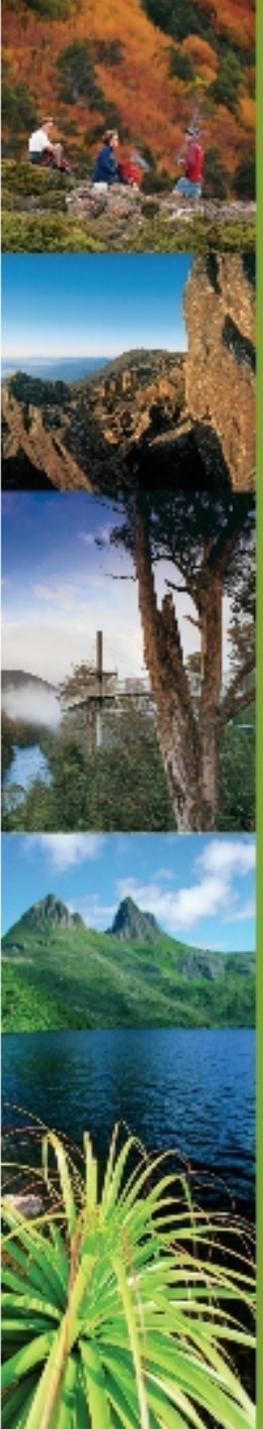


Road Map for Ecotourism Certification

Directions for Ecotourism Certification

Focus should be on Licensing successful schemes to other nations

- Why re-invent the wheel?
 - Modify for local conditions (often less modification than imagined);
 - Provide nations with autonomy over their own scheme – but maintain licensing quality control;
 - Strength in numbers – mutual benefits
- 

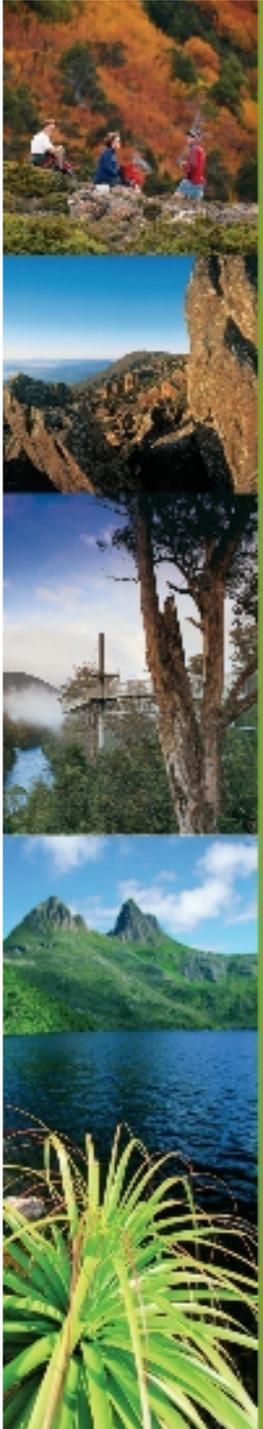


Road Map for Ecotourism Certification

Directions for Ecotourism Certification

Focus on actions not numbers

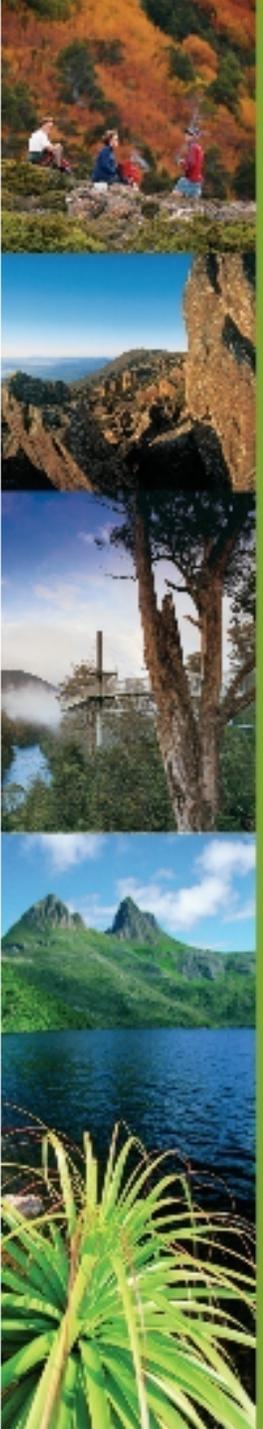
- Benchmarking and performance monitoring is complex, confusing and high maintenance. If it requires consultants it is also expensive.
 - If equipment manufacturers are exceeding industry benchmarks is it necessary to have operators also monitoring and benchmarking their performance?
 - Some parameters (eg potable water quality, sewage treatment plants) must be measured – this is a different matter.
- 



Road Map for Ecotourism Certification

Directions for Ecotourism Certification

- Certification should focus on allowing operators to direct scarce resources into good practices.
 - If operators adopt best practices won't the benchmarking numbers look after themselves?
 - In simple terms, should tourism operators be focussed on reading electricity meters or serving guests?
- 



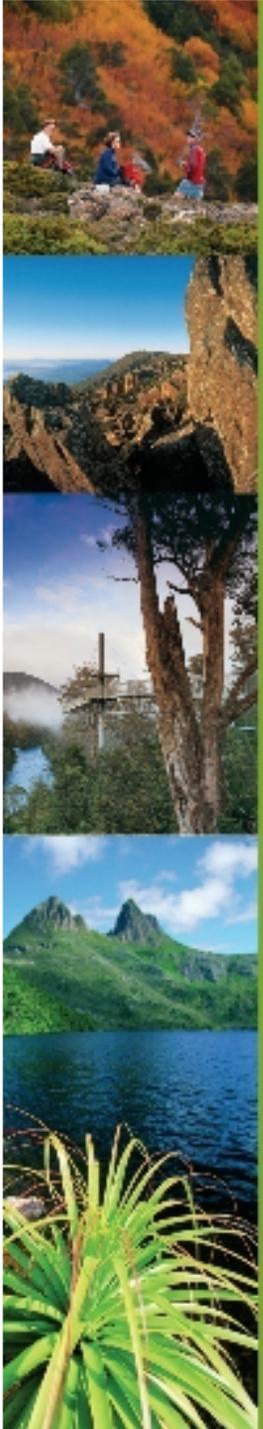
Road Map for Ecotourism Certification

Directions for Ecotourism Certification

Recognition that best practice doesn't always require high technology

- In this global environment access to technology is pretty universal, but the cost of technology is often prohibitive.
- In developing economies though the cost of labour is affordable – many excellent environmental and social outcomes can be achieved through application of labour instead of technology.
- Certification schemes must make allowance for labour intensive alternatives



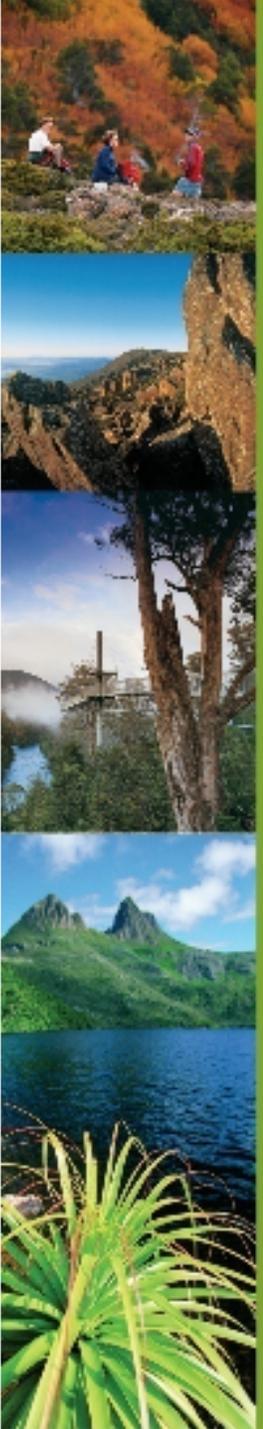


Road Map for Ecotourism

Conclusion

- Ecotourism has new energy and relevance – driven partially by the debate and concern over Climate Change.
- Ecotourism and sustainable tourism are not interchangeable – and to attempt to interchange them is bad for ecotourism.
- Ecotourism is an excellent option for emerging destinations.
- Protection of the ecotourism ‘brand’ and credibility can be assisted through certification programs



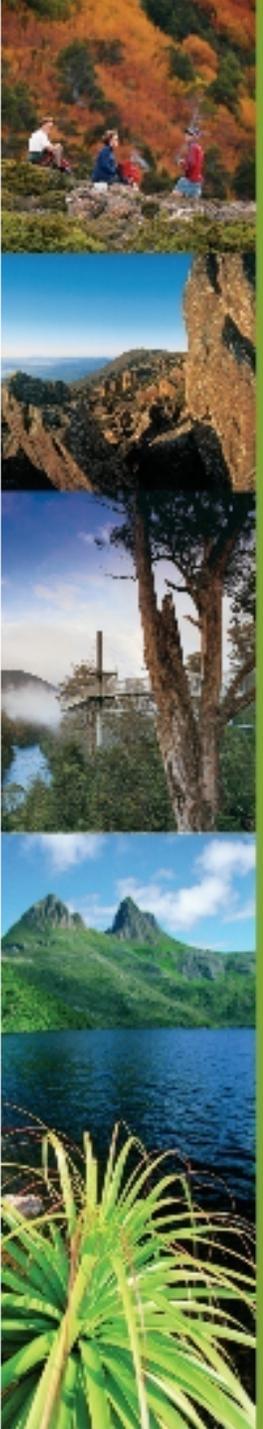


Road Map for Ecotourism

Conclusion

- I believe the primary focus with ecotourism certification should be on adopting best practice and always pushing the boundaries of best practice. It should not be on measuring and benchmarking – leave that for others.
- If operators adopt best practice the numbers will look after themselves.





Thankyou

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