



Sustainable Regions Executive Summary

Airlie Beach | Mackay Region | North Stradbroke Island | Winton

Prepared by
EC3
EVALUATE COMMUNICATE EVOLVE

Sustainable Regions for Queensland Executive Summary

Executive Summary

In responding to global concern over climate change, Queensland is moving to become a world-leading 'guilt-free' destination. Tourism Queensland is working towards building sustainable destinations and supporting global best practice in tourism through its Sustainable Regions program. The Sustainable Regions program starts at ground zero, working with regions and their tourism operators and communities to determine their current performance and then identify and implement actions needed to ensure ongoing sustainable tourism development.

This Final Report signifies the conclusion of the Sustainable Regions pilot program. The pilot program was delivered in five regions – Airlie Beach, Magnetic Island, North Stradbroke Island, Pioneer Valley / Cape Hillsborough and Winton. EC3 Global, working with the Working Group for Cleaner Production at the University of Queensland, managed the delivery of the program in four of these regions (excluding Magnetic Island).

The key steps in the Sustainable Regions pilot program were:

- i. Form an operator cluster of up to 20 tourism businesses committed to completing steps 1 – 4 of the ecoBiz program (including baseline assessment, site audits, opportunities checklists and action plan);
- ii. Use the ecoBiz tool to undertake baseline assessments and operator site audits to identify opportunities to improve sustainability of participating businesses;
- iii. Conduct a regional audit and sustainability health check on the region which assesses current initiatives, management and reporting of sustainability outcomes;
- iv. Conduct a stakeholder workshop with the regional cluster to identify and discuss regional and individual operator opportunities, and
- v. Prepare an action plan for the region with short and long term actions to be implemented by a variety of regional stakeholders including Council, Regional Tourism Organisation, industry bodies and work with participants to develop operator-specific action plans.

Sustainable Tourism Operators

The Sustainable Regions program has been developed to assist individual tourism operators to become more sustainable through cost-effective measures. There are a range of initiatives that Queensland tourism operators can engage in to improve the sustainability of their operations. In the four regions coordinated by EC3 Global and the University of Queensland ecoBiz facilitators a total of 49 operators participated. Ranging from accommodation providers, to attractions, tour operators and service providers such as bakeries and cafés each operator joined the Sustainable Regions programs with different challenges but a common goal – to progress along the pathway to sustainability.

Sustainable Regions Vision:

“For Queensland to be **recognised internationally and domestically as a sustainable tourism destination**, where the very assets that attract visitors to the region are managed for the enjoyment of future generations”



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The Wins

The Sustainable Regions program was an ambitious initiative to encourage businesses at various stages along the pathway to sustainability to work together to improve their businesses, their region and the reputation of Queensland as a 'sustainable tourism' destination. The pilot phase of the program should be considered a resounding success, with some measurable wins, some lessons, a clear plan for the future and agreed next steps. Just some of the outcomes from the pilot phase include:

- ✓ Almost 50 Queensland tourism businesses have made a commitment and progressed along the pathway to sustainability and have a **plan to reduce their combined carbon footprint by 1,173.31 tonnes** of CO₂-e, the equivalent of 273 cars off the road for a year;
- ✓ **Carbon Footprints** have been completed for 19 businesses, 9 operators are on their way to becoming ecoBiz partners and an additional 26 operators have the potential to be recognised through the ecoBiz 'Climate Smart Cluster Program' and gain recognition for their actions;
- ✓ The Winton Shire Council has been successful in its application to form an ecoBiz '**Climate Smart Cluster Program**' which will include the 13 Sustainable Regions participants;
- ✓ **Clusters** have been formed in each of the four areas supported by the Regional Tourism Organisations and Councils to deliver innovative visitor education, promotion and operator engagement programs including the 'Winton Jump-Up' and a refresh and expansion of 'Caring for Straddie';
- ✓ Significant improvements have been made to the **ecoBiz tool** to better meet the needs of the tourism industry including revised templates and forms specifically for Strata-Title properties; and
- ✓ Operators and clusters have invested in new **green initiatives** as a result of the program including:
 - The **Stradbroke Island Bakery** purchased a new fan-forced oven predicted to save over \$26,000 in LPG costs and pay for itself in 2.5 years;
 - Businesses at the **Abel Point Marina** at Airlie Beach joined forces to plan and fund a joint recycling program for cardboard and co-mingled waste including a training program for staff coordinated by the local Charter Boat Association;
 - The **Big Red Cat** ferry service to North Stradbroke Island has already reduced its energy bill by 35% through changes to its timetable – the equivalent of taking 181 cars off the road, and is now looking at ways to further improve through recycling and visitor education;
 - **Cape Hillsborough Resort** aims to reduce energy use associated with their hot water systems by 75%. By converting their six gas fired hot water systems with four heat pump systems it is predicted they will save almost \$9,000 from their current energy bill, with a capital cost of \$15,000 the heat pumps will pay for themselves within 5.2 years at peak tariff or 20 months at off peak rate.

STEP #1

Make a commitment

49 tourism operators have made the first step

STEP #2

Measure and assess

28 tourism operators have completed a baseline assessment, of which 13 partially fulfilled the ecoBiz requirements

STEP #3

Get recognised

18 tourism operators could become / renew as an 'ecoBiz partner'. 9 of these are on their way and the remaining have opted for 'cluster' status

STEP #4

Invest in green technology

14 operators have either already invested or plan to invest in significant green technology following the program

STEP #5

Offset

3 operators are considering offsetting a total of 175.6 tonnes

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- Customers at **Fishes at the Point** on North Stradbroke Island can rest easy knowing that the oil used to cook their meal will later be filtered and reused in the boat that catches the fish! Along with recycling their food waste at a community farm, this means 128 cubic metres of waste will be diverted from landfill and a reduction of 45.5 tonnes in CO2-e will be made. Investing in a heat exchanger that creates hot water from unwanted compressor heat will reduce both the heating and cooling bills by up to 25%.

Planned Actions

In just six (6) months the Sustainable Regions Pilot Program has achieved a great deal. Beyond what has already been completed, the operators, Councils, Regional Tourism Organisations and local partners have a number of exciting initiatives planned. Outlined below is a summary from the operator and regional action plans:

Table A: Planned Sustainability Initiatives for Queensland Tourism Operators

Measures Recommended to Sustainable Regions Participants

General

- Educating owners, staff and visitors on sustainable practice

Energy / GHG

- Replacing gas hot water systems with heat pump systems
- Heat recovery from cool room compressor to heat hot water
- Installing solar panels to generate renewable power
- Replacing inefficient air conditioners and ensuring regular maintenance and cleaning of existing systems (especially in high salt environments)
- Reducing the temperature settings of air conditioners
- Ensuring screen savers have been removed from computers and that all equipment is operating on 'energy saving' settings
- Replacing inefficient gas ovens with efficient fan forced gas ovens
- Purchasing electricity from renewable energy sources such as solar, wind or hydro (Green Power)
- Offsetting carbon emissions from vehicles through green fleet
- Installing insulation
- Installing energy efficient lights/ removal of bulbs in over lit areas
- Ensuring all drafts and air leaks from buildings have been sealed
- Replacing refrigeration seals
- Encouraging greater ownership of electricity use by installing sub-meters

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- Collecting consumption information to calculate more accurate carbon footprints
- Training for commercial kitchen staff on energy efficient cooking practices

Water

- Installing water tanks and using high pressure hoses for vehicle washing
- Installing low flow restrictors on taps and water efficient shower roses
- Implementing leaks reporting program

Waste

- Working with suppliers to reduce packaging waste, ensure packaging is recyclable and made from recycled products e.g. bulk, return packing, reusable containers
- Reducing food waste through portion sizes and menu changes
- Reducing plastic waste through collapsible water bladders and offering branded reusable water bottles i.e. 'disposable water bottle free zones'
- Using recycled paper and stationary in office
- Recycling print cartridges or refill
- Co-mingled waste collection – including training and monitoring of staff and careful placement of colour coded bins or bags and signage
- Including waste management in staff induction
- Inviting staff to input ideas for waste management
- Reviewing chemicals used and suppliers to ensure purchased locally, ecologically friendly and packaging is bulk and recyclable
- Shredding paper for recycling
- Sending food, garden waste and shredded paper to a community farm
- Replacing wax coated or polystyrene/plastic cups with biodegradable or reusable alternatives
- Reviewing brochure production and consider electronic options
- Submission of waste survey to council and supporting the clusters efforts to find solution to accessing a viable co-mingled waste collection for businesses

Waste-water

- Installation of improved effluent treatment systems on vessels
- Investigation to explore option of using bio-cycle water on vegetable and herb farm

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Sustainable Tourism Regions – Short Term Actions

Airlie Beach

1. Community Education and Involvement in Sustainability through Community Events
2. Waste Recycling for Strata-titled Accommodation Operators
3. Community and Other Business Recycling Initiatives



North Stradbroke Island

1. Develop a Strategic Tourism Plan for the Redlands
2. Product Development and Marketing to Address Seasonality
3. Community and commercial recycling
4. Caring for Straddie Initiative



All Regions

1. Engage businesses and the community in Sustainability Committee / Cluster (supported by Council or Regional Tourism Organisation)
2. Business and community education and awareness raising



Pioneer Valley / Cape Hillsborough

1. Sustainability Policy for Mackay Regional Council
2. Align with existing GBRMPA and Landcare Initiatives
3. Identify Sectoral Partnerships
4. Carbon Footprinting of Council Facilities
5. Visitor Education and Awareness



Winton

1. Winton Jump-Up Program
2. Energy audits of Council facilities
3. "Adopt-a-tree" tourism initiative
4. Increase community pride through education

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Next Steps

The pilot stage of the Sustainable Regions program will come to a close with Tourism Queensland coordinating a number of events in the five regions early in 2010. The aim of these events is to recognise the participants in the program and create the momentum needed to continue the program. The Sustainable Regions Program is the first step in a three-step 'integrated approach to Sustainable Clusters' being recommended by EC3 Global (see Figure A). The integrated approach recognises that 'bottom-up' initiatives such as those identified through the operator and regional action plans need to meet the 'top down' marketing and communications initiatives of the Councils and Regional Tourism Organisations reflected in their Corporate and Strategic Plans. That is, while you can deliver some outstanding projects and initiatives on the ground, the cluster programs rely on consumer marketing and communications to be sustainable.

It is recommended that the next step (Step 2) in the process is a linkage of the cluster initiatives such as 'Caring for Straddie', the 'Winton Jump-Up' and the Mackay and Airlie Beach Cluster programs to the RTO and Council Regional communication and marketing program. This will require further consultation with both the RTO and Council and will lead to the development of a Communications Plan (Step 3). Further work is likely to be required in each region to consolidate the work in Step 1 through facilitation of the first cluster meetings, development of 'business rules' for the ongoing management of the clusters and assistance to create the brand linkages.

Figure A: Integrated approach to Sustainable Clusters



Brand Linkages

- Link to Tourism Queensland and Regional Tourism Organisation
- Establish Identity and Story
- Supported by - Brand rules and creative tools

Communications Plan

- Linking regional tourism plans and the broader community

Sustainable Regions

- Clusters with a Starter Kit
- Onsite education and action e.g. recycling, energy and education posters
- Supported by - Operator cluster facilitation including cluster workshops, business rules and links to brand and marketing.