

Comparing Environmental Benchmarking and Certification Programs

Factsheet 4.2: Comparing Environmental Benchmarking and Certification Programs

Certification programs typically provide a logo to those companies that exceed (or claim to exceed) a baseline standard. The logo primarily allows these businesses or destinations to demonstrate their environmental and sustainability credentials to consumers.

Certification programs include [ecolabelling](#) programs, [benchmarking](#) schemes, programs for which membership criteria are set and a membership fee is paid in return for use of a logo, [self assessed accreditation](#) programs, and [third party audited](#) and externally-verified initiatives.

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), more than 60 voluntary "green" certification programs were developed for the tourism industry between 1992 and 2002. The majority of these programs (78%) are based in Europe, 17% are based outside of Europe, and 5% have an international focus. In 2008, there are an estimated 500 programs for carbon pollution measurement, management and mitigation¹.

With so many programs on the market, operators have difficulty in differentiating between the programs and identifying which program can best meet their needs. This factsheet provides an overview of environmental benchmarking and/or certification programs available to Queensland tourism operators.

What to Look Out For

Environmental Benchmarking and Certification Programs are useful tools in responding to sustainability. High-quality programs make operators accountable for their environmental impact, set minimum standards/goals for businesses to achieve, and enable an operator to monitor their environmental performance over time.

In assessing the value of an environmental or benchmarking program, there are key criteria to consider. The following questions should be asked of an environmental program before becoming involved:

1. Does the program have the ability to demonstrate the impacts of being certified on the business (e.g. impact on triple bottom-line)?
2. Is the program online or paper-based?
3. Is the program multi-sectoral program i.e. There are different standards developed for the different sectors within the travel and tourism industry?
4. Does the program encourage best practice, continual improvement and offer strategies for improvement?
5. Is the program available to operators internationally, nationally or only within Queensland?
6. Are the areas that are assessed under the program publicly available?
7. Does the program offer frequent access to data and the ability to monitor progress?
8. Does the certifying body offer technical assistance in data entry and ongoing support?
9. Do the program criteria comply with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (as released by the Partnership for GSTC in October 2008)?
10. Does the program offer third party verification of environmental data to ensure validity and compliance with the Standard?

¹ UN Foundation, 2008

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11. Does the program provide benchmarking and comparison of an operator's results against similar businesses
12. Which phases of the lifecycle of carbon does the program assess? Scope 1/ Scope 2 / Scope 3? (At a minimum a program should measure scope 1 emissions)
13. Do the certification body and the program itself undergo periodic reviews?
14. How many members does the program have?
15. What percentage of the certification body's budget is put towards marketing of the program?
16. What is the price and validity period of the program
17. Is the program based on the best international science to comply with international and national guidelines? E.g. ISO14064/14001, IPCC Guidelines for GHG Inventories, United Nations Environment Program definitions of Scope 1, 2 & 3 emissions, Australian National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Technical Guidelines
18. Does the certification body regularly verify compliance with the program's Standard and do they have strict standards on what happens in a situation of non-compliance?
19. Does all the information provided by an operator remain confidential?
20. Does the program have documented minimum standards that must be achieved to gain certification?

Existing Programs

Provided below is an overview of Benchmarking and Certification Programs, that focus on operation not construction, available to Queensland tourism operators. Each program below has been asked to answer the questions above and their answers are available on the [Tourism Queensland](#) website.

Audubon Green Leaf Eco-Rating Program

This program began in 1998 to meet the lodging industry's desire to provide quality guest services, while minimizing their impact on the environment. Through a comprehensive and credible method for assessing the extent of the environmental measures undertaken, participating facilities can reduce environmentally-related costs and gain a marketing advantage and achieve a rating of one to five 'Green Leafs'.

The Audubon Green Leaf™ is currently offered to hotels, motels and resorts, conference centres, inns and B&Bs and tourist destinations. By earning a rating in the Audubon Green Leaf™ Program, confirms a commitment to water quality, water conservation, waste minimization, resource conservation, and energy efficiency.

Carbon Reduction Institute No CO2 / Low CO2

The Carbon Reduction Institute offers two different business certification levels depending on whether you wish to become a carbon neutral or a low carbon certified business:

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- 1 A **NoCO2** certified business is completely carbon neutral and has accounted for, reduced and offset its total operational greenhouse gas emissions as well as the carbon emissions embodied in the products it sells and uses. NoCO2 certified businesses can sell carbon neutral products and services.
- 2 A **LowCO2** certified business is one that has reduced and offset a percentage of its total carbon emissions. The percentage reduction is displayed in the LowCO2 certification logo so that consumers are aware of the carbon emissions reduction initiated by the company. A LowCO2 certified business sets a goal to become carbon neutral over a certain period of time. LowCO2 certified businesses offer their products with a 'Make It Carbon Neutral' choice.

Climate Action Australia Certification Program

Launched in 2009, the **Climate Action Certification Program** is designed for tourism hotels, attractions, tours, transport, restaurants, travel agents, tourism commissions and industry bodies. This certification scheme will use an online questionnaire with instant help desk, and automatic filtering so businesses only deal with relevant questions.

Three levels of certification are available in this program:

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

★ ★ ★ ★ **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.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ **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 is carbon neutral.

ecoBiz

ecoBiz is the Environmental Protection Agency's partnership program to assist businesses identify efficiencies in waste, water and energy for financial and environmental benefits. The **ecoBiz** program defines resource costs in terms of units of production, to assist businesses to prioritise areas for improvement, and enable accurate calculations of payback periods.

The five steps to **ecoBiz** are:

1. **Application form**
2. **Baseline assessment** – assess your resource consumption
3. **Site survey** - conduct a 'walk through' of your business to identify opportunities for improvement
4. **Action Plan** - shows the eco-efficiency improvements to be made Implementation - of Action Plan items
5. **Re-assessment** - re-assess your resource consumption to demonstrate savings

Once a business has completed the ecoBiz process, they are permitted to use the ecoBiz symbol on communication and promotional material. The EPA promotes operators' achievements. Another feature of the program is a rebate scheme, designed to assist with the capital cost of projects that demonstrate a high level of innovation, increase recycling, and conserve water and energy. Rebate assistance of up to \$150,000, limited to a maximum of 30 percent of capital equipment costs, is available on completion of projects identified in the ecoBiz Action Plan.

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Ecotourism Australia ECO Certification Program

This certification is only suitable for nature based and ecotourism products. Nature based tourism is defined as: "*ecologically sustainable tourism with primary focus on experiencing natural areas*"² whereas ecotourism products goes a step further by including the encouragement of environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation. It is only applicable for tours, accommodation and attraction.

A self- assessment process, once the information is provided it is reviewed and a third party independent audit is conducted. The obtained certification is valid for three year and contains the use of a logo which can be used publicly by the business. Fees vary according to the operator's annual turnover.

EarthCheck Assessed

EarthCheck Assessed is an entry level on-line program which provides a detailed framework of sustainable business practices, plus a proven CO2 emissions benchmarking tool to measure emission levels and benchmark against peer organisations. EarthCheck Assessed includes a sustainability 'health check' which provides a quantitative assessment of the business's environmental performance in the areas of:

- Energy Consumption
- CO2 Emissions
- Water Consumption
- Waste Production

EarthCheck Assessed meets international standards for Carbon Footprint calculations and adheres to Green House Gas protocols of reporting. EarthCheck Assessed is a global program.

EarthCheck Certified

EarthCheck Certified is a worldwide Benchmarking, Certification and performance improvement system adapted from the United Nations Agenda 21 principles for sustainable tourism development.

The program consists of two phases: Benchmarking and Certification; and each stage is rewarded with a logo which can be publicly displayed. EarthCheck Certified helps tourism businesses to measure their current performance and to compare it to global baseline and best practice performance standards. The program is applicable to all sectors and firm sizes within the tourism industry.

Green Key

The GreenKey® is awarded to companies within tourism: hotels, youth hostels, conference- and holiday centres, campsites, holiday houses, leisure facilities and restaurants. To obtain the GreenKey the company has to fulfill a list of environmental requirements. These requirements are contained in a number of criteria. Besides pure environmental demands, the criteria include demands on policy and action plans.

The Green Key criteria cover three main areas: environmental management, communication and training, and technical criteria. The criteria that focus on environmental management ensure meaningful activities related to the single establishment through an environmental policy, specific goals, and action plans. The aim of the communication and training criteria is involve of staff, guests, and suppliers in the environmental work. The technical criteria ensure that each facility fulfils a large number of specific technical requirements on efficiency in energy and water consumption, waste separation, use of chemical, etc.

² See [Ecotourism Australia](#)

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Green Star Accreditation

Green STAR Accreditation is an additional endorsement to a current AAA Tourism STAR Rating. Green STAR Accreditation doesn't change a STAR Rating - but gives special recognition for commitment to reducing the environmental impacts of a business.

To be awarded a Green STAR your property must achieve adequate points against a set of practical environmental criteria. These criteria include:

- **Energy efficiency** - eg: energy efficient light bulbs and fixtures, zoned heating and cooling, signage reminding guests to turn off lights and air-conditioning, correct seals on doors and windows and natural ventilation available.
- **Waste minimisation** - eg: recycling program, towel re-use option, optional newspapers, printer cartridge recycling, linen no change options.
- **Water management** - eg: dual flush toilets, environmentally friendly cleaning products, unbleached paper products, no leaking taps, water efficient dishwasher, use of recycled water on gardens.

Green STAR involves a self assessment followed by a desktop audit conducted by AAA Tourism. On successful completion of the audit, an Assessor then conducts a Green STAR audit.

NABERS

NABERS is a national initiative managed by the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change. NABERS is a tool for measuring and benchmarking the environmental performance of existing Australian buildings, incorporating the Australian Building Greenhouse Rating for offices. NABERS provides a suite of tools to rate a range of environmental impact categories of hotel, office and residential buildings, with retail tools under development.

NABERS ratings are based on actual data related to the performance of a premise over the last 12 months. Benchmarks for comparison are provided and a rating score reflecting performance relative to peers is calculated.

Under the NABERS program, energy and water consumption is measured on a scale of one to five stars, reflecting the performance of the building relative to the market, from least efficient (one star) to best practice (five stars). Two and a half stars is the current market average.

Applicants must have an [Accredited Assessor](#) complete their assessment in order to promote their rating and use the NABERS trademark. The cost of an accredited rating will depend on the type of rating being undertaken, the size of the building, and the difficulty of gathering the data.

NABERS will soon be offering a self-assessment Rating calculator via their website.

Sustainable Tourism Eco-certification Program (STEP)

The Sustainable Tourism Eco-certification Program™ (STEP) is a voluntary certification initiative developed by Sustainable Travel International for tourism providers. The system measures travel companies' environmental, economic, and social-cultural impacts, helping them to minimize their negative impacts and enhance their positive impacts. STEP also provides consumers with an easy way to identify tourism providers who are committed to the triple bottom line of respect for the environment, social responsibility and economic profitability.

STI's STEP is educational in nature, practical as a measurement, management and marketing tool, and applicable to businesses of all sizes, including newcomers to sustainability. STEP is designed to help tourism operators around the world support environmental conservation and protect cultural heritage while promoting cross-cultural understanding and economic development.