

QUEENSLAND ECOTOURISM INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Best practice development guidelines

Ecotourism facilities on national parks

DECEMBER 2020



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Contents

Introduction	5
How to use the Best Practice Guidelines.....	7
How to use Part A: Information for preparing a Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan.	7
How to use Part B: Information for applicants developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal	8
Legislation and policy	9
Appropriate nature and scale of ecotourism facilities on national parks.....	11
Part A: Information for preparing a Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan	12
Site suitability	12
How to undertake a Site Suitability Assessment	12
Applying the best practice criteria to the preparation of a Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan ..	16
Part B: Information for preparing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal	21
Applying the best practice criteria to the development of a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal	21
Best practice criteria for a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal	22
Case studies	29
Case study 1: Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP), Queensland	30
Case study 2: Quarantine Station, New South Wales.....	31
Case study 3: Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef, Western Australia	32
Case study 4: Wilsons Promontory Wilderness Retreats, Victoria	33
Case study 5: Minjerribah Camping, North Stradbroke Island, Queensland	34
Case study 6: Scenic Rim Trail, Queensland	35
More information	36
References.....	36



Introduction

The Queensland Government is working towards its vision to make Queensland a world leader in ecotourism. Already a popular tourist destination, Queensland boasts more than 1300 protected areas on state land, including national parks, conservation parks, state forests and marine parks along with a network of private protected areas, such as nature refuges, that conserve a diverse array of species and ecosystems. Queensland also has a rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage and five World Heritage Areas.

The Queensland Government and the tourism industry are working in partnership to capitalise on this unique competitive advantage and provide world-class recreation and tourism experiences to visitors. A balanced approach between tourism and conservation is essential to ensure that only appropriately designed and managed, low impact, ecotourism facilities are allowed on national parks. Ecotourism facilities on national parks must be conducted with an understanding of how the national park functions as an ecosystem, and how a facility will conserve the cultural and heritage values, benefit Traditional Owners and community; improve the visitor experience, and be integrated into the park.

The *Best Practice Ecotourism Development Guidelines* (Best Practice Guidelines), together with the Queensland Ecotourism Investment Opportunities—Implementation Framework (Implementation Framework), assist proponents to conceptualise and develop ecotourism facilities and experiences in national parks that are in the public interest, are ecologically sustainable and ensure, to the greatest possible extent, the preservation of the land's natural condition and protection of its cultural values and resources.

To apply for an ecotourism facility under section 35 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (NC Act), proponents must use these Best Practice Guidelines. They provide background information and tools to direct proponents through the legislative requirements, best practice ecotourism development criteria (best practice criteria), and merit criteria that must be addressed as a first step in achieving best practice for ecotourism in Queensland's national parks.

Best practice in ecotourism can be achieved by developing an ecotourism operation that is integrated into the national park in a way that meets the best practice criteria, for example by taking into account:

- site values and constraints and awareness of park management priorities
- site layout that aligns with cleared or disturbed areas
- site design that blends into the landscape
- construction methods that have minimal impact
- energy, water and waste systems that promote the conservation of resources
- well-informed visitor interpretation and activities that raise awareness of the critical importance of national parks
- long term community and Traditional Owner partnerships, cultural awareness and shared economic benefits.

The Department of Environment and Science (the department) uses a two-stage process for assessing new or expanded ecotourism proposals in national parks.

These stages are:

- Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan
- Stage 2 Detailed Proposal

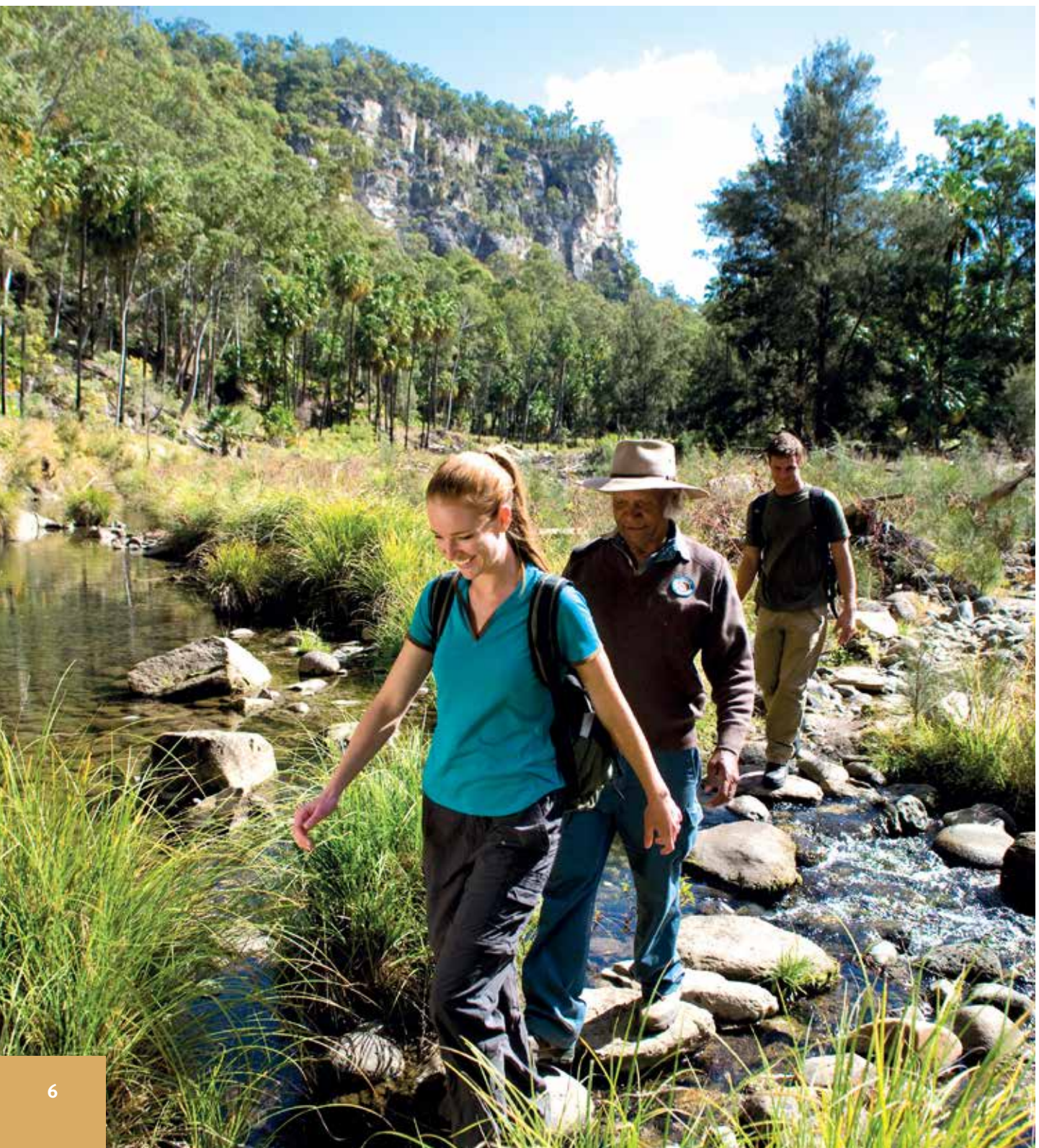
The Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan is intended to limit the investment of time and resources required by proponents in outlining a preliminary ecotourism concept. The completed Preliminary Concept Plan should provide enough information to enable the department to assess and determine if the ecotourism concept may be acceptable for the proposed site, and whether the proponent has the experience and capacity to finance and run the proposed ecotourism operation.

The Stage 2 Detailed Proposal requires significantly more investment, investigation and technical information from the proponent. It will often include discussions and negotiations between the department and the proponent, as well as consultation with Traditional Owners, the community and other key stakeholders, for example local government or the Commonwealth Government.

The requirements and contents of a Detailed Proposal will be determined on a case-by-case basis, informed by the assessment of Stage 1.

The Best Practice Guidelines and Implementation Framework apply to ecotourism facility proposals in the protected area estate which includes national parks, conservation parks, Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land and indigenous joint management areas on national parks.

For the purpose of the Best Practice Guidelines and Implementation Framework, references to national parks will encompass these other tenures unless stated otherwise.



Trail walking with Traditional Owner guide Fred Conway © Tourism and Events Queensland

How to use the Best Practice Guidelines

To assist proponents, the Best Practice Guidelines are divided into two parts:

- Part A: Information for preparing a Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan
- Part B: Information for developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal.

These Best Practice Guidelines also include an introductory section outlining relevant legislative and policy considerations, and six case studies of Australian ecotourism operations that demonstrate different elements of best practice in ecotourism.

The guidelines were developed in line with the statutory provisions for ecotourism facilities outlined in the NC Act and should be read in conjunction with the Implementation Framework.

How to use Part A: Information for preparing a Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan

The department must ensure that all ecotourism facilities and related activities authorised on national parks are in the public interest, are ecologically sustainable, and to the greatest possible extent, preserve the land's natural condition and protect its cultural values and resources, as per section 35 of the NC Act. The best practice criteria are a key element in evaluating Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plans to ensure the proposed ecotourism operation meets these legislative requirements.

Proponents are required to complete the following elements for their Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan:

- **Step 1:** Gather relevant information for the site—for example information about natural and cultural values from park management plans, and the native title status—and review this information in the context of the legislative requirements, these best practice guidelines, and the implementation framework. This step should include a pre-lodgement meeting with the department to ensure all relevant site information has been gathered. A pre-lodgement template will be provided to encourage proponents to submit as much information as possible to allow early consideration and discussion of the project vision and features at the pre-lodgement meeting

- **Step 2:** Undertake a Site Suitability Assessment (using the self-assessment tool in Part A) to assist in determining whether the nature and scale of the proposed ecotourism facility is potentially suitable for the site. This assessment must be presented in the Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan.
- **Step 3:** Request a Preliminary Concept Plan template and complete your Preliminary Concept Plan in consideration of the legislative requirements, merit criteria and six best practice criteria; as well as sub-criteria and sample questions provided in these Best Practice Guidelines.

Assessment of a Preliminary Concept Plan

- **Step 4:** After receiving a Preliminary Concept Plan, the department will evaluate the proposal and may request further information to assist in the process. The outcome of the evaluation will be communicated to the proponent and there will be an opportunity to discuss the outcome with departmental representatives. Pending the successful outcome of the evaluation, the department may issue a Request for a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal.

How to use Part B: Information for applicants developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal

- Step 5:** If a proponent is invited to progress to a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal, as a minimum they will need to provide the department with a more informed and detailed consideration of the six best practice criteria across the entire lifecycle of the proposed ecotourism facility and operation.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the two stages of assessment of ecotourism proposals, and a more detailed flowchart is provided in the Implementation Framework.

Figure 4 (p 18) provides an overview of the lifecycle components of an ecotourism operation. Refer to Table 4 (p 19) for the best practice criteria and sub-criteria considerations applicable to a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal covering each phase of the design, construction, operation, renewal, decommissioning and rehabilitation of a proposed ecotourism facility. Proponents will need to select which sub-criteria considerations are most relevant to their proposal. These sub-criteria considerations will determine the type of details a proponent must incorporate into the Detailed Proposal. Any commitments made by proponents during this stage would need to be implemented for the lifecycle of the project.

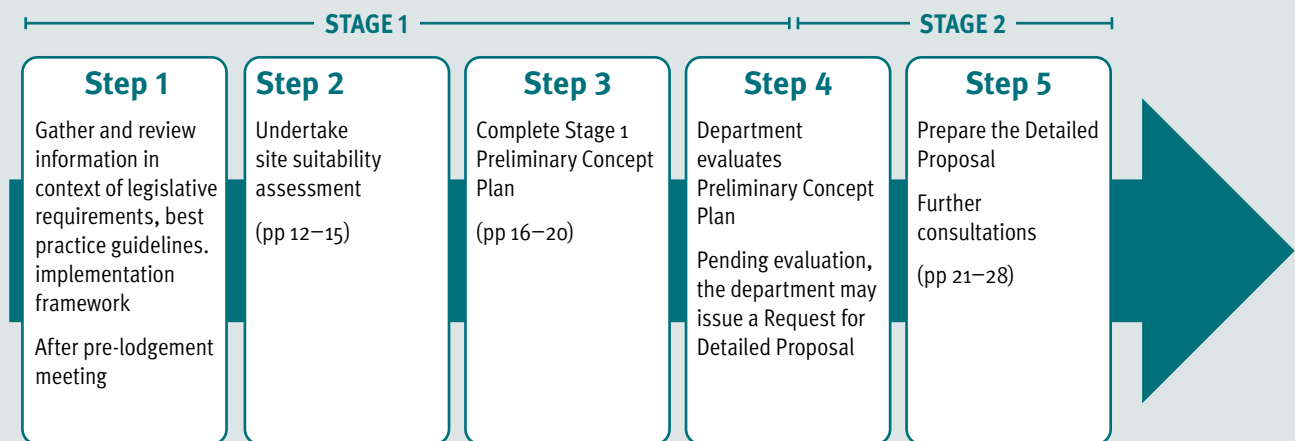


Figure 1: Overview of the two-stage assessment process

Legislation and policy

The object of the NC Act is the conservation of nature while allowing for the involvement of Traditional Owners in the management of protected areas in which they have an interest under Aboriginal tradition or Island custom. Conservation is defined as the protection and maintenance of nature while allowing for its ecologically sustainable use. Section 17 of the NC Act states that:

A national park is to be managed to provide opportunities for ecotourism in a way consistent with the area's natural and cultural resources and values.

The NC Act has several specific provisions for considering ecotourism facility proposals on protected areas, notably, section 35 of the NC Act states that the Chief Executive of the department may grant a lease, agreement, licence, permit or other authority for an ecotourism facility if satisfied that use of the land:

- will be in the public interest
- is ecologically sustainable
- will provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the preservation of the land's natural condition and protection of cultural values and resources.

These legislative terms are considered in further detail in the Implementation Framework.

Key elements of the Implementation Framework and Best Practice Guidelines

The department will manage, evaluate and authorise ecotourism proposals in accordance with:

- legislative requirements under the NC Act
- best practice criteria
- merit criteria.

These Best Practice Guidelines outline the best practice criteria, while the Implementation Framework provides further details on the statutory criteria and the merit

Guiding principles

Principle 1: Ecotourism facilities on national parks are located, designed and managed sensitively to ensure compatibility with the natural and cultural values of the park.

Principle 2: Ecotourism facilities on national parks should offer unique or innovative visitor experiences.

Principle 3: Diverse experiences and settings are promoted.

Principle 4: Facilities will provide for the public interest.

Principle 5: Successful ecotourism operations are characterised by commercial operators committed to environmental best practice.

Principle 6: The authorisation of ecotourism facilities will be consistent and transparent while protecting the intellectual property of the proponent.

Principle 7: The type and duration of authorities granted will recognise the level of investment and rate of return on investment.

Best practice criteria

Best practice criteria 1: The ecotourism operation is compatible with the natural and cultural values of the national park.

Best practice criteria 2: The ecotourism operation design and layout fits within the character of the national park.

Best practice criteria 3: The ecotourism operation minimises its footprint on the site.

Best practice criteria 4: The ecotourism operation contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park.

Best practice criteria 5: The ecotourism operation engages, involves and benefits Traditional Owners and local communities.

Best practice criteria 6: The ecotourism operation encourages visitors to appreciate and want to protect and conserve the national park.

Best practice criteria

The best practice criteria are intended to assist proponents in demonstrating that the proposed ecotourism operation meets the requirements of the NC Act.

Application of the best practice criteria should ensure that an ecotourism operation will contribute to and be compatible with the national park. Best practice ecotourism operations should provide benefits across each of the six best practice criteria.

In preparing the Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan, proponents should consider each criterion as is

appropriate to the scale, nature and site of their individual ecotourism concept. Further guidance on this is provided on page 13.

The best practice criteria are described in Table 1, with the key considerations (italicised) for an ecotourism operation to achieve social, environmental and economic sustainability outcomes.

Table 3 (p 19) expands on the best practice criteria by outlining sub-criteria and sample questions that focus on the conceptual or planning phase for Stage 1 (pp 13–17) and Table 4 provides the best practice criteria for Stage 2 (p 22).

Table 1: Best practice criteria; and key considerations

No	Best practice criteria	Values
1	The ecotourism operation is compatible with the natural and cultural values of the national park. <i>The natural and cultural values of the site are known and unique elements highlighted. Any constraints or stressors on the system are identified and development and activities on sensitive and vulnerable areas are avoided.</i>	Environmental
2	The ecotourism operation design and layout fits within the character of the national park. <i>The design and layout of the ecotourism operation is in harmony with the landscape and natural features. The design and layout maximise the ecotourism facility's sustainability and visitor comfort by considering factors such as aspect and orientation. The site is landscaped with endemic native species.</i>	Environmental
3	The ecotourism operation minimises its footprint on the site. <i>Impacts on the site from construction and operation of the ecotourism facility are minimized, for example, a site layout that aligns with existing cleared or disturbed areas. The ecotourism operation promotes water and energy conservation and a 'leave no trace' philosophy is applied in relation to visitor activity. Waste and pollution is minimised.</i>	Environmental
4	The ecotourism operation contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park. <i>The long-term viability of the national park is supported by the ecotourism operation working in partnership with park management and local groups to, for example, rehabilitate disturbed areas of the national park and educate staff and visitors regarding intrinsic park values.</i>	Environmental Social Economic
5	The ecotourism operation engages, involves and benefits Traditional Owners and local communities. <i>The importance of the national park to the cultural and economic priorities of local communities is identified and long term partnerships pursued. Traditional Owners are involved in the interpretation and experience of Indigenous cultural resources.</i>	Social Economic
6	The ecotourism operation encourages visitors to appreciate and want to protect and conserve the national park. <i>The natural and cultural values of the site are appropriately interpreted and visitor activities and experiences support the protection and conservation of these values.</i>	Social Economic Environmental

Appropriate nature and scale of ecotourism facilities on national parks

Any new or expanded ecotourism facilities must align with the Queensland Government’s directives regarding the appropriate nature and scale of ecotourism facilities on national parks.

As specified in the Implementation Framework, ecotourism facilities must be appropriately designed and managed, low-impact, and consistent with the NC Act definition of an ecotourism facility.

The NC Act requires that an ecotourism facility does not significantly change the land’s natural condition or adversely affect its cultural resources and values. Examples of facilities that are inconsistent with this definition are golf courses, amusement parks, casinos, and high-rise resorts.

Examples of ecotourism facilities that are of a nature and scale consistent with the NC Act definition range from relatively small, simple structures, such as

safari tents or walkers’ huts to larger campgrounds or eco-cabins.

The department encourages the adaptive re-use of redundant or under-utilised departmental buildings such as old homesteads, workers quarters and lighthouses to provide memorable, unique national park experiences with a point of difference.

Figure 2 illustrates the types of ecotourism facilities considered to be of an appropriate nature and scale for Queensland’s national parks. Refer also to the case studies section for more information.

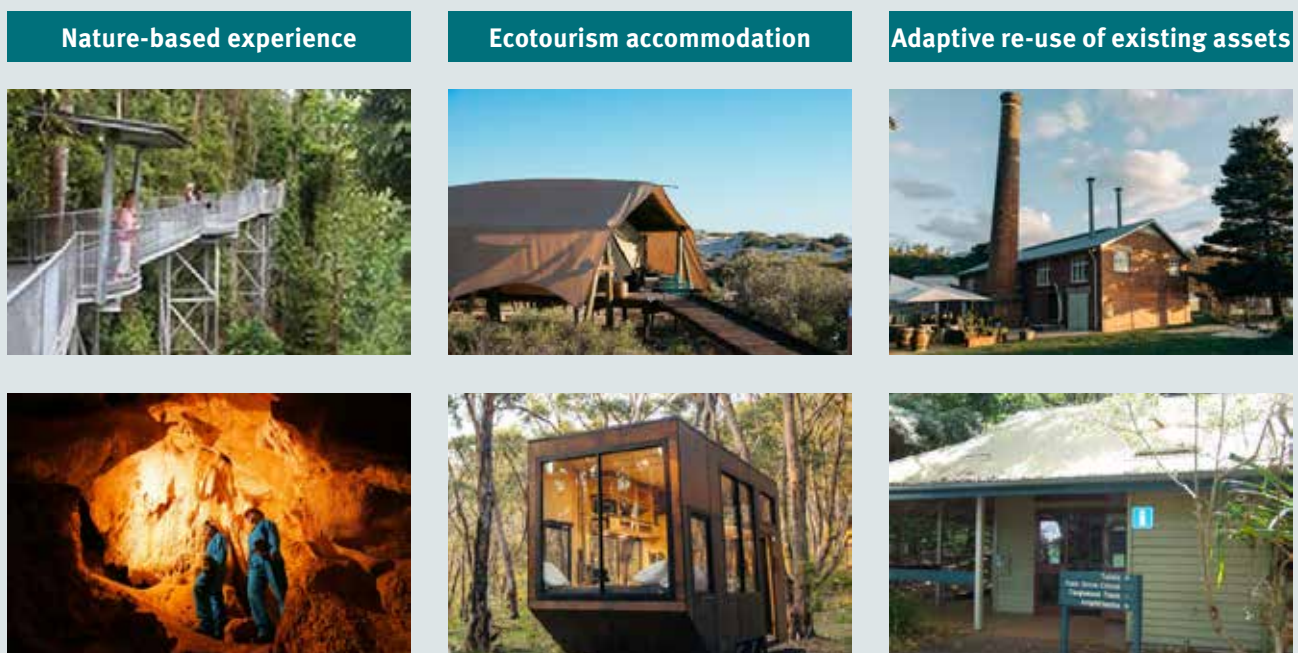


Image credits top from left to right: Mamu Canopy Walk image courtesy of Queensland Government, Sal Salis Wilderness Retreat image courtesy of Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef and Moreton Island Lighthouse image courtesy of Queensland Government.

Image credits bottom from left to right: Capricorn Caves image courtesy of Tourism and Events Queensland, Mobile ecocabins image courtesy of CABN, Q Station Sydney Harbor National Park image courtesy of Q Station.

Figure 2: Ecotourism facilities of a nature and scale considered appropriate for national parks

Part A: Information for preparing a Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan

Site suitability

To assist proponents in staying within the intent of section 35 of the NC Act, the Best Practice Guidelines provide a basic self-assessment tool (Site Suitability Assessment) to test a site's suitability for an ecotourism operation. Proponents need to undertake a Site Suitability Assessment as part of Stage 1. To ensure a proposed concept does not materially change between Stage 1 and a Stage 2, the self-assessment also provides a useful reference point for the nature and scale of the proposed ecotourism facility.

Proponents are encouraged to identify sites that are suited to their concept's proposed level of development and activity. The Site Suitability Assessment will help proponents gauge whether the proposal is likely to have an acceptable level of change or impact on the site and be considered suitable. Impacts that are considered unacceptable in a national park context include significant modification to the landscape and/or unacceptable impact on ecosystems, wildlife and cultural resources.

The location of an ecotourism facility, combined with the nature and scale of ecotourism activities to be undertaken at the site, are important decisions to be made. These decisions will influence the likely level of impact of the proposed ecotourism operation on the site and whether net beneficial social, environmental and economic outcomes are achievable.

How to undertake a Site Suitability Assessment

A Site Suitability Assessment is undertaken in three steps:

1. determine the likely nature and scale of the proposed ecotourism operation (small, medium or large)
2. determine the current landscape classification value of the proposed site (on a scale ranging from totally natural through to not natural)
3. use the Site Suitability Matrix (Figure 3) to gauge the potential suitability of the concept for the site.

Further explanation is provided below.

Step 1: Determine nature and scale of the proposed ecotourism operation

Ecotourism operations may be small in scale and nature and only accommodate a limited number of participants, for example safari tents, or medium to large facilities such as medium scale eco-cabins or larger camping grounds. There will be several factors that determine the nature and scale of an ecotourism operation including:

- size and layout of the ecotourism facility and area of land required for the entire ecotourism operation
- visitation numbers and the types of activities or experiences offered to visitors
- impact of the ecotourism facility, its operations, and activities on the values of the site
- access and infrastructure requirements (if any) such as service and access roads or connection to utilities.

As a broad guide to determining scale, proponents should consider that small-scale ecotourism operations may require a small area of land to accommodate a limited number of visitors. These ecotourism operations may be accessible using existing walking tracks and access routes and provide on-site water and electricity through water tanks and solar power. As ecotourism operations increase in scale they also increase in size and complexity, resource use and site impacts.

Step 2: Determine landscape classification value of proposed site

The naturalness of landscapes varies considerably across national parks. In some sites there is significant evidence of previous use and human modification of the environment, i.e. not natural.

At other sites the natural condition may appear relatively unaltered, i.e. very natural. Understanding the naturalness of a proposed site may provide an insight into its ecological sensitivity to some forms of development and activity.

The department’s Landscape Classification System (LCS) for Visitor Management Operational Policy is designed to assist in determining a site’s ‘naturalness’ or landscape class.

The LCS provides the standard classification system for characterising the biophysical, social and management attributes of sites and areas in national parks.

The LCS assesses the naturalness of landscape settings from a visitor use and management perspective and can be used to gauge the level of change that will result from increasing infrastructure and visitation.

Table 2 provides an abridged summary of the LCS, with the full version of the policy available from the department’s website or you may request a copy for the pre-lodgment meeting. Proponents should consider the proposed site of the ecotourism operation in terms of the LCS and determine at an indicative level, the landscape classification value (or values) that most likely applies.

The evaluation of the landscape class should be undertaken for the proposed site and the surrounds, not for the whole national park.

Table 2: Landscape classification system for visitor management (abridged)

Totally natural (LCS level 1–2)	Very natural (LCS level 3–4)	Somewhat natural (LCS level 5–6)	Not natural (LCS level 7–9)
VISITOR IMPACTS			
No impact on natural condition	Minor to moderate impacts evident Recovery to pre-impact conditions unlikely Impacts persist along walking tracks Local native fauna behaviour is unaffected by use	Physical change as a result of visitor use obvious, widespread and permanent Significant portion of native wildlife/fish life displaced Vegetation altered Native fauna behaviour and population changes are obvious The natural condition is unlikely to recover	Physical change as a result of visitor use obvious, widespread and permanent. Vegetation significantly altered Native fauna populations significantly changed due to human interaction Natural condition non-existent
GENERAL LANDSCAPE APPEARANCE			
A wild, totally natural site or landscape	A very natural site or landscape/seascape Modifications are semi-permanent, small/minor and restricted to a few dispersed areas	A somewhat natural appearing site or landscape/seascape Natural elements dominate over other elements in the landscape/seascape	Managed parkland with small to large areas of open space Built structures and other modifications to the natural landscape/seascape dominate
EVIDENCE OF OTHER PEOPLE			
No evidence of human habitation, visitation use Communication with other parties extremely rare	Some permanent evidence and modifications along main routes	Apparent evidence of use (i.e. sights, sounds and smells) pervades main routes and their surrounds	Widespread, all-encompassing and permanent Site dominated by human habitation

Step 3: Apply findings to the site suitability matrix

Apply the findings from Steps 1 and 2 to the site suitability matrix provided in Figure 3 to identify where a proposed ecotourism operation may be positioned based on nature, scale and landscape values.

Proponents will need to present an understanding of the potential benefits, challenges, impacts or risks that may be associated with a proposed ecotourism operation on the specific site in the Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan template. Proposals for ecotourism operations in all settings need to demonstrate a genuine commitment to best practice sustainability outcomes for the site.

Proponents should note that, irrespective of whether a proposed ecotourism operation is self-assessed as potentially 'acceptable' using the site suitability matrix, suitability will be confirmed through the formal Stage 1 evaluation process.

The concept's site suitability will be further assessed through the Stage 2 Detailed Proposal phase. This may also involve detailed impact assessment of matters such as heritage, flora and fauna, as well as requiring significant public consultation.



Image: Scenic Rim Trail developed in partnership with the Queensland Government with Spicer's, includes budget camping options, and high-end eco-cabins | © Queensland Government

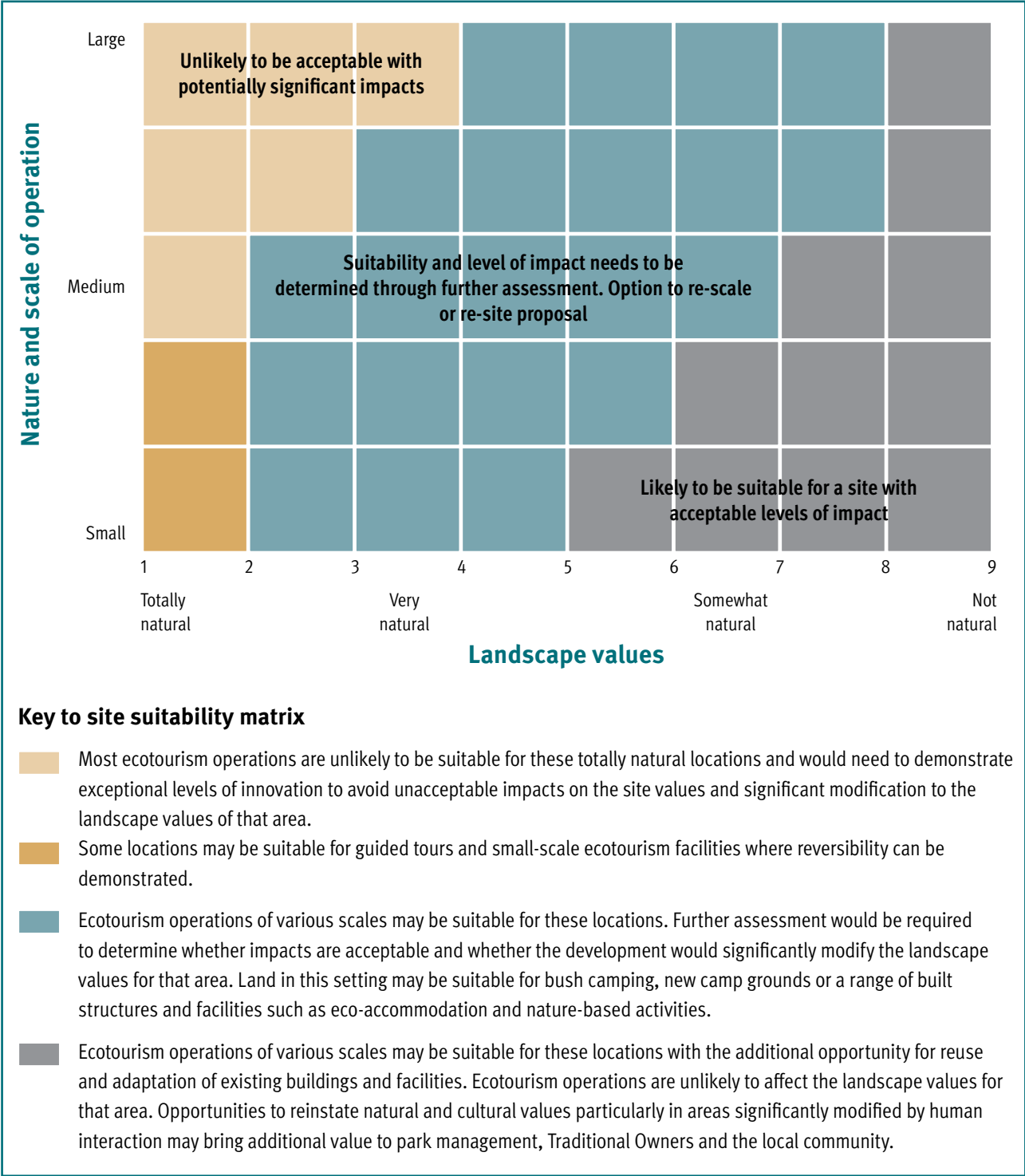


Figure 3: Site suitability matrix

Applying the best practice criteria to the preparation of a Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan

After completing a Site Suitability Assessment, proponents will need to address all six best practice criteria in the Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan template to the extent that is relevant to the proposed site and the nature and scale of the proposed ecotourism operation.

The best practice criteria, sub-criteria and sample questions outlined in Table 3 represent the key factors that Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plans for proposed ecotourism operations need to address. The sub-criteria are relevant to the concept planning stage of a proposal and the sample questions may

assist proponents in refining and developing the ecotourism concept. The sample questions are not intended to be an exhaustive list of examples and proponents are encouraged to be innovative in the response to the best practice criteria. Some questions may require more detailed understanding of the site and ecotourism concept than proponents may have available at this stage.

The sample questions have been included to encourage whole of project planning at an early stage.

Figure 3: Best practice criteria for Stage 1

Note: The sample questions outlined in this table are intended to assist proponents in responding to the best practice criteria. Commensurate with the nature and scale of development only certain questions apply. Proponents are not required to respond to each of these sample questions, but are encouraged to consider them as guides for practical application of the best practice criteria.

BEST PRACTICE CRITERIA:	
1. The ecotourism operation is compatible with the natural and cultural values of the national park	
1.1 Protecting and conserving natural and cultural values	
SAMPLE QUESTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the natural values of the national park, taking into consideration listed and protected species and habitat? • What are the cultural values of the national park, taking into consideration cultural heritage, artefacts and non-physical values? • What is the capacity of natural and cultural values to sustain development impacts and visitor activity over time? Are there any specific constraints or vulnerabilities? (e.g. refer to any management plans for the park if available) • Would construction and operation of the ecotourism facility impact the national park's natural values? Could impacts be adequately mitigated? Would it be possible to achieve no net impact or no degradation to natural values of the site? • Would strategies be required to protect sensitive habitat areas and/or avoid activity in vulnerable or highly valued areas?
1.2 Site access and suitability	
SAMPLE QUESTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the ecotourism operation utilise previously disturbed areas where possible? • Would access to the site be provided using existing roads and tracks where possible? • Would the development and activity be located on lower value habitat as opposed to high conservation areas? • Would the ecotourism facility and associated activity avoid high conservation areas, riparian zones and narrow and steep slopes? • Would there be a clear demarcation of the development footprint, including appropriate barriers to limit activity to stabilised and designated areas?

BEST PRACTICE CRITERIA:

2. The ecotourism operation design and layout fits within the character of the national park

2.1 Site layout is compatible with the landscape

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- In planning site layout, would landscape features predominate and would the ecotourism facility blend into the surrounding environment?
- Would the ecotourism facility design and layout maximise use of landscape features and natural geological formations of the site?
- Would natural sights, sounds and scents prevail throughout the ecotourism facility?
- Would consideration be given to either dispersing or concentrating the ecotourism facility to achieve minimal environmental impact?
- Would consideration be given to the microclimate of the site and how factors such as aspect, exposure, elevation and wind can be utilised to maximise visitor comfort without depending on mechanical systems?
- Would the layout and design be appropriate with regard to any risk of bushfire or flooding at the site?

2.2 Ecotourism facility design and appearance is compatible with the landscape and local conditions

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- Would the ecotourism facility use aspect and orientation to provide insulation, ventilation, passive heating and cooling?
- Would landscape features be reflected in design through scale, form, colour and texture of the ecotourism facility?
- Would the architectural style and materials of the ecotourism facility be reflective of aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture (if appropriate)?
- Would the overarching design philosophy of the ecotourism facility be based on climate sensitive design and a strong 'sense of place'?
- Would the ecotourism facility be designed so that it does not dominate landscape features? Have 'biomimicry' concepts been utilised such as tree-house style accommodation, or cabins the colour and shape of surrounding boulders?
- Would future landscaping use local species which require minimal maintenance and are essentially self-sustaining?
- Would the ecotourism facility aim for smaller is better, optimising use and flexibility of spaces so building size and associated resources required for construction are minimised?
- Would sustainability features such as recycled materials, efficient water and energy systems and waste minimisation practices be visible throughout the site?
- Would adaptive re-use of existing structures be considered to reflect part of the story of the site?



BEST PRACTICE CRITERIA:

3. The ecotourism operation minimises its footprint on the site practice criteria

3.1 Ecotourism facility construction methods are low impact

- SAMPLE QUESTIONS**
- Would disturbance and clearing of habitat during construction be minimised through best practice technologies for environmentally and culturally sensitive areas?
 - Would the development footprint be contained during construction, avoiding impacts on surrounding areas and habitat?
 - Would consideration be given to modular, pre-fabricated and easy to assemble construction technologies to reduce construction related impacts?
 - Would locally sourced and lightweight yet durable materials and construction practices be considered?
 - Would renewable, durable, non-toxic and environmentally sustainable materials be used throughout the ecotourism facility?
 - Would strategies be developed to limit pollutants and toxins brought on site during construction?
 - Would waste streams be managed during construction through re-use of on-site materials that are within the development zone (e.g. soils, vegetation, fabricated materials)?

3.2 Energy conservation practices are employed

- SAMPLE QUESTIONS**
- Would an energy efficiency strategy be developed for the construction and operation of the ecotourism facility—minimising energy requirements, using energy efficient appliances and generating on-site renewable energy?
 - Would consideration be given to use of passive energy technologies for natural heating and cooling through the design of the ecotourism facility (e.g. natural ventilation, shading and solar heating)?
 - Would integration of energy awareness, conservation and efficiency practices into the operation of the ecotourism facility and visitor experience be considered?
 - Would the use of renewable energy technologies that are best suited to the site and have whole of lifecycle benefits be considered (e.g. no major adverse impacts from installation or high maintenance costs)?

3.2 Water conservation practices are employed

- SAMPLE QUESTIONS**
- Would water required by the site be minimised for the needs of visitors and ecotourism facility operation?
 - Would water sensitive urban design practices such as rainwater tanks, onsite recycling of water/wastewater, swales and bio-retention basins for water treatment and water efficient appliances be considered?
 - Would strategies to protect surface and groundwater through best practice approaches to managing pollutants and debris in stormwater run-off and sediment transport be considered, e.g. have bio-filtration technologies and sediment traps been considered?
 - Would water awareness, conservation and efficiency practices be integrated into the operation of the ecotourism facility and visitor experience?

3.4 Waste generation is minimised

- SAMPLE QUESTIONS**
- Would a 'towards zero waste strategy' be viable for the ecotourism operation with the ultimate objective that nothing is brought into the ecotourism facility that is not durable, biodegradable or recyclable?
 - Would the ecotourism facility 'avoid, reduce, reuse or recycle'—identifying activities and services associated with the ecotourism facility that can generate less waste?
 - Would the ecotourism operator partner with the local community to implement best practice waste separation and management including composting of biodegradable waste (if appropriate)?
 - Would the ecotourism facility provide on-site waste management facilities for processing reusable and recyclable resources and ensuring hazardous wastes are not released into the environment?
 - Would the ecotourism facility propose to manage sewerage and effluent to best practice standards with no impacts on the site?

BEST PRACTICE CRITERIA:**4. The ecotourism operation contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park****4.1 Contributions to on-site rehabilitation and restoration**

- SAMPLE QUESTIONS**
- Would strategies be developed to rehabilitate previously impacted and degraded areas, and areas currently landscaped with exotic species where appropriate?
 - Would strategies be developed to progressively rehabilitate areas impacted by the construction and operation of the ecotourism facility?
 - Would land be available for resting and rehabilitating heavy use or impacted areas over time?

4.2 Contributions to park management

- SAMPLE QUESTIONS**
- Would there be a commitment to partnering with park management and Traditional Owners to deliver shared park outcomes, e.g. assistance with preserving and restoring impacted areas of the natural or protected area, research and monitoring, attracting specialist studies, working with volunteers and providing funding?
 - Would there be a commitment to undertaking or contributing to research/monitoring of 'acceptable limits of change' for near threatened, vulnerable and endangered species impacted by visitation and the ecotourism facility operations?
 - Would ecotourism operation management undertake self-monitoring for continuous improvement in minimising impact of operations using environmental management systems that comply with ISO14001?

BEST PRACTICE CRITERIA:**5. The ecotourism operation engages, involves and benefits Traditional Owners and local communities criteria****5.1 Sharing ecotourism benefits with Traditional Owners**

- SAMPLE QUESTIONS**
- Would Traditional Owner endorsement and participation in the ecotourism operation be sought including guidance and involvement in visitor interpretation and experiences?
 - Would the cultural heritage and values of the site be respected through sensitive visitor interpretative experiences and partnerships to contribute to the long term preservation and protection measures of these values?
 - Would the proposed ecotourism operation be compatible with cultural uses of the site?

5.2 Sharing ecotourism benefits with neighbouring communities

- SAMPLE QUESTIONS**
- Would an ongoing dialogue with neighbouring residents and community organisations be undertaken to understand their attitudes to the site and impacts (positive and negative) and to inform continual improvement?
 - Would the proposed ecotourism operation fit with existing uses of the area (and adjacent areas) such as recreation, water production, landscape amenity, grazing and residential?
 - Would the ecotourism operation be compatible with existing tourism activities in the national park and community use of the site?
 - Would the ecotourism operation provide for improved community access and enjoyment of the national park?

5.3 Local and regional economic development

- SAMPLE QUESTIONS**
- Would economic benefits for surrounding communities be identified, e.g. local procurement of food and materials, construction, repairs and maintenance, Traditional Owners and local community arts and craft for purchase by visitors (if appropriate)?
 - Would employment and training opportunities be provided for the local community?
 - Would partnering with the community to maximise the benefit from tourism including shared activities around festivals and events, and tours of local business/industry be undertaken?

BEST PRACTICE CRITERIA:

6. The ecotourism operation encourages visitors to appreciate and want to protect and conserve the national park practice criteria

6.1 Appropriate interpretation of natural and cultural values

- SAMPLE QUESTONS**
- Would well-researched information on the site be shared with visitors through appropriately qualified guides?
 - Would the special or unique environmental and cultural features of the site be identified and be built into the visitor experience through responsible tourism practices, e.g. wildlife viewing that doesn't interfere with foraging or breeding patterns?
 - Would there be any development of educational opportunities and programs relating to aesthetic, scientific and cultural values of the site using interpretative techniques such as face-to-face cultural education by Traditional Owners or active visitor involvement in site restoration?
 - What strategies will be employed to inform visitors of Traditional Owner customs and expectations regarding use of the site particularly in relation to cultural resources?

6.2 Sensitive and responsible visitor experiences and activities criteria

- SAMPLE QUESTONS**
- Would strategies be in place to prevent deliberate and regular intrusion of wildlife habitat?
 - Has consideration been given to activity zones and buffers to protect sensitive habitat areas and manage visitor use and overcrowding of sites?
 - Would staff awareness and education on the natural and cultural values of the site be provided and appropriate visitor activities to support conservation outcomes?
-

Part B: Information for preparing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal

Applying the best practice criteria to the development of a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal

The information contained in this section applies primarily to Stage 2 proponents. However, Stage 1 proponents may also wish to consider the information to refine their concept.

A whole of project or lifecycle approach is required when developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal. Potentially negative impacts associated with each stage of a proposed project should be identified and documented at the outset in order to ‘design out’ those impacts.

Ecotourism operations on national parks should also be designed, constructed and operated to ‘leave no trace’, should decommissioning and rehabilitation be required. Ecotourism operations should enhance the long term viability of the national park and minimise impacts through each phase in the development lifecycle.

The lifecycle components of an ecotourism operation are summarised in Figure 4. The best practice criteria will assist to inform planning and works activities associated with each phase in the development of the ecotourism proposal. Proponents will need to submit sustainable environmental solutions in terms

of each phase in the lifecycle and provide supporting documentation for those solutions.

Table 4 presents the best practice criteria, sub-criteria, and sub-criteria considerations relevant to a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal. To demonstrate genuine commitment to best practice design, construction, operation, and decommissioning as part of the Detailed Proposal, proponents will need to select the sub-criteria considerations that are relevant to the nature, scale, and site of their proposed ecotourism operation. As operations increase in size, complexity and potential impacts, a broader range of sub-criteria considerations will be relevant. The lifecycle components are incorporated in the table to enable considerations to be selected according to each phase of the project lifecycle.

In developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal, proponents should review all criteria relevant to each phase of the project (starting with design, and then moving on to construction and commissioning, etc) and identify which sub-criteria considerations are most relevant to the proposed ecotourism operation.

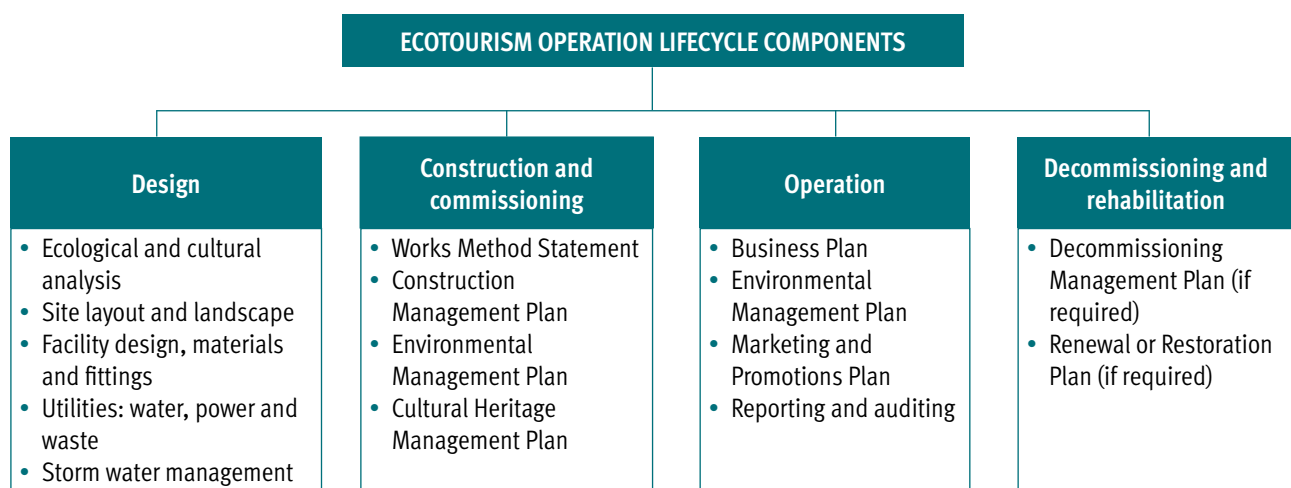


Figure 4: Ecotourism operation lifecycle components

Best practice criteria for a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal

Table 4: Best practice criteria and considerations for Stage 2 Detailed Proposal

Best practice criteria 1: The ecotourism operation is compatible with the natural and cultural.		
<i>The natural and cultural values of the site are known and unique elements highlighted. Any constraints or stressors on the system are identified, and development and activities on sensitive and vulnerable areas are avoided.</i>		
1.1 Protecting and conserving natural and cultural values		
1.1.1	What are the natural values of the national park taking into consideration listed and protected species and habitat? What are the unique natural features of the national park that may be incorporated into the visitor experience offered by the ecotourism operation?	Design
1.1.2	What are the cultural values of the national park taking into consideration cultural heritage, artefacts and non-physical values? What are the unique cultural features of the national park that may be incorporated into the visitor experience offered by the ecotourism operation?	Design
1.1.3	What is the capacity of natural and cultural values to sustain development impacts and visitor activity over time? Are there any specific constraints or vulnerabilities? Refer to any management plans for the park if available.	Design
1.1.4	Would the construction and operation of the ecotourism facility and associated activities be expected to impact the national park on natural and/or cultural values? Could impacts be adequately mitigated? Would it be possible to achieve no net impact or no degradation to natural and/or cultural values of the site?	Design
1.1.5	Would strategies be required to protect sensitive habitat areas and/or would activity be avoided in vulnerable or highly valued areas?	Design
1.1.6	Would the ecotourism operation result in cumulative impacts on the natural and cultural values of the site? Have impacts from existing use and development been taken into consideration?	Design
1.1.7	Would baseline ecological values be documented in an Environmental Management System with monitoring and reporting of any changes to the site to park management?	Operation
1.1.8	Would previously impacted landforms be restored and areas with exotic weed species rehabilitated?	Operation
1.1.9	Would the decommissioning of the ecotourism facility and rehabilitation of the site leave no trace of negative impacts to ecosystems, biodiversity and water resources?	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
1.1.10	Would the latest climate variability predictions for the region be reviewed? Would an assessment be undertaken to determine whether considerations such as additional buffers for protection of wildlife are required?	Design
1.2 Site access and suitability		
1.2.1	Would the ecotourism operation use previously disturbed areas where possible?	Design
1.2.2	Would access to the site be provided using existing roads and tracks where possible?	Design
1.2.3	Would an effort be made to locate development and activity on lower value habitat as opposed to high conservation value areas?	Design
1.2.4	Would the ecotourism operation avoid high conservation value areas, riparian zones and narrow and steep slopes etc?	Design
1.2.5	Would there be an intention to clearly demarcate the development footprint, including erecting appropriate barriers to limit activity to stabilised and designated areas?	Design

Best practice criteria 2: The ecotourism operation design and layout fits within the character of the national park.

The design and layout of the ecotourism operation is in harmony with the landscape and natural features. The design and layout maximise ecotourism facility sustainability and visitor comfort by considering factors such as aspect and orientation. The site is landscaped with endemic native species.

2.1 Site layout is compatible with the landscape

2.1.1	In planning site layout would landscape features predominate and would the ecotourism facility blend into the surrounding environment?	Design
2.1.2	Would the ecotourism facility design and layout maximise use of landscape features and natural geological formations of the site?	Design
2.1.3	Would natural sights, sounds and scents prevail throughout the ecotourism facility?	Design
2.1.4	Would consideration be given to either dispersing or concentrating the ecotourism facility to achieve minimal environmental impact?	Design
2.1.5	Would consideration be given to the microclimate of the site and how factors such as aspect, exposure, elevation and wind can be utilised to maximise visitor comfort without depending on mechanical systems?	Design

2.2 Ecotourism facility design and appearance is compatible with the landscape and local conditions

2.2.1	Would the overarching design philosophy of the ecotourism facility be based on climate-sensitive design and a strong 'sense of place'?	Design
2.2.2	Would aspect and orientation be used to provide insulation, ventilation, and passive heating and cooling?	Design
2.2.3	Would landscape features be reflected in design through scale, form, colour and texture of the ecotourism facility?	Design
2.2.4	Would the architectural style and materials of the ecotourism facility reflect aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, if appropriate?	Design
2.2.5	Would the ecotourism facility be designed so that it does not dominate landscape features? Would 'biomimicry' concepts be utilised such as tree-house style accommodation or cabins the colour and shape of surrounding boulders?	Design
2.2.6	Would local species which require minimal maintenance and are essentially self-sustaining be used for landscaping?	Design
2.2.7	Would the ecotourism facility aim for smaller is better, optimising use and flexibility of spaces so building size and associated resources required for construction are minimised?	Design
2.2.8	Would sustainability features such as recycling, efficient water and energy systems and waste minimisation practices be visible and/or promoted to visitors throughout the site?	Design
2.2.9	Would adaptive re-use of existing structures be considered to reflect part of the story of the site?	Design
2.2.10	Would external lighting be limited to minimum requirements to, for example, illuminate pathways for orientation and safety but not act as spotlights or floodlights into the surrounding environment? Would movement sensors and portable lights be used to avoid excess lighting?	Design

Best practice criteria 3: The ecotourism operation minimises its footprint on the site.

Impacts on the site from construction and operation of the ecotourism facility are minimised. The ecotourism operation promotes water and energy conservation and a 'leave no trace' philosophy is applied in relation to visitor activity. Waste and pollution is minimise.

3.1 Ecotourism facility construction methods are low impact

3.1.1	Would disturbance and clearing of habitat during construction be minimised through use of best practice technologies for environmentally and culturally sensitive areas?	Construction and commissioning
3.1.2	Would strategies be developed to contain the development footprint during construction with impacts on surrounding areas and habitat avoided?	Construction and commissioning
3.1.3	Would consideration be given to modular, pre-fabricated and easy to assemble construction technologies to reduce construction related impacts?	Design
3.1.4	Would locally sourced and lightweight yet durable materials be considered?	Design
3.1.5	Would renewable, durable, non-toxic and environmentally sustainable materials be used throughout the ecotourism facility?	Design
3.1.6	Would strategies be developed to limit pollutants and toxins brought on site during construction?	Construction and commissioning
3.1.7	Would waste streams be managed during construction through re-use of on-site materials that are within the development zone (e.g. soils, vegetation, fabricated materials)?	Construction and commissioning
3.1.8	Would construction materials and methodologies enable the ecotourism facility to be removed 'without a trace' on completion of the authority term or due to other circumstances?	Design
3.1.9	Would breeding patterns and habitat movements of vulnerable and protected species be respected in construction plan phasing?	Construction and commissioning
3.1.10	Would decommissioning plans be developed and have decommissioning and dismantling methodologies been considered? Has the ecotourism facility been designed to allow for renewal/renovation to achieve best practice standards?	Decommissioning and rehabilitation

3.2 Energy conservation practices are employed

3.2.1	Would energy requirements of the ecotourism facility be minimised?	Design
3.2.2	Would an energy efficiency strategy be developed for the construction and operation of the ecotourism facility—minimising energy requirements, using energy efficient appliances and generating on-site renewable energy?	Design
3.2.3	Would consideration be given to use of passive energy technologies for natural heating and cooling through the design of the ecotourism facility (e.g. natural ventilation, shading and solar heating)?	Design
3.2.4	Would energy awareness, conservation and efficiency practices be integrated into the operation of the ecotourism facility and visitor experience?	Operation
3.2.5	Would renewable energy technologies that are best suited to the site and have whole of lifecycle benefits be considered (e.g. no major adverse impacts from installation or high maintenance costs)?	Design
3.2.6	Would consideration be given to energy minimisation technologies such as energy efficient lighting including zoning, sensor control and smart metering, selecting the highest efficiency rating?	Design
3.2.7	Would on-site transport needs be met through solar -powered or electric vehicles, bus access, bicycle and pedestrian pathways?	Operation
3.2.8	Would an energy conservation plan with measurable targets and monitoring and reporting requirements be included in the Environmental Management System?	Operation
3.2.9	Would log books of vehicle use be kept to allow review and auditing of vehicle use and promotion of continual improvement?	Operation

3.3 Water conservation practices are employed

3.3.1	Would consideration be given to how water can be minimised for the needs of visitors and ecotourism facility operation?	Design
3.3.2	Would water-sensitive urban design practices such as installation of rainwater tanks, onsite recycling of water/wastewater, use of swales and bio- retention basins for water treatment and installation of water-efficient appliances be considered?	Design
3.3.3	Would strategies to protect surface and groundwater through best practice approaches to managing pollutants and debris in stormwater run-off and sediment transport (e.g. bio-filtration technologies and sediment traps) be considered?	Design
3.3.4	Would water awareness, conservation and efficiency practices be integrated into the operation of the ecotourism facility and visitor experience?	Operation

3.3.5	Would water minimisation technologies be employed throughout the ecotourism facility via the installation of water-efficient taps, showers, toilets, dishwashers and washing machines? Would these technologies achieve the highest efficiency ratings?	Design
3.3.6	Would the ecotourism facility collect and treat water required for its operation on site?	Design
3.3.7	Would biological and non-mechanical systems be considered where possible including composting or water-efficient toilets and alternative disinfection systems?	Design
3.3.8	Would a water minimisation plan with measurable targets and monitoring and reporting requirements be developed for inclusion in the facility Environmental Management System?	Operation
3.4 Waste generation is minimised		
3.4.1	Would a 'towards zero waste strategy' be developed for the ecotourism facility with the ultimate objective that nothing is brought into the facility that is not durable, biodegradable or recyclable?	Operation
3.4.2	Would the ecotourism facility and associated activities intend to 'avoid, reduce, reuse or recycle'—identifying activities and services associated with the ecotourism facility that can generate less waste?	Operation
3.4.3	Would the ecotourism operator partner with the local community to implement best practice waste separation and management including composting of biodegradable waste (if appropriate)?	Operation
3.4.4	Would the ecotourism operator provide on-site waste management facilities for processing reusable and recyclable resources, and ensuring hazardous wastes are not released into the environment?	Design
3.4.5	Would there be a strategy to manage sewerage and effluent to best practice standards with no impacts on the site?	Design
3.4.6	Would a waste minimisation plan with measurable targets and monitoring and reporting requirements be developed for inclusion in the facility's Environmental Management System?	Operation
3.4.7	Would there be separation and containment of waste streams to avoid any vermin, odour or spillage?	Operation
3.4.8	Would strategies be considered for re-using and recycling materials and building finishes associated with the ecotourism facility on renewal or dismantling?	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
3.5 On-site hazardous materials are minimised		
3.5.1	Would on-site chemical requirements be minimised through use of non-toxic and biodegradable materials, finishes and cleaning agents wherever possible?	Operation
3.5.2	Would on-site maintenance of grounds and landscaping be minimised through natural landscaping using endemic species?	Operation
3.5.3	Would there be a strategy to avoid herbicides and pesticides through natural control measures and environmentally benign alternatives?	Operation
3.5.4	Would fuel storage techniques reflect best practice approaches with appropriate bunding, level of impermeability, restricted access, signage, spill response and regular monitoring as required?	Operation
3.5.5	Would there be a strategy to monitor soils and ground and surface water on a regular basis for any fuel or chemical contamination for inclusion in the Environmental Management System?	Operation
3.5.6	Would vehicles be maintained off-site?	Operation
3.5.7	On closure and dismantling of the ecotourism facility would fuel and chemical contamination leave no trace of negative impacts to the site?	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
3.6 Noise and air emissions are minimised		
3.6.1	Would power generation, toilet and waste systems employed throughout the ecotourism facility be low emission and low pollutant?	Design
3.6.2	Would dust suppression procedures be in place during construction?	Construction and commissioning
3.6.3	Would services, utilities and maintenance facilities be sound-proofed through use of appropriate material or vegetation buffering? Would these facilities be located away from key habitats, neighbours, accommodation and quiet areas?	Design
3.6.4	Would natural acoustic conditions predominate and would noise levels from site activities be on par with existing background noise?	Design
3.6.5	Would there be an intention to quantify, avoid, reduce and offset greenhouse gas emissions generated through the operation of the ecotourism facility and associated activities?	Operation
3.6.6	Would non-toxic materials and finishes be used in the design of the ecotourism facility to maximise indoor and outdoor air quality?	Design

Best practice criteria 4: The ecotourism operation contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park.

The long-term viability of the national park is supported by the ecotourism operation working in partnership with park management and local groups, for example, rehabilitate disturbed areas of the park and educate staff and visitors regarding intrinsic park values.

4.1 Contributions to on-site rehabilitation and restoration

4.1.1	Where appropriate, would strategies be developed to rehabilitate previously impacted and degraded areas, and areas currently landscaped with exotic species?	Operation
4.1.2	Would strategies be developed to progressively rehabilitate areas impacted by the construction and operation of the ecotourism facility?	Operation
4.1.3	Would there be land available for resting and rehabilitating heavily used or impacted areas over time?	Operation
4.1.4	Would site rehabilitation be included as part of the visitor experience to the site, or as an experience offered specifically to conservation volunteers in partnership with conservation organisations?	Operation

4.2 Contributions to park management

4.2.1	Would the business model of the ecotourism operation be viable such that it would not result in a burden to park management or the government over time, for example, through not meeting environmental conditions?	Design
4.2.2	Would strategies be in place to avoid site mismanagement (or short cutting) over time and ensure that sustainability features of the ecotourism facility design and operation are always maintained to a high standard?	Design
4.2.3	Would there be a commitment to partnering with park management and Traditional Owners to deliver shared park outcomes, e.g. assistance with preserving and restoring impacted areas of the natural or protected area, research and monitoring, attracting specialist studies, working with volunteers and/or providing funding?	Operation
4.2.4	Would there be a commitment to undertaking or contributing to research/monitoring of 'acceptable limits of change' for near threatened, vulnerable and endangered species impacted by the operation?	Operation
4.2.5	Would ecotourism operation management undertake self-monitoring for continuous improvement in minimising impact of operations using environmental management systems that comply with relevant standards?	Operation
4.2.6	In partnership with park management, would a strategy be developed for ongoing management of areas for which the operator took responsibility (i.e. maintenance of designated area, or monitoring of particular vulnerable species) on closure and decommissioning of the ecotourism facility?	Decommissioning and rehabilitation

Best practice criteria 5: The ecotourism operation engages, involves and benefits Traditional Owners and local communities.

The importance of the national park to the cultural and economic priorities of local communities is identified and long-term partnerships pursued. Traditional Owners are involved in the interpretation and experience of Indigenous cultural resources.

5.1 Sharing ecotourism benefits with Traditional Owners

5.1.1	Would there be an intention to seek Traditional Owner endorsement and participation in the ecotourism operation including guidance and involvement in visitor interpretation and experiences, or co-ownership or partnering in the business?	Design
5.1.2	Would the cultural heritage and values of the site be respected through sensitive visitor interpretative experiences and partnerships to contribute to the long-term preservation and protection measures of these values?	Construction and commissioning
5.1.3	Would the proposed ecotourism operation be compatible with cultural uses of the site?	Design
5.1.4	Would a cultural heritage management plan be included in the construction management plan identifying where sacred sites are located and processes for stopping work and re-evaluating sites where features or objects are discovered?	Construction and commissioning
5.1.5	Would the business model for the ecotourism operation provide for partial ownership of some aspects, such as cultural tours, by Traditional Owners?	Design
5.1.6	Would the ecotourism operation attract local schools, researchers and specialist interest groups to raise awareness of the cultural resources and values of the national park and those of Traditional Owners?	Operation
5.1.7	In partnership with the Traditional Owners and park management, is there a strategy for ongoing conservation of cultural heritage items and long-term economic opportunities following closure and decommissioning of the ecotourism facility?	Decommissioning and rehabilitation

5.2 Contributions to park management

5.2.1	Would ongoing dialogue with neighbouring residents and community organisations be undertaken to understand their attitudes to the site and impacts (positive and negative) and promote continual improvement?	Design
5.2.2	Would consideration be given to how the proposed ecotourism operation fits with existing uses of the area such as recreation, water production, landscape amenity, grazing and residential?	Design
5.2.3	Would consideration be given to whether the ecotourism operation is compatible with existing tourism activities in the national park and community use of the site?	Design
5.2.4	Would the ecotourism operation provide for improved community access and enjoyment of national parks?	Design
5.2.5	Would universal design that facilitates access for a range of abilities to the site and surrounds be incorporated?	Design
5.2.6	Would adaptive re-use of existing buildings and structures be considered to reflect and retain part of the story of the site?	Design
5.2.7	Would the ecotourism operation attract local schools, researchers and specialist interest groups to raise awareness of the cultural resources and values of the national park and other local cultures?	Operation
5.2.8	In partnership with the stakeholders and park management, would a strategy for ongoing conservation of cultural heritage items following closure and decommissioning of the ecotourism facility be developed?	Decommissioning and rehabilitation

5.3 Local and regional economic development

5.3.1	Would economic benefits for surrounding communities be identified, e.g. local procurement of food and materials, construction, repairs and maintenance, Traditional Owner arts and craft for purchase by visitors (if appropriate)?	Design
5.3.2	Would employment and training opportunities for the local community be provided?	Operation
5.3.3	Would partnering with the community to maximise the benefit from tourism including shared activities around festivals and events, and tours of local business/industry be undertaken?	Operation
5.3.4	Would the development preclude or obstruct current or future site access to designated easements such as power, telecommunications or water and sewerage (or other designated uses)?	Design

Best practice criteria 6: The ecotourism operation encourages visitors to appreciate and want to protect and conserve the national park. The natural and cultural values of the site are appropriately interpreted and visitor activities and experiences support the protection and conservation of these values.

6.1 Appropriate interpretation of natural and cultural values

6.1.1	Would well-researched information on the site be shared with visitors through appropriately qualified guides?	Operation
6.1.2	Would the special or unique environmental and cultural features of the site be identified and interpreted to build understanding into the visitor experience through responsible tourism practices, e.g. wildlife viewing doesn't interfere with foraging, territorial or breeding patterns?	Design
6.1.3	Would there be any development of educational opportunities and programs relating to aesthetic, scientific and cultural values of the site using interpretative techniques such as face-to-face cultural education by Traditional Owners or active visitor involvement in site restoration?	Operation
6.1.4	Would visitors be informed of Traditional Owner customs and other local customs and expectations regarding use of the site particularly in relation to cultural resources?	Operation
6.1.5	Would a range of unique and different experiences be provided for visitors reflecting the degrees in ability and mobility?	Design
6.1.6	Would passive and quiet areas be provided where visitors can reflect and meditate on the natural scene?	Design
6.1.7	On closure of the ecotourism facility, would any interpretation and education materials and resources be provided to local interest groups/schools?	Decommissioning and rehabilitation

6.2 Sensitive and responsible visitor experiences and activities

6.2.1	Would strategies to prevent deliberate and regular intrusion on wildlife habitat be implemented?	Design
6.2.2	Would consideration be given to activity zones and buffers to protect sensitive habitat areas and manage visitor use and overcrowding of sites?	Operation
6.2.3	Would there be a commitment to providing staff awareness and education on the natural and cultural values of the site and appropriate visitor activity to support conservation outcomes?	Operation
6.2.4	Would opportunities for visitor participation in the conservation and protection of the site (e.g. weeding and planting to rehabilitate habitat) be identified?	Operation
6.2.5	Would a risk management plan be developed for managing risks associated with the site including regular monitoring and reporting in the Environmental Management System?	Operation
6.2.6	Would strategies and contingencies be developed to protect visitor safety including an induction process for visitors?	Operation
6.2.7	Would an emergency management plan be developed that includes first aid response, fully functioning emergency communication equipment and processes?	Operation
6.2.8	Would a process for continual improvement based on visitor feedback be undertaken covering items such as value for money, cleanliness and comfort, staff competency and manner, interpretation activities, natural and cultural heritage focus and sensitivity of the ecotourism operation to the site?	Operation

Case studies

This section includes six case studies that provide proponents with practical information on the features of existing Australian ecotourism operations that demonstrate different elements of best practice in their facility or operations.

The following six case studies cover a selection of ecotourism operations from across Australia. They include operations owned and managed by private organisations, Traditional Owners and State Government agencies across a mix of tenures including freehold, Traditional Owner lands, national parks, marine parks and state-owned land.

Each case study represents an ecotourism operation that has considered the natural and cultural values of the land (predominantly national park land) and sought to protect, conserve and reflect these values through the design, construction and operation phases, where applicable.

The case studies are not an exhaustive list of best practice ecotourism operations and there are other similar successful enterprises in operation across Australia. The information presented has been sourced from publicly available information and with consent of the relevant operator (see References at end of this document).

The six case studies are:

- Case study 1: Lady Elliot Island, Queensland—A best practice example of creating an ecotourism operation on a ‘brown field’, denuded site within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and re-establishing the ecological values of the site and successfully incorporating adaptive re-use and management of heritage assets.
- Case study 2: Quarantine Station, New South Wales—A best practice example of adaptive re-use of an existing historic site.
- Case study 3: Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef, Western Australia—A best practice example of a low impact sustainable ecotourism facility on a national park in its design, construction and operation.
- Case study 4: Wilson’s Promontory Wilderness Retreats, Victoria—A best practice example of a state-owned ecotourism facility.
- Case study 5: Minjerribah Camping, Queensland—A best practice example of a Traditional Owner developed and managed ecotourism operation.
- Case study 6: Scenic Rim Trail, Queensland—A best practice example of the design and build of an ecotourism facility on a national park.

QYAC Ranger on Minjerribah



Case study 1: Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP), Queensland

Lady Elliot Island (LEI) is a 42 hectare coral cay that is a Commonwealth Island located in the GBRMP. The island is managed jointly by Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and QPWS under a collaborative lease arrangement with LEI Eco Resort (since 2005). While a resort of this size and scale would not be approved in a pristine natural area, the LEI Eco Resort was developed on a denuded 'brown-field' site, and is now an outstanding example of how an ecotourism operation can re-establish ecological values adjacent to a park (in this case a marine park) and successfully incorporate adaptive re-use and management of a heritage site.

The island's 150 years of European settlement saw the natural landscape irrevocably altered by guano mining, subsequent decades of construction and habitation for the Lady Elliot Island lightstation and intensive cropping by goats. Through extensive revegetation activities beginning in the late 1960s, LEI is now one of the most important sites in the GBRMP for seabird nesting, with the second highest biodiversity of seabirds of any island in the GBRMP.

In partnership with GBRMPA, the Eco Resort plays a key role in conserving the heritage values of the lightstation including adaptive re-use and conservation of associated historic buildings. The Eco Resort caters for a maximum of 150 overnight guests and 100 day guests in its 44-room facility.

The following information outlines examples of how the case study meets a selection of the best practice criteria:

Best Practice Criteria 1: The ecotourism facility is compatible with the natural and cultural values of the national park

The resort has restored the island cay from a predominately introduced or weed species vegetation to a largely native species ecosystem.

The site's heritage values are conserved and maintained in accord with the heritage management plan.

Adaptive re-use of the lightstation buildings was designed to protect and manage the heritage values and access to the buildings is controlled.

Accommodation styles and materials have evolved from those first constructed in the 1980s to better reflect the resort's eco-friendly practices.

Best Practice Criteria 3: The ecotourism facility minimises its footprint on the site

To fast-track its restoration through revegetation, LEI became one of four islands included in the Reef Islands

Initiative that establishes a network of climate change refuges (arks).

Cardboard, organic garden matter and food is composted on site and used in the Revegetation Program.

Solar Power Station with over 800 solar panels (including solar hot water) minimises the resort's carbon footprint, with the goal to use 100% renewable energy.

Food, goods and services are purchased locally.

Barriers are in place to prevent access to sensitive areas for wildlife. Resort footprint is restricted with two-thirds of Island natural conservation area.

Best Practice Criteria 4: The ecotourism facility contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park

Extensive research is undertaken in partnership with universities and government agencies to monitor turtle, bird and manta ray populations and coral condition.



Staff participate in GBRMPA's Eye on the Reef monitoring and assessment program.

Photos taken by staff and guests are used for photographic monitoring of manta ray populations as part of Project Manta.

Best Practice Criteria 6: The ecotourism operation encourages visitors to appreciate and want to protect and conserve the national park

Activities offered focus on appreciating the natural values of the GBRMP.

Nature-based interpretation with more than 30 guided tours and citizen science opportunities.

Guests have access to a free LEI field-guide app for use on electronic devices, for recording and sharing sightings and photos.

Case study 2: Quarantine Station, New South Wales

The Quarantine Station (Q Station) is leased by private operator, the Accor Group, and remains part of the Sydney Harbour National Park. The lease is managed by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Q Station is a 30-hectare site that contains 65 buildings, a wharf, more than 1000 stone inscriptions and paintings, a moveable heritage collection, and bush land that is home to several threatened species.

A total of 233 planning conditions were put in place upon the adaptive reuse and operation of the heritage site as an accommodation and functions venue to ensure that the natural and cultural values of the site were protected.

The operation includes a mix of unique heritage accommodation, a harbour-front restaurant, conference and function facilities, a health retreat, a visitor centre, residential education, and storytelling tours. The lessee of Q Station has invested significantly in maintaining and improving the site and its many heritage buildings to deliver tangible outcomes in terms of conservation of cultural heritage. The adaptive reuse of the Quarantine Station contributes to increased visitation within Sydney Harbour National Park, and raises public awareness about the importance of protecting the natural and cultural values of the area.

The following information outlines examples of how the case study meets a selection of the best practice criteria:

Best Practice Criteria 1: The ecotourism operation is compatible with the natural and cultural values of the national park

Fences are located at either end of Quarantine Beach so visitors cannot access penguin habitat. The outdoor eating area has a fence to screen sound and encroaching light into the surrounding area.

Seagrass mapping at Quarantine Beach determines seasonal distribution and provides a benchmark for monitoring. The ferry's set route into and out of Quarantine Wharf avoids the main seagrass area.

Triggers have been established for managing unacceptable impacts on little penguin and long-nosed bandicoot populations and are regularly monitored. Q Station contributes funds for annual monitoring report.

Best Practice Criteria 3: The ecotourism operation minimises its footprint on the site

Water tanks are installed as heritage constraints allow to reuse rainwater and facilitate appropriate use of grey water for toilet flushing and irrigation.

An Outdoor Visitor Infrastructure Plan has been developed that outlines strategies to minimise the impacts of light spill into the wider environment. Initiatives include downward pointing lights, low level mounting and low intensity bulbs.

Best Practice Criteria 4: The ecotourism operation contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park

Operations are managed under a sustainability policy that surpasses the lease conditions, focusing on;

- maintenance of the key natural values
- minimising use of resources
- maintaining cultural heritage in a good condition
- ensuring visitation patterns reflect forecasts

- meeting visitor expectations
- ensuring visitors recognise key site values and protocols.

20% of revenue from visitation at Q Station is reinvested by the private operator into the long-term conservation of the site.

Environmental offsets for lost habitat have been established.

Volunteers undertake weeding.

Best Practice Criteria 5: The ecotourism operation engages, involves and benefits Traditional Owners and local communities

Q Station offers a diverse range of education programs created to engage and challenge local school students to learn from history so that they can make informed decisions in the present and for the future.

The site is open to the public every day of the year to explore the site and learn more about how it is being conserved, adapted, used and monitored.



Q Station, Sydney Harbour National Park image courtesy of Q Station

Case study 3: Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef, Western Australia

The Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef is privately owned by Journey Beyond Ningaloo Pty Ltd and is located within the Cape Range National Park, Western Australia.

The operation is an exclusive safari camp that consists of 16 wilderness tents and a main lodge located near the water's edge.

The camp has been designed to operate in tune with the fragile environment of the national park, with strict principles of minimal impact and sustainability.

Visitors come to Sal Salis to experience the pristine natural environment including the marine life of Ningaloo Reef and surrounding fauna and flora.

The operation is certified by Ecotourism Australia as Nature Tourism.

The following information outlines examples of how the case study meets a selection of the best practice criteria:



Top: Sal Salis Wilderness Retreat
Bottom: Ningaloo Reef and Cape Range National Park
images courtesy of Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef

Best Practice Criteria 1: The ecotourism operation is compatible with the natural and cultural values of the national park

The lease agreement requires no more than 32 visitors at a time.

Construction and operation impacts on native vegetation are monitored.

Use of locally sourced food is a key part of the visitor experience.

Best Practice Criteria 2: The ecotourism operation design and layout fits within the character of the national park

The colour of the tents and main lodge blends in naturally with the surrounding landscape.

All tents face the ocean to allow the coastal breeze to naturally cool the interiors and are designed to expose guests to the view and sounds of the natural surroundings.

The rooms and main lodge facility were constructed above ground level to protect the fauna and flora.

The boardwalk prevents unnecessary soil and sand dune erosion and compaction.

Best Practice Criteria 3: The ecotourism operation minimises its footprint on the site

A full environmental assessment was undertaken prior to construction.

The linen used is made from organic cotton and does not need to be bleached or ironed.

Where possible, products used are eco-certified and sourced from the local region or State.

The camp uses composting toilets.

Grey water from showers and basins is carefully managed to ensure only filtered water is dispersed into the ground.

Guests are provided with 20 litres of water per day for washing and showering.

The composting toilets are transported off-site for cleaning.

All waste generated by the operation is transported to the Exmouth waste depot and used cans and bottles are separated and sent to the Exmouth recycle depot.

Solar panels supply almost 100% of the operation's electricity requirements.

Hot water is generated by a solar and gas system.

Solar light sticks are used along the pathways.

Best Practice Criteria 6: The ecotourism operation encourages visitors to appreciate and want to protect and conserve the national park

Guides take guests 'behind the scenery', providing an extensive overview of the area's wildlife, geography, ecology and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and importance of the Ningaloo Reef and the Cape Range National Park during their stay.

In addition to the park entrance fees, 5% of revenue goes to Parks and Wildlife Services for conservation work in the Cape Range National Park.

Case study 4: Wilson's Promontory Wilderness Retreats, Victoria

Wilson's Promontory Wilderness Retreats at Wilson's Promontory National Park ('The Prom') is a state-owned and managed operation (Parks Victoria).

The facility aims to provide a 'close to nature' experience of bush camping with the conveniences of modern cabins. The Prom is framed by granite headlands, mountains, forests and fern gullies, which can easily be explored by foot, with a range of walks from short strolls to overnight hikes.

The Wilderness Retreats have been eco-certified to Advanced Ecotourism level by Ecotourism Australia. The footprint of the Wilderness Retreat precinct is approximately 4000m² and consists of five tents, each 35m² including the decks. There is one tent dedicated to a communal kitchen, and there are four accommodation tents which include ensuites.

Each accommodation tent is designed for a couple, but a single rollaway bed is available to allow a maximum occupancy of three.

The following information outlines examples of how the case study meets a selection of the best practice criteria:

Best Practice Criteria 2: The ecotourism operation design and layout fits within the character of the national park

External colours have been selected to complement the colours of the landscape.

The tents sit on an innovative modular, galvanised steel frame which does not require concrete footings.

The tents are not permanent structures and can be shifted between locations if required.

Care has been taken with the fit out of the tent to ensure the stay has a minimal environmental impact and complements the park environment.

Best Practice Criteria 3: The ecotourism operation minimises its footprint on the site

Low flow fixtures are fitted to the shower and the vanity basin.

The furniture has been made from locally and sustainably grown hardwood.

Hand-made chemical-free shampoo, conditioner and liquid soap is supplied in each tent via a dispenser unit to ensure packaging and waste is minimised.

There is a recycling station at the western end of the Wilderness Retreat precinct to minimise the amount of rubbish sent to landfill. There is also a recycling bin inside the kitchen tent.

All tents are fitted with an instant gas hot water unit to minimise the energy used to heat water for showers and washing dishes.

A solar hot water booster unit has been fitted to the roof of the neighbouring amenities block to assist in the heating of the water for the precinct. The efficiencies gained by the installation of the solar booster offset the consumption of LPG gas.

The inside tent lighting and path lighting has been fitted with low wattage lights.

Best Practice Criteria 4: The ecotourism operation contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park

Revegetation of the Wilderness Retreat precinct will include propagation and planting of more than 1700 Indigenous plants by volunteers. The plant species have been grown from Indigenous cuttings and seeds that were approved for collection from around the surrounding area.

Best Practice Criteria 6: The ecotourism operation encourages visitors to appreciate and want to protect and conserve the national park

To enhance the natural experience for all guests, and allow wildlife to roam safely, no cars are allowed inside the Wilderness Retreat area.



Images courtesy of Wilson's Promontory Wilderness Retreats

Case study 5: Minjerribah Camping, North Stradbroke Island, Queensland

Minjerribah Camping Pty Ltd is an innovative private enterprise owned by QYAC Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC). The Quandamooka People of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) manage the camping grounds and beaches on the Island which were previously under the management of Redland City Council. The camping areas are outside of the island's Naree Budjong Djara National Park and Main Beach Conservation Park.

QYAC are committed to delivering a quality nature-based camping experience, in a safe, culturally sensitive, and environmentally sustainable manner. The operation offers 1200 campsites (plus some cabins and glamping options) across eight campgrounds and 20km of surf beaches. While a camping operation of this size and scale would not be approved in a pristine natural area, the Minjerribah Camping operation is an outstanding example of re-use and adaption of existing camp ground infrastructure which is providing direct benefits to the Traditional Owners of the land.

Minjerribah Camping has gained Advanced Ecotourism, Respecting Our Culture and Climate Action Business certification through Ecotourism Australia. QYAC's 'Gugjundabu Marumba Gubiyiyanya' (Tourism for a Glad Tomorrow) is a five year strategy for tourism within Quandamooka Country, founded on a commitment to sustainable tourism in harmony with the rights and values of Traditional Owners.

The following information outlines examples of how the case study meets a selection of the best practice criteria:

Best Practice Criteria 4: The ecotourism operation contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park

A continuous improvement program has been implemented across Minjerribah's campgrounds to reduce overcrowding and impacts upon the cultural and environmental values.

Revegetation is undertaken in campgrounds.

Quandamooka Parks Rangers are employed to protect wildlife including koala and turtle nesting sites.

Best Practice Criteria 5: The ecotourism operation engages, involves and benefits Traditional Owners and local communities

Employs a large proportion of Traditional Owners and other members of the local community within the operation.

Quandamooka Aboriginal Land and Sea Management Agency has been established to look after all land and sea matters including joint management with QPWS of the Naree Budjong Djara National Park.



Top: Minjerribah camping grounds, North Stradbroke Island
Bottom: Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation Ceremony
Images courtesy of QYAC

Best Practice Criteria 6: The ecotourism operation encourages visitors to appreciate and want to protect and conserve the national park

Visitors to Minjerribah Camping can learn about Aboriginal culture, heritage and art, the plants and animals of the Island and national parks and bush medicine and foods through educational activities, workshops and guided walks.

The operation's rangers educate campers and visitors on how to avoid damaging dunes and vegetation, while having a great experience that respects Minjerribah's values.

Case study 6: Scenic Rim Trail, Queensland

Open to the public in 2020, the 55 kilometre Scenic Rim Trail has been designed and built in the rugged and remote mountains of Main Range National Park and Thornton Nature Refuge, at the northern tip of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area.

The trail includes three public camping areas and two privately operated eco-camps within the park for experienced walkers tackling the four-day (three-night) hike.

The Scenic Rim Trail and associated ecotourism facilities were built through a partnership between the Queensland Government and ecotourism operator Spicers Retreats, Hotels and Lodges Pty Ltd.

The design and build has focused on preserving and enhancing the environmental and cultural values of the area to provide guests with high quality encounters with nature.

The following information outlines examples of how the case study meets a selection of the best practice criteria:



Top: Spicers Ecolodge, Scenic Rim Trail
Bottom: Inside a Spicers Ecolodge cabin
images courtesy of Spicers Ecolodge

Best Practice Criteria 1: The ecotourism operation is compatible with the natural and cultural values of the national park

Previously disturbed areas of the park were chosen as locations for the two eco-camps and both use existing fire trails for service access.

Both eco-camps footprints were minimised to the greatest possible extent.

Buildings were pre-fabricated off site, minimising time, noise, chemicals, and tradespeople on-park.

Building design enables maintenance to be conducted off park, with panels removed and replaced as required.

Best Practice Criteria 2: The ecotourism operation design and layout fits within the character of the national park

Cabins and camping platforms are designed to blend with the natural environment, including selection of locally sourced timbers and sustainable cladding materials from within 500km radius of the site.

The compact scale of the Ecocamps ensures the surrounding landscape remains the dominant attraction of the site.

The Ecocamps layout minimises vegetation disturbance and tree clearing requirements and raised walkways connecting all buildings will ensure minimal ground and vegetation impacts during operation.

Innovative no-dig building footings also minimised ground disturbance during construction. With the building services suspended under the connecting walkways and no digging for footings, the natural overland water flow paths of the sites have been maintained and erosion risk reduced.

Best Practice Criteria 3: The ecotourism operation minimises its footprint on the site

Sites are self-sufficient for water with all roof water collected and stored on site in 90,000L above ground tanks. Specific water saving methods include the use of low-volume flush toilets (0.5L), water efficient fixtures and timed showers.

Sites are self-sufficient for power through silent solar and battery systems with low decibel backup generators only for top up of battery systems with use limited to daylight hours during site occupation.

Black and grey water is treated on site to a Class A standard, held in tanks and removed from site regularly, with no dispersal of treated water on site.

Minimal external lighting is installed with wildlife friendly amber dot lighting used along walkways. Internal lighting is low level and inward facing to reduce light pollution and minimise impact on the area's nocturnal wildlife.

More information

Learn more from the Parks section of the Department of Environment and Science website (www.parks.des.qld.gov.au) where you can download the:

- Implementation Framework
- Queensland Ecotourism Development Toolkit
- Landscape Classification System (LCS) for Visitor Management Operational Policy

Contact the Ecotourism Development Unit, QPWS, Department of Environment and Science for advice regarding ecotourism facility development on national parks, or for the Pre-lodgement and Stage 1 Preliminary Concept Plan templates. If required, you may be referred to the local QPWS office to discuss suitability of your proposed concept for the park or site.

Email: ecofacilities@des.qld.gov.au

Phone: (07) 3096 6345

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4. Parks Victoria 2014, Parks Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria, <https://www.wildernessretreats.com.au/home.htm>
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6. Spicers Retreats, Scenic Rim Trail, Queensland, <https://spicersretreats.com/scenic-rim-trail/>
7. *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/2017-07-03/act-1992-020>