



Eco-certified Tourism Destination Program Guidelines



Queensland
Government

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Application opening date: **Wednesday 17 August 2022**

Application closing date and time: **11:59 pm, Friday 7 October 2022**

Funding period: **All approved projects must be completed by 30 June 2024**

Policy agency: **Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport**

Administering agency: **Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport**

Program type: **Competitive**

Enquiries: **If you have any questions, please contact: growingTI@dtis.qld.gov.au**

1. Overview

The \$2 million Eco-certified Tourism Destination Program (the Program) is designed to support Queensland Destinations to achieve globally recognised certification as a tourism eco destination. This status assures visitors that certified Destinations are backed by a strong, well-managed commitment to ongoing improvement of sustainable practises and provision of high-quality nature-based tourism experiences within the region.

The Program underpins the vision for Queensland to become a leader in sustainable tourism, leverages the growth potential in nature-based tourism experiences, and supports actions to achieve the target of net zero emissions by 2050.

Through a competitive process, the Program provides grant funding to support Queensland Destinations in obtaining or advancing certified Destination status through one of the two globally recognised programs available in Queensland:

- [Ecotourism Australia ECO Destination Certification program](#)
- [EarthCheck Sustainable Destinations program](#)

The grant opportunity aims to leverage the commitment and investment from Destinations that have already commenced or are ready to commence the certification process, providing funding support to fast-track or fill gaps in preparing the policies, plans and processes required to achieve or advance certification.

Supporting certification at a Destination level enables a strong focus on collective effort and commitment across the industry and government, helping to ‘future proof’ regional tourism economies. It provides a marketable point of difference to visitors that the Destination has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to the principles of sustainability for the Destination. Undertaking the certification process may inform future investment needs for a Destination to continue their sustainability journey to ensure they can maintain their certification into the future.

The Program will conclude by 30 June 2024.

1.1 Program aim

The aim of the Program is to:

- increase the number of Queensland Destinations that are globally recognised as certified sustainable tourism Destinations;
- position Queensland as a leader in sustainability and environmental best practice within the tourism sector; and
- promote long term uptake of practical local-level actions and approaches led by tourism stakeholders, that will contribute to Queensland’s pathway to achieving net zero emissions goals.

1.2 Program objective

The objective of the Program is to:

- fast track certification for Destinations already engaged in either of the two globally recognised programs
- support new Destinations to join the certification programs and achieve certification
- support certified Destinations to attain a higher level of certification
- build a network of globally recognised certified Destinations throughout Queensland.

For grant recipients, funding will support them to achieve a level of Destination certification that will:

- help deliver improvements to sustainable practises
- better position the Destination as a sustainable, low carbon and climate resilient tourism Destination
- enable them to be responsive to changing visitor needs and grow and adapt to future demand for high-quality nature-based tourism experiences.

1.3 Strategic links

The Program aligns with the Queensland Government priorities to:

- protect and enhance our natural environment and heritage for future generations and achieve a 50 per cent renewable energy target by 2030
- support increased jobs in more industries to diversify the Queensland economy and build on existing strengths in agriculture, resources and tourism
- help Queensland's regions grow by attracting people, talent and investment, and driving sustainable economic prosperity.

The Program supports the forward directions and priorities of the independent industry report to Government titled [*Action Plan for Tourism Recovery*](#), by providing the necessary stimulus to support Queensland's tourism regions to pursue environmental best practice. It is an important step in driving a renewed focus on the sustainability agenda for tourism in a post-COVID world, highlighting the important role the tourism industry can play to progress reaching net zero emissions. The Program underpins the opportunity for Queensland to become a leader in sustainable tourism and leverages the growth potential in nature-based tourism experiences.

The Program also aligns with the [*Queensland Climate Adaptation Strategy*](#) (Q-CAS) 2017–2030, which includes the [*Building a resilient tourism industry: Queensland tourism climate change response plan*](#) (Tourism Sector Adaptation Plan). The Adaptation Plan outlines a vision for the tourism industry in leading the way towards carbon neutrality, highlighting the opportunity to develop 'green Destinations' across Queensland and the need to achieve best practice in environmental management to support the state's overall position as a global leader in sustainable, and particularly nature-based, tourism.

The Program also broadly aligns with the objectives of a Queensland Government supported project currently underway through the Queensland Regional Tourism Network, aimed at developing a pathway towards net zero emissions for the tourism industry.

Tourism and Events Queensland's [*Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2021–2024*](#) identifies experiences celebrating nature as a core area and specifically mentions Queensland having a high number of ECO Certified products and ECO Destinations that can be highlighted in promotion. This Program will support this intention by helping to grow the number of ECO Destinations in the state.

2. Available funding

The Queensland Government, through the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport (DTIS) has committed \$2 million (excluding GST) over two years to the Program, funded under the Tourism Activation Fund.

Funding will be offered over one round.

The grant amount available to applicants will be up to 100 per cent of eligible activity expenditure.

The minimum grant amount is \$50 000 excluding GST.

The maximum grant amount is \$150 000 excluding GST.

Applicants are responsible for the remaining eligible activity expenditure if the activity exceeds the awarded grant amount as well as any ineligible expenditure.

Costs for maintaining ongoing certification will be the responsibility of the applicant.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to seek further information from EarthCheck or Ecotourism Australia about the requirements of their certification programs and costs involved, prior to submitting an application.

3. Eligibility criteria

Applications must meet the following mandatory criteria to be considered for Program funding.

3.1 Applicant

To be eligible for funding under the Program, you must be a:

- Queensland local government authority, or any entity governing or managing a local government area in accordance with legislation; or
- Regional Tourism Organisation or Local Tourism Organisation in partnership with the relevant local government authority and/or authorities.

For Queensland local government authority applicants, evidence demonstrating Chief Executive Officer (CEO) / equivalent level support of the application must be provided.

Joint applications are encouraged such as applications involving a number of local government authorities, the regional tourism organisation and/or local tourism organisation.

Where a joint application is being submitted, a single entity must be nominated as the lead contact responsible for contract management and delivery. Evidence demonstrating structure and governance (actual or proposed) of the partnership and support by partners (CEO / equivalent level support) must be provided as part of any joint application.

Examples of joint applications include:

- a local government authority and a Regional Tourism Organisation
- a local government authority and a Local Tourism Organisation
- a Regional Tourism Organisation and several local government authorities
- several local government authorities.

A **limit of one grant** will apply per local government area regardless of whether it is a stand-alone or joint application.

A Regional Tourism Organisation may be a joint partner for multiple applications, as long as the local government area is different in each application.

3.2 Eligible activities

Program funding may be used to support activities directly associated with meeting the requirements and achieving certification under the:

- **Ecotourism Australia** – ‘[ECO Destination Certification](#)’ program: *Nature Tourism, Ecotourism or Advanced Ecotourism* level; or
- **EarthCheck** – ‘[Sustainable Destination Standard](#)’ program: *Silver or Gold* level.

Grant funding can be used for eligible costs associated with attaining EarthCheck Sustainable Destinations Bronze level as part of the Destination’s journey to Silver level certification.

Where a Destination has already achieved certification at an entry level (e.g. Nature Tourism, Bronze) or would achieve certification without the need for government assistance, Program funding may be used to achieve the next level of certification.

Where a Destination is already in the process of getting certified, an application for funding can still be submitted demonstrating why this grant funding is required to expedite the completion of the certification process by 30 June 2024 or earlier.

3.3 Eligible costs

Grant funds can be used for direct expenditure associated with the certification process which may include:

- certification fees, onsite audit fees, coaching support and/or support packages and associated logistical costs
- engagement of consultants/contractors/temporary employees to:
 - project manage and/or coordinate the certification process
 - prepare reports, plans, policies, and process development to directly support certification requirements.
- undertaking required industry and/or community engagement.

3.4 Ineligible costs

Costs not eligible for grant funding include:

- activities, resources and supplies that are already being supported through other sources such as other grant or funding support programs
- any expenditure or in-kind contributions associated with the certification process incurred prior to the date of application approval
- activities that do not directly support the applicant to obtain a new level of certification
- capital infrastructure, feasibility studies or product development (such as eco-tourism products)
- as a contribution towards other State or Government funding programs
- marketing, advertising, gifts and promotional activities
- board costs / remuneration, engaging and/or hiring new or existing permanent employees, for example remuneration, wages and entitlements, regardless of whether for the purpose of managing the activity
- costs of preparing supporting material as part of the grant application
- routine operational expenses, including communications, accommodation and office computing.

This list is not exhaustive. Other costs may be ineligible where it is determined they do not directly support the achievement of the approved activity, or they are contrary to the objective of the program.

Applicants / organisations must ensure they have adequate funds and resources to meet the costs of any ineligible expenditure associated with the activity.

4. Funding arrangements

Successful applicants will receive a written offer of financial assistance.

If the applicant accepts the offer, they will be required to enter into a legally binding contract with DTIS (acting on behalf of the State of Queensland).

The agreement will provide details on general and specific conditions associated with the delivery of the approved activity.

Approved grant payments will generally be made in two instalments with partial payment in advance and will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Key inclusions of the agreement are:

- scope of the approved activity
- milestone deliverables and dates
- funding amount and payment terms
- quarterly reporting requirements
- record-keeping requirements
- applicant's obligation to acknowledge Queensland Government support.

An example of the terms and conditions of a standard DTIS grant agreement can be viewed [here](#).

Successful grant recipients will be required to commence the approved activity within four weeks from the date of approval and attain the approved level of certification by 30 June 2024.

Under the terms and conditions of the grant agreement, the recipient must acquit the full amount of any grant payments by providing evidence of expenditure on eligible costs.

The final grant payment will be made **after certification is achieved**, (which must be by 30 June 2024), and after receipt of the final milestone report.

Should certification be achieved without the full expenditure of the awarded grant funding, any funds not acquitted will be returned or retained by the Department.

5. Application and assessment process

5.1 Key dates

Date	Key activities/actions
Wednesday 17 August 2022	Applications open
11:59pm Friday 7 October 2022	Applications close
Late 2022	Expected announcement date
30 June 2024	Approved activity completion and target level of certification attained

5.2 How to apply

Funding under this Grant Program is awarded through a competitive application and assessment process.

To apply for this funding, you must:

- complete the online application form via the SmartyGrants portal ditidtourism.smartygrants.com.au/ecocertified-tourism-destinations
- provide all the information requested
- address all eligibility criteria and assessment criteria
- identify any co-contribution the applicant will make towards the total activity cost, including in-kind contributions
- include all necessary attachments; and
- submit the application by the closing date and time.

5.3 How applications are assessed

Applications must be submitted complete with all necessary supporting documentation provided at time of submission. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not progress to being assessed.

Complete and eligible applications will be assessed against the assessment criteria by an assessment panel for recommendation to the Delegate.

The assessment panel may contact applicants to seek further information or clarification of applications.

The Delegate considers the recommendations of the application assessment panel.

The Delegate's decision is final in all matters, including:

- the grant approval
- the grant funding to be awarded
- any conditions attached to the offer of the grant funding.

6. Assessment criteria

To be considered for funding, you will need to address all assessment criteria in the application.

Criteria 1: Commitment and capacity (weighting 50 per cent)

1. Identify the certification program and level that will be achieved through the grant funding and applicant's level of readiness by:
 - a) providing evidence that the applicant has already engaged with EarthCheck or Ecotourism Australia and has progressed towards or attained certification; or
 - b) providing evidence of the applicant's readiness, plans, and ability to attain certification within the timeframe of the Program.
2. Demonstrate that the applicant and/or joint partners have the appropriate authority and capacity to implement the required policies, processes and plans to meet the requirements of the certification program.
3. Demonstrate existing relationships and commitment from relevant partners across local government, local/regional tourism organisations and industry operators to support the certification process. This may include letters confirming resource commitment, evidence of collaboration provided to date, number of eco-certified business in the Destination.
4. Provide a project plan that shows how the applicant will achieve certification within 18 months of approval (the project plan must include timelines, key activities, resource allocation, risk management and contingencies to achieve the Activity).
5. Outline how the Destination is committed to maintaining certification beyond the lifetime of the Program.

Criteria 2: Benefits (weighting 30 per cent)

1. Outline the sustainability initiatives and outcomes (qualitative and quantitative) that are expected as a result of activities undertaken in the certification process.
2. Outline how certification will benefit the Destination and position the Destination as a sustainable, low carbon and climate resilient tourism Destination.
3. Outline how certification will help the Destination to respond to changing visitor needs and growing future demand for high-quality nature-based tourism experiences.

Criteria 3: Value for money and financial capacity (weighting 20 per cent)

1. Demonstrate why the grant funding is required to achieve and/or fast-track certification.
2. Detail the investment from the applicant organisation and/or partners to support the process including identified costs and funding sources required to achieve certification.
3. Detail the proposed use of grant funds, key in-kind resourcing and cash co-contributions to assist the Destination to achieve certification.

7. Communications

7.1 Confidentiality, privacy and use of information

The Queensland Government collects and collates information from the application form to evaluate applications for the Program. Only authorised departmental officers and approved grant assessors have access to this information under the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* for the purpose of assessing the application for funding.

The State intends to publicly disclose the names of applicants, information about the approved activity, the amount of funding granted to each successful applicant and details about the anticipated outcomes and benefits.

Any personal information submitted as part of an application will not be used by the State or disclosed to any third party for a purpose other than in connection with the assessment of the application without an applicant's consent, unless required by law or in accordance with the *Information Privacy Act 2009*.

For audit purposes, the Queensland Government is required to retain the applications and other supplied support material. The provisions of the *Right to Information Act 2009* apply to documents in the possession of the Queensland Government.

7.2 Communication with the media

All media enquiries and public announcements relating to the Grant Program will be coordinated and handled by the DTIS media team.

As far as practicable, all media and communications will be undertaken jointly with successful applicants.

Applicants must seek and obtain the State's approval before contacting the media to discuss any information regarding successful or unsuccessful applications for funding support under or in connection with the Grant Program.

7.3 Complaints

All funding decisions made in relation to applications are final. Under the department's Complaints Management Policy, DTIS has established processes for dealing with complaints and is committed to effectively managing concerns in a fair, transparent and timely manner. If an applicant has any concern in relation to the application or assessment process, a formal complaint may be submitted to the department via GrowingTI@dtis.qld.gov.au.

8. Further information

If you require any further information or clarification of these guidelines, please contact the Growing Tourism team via email: GrowingTI@dtis.qld.gov.au

Glossary

Approved activity	Means activities that are directly involved in meeting the requirements and achieving certification under the Ecotourism Australia – ‘ECO Destination Certification’ program: Nature Tourism, Ecotourism or Advanced Ecotourism level, and activities that are directly involved in meeting the requirements and achieving certification under the EarthCheck – ‘Sustainable Destination Standard’ program: Silver or Gold level.
Certification	For the purposes of the Program, under the Ecotourism Australia ECO Destination Certification program, means the applicant Destination has met all of the criteria and has received a successful audit report at the relevant level. For the purposes of the Program, under the EarthCheck Sustainable Destination Standard’ program means the applicant Destination has met all of the criteria required for the Certification phase and has passed an Onsite Certification Audit.
Destination	For the purposes of the Program, a ‘Destination’ is the specific geographical area under the jurisdiction of the applicant or joint application partners. The Destination area must be located within Queensland.
EarthCheck	A certification body in Australia which is accredited by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and delivers the Sustainable Destinations program. earthcheck.org/products-services/certification/sustainable-destinations/
Ecotourism Australia	A certification body in Australia which delivers the ECO Destination Certification program, which aligns with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council-accredited Green Destinations. ecotourism.org.au/our-certification-programs/eco-certification-4
Global Sustainable Tourism Council	An organisation which establishes and manages global standards for sustainable travel and tourism. gstcouncil.org/
Ongoing certification	Ongoing certification refers to maintaining your certification in future years, beyond the lifetime of the Program. Please refer to the relevant certification program requirements for more information on ongoing certification.
Program	This grant program, the Eco-certified Tourism Destination Program..
Project plan	A plan which includes timelines, key activities, resource allocation, risk management and contingencies to achieve the Activity.
Program funds / Program funding / Grant funding	Means the funds to be provided by the State to an applicant who is successful in an application for funding under the grant program. Program funding is given for a specific purpose and can only be used for eligible expenditure, on approved activities, as outlined in the Program guidelines and the funding agreement.