



Best Practice Ecotourism Development Guidelines

October 2015

Prepared by: Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing

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Contents

Glossary	2
Introduction	3
How to use the Best Practice Guidelines	4
How to use Part A—Information for Applicants preparing a Stage 1 Application	4
How to use Part B—Information for Applicants developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal	5
Part A—Information for Applicants preparing a Stage 1 Application	6
Legislative and policy context	6
Best Practice Criteria	7
Appropriate nature and scale of Ecotourism Facilities on national parks	8
Site suitability	10
How to undertake a Site Suitability Assessment	10
Applying the Best Practice Criteria to the preparation of a Stage 1 Application.....	13
Part B—Information for Applicants developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal.....	18
Applying the Best Practice Criteria to the development of a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal.....	18
Certification	19
Case studies and hypothetical example of applying the Best Practice Guidelines.....	29
Case studies	29
Case study 1 —Kuranda Skyrail Rainforest Cableway, 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 —Lapa Rios, Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica	34
Case study 6 —Damaraland Camp, Huab River Valley, Namibia	35
Hypothetical example of applying the Best Practice Guidelines to the development of a Stage 1 Application	36
Scenario	36
References	37

Glossary

Term	Definition
Applicant	An organisation or individual that has submitted, or intends to submit, an Application or Detailed Proposal and, where the context allows, includes their representative officers, employees, advisers, contractors and agents.
Application	Stage 1 Application Form and attachments detailing an Applicant's proposed Ecotourism Operation for a particular Site.
Department	The Queensland Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing.
Best Practice Ecotourism Development Criteria	One of the key tools to assist Applicants to demonstrate that a proposed Ecotourism Operation meets the requirements of the <i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i> .
Detailed Proposal	The Stage 2 submission in response to the Request for Detailed Proposal (RFDP).
Ecotourism Facility	As defined in the <i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i> .
Ecotourism Operation	An Ecotourism Operation includes all built facilities, infrastructure and visitor activities such as tours and interpretation associated with the Ecotourism Facility on the national park.
Landscape Classification System	A management tool that provides the standard classification system for characterising the biophysical, social and management attributes of sites and areas in national parks.
Sample Questions	Questions for consideration by Stage 1 Applicants when refining and developing an ecotourism concept in order to prepare a Stage 1 Application.
Site	The national park location for a proposed Ecotourism Operation.
Site Suitability Assessment	A basic self-assessment tool to test Site suitability for a proposed Ecotourism Operation in Stage 1.
Site Suitability Matrix	<p>A graphic representation of the potential suitability of a proposed Ecotourism Operation for a Site based on the nature and scale of the proposed Ecotourism Operation, and the Landscape Classification Value of the Site.</p> <p>To be used as the final step in completing the Site Suitability Assessment.</p>
Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria of the Best Practice Ecotourism Development Criteria. Relevant to Stage 1 and 2 Applicants.
Sub Criteria Considerations	Questions for consideration by Stage 2 Applicants when developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal.

Introduction

The Queensland Government is working towards its vision to make Queensland a world leader in Ecotourism. Already a popular destination for tourists, Queensland boasts more than 1300 national parks, marine parks and other reserves that conserve a diverse array of species and ecosystems. The state also has a rich Indigenous cultural heritage and five World Heritage listed areas.

The Queensland Government and the tourism industry are working in partnership to capitalise on this unique competitive advantage and ensure world class recreation and tourism experiences are provided to visitors. However, a balanced approach between development and conservation is essential. Ecotourism Operations in national parks must: be conducted with an understanding of how the national park functions as an ecosystem; conserve the cultural and heritage values; improve the visitor experience; and be integrated into the park.

The *Best Practice Ecotourism Development Guidelines* (the Best Practice Guidelines) assist ecotourism Applicants to develop Ecotourism Facilities and experiences on 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 make an application for an Ecotourism Facility under section 35 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (NC Act), Applicants are required to use these guidelines to prepare responses to the application form and refine the concept for an Ecotourism Operation. The Best Practice Guidelines provide background information and tools to direct Applicants through key considerations that must be addressed as a first step in achieving best practice for ecotourism in Queensland's national parks.

Best practice in ecotourism is achieved by developing a unique visitor experience that is integrated into the national park in consideration of:

- site values and constraints and awareness of park management priorities
- site layout and 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 partnerships, cultural awareness and shared economic benefits.

The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (the Department) uses a two-stage process for assessing new or expanded ecotourism opportunities on national parks. These stages include:

- Stage 1 - Application
- Stage 2 - Request for Detailed Proposal (Detailed Proposal).

The Stage 1 Application is intended to limit the Applicants investment, in terms of time and resources, in developing a preliminary ecotourism concept. The completed Application will provide enough information to enable the Department to assess and qualify Applications by determining if the ecotourism concept is acceptable for the proposed Site as well as whether the Applicant has the experience and capacity to finance and run the proposed Ecotourism Operation.

The Stage 2 Detailed Proposal requires significantly more investment and investigation by the Applicant. This stage involves a more iterative process and will require discussions and negotiations between the Department and the Applicant. 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 assessment process for these stages is outlined in the *Ecotourism Facilities on National Parks - Implementation Framework* (Implementation Framework). Applicants should refer to both the Implementation Framework and the Best Practice Guidelines when developing either a Stage 1 Application or a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal.

How to use the Best Practice Guidelines

The Best Practice Guidelines are designed to be used by Applicants preparing either a Stage 1 Application or a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal. These guidelines have been divided into two parts:

- Part A - Information for Applicants preparing a Stage 1 Application
- Part B - Information for Applicants developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal.

The Best Practice Guidelines include case studies of best practice Ecotourism Operations from Australia and overseas as well as a hypothetical example of how these guidelines can be applied in Stage 1. These examples are provided to assist Applicants to use the Best Practice Guidelines.

These 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.

Guidance on how to use Parts A and B is provided below.

How to use Part A—Information for Applicants preparing a Stage 1 Application

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. The Best Practice Ecotourism Development Criteria (Best Practice Criteria) will be used as a basis to evaluate Stage 1 Applications.

Applicants are required to complete the following steps to enable the Department to undertake assessments:

Step 1—Understand the relevant legislative and policy framework, the Government's intention for ecotourism on national parks, and the purpose of the Best Practice Criteria as the first step in developing a Stage 1 Application. This information is available on pages 6–9 of the Best Practice Guidelines.

Step 2—Complete an indicative Site Suitability Assessment to assist in determining whether the nature and scale of the proposed Ecotourism Operation is potentially suitable for the Site. This assessment must be presented in the Stage 1 Application form. For a basic self-assessment tool to test Site suitability for a proposed Ecotourism Operation refer to pages 10–12 of these guidelines.

Step 3—Address the six Best Practice Criteria in the Stage 1 Application form. Table 3 of the Best Practice Guidelines presents the Best Practice Criteria along with Sub Criteria and Sample Questions for consideration relevant to the preliminary concept development of Stage 1.

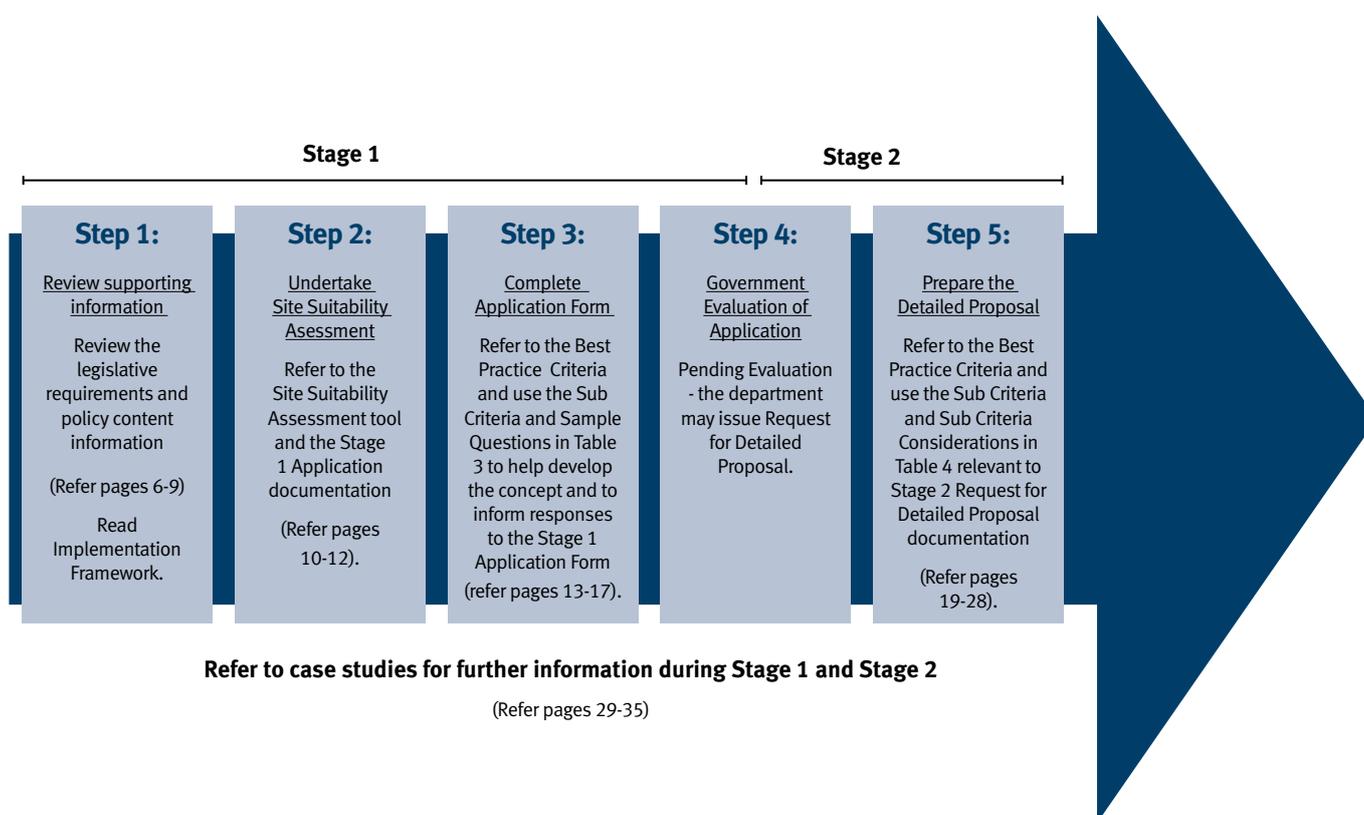
How to use Part B—Information for Applicants developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal

The Department will use the Best Practice Criteria to inform the evaluation process for Stage 2 Detailed Proposal. If an Applicant is invited to progress to a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal, as a minimum, they will be required to provide a more informed and detailed consideration of the six Best Practice Criteria across the entire lifecycle of the proposed Ecotourism Operation.

Page 18 of the Best Practice Guidelines provides Applicants with an overview of lifecycle components of an Ecotourism Operation. Table 4 provides Applicants with the full range of Sub Criteria Considerations relevant to each Best Practice Criteria. To develop a Detailed Proposal, Applicants will need to select which Sub Criteria Considerations are most relevant to the design, construction, operation, renewal, decommissioning and rehabilitation of the proposed Ecotourism Operation. These Sub Criteria Considerations will determine the type of details an Applicant must incorporate in the Detailed Proposal. Any commitments made by Applicants during this stage would need to be implemented for the lifecycle of the project.

Figure 1 is an overview of the application of the Best Practice Guidelines during the development of a Stage 1 Application and Stage 2 Detailed Proposal.

Figure 1: Application of Best Practice Guidelines



Part A—Information for Applicants preparing a Stage 1 Application

Legislative and policy context

The object of the NC Act is the conservation of nature while allowing for:

- the involvement of Indigenous people in the management of protected areas in which they have an interest
- the use and enjoyment of protected areas by the community
- the social, cultural and commercial use of protected areas in a way that is consistent with the natural and cultural and other values of the areas.

The NC Act (section 35A) also allows for the authorisation of privately owned, low-impact, permanent Ecotourism Facilities on national parks where use of the land for this purpose:

- is 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.

Guiding principles

The Department has established seven principles to guide considerations for the development of Ecotourism Facilities on national parks as outlined in the Implementation Framework. These principles guide the Department’s assessment process, the types of matters that will be considered and the approval arrangements. These seven guiding principles are:

- **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 who have commitment to environmental best practice.
- **Principle 6:** The authorisation of Ecotourism Facilities will be consistent and transparent while protecting the intellectual property of the Applicant.
- **Principle 7:** The type and duration of authorities granted will recognise the level of investment and rate of return on investment.

Best Practice Criteria

The Best Practice Guidelines build on both the legislative requirements and the Implementation Framework guiding principles to assist ecotourism Applicants to develop Ecotourism Facilities and experiences that fulfil the requirements of section 35A of the NC Act. The Best Practice Guidelines outline six Best Practice Criteria for Ecotourism Operations:

- **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 Applicants to demonstrate 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 an Application for Stage 1, Applicants should consider each criterion as is appropriate to 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 more detail in Table 1 below, providing key considerations for achieving social, environmental and economic sustainability outcomes for an Ecotourism Operation. The Best Practice Criteria have been developed to be relevant to a wide range of Ecotourism Facilities and activities and are presented in the form of a statement followed by key considerations.

Table 3 expands on the Best Practice Criteria by outlining Sub Criteria and Sample Questions that focus on the conceptual or planning phase for Stage 1 (see page 13-17).

Table 1: Best Practice Criteria

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 is designed to fit 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 Ecotourism Facility 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 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 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
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 government’s directives regarding appropriate nature and scale of Ecotourism Facilities on national parks. As specified in the Implementation Framework, Ecotourism Facilities must be purpose built, 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.

Figure 2 provides an illustrative example of the types of facilities of a nature and scale that would be considered inconsistent with the NC Act definition of an Ecotourism Facility.

Figure 2: Facilities considered inconsistent with the NC Act definition of an Ecotourism Facility



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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 walker’s huts to larger campgrounds or eco-lodges. 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 3 provides an illustrative example of the types of Ecotourism Facilities that would be considered to be of an appropriate nature and scale for Queensland’s national parks. Refer also to the case studies section for more information.

Figure 3: Ecotourism Facilities of nature and scale considered appropriate for national parks



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Site suitability

To assist Applicants stay within the intent of the NC Act section 35A provision, the Best Practice Guidelines provide a basic self-assessment tool to test Site suitability for an ecotourism concept. Applicants will need to undertake a Site Suitability Assessment as part of the Stage 1 Application. This self-assessment will provide a guide to the potential suitability of the ecotourism concept for the selected Site. To ensure a proposed concept does not materially change between a Stage 1 Application and a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal the self-assessment also provides a useful reference point for the nature and scale of the proposed Ecotourism Operation.

Applicants are encouraged to target Sites that are suited to the concept's proposed level of development and activity. The Site Suitability Assessment will assist to gauge whether the proposed concept 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 and cultural resources.

The location of an Ecotourism Operation 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 beneficial social, environmental and economic outcomes are achievable.

How to undertake a Site Suitability Assessment

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 4) to gauge the potential suitability of the concept for the Site.

Further explanation is provided below.

Step 1: Determine nature and scale of 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 providing facilities and accommodation for a range of visitor experiences and activities, such as a medium scale eco-lodge. 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, Applicants 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.

Image courtesy of Adam Creed, Queensland Government



Step 2 – Determine landscape classification value of proposed Site

There is considerable variation in the naturalness of landscapes across national parks. In some sites there is significant evidence of previous use and human modification of the environment. At other sites the natural condition may appear unaltered. By understanding the naturalness of a proposed Site, it may provide an insight into the sensitivity of that Site to some forms of development and activity. The Department’s *Landscape Classification System (LCS) for Visitor Management Operational Policy* provides the mechanism to develop this understanding.

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 available from the Department’s website (www.npsr.qld.gov.au). Applicants 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 of a given Site or area should be taken from a representative location such as the proposed Site and the surrounds and is not intended to apply to 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 activity areas.	A somewhat natural appearing site or landscape/seascape. Natural elements just 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 or use. Communications with other parties extremely rare.	Some permanent evidence and 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, visitation or use.

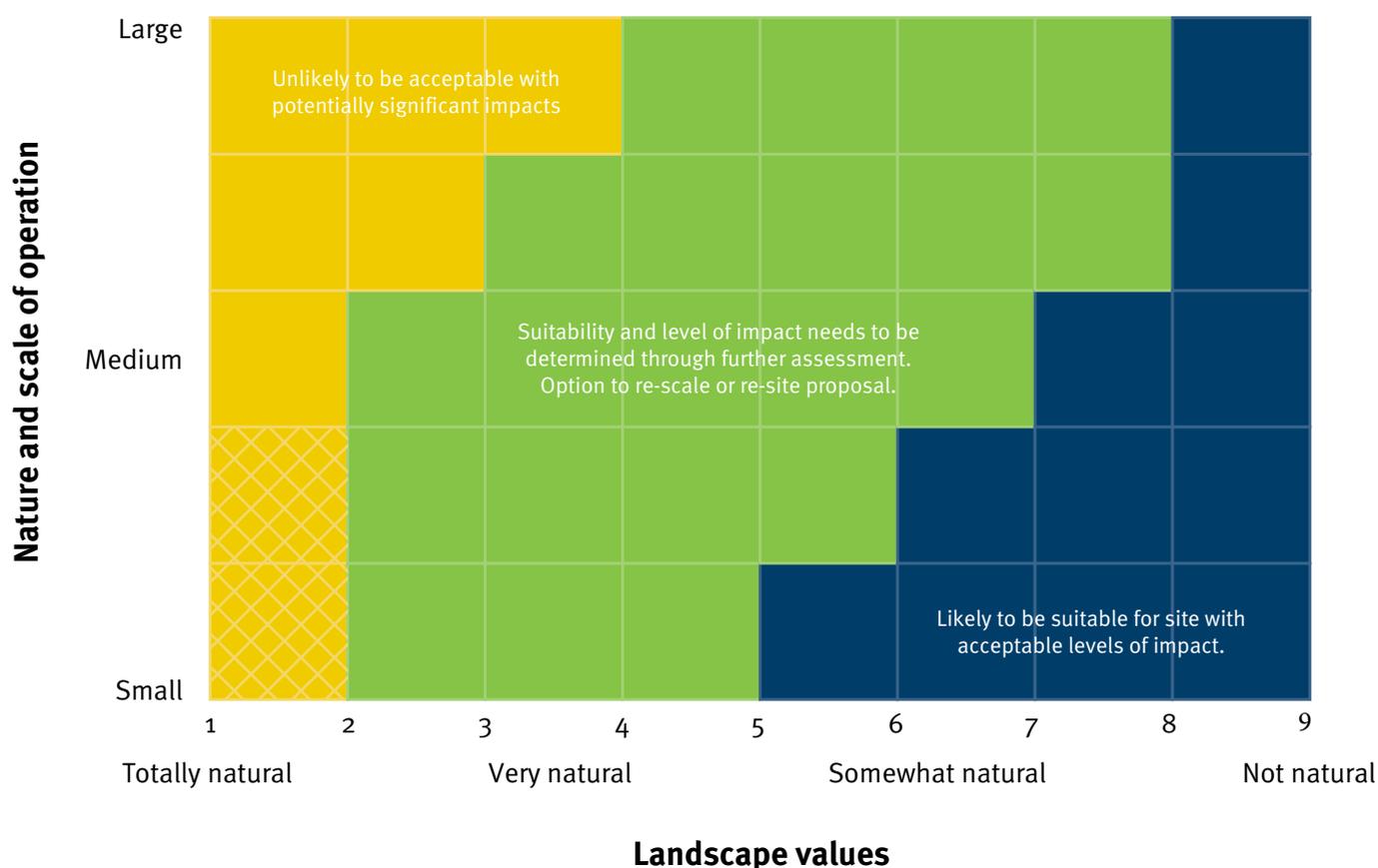
Step 3: Apply finding to the Site Suitability Matrix

By applying the findings from Steps 1 and 2 to the Site Suitability Matrix provided in Figure 4, it will assist to identify where a proposed Ecotourism Operation is likely to be positioned based on nature, scale and landscape values.

Applicants 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 Application.

Applicants 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 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.

Figure 4: Site Suitability Matrix



All Applications for Ecotourism Operations in all settings would need to demonstrate a genuine commitment to best practice sustainability outcomes to be considered as potentially suitable for the Site.

Yellow: Most Ecotourism Operations are unlikely to be suitable for these locations and would need to demonstrate exceptional levels of innovation to avoid unacceptable impacts on the values of the Site and significant modification to the landscape values of that area. Some locations may be suitable for guided tours and small-scale Ecotourism Operations where reversibility can be demonstrated (refer orange hashed area).

Green: Ecotourism Operations of various scales may be suitable for these locations. Further assessment would be required to determine whether impacts are acceptable and whether the development would significantly modify the landscape values for that area. Land in this setting may be suitable for bush camping, new camp grounds or a range of built structures and facilities such as accommodation and venues and nature-based activities such as canopy walks and zip lines.

Blue: Ecotourism Operations of various scales may be suitable for these locations with the additional opportunity for reuse and adaptation of existing buildings and facilities. Ecotourism Operations are unlikely to affect the landscape values for that area. Opportunities to reinstate natural and cultural values particularly in areas significantly modified by human interaction may bring additional value to park management and the local community.

Applying the Best Practice Criteria to the preparation of a Stage 1 Application

Following completion of a Site Suitability Assessment, Applicants will need to address all six Best Practice Criteria in the Stage 1 Application 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 Applications for Ecotourism Operations need to address. The Sub Criteria are relevant to the concept planning stage of an Application and the Sample Questions may assist Applicants in refining and developing the ecotourism concept. The Sample Questions are not intended to be an exhaustive list of examples and Applicants 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 Applicants may have available at this stage. These questions have been included to encourage whole of project planning at an early planning stage.

Table 3: Best Practice Criteria for Stage 1

Note: The Sample Questions outlined in this Table are intended to assist Applicants in responding to the Best Practice Criteria. Commensurate with nature and scale of development only certain questions apply. Applicants 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	Sub Criteria	Sample Questions
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	<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	<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	Sub Criteria	Sample Questions
<p>2. The Ecotourism Operation is designed to fit within the character of the national park</p>	<p>2.1 Site layout is compatible with the landscape</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
	<p>2.2 Ecotourism Facility design and appearance is compatible with the landscape and local conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 local Indigenous 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	Sub Criteria	Sample Questions
3. The Ecotourism Operation minimises its footprint on the Site	3.1 Ecotourism Facility construction methods are low impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 with impacts on surrounding areas and habitat avoided? • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)?
	3.3 Water conservation practices are employed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	Sub Criteria	Sample Questions
4. The Ecotourism Operation contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park	4.1 Contributions to on-site rehabilitation and restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
5. The Ecotourism Operation engages, involves and benefits Traditional Owners and local communities	5.1 Sharing ecotourism benefits with Traditional Owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would Traditional Owner endorsement and participation in the Ecotourism Operation be sought including guidance and involvement in visitor interpretation and experiences? • Would the Indigenous cultural heritage and cultural 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would economic benefits for surrounding communities be identified e.g. local procurement of food and materials, construction, repairs and maintenance, local Indigenous 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	Sub Criteria	Sample Questions
<p>6. The Ecotourism Operation encourages visitors to appreciate and want to protect and conserve the national park</p>	<p>6.1 Appropriate interpretation of natural and cultural values</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 Indigenous cultural education or active visitor involvement in Site restoration? • What strategies will be employed to inform visitors of local Indigenous and non-Indigenous customs and expectations regarding use of the Site particularly in relation to cultural resources?
	<p>6.2 Sensitive and responsible visitor experiences and activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?

Image courtesy of Adam Creed, Queensland Government



Part B—Information for Applicants developing 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 is intended to apply primarily to Stage 2 Applicants. However, Stage 1 Applicants may also wish to consider the information below to refine an ecotourism concept.

Applicants will need to adopt a whole of project or lifecycle approach when developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal. Potentially negative impacts associated with each stage of a proposed project should be identified 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.

Figure 5 provides an overview of lifecycle components for an Ecotourism Operation and the Best Practice Criteria will assist to inform planning and works activities associated with each phase in the development. Applicants will need to submit sustainable environmental solutions in terms of each phase in the lifecycle and provide supporting documentation for those solutions.

Figure 5: Ecotourism Operation lifecycle components



Table 4 presents the Best Practice Criteria, Sub Criteria and Sub Criteria Considerations relevant to a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal. Applicants will need to select the Sub Criteria Considerations that are relevant to the nature, scale, and Site of the proposed Ecotourism Operation. As operations increase in size, complexity and potential impacts, a broader range of Sub Criteria Considerations would be relevant. The table also enables considerations to be selected according to each phase in the project lifecycle.

In developing a Stage 2 Detailed Proposal, Applicants should apply the table by reviewing 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.

Applications will need to demonstrate genuine commitment to best practice design, construction, operation and decommissioning as part of the Detailed Proposal.

Certification

As specified in the Implementation Framework, Applicants should note that if they are granted an NC Act authority they will be required to obtain certification under an accredited certification scheme. Industry certification provides assurance that an Ecotourism Operation has an on-going commitment to best practice through the lifecycle of the Ecotourism operation. Applicants are encouraged to aim for the highest level of certification offered by industry providers and an informed consideration of, and response to, the Best Practice Criteria at the early planning stage should assist to achieve industry certification. The Department will advise of providers that are accredited to provide eco certification.

Table 4: Best Practice Criteria for Stage 2

Best Practice Criteria 1: The Ecotourism Operation is compatible with the natural and cultural values of the national park.

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.

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
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?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	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? (e.g. refer to any management plans for the park if available).	✓			
	1.1.4 Would the construction and operation of the Ecotourism Facility and associated activities be expected to impact the national park's 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?	✓			
	1.1.5 Would strategies be required to protect sensitive habitat areas and/or would activity be avoided in vulnerable or highly valued areas?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	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?			✓	
	1.1.8 Would previously impacted landforms be restored and areas with exotic weed species rehabilitated?			✓	
	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?				✓
	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?	✓			

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
1.2 Site access and suitability	1.2.1 Would the Ecotourism Operation use previously disturbed areas where possible?	✓			
	1.2.2 Would access to the Site be provided using existing roads and tracks where possible?	✓			
	1.2.3 Would an effort be made to locate development and activity on lower value habitat as opposed to high conservation value areas?	✓			
	1.2.4 Would the Ecotourism Operation avoid high conservation value areas, riparian zones and narrow and steep slopes etc?	✓			
	1.2.5 Would there be an intention to clearly demarcate the development footprint, including appropriate barriers to limit activity to stabilised and designated areas?	✓			

Best Practice Criteria 2: The Ecotourism Operation is designed to fit 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.

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
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?	✓			
	2.1.2 Would the Ecotourism Facility design and layout maximise use of landscape features and natural geological formations of the Site?	✓			
	2.1.3 Would natural sights, sounds and scents prevail throughout the Ecotourism Facility?	✓			
	2.1.4 Would consideration be given to either dispersing or concentrating the Ecotourism Facility to achieve minimal environmental impact?	✓			
	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?	✓			

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
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'?	✓			
	2.2.2 Would aspect and orientation be used to provide insulation, ventilation, and passive heating and cooling?	✓			
	2.2.3 Would landscape features be reflected in design through scale, form, colour and texture of the Ecotourism Facility?	✓			
	2.2.4 Would the architectural style and materials of the Ecotourism Facility be reflective of aspects of local Indigenous culture (if appropriate)?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	2.2.6 Would local species which require minimal maintenance and are essentially self-sustaining be used for landscaping?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	2.2.9 Would adaptive re-use of existing structures be considered to reflect part of the story of the Site?	✓			
	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?	✓			

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 minimised.

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
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?		✓		
	3.1.2 Would strategies be developed to contain the development footprint during construction with impacts on surrounding areas and habitat avoided?		✓		
	3.1.3 Would consideration be given to modular, pre-fabricated and easy to assemble construction technologies to reduce construction related impacts?	✓			
	3.1.4 Would locally sourced and lightweight yet durable materials be considered?	✓			
	3.1.5 Would renewable, durable, non-toxic and environmentally sustainable materials be used throughout the Ecotourism Facility?	✓			
	3.1.6 Would strategies be developed to limit pollutants and toxins brought on site during construction?		✓		
	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)?		✓		
	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?	✓			
	3.1.9 Would breeding patterns and habitat movements of vulnerable and protected species be respected in construction plan phasing?		✓		
	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?				
3.2 Energy conservation practices are employed	3.2.1 Would energy requirements of the Ecotourism Facility be minimised?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	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)?	✓			
	3.2.4 Would energy awareness, conservation and efficiency practices be integrated into the operation of the Ecotourism Facility and visitor experience?			✓	
	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)?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	3.2.7 Would on-site transport needs be met through solar powered or electric vehicles, bus access, bicycle and pedestrian pathways?			✓	
	3.2.8 Would an energy conservation plan with measurable targets and monitoring and reporting requirements be included in the Environmental Management System?			✓	
	3.2.9 Would log books of vehicle use be kept to allow review and auditing of vehicle use and promotion of continual improvement?			✓	

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
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?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	3.3.4 Would water awareness, conservation and efficiency practices be integrated into the operation of the Ecotourism Facility and visitor experience?			✓	
	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?	✓			
	3.3.6 Would the Ecotourism Facility collect and treat water required for its operation on Site?	✓			
	3.3.7 Would biological and non-mechanical systems be considered where possible including composting or water-efficient toilets and alternative disinfection systems?	✓			
	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?			✓	
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?			✓	
	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?			✓	
	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)?			✓	
	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?	✓			
	3.4.5 Would there be a strategy to manage sewerage and effluent to best practice standards with no impacts on the Site?	✓			
	3.4.6 Would a waste minimisation plan with measurable targets and monitoring and reporting requirements be developed for inclusion in the facility Environmental Management System?			✓	
	3.4.7 Would there be separation and containment of waste streams to avoid any vermin, odour or spillage?			✓	
	3.4.8 Would strategies be considered for re-using and recycling materials and finishes associated with the Ecotourism Facility on renewal or dismantling?				✓

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
3.5 On-site hazardous materials is 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?			✓	
	3.5.2 Would on-site maintenance of grounds and landscaping be minimised through natural landscaping using endemic species?			✓	
	3.5.3 Would there be a strategy to avoid herbicides and pesticides through natural control measures and environmentally benign alternatives?			✓	
	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?			✓	
	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?			✓	
	3.5.6 Would vehicles be maintained off-site?			✓	
	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?				✓
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?	✓			
	3.6.2 Would dust suppression procedures be in place during construction?		✓		
	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?	✓			
	3.6.4 Would natural acoustic conditions predominate and would noise levels from site activities be on par with existing background noise?	✓			
	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?			✓	
	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?	✓			

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 to, for example, rehabilitate disturbed areas of the park and educate staff and visitors regarding intrinsic park values.

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
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?			✓	
	4.1.2 Would strategies be developed to progressively rehabilitate areas impacted by the construction and operation of the Ecotourism Facility?			✓	
	4.1.3 Would there be land available for resting and rehabilitating heavily used or impacted areas over time?			✓	
	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?			✓	
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?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	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?			✓	
	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?			✓	
	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?			✓	
	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?				✓

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.

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
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?	✓			
	5.1.2 Would the Indigenous cultural heritage and cultural 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?			✓	
	5.1.3 Would the proposed Ecotourism Operation be compatible with cultural uses of the Site?	✓			
	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?		✓		
	5.1.5 Would the business model for the Ecotourism Operation provide for partial ownership of some aspects, such as cultural tours, by the Traditional Owner communities?	✓			
	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 the local Indigenous culture?			✓	
	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?				✓
5.2 Sharing ecotourism benefits with neighbouring communities	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?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	5.2.4 Would the Ecotourism Operation provide for improved community access and enjoyment of national parks?	✓			
	5.2.5 Would universal design that facilitates access for a range of abilities to the Site and surrounds be incorporated?	✓			
	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?	✓			
	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 the local non-Indigenous culture?			✓	
	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?				✓

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	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, local Indigenous arts and craft for purchase by visitors (if appropriate)?	✓			
	5.3.2 Would employment and training opportunities for the local community be provided?			✓	
	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?			✓	
	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)?	✓			

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.

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	Decommissioning and rehabilitation
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?			✓	
	6.1.2 Would the special or unique environmental and cultural features of the Site be identified and build understanding into the visitor experience through responsible tourism practices e.g. wildlife viewing doesn't interfere with foraging, territorial or breeding patterns?	✓			
	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 Indigenous cultural education or active visitor involvement in Site restoration?			✓	
	6.1.4 Would visitors be informed of local Indigenous and non-Indigenous customs and expectations regarding use of the Site particularly in relation to cultural resources?			✓	
	6.1.5 Would a range of unique and different experiences be provided for visitors reflecting the degrees in ability and mobility?	✓			
	6.1.6 Would passive and quiet areas be provided where visitors can reflect and meditate on the natural scene?	✓			
	6.1.7 On closure of the Ecotourism Facility, would any interpretation and education materials and resources be provided to local interest groups/schools?				✓

Sub Criteria	Sub Criteria Considerations	Design	Construction and commissioning	Operation	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?			✓	
	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?	✓			
	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?			✓	
	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?			✓	
	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?			✓	
	6.2.6 Would strategies and contingencies be developed to protect visitor safety including an induction process for visitors?			✓	
	6.2.7 Would an emergency management plan be developed that includes first aid response, fully functioning emergency communication equipment and processes?			✓	
	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?			✓	

Image reference on inside cover



Case studies and hypothetical example of applying the Best Practice Guidelines

This section includes six case studies that provide Applicants with practical information on the features of existing best practice Ecotourism Operations.

It also includes an example process for applying the Best Practice Guidelines during the development of a Stage 1 Application (refer to pages 36-37).

Case studies

The following six case studies cover a selection of best practice Ecotourism Operations from across Australia and overseas. Each case study represents an Ecotourism Operation that has considered the natural and cultural values of the national park and sought to protect, conserve and reflect these values through the design, construction and operation phases. The case studies are not an exhaustive list of best practice Ecotourism Operations and there are other similar successful enterprises in operation. The information presented has been sourced from publicly available information.

The six case studies are:

- **Case study 1:** Kuranda SkyRail Rainforest Cableway, Queensland—A Queensland example of best practice construction techniques
- **Case study 2:** Quarantine Station, New South Wales—An Australian example of a best practice environmental management system
- **Case study 3:** Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef, Western Australia—An Australian example of best practice in design, construction and operation
- **Case study 4:** Wilsons Promontory Wilderness Retreats, Victoria—An Australian example of best practice in design and operation as well as involvement of the local community
- **Case study 5:** Lapa Rios, Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica—An international example of best practice in local community involvement and benefits adjacent to a national park
- **Case study 6:** Damaraland Camp, Huab River Valley, Namibia—An international example of best practice in local community ownership and management and restoration of ecological values in a protected area.

Image reference on inside cover





Case study 1—Kuranda Skyrail Rainforest Cableway, Queensland

The Skyrail Rainforest Cableway runs through and adjacent to Barron Gorge National Park in North Queensland. It is a privately owned business that was first opened in 1995 but has undergone several major upgrades and extensions. It involves seven and a half kilometres of cableway and 32 towers and is powered by electric motor. The cableway has 114 gondolas that can ferry up to 650 passengers per hour.

The Skyrail experience allows visitors to glide metres above the rainforest canopy with stopping points at Skyrail's two rainforest mid-stations. The experience takes approximately two hours return. When construction of the Skyrail was completed it was the world's longest gondola cableway at the time. The Skyrail project required application of world first construction techniques and according to the company website remains the most environmentally sensitive cableway project in the world.

Skyrail has been the recipient of numerous awards including the 2010 Hall of Fame for Sustainable Tourism by the Queensland Tourism Awards. It is also accredited by T-QUAL, Platinum EarthCheck (EC3 Global), Advanced Ecotourism and Climate Action (Ecotourism Australia), Environmental Management Systems (ISO 14001:2004) and Quality Management System (9001:2008).

The information below 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

- Skyrail's tower sites were selected to coincide with existing canopy gaps, and were surveyed to ensure no threatened or endangered species would be affected by construction.
- Before construction commenced on the tower sites, the operator received approval to collect and stockpile the leaf litter, top soil and plant seedlings for reintroduction when construction was complete. Plant seedlings were catalogued at each site, then removed and propagated during construction. Upon completion of construction the seedlings were re-planted in their original locations and the saved top soil and leaf litter was replaced.

Best Practice Criteria 2: The Ecotourism Operation is designed to fit within the character of the national park

- The two rainforest mid-stations were designed to blend in with the surrounding rainforest and minimise environmental impact, and were built in pre-existing clearings.



Images courtesy of Skyrail Rainforest Cableway.

Best Practice Criteria 3: The Ecotourism Operation minimises its footprint on the Site

- The tower footings were built largely by hand, up to five metres deep in some cases, using picks and shovels. No roads were built during Skyrail's construction; workers walked to the remote tower sites each day, carrying their equipment.
- Helicopters were used extensively to assist construction. The helicopters were used to carry equipment, materials and cement to tower sites and rainforest stations. The helicopters carried their loads on 100 metre long lines to avoid generation of wind turbulence which would affect the sensitive rainforest canopy. The towers were flown-in in sections and assembled on site. The cableway haul rope was then laid and tensioned across towers by the helicopters.

Best Practice Criteria 4: The Ecotourism Operation contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park

- The Skyrail Rainforest Foundation was established by the company in 2005, with the primary objective of raising and distributing funds to support tropical rainforest research and education projects. The vision of the foundation is: 'The protection of tropical rainforests worldwide through sound management, understanding and appreciation through research and education'.
- In order to directly contribute to enhancing ecological values, monies raised by the Foundation are paid into the Skyrail Rainforest Research Fund which is administered for a number of environmental research purposes.

Case study 2—Quarantine Station, New South Wales

The Quarantine Station (Q Station) is leased to a private operator and remains part of the Sydney Harbour National Park. The lease is managed by the New South Wales Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC). Q Station is a 30 hectare site that contains 65 buildings, a wharf, over 1000 stone inscriptions and paintings, a moveable heritage collection, and bush land that is home to several threatened species.

The operation includes a mix of retreat-style heritage accommodation, a harbour-front restaurant, conference and function facilities, a health retreat, a visitor centre, residential education, and storytelling tours.

The information below 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 in the vicinity of Quarantine Beach is mapped to determine seasonal distribution and provide a benchmark to monitor from. The ferry uses a set route into and out of Quarantine Wharf that 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.

Best Practice Criteria 3: The Ecotourism Operation minimises its footprint on the Site

- Water tanks have been installed 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 goes above and beyond the conditions of lease approval. Focus areas of the sustainability policy include:
 - » the key elements of the natural environment are maintained
 - » operational consumption of resources is efficient
 - » cultural heritage is maintained in good condition
 - » visitation patterns reflect forecasts
 - » visitor expectations are met
 - » 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.
- Q Station operates a targeted feral species control program for foxes, dogs, cats, rats and rabbits.

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.
- Community days offer people the opportunity to visit the Site and learn more about how it is being conserved, adapted, used and monitored. An ongoing Community Committee, running for the life of the lease, meets regularly.

Images courtesy of Quarantine Station



Case study 3—Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef, Western Australia

The Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef is privately owned by Wild Bush Luxury and is located within the Cape Range National Park, Western Australia. The operation is an exclusive safari camp that consists of nine semi-permanent tents and a main lodge located near the water's edge. According to Wild Bush Luxury, Sal Salis's ecological principles aim to generate a minimal environmental footprint. Visitors come to Sal Salis to experience the pristine natural environment including the marine life of Ningaloo Reef and surrounding fauna and flora.

The information below outlines examples of how the case study meets a selection of the Best Practice Criteria:

Best Practice Criteria 2: The Ecotourism Operation is designed to fit within the character of the national park

- The colour of the tents and main lodge blends in naturally with the surrounding landscape.
- All the tents face the ocean to allow the coastal breeze to naturally cool the interiors.
- The tents 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 erosion.

Best Practice Criteria 3: The Ecotourism Operation minimises its footprint on the Site

- 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.
- Used cans and bottles are separated and sent to the Exmouth recycle depot.
- Solar panels supply 100% of the operations electricity requirements.
- Hot water is generated by a solar system.
- 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

- Guests are informed about the importance of the Ningaloo Reef and the Cape Range National Park. During their stay they learn about the flora and fauna of the region, and climate variability and its impact on the local environment.
- Wild Bush Luxury makes a donation for every guest per night to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy to support wildlife and habitat conservation initiatives.



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

Wilson's Promontory Wilderness Retreats at Wilson's Promontory National Park ('The Prom') are owned and managed by Parks Victoria and aim 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. The Prom 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 information below outlines examples of how the case study meets a selection of the Best Practice Criteria:



Best Practice Criteria 2: The Ecotourism Operation is designed to fit within the character of the national park

- External colours have been specially selected to complement the colours of the landscapes.
- 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 Parks Victoria



Case study 5—Lapa Rios, Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica

Lapa Rios Eco Lodge is a privately owned operation set in a private nature reserve spread over 1 000 acres of Central America’s last remaining lowland tropical rainforest in Costa Rica’s Osa Peninsula adjacent to Corcovado National Park. The operation has 16 private bungalows that line three ridges overlooking the area where the Golfo Dulce meets the Pacific Ocean. The bungalows are situated 350 feet above sea level. Walking paths and stairs through the rainforest connect the main lodge with all bungalows.

The facility is made from locally harvested material, and was designed to operate in harmony with the surrounding environment. According to the company website, Lapa Rios has a reputation as a model ecotourism project and a sustainable tourism pioneer. The operation has won many awards for social and environmental excellence.

The case study is an example of how remote or regional communities can benefit from Ecotourism Operations through employment and provision of goods and services.

The information below outlines examples of how the case study meets a selection of the Best Practice Criteria:

Best Practice Criteria 2: The Ecotourism Operation is designed to fit within the character of the national park

- The bungalows are open-air with screens that allow guests to experience the sounds, sights and smells of the rainforest and the ocean. All bungalows offer guests stunning views of the Pacific Ocean or Golfo Dulce.

Best Practice Criteria 5: The Ecotourism Operation engages, involves and benefits Traditional Owners and local communities

- Lapa Rios helped build the Carbonera School next to the nature reserve in the early 1990’s and has supported the education of elementary school children in this very remote part of Costa Rica for more than two decades. The operation continues to support the school through donations, organisation of summer schools as well as through provision of environmental education programs.
- Lapa Rios offers scholarships to employees’ children at a private school in Puerto Jimenez and offers help with college education to its staff members.
- Lapa Rios buys and hires local; purchasing local produce and products to support local producers, commerce, and retail. Any goods and services that are unavailable at Osa Peninsula are purchased in nearby Costa Rica.
- The operation hires a local workforce, including top management positions.
- Lapa Rios support local transportation companies for boat, air and ground transfers and allow local dance groups and artisans to perform and sell their crafts at the lodge.

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

- Educational hiking tours are led by trained, experienced local guides offering an authentic local interpretation which supports the local community by providing employment opportunities.



Case study 6—Damaraland Camp, Huab River Valley, Namibia

Damaraland Camp is owned and operated by the local community and is considered a rare venture which integrates communities, the environment and sustainable wildlife interactions. It has been rated as the most successful ecotourism venture in Namibia. The 80,000 hectare Torra Wildlife Conservancy has been proclaimed as a result of the partnership between private ecotourism operator Wilderness Safaris and the local community. It is located on the north bank of the Huab River Valley, 90 kilometres inland from Torra Bay on Namibia's Skeleton Coast and consists of ten thatch style adobe tents and a main lodge.

Damaraland Camp is an example of how Ecotourism Operations can benefit local communities and Traditional Owners particularly in rural or remote areas and how ecotourism can be used to re-establish ecological values on previously denuded land.

The information below outlines examples of how the case study meets a selection of the Best Practice Criteria:



Best Practice Criteria 2: The Ecotourism Operation is designed to fit within the character of the national park

- The eco-friendly construction of Damaraland Camp has merged new technology with ancient methodology. Accommodation at Damaraland Camp consists of 10 adobe-styled, thatched units each raised on individual wooden decking—part of which extends out to form a large viewing deck. The main living area is made from local rock and canvas.

Best Practice Criteria 4: The Ecotourism Operation contributes to protecting and positively enhancing the national park

- The ecological values of the area have been re-established with measurable increases in wildlife numbers. The rare desert-adapted elephant, black rhino and plains game are flourishing again.

Best Practice Criteria 5: The Ecotourism Operation engages, involves and benefits Traditional Owners and local communities

- Wilderness Safaris and the local Torra community in Damaraland have formed a highly successful partnership, with the community acting as landlord. It has resulted in a 352,000-hectare Community Wildlife Conservancy being proclaimed in what was once barren denuded land.
- Revenues flow from Damaraland Camp to the community through significant bed-night levies, the provision of services, secondary businesses and salaries; thus the very existence of the camp has been instrumental in alleviating poverty in the region. The community earns a percentage of the camp's accommodation revenue and its Trust is one of the most successful community trusts in Namibia.

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 area and include drives into the Huab River System in search of desert elephants and other specially adapted flora and fauna.
- The natural environment is appreciated through all visitor activities. For example, evening meals at Damaraland Camp are often prepared over an open fire and served out in the open in an area near to the camp.



Images courtesy of Wilderness Safaris

Hypothetical example of applying the Best Practice Guidelines to the development of a Stage 1 Application

Scenario

An Applicant has identified a Site that has potential to be used for an Ecotourism Operation. The Site is an existing camp ground of about 100 square metres in size and has access to a small beach. There is a walking track to access the Site from the main road, which is about one kilometre in length. Composting toilets and tank water facilities are available at the Site already. The Applicant is not sure what type of Ecotourism Facility and activities to offer and only has general ideas and concepts about the development.

The Applicant has identified three potential opportunities that appear to suit the environmental and cultural values of the Site while delivering an experience that would attract enough visitors to make the operation commercially viable:

- **Option 1:** Offer a safari camp experience. This would involve six semi-permanent safari tents which could accommodate a maximum of 12 people and would not require any additional infrastructure or clearing. The camp ground would no longer operate as a public site.
- **Option 2:** Offer a 'glamping' style experience. This would involve 10 tents each with amenities such as a toilet and shower facilities as well as a tented restaurant and administration area. The Site would accommodate about 20 people plus five staff. Private beach access from the Site would be preferred and four-wheel-drive access to the Site would be gated at the entrance to avoid unauthorised vehicles. Activities offered would include guided walks. A small area of additional clearing would be required.
- **Option 3:** Offer an all-inclusive eco-lodge experience with a restaurant, swimming pool, day spa and luxury accommodation. Activities offered would include Indigenous cultural experiences, guided walks and fauna studies and crocodile experiences. Transport would also be provided to and from other tourism experiences in the region. The Ecotourism Facility would include eco-cabin style accommodation for up to 12 groups as well as an administration / restaurant / day spa facility. A large area of additional clearing would be required along with access to power and water. A sealed access road would be required.

The Best Practice Guidelines were applied as follows:

Step 1: General review of the Best Practice Guidelines

The Applicant read through the Best Practice Guidelines to understand the government's intention for ecotourism development on national parks, focussing in particular on the Appropriate nature and scale of Ecotourism Facilities on National Parks and Case studies sections. The Applicant noted that it was not just the Ecotourism Facility design and layout that was important but also the interpretative experience offered to visitors and the fact that a cohesive theme was required that linked the Ecotourism Facility, activities and the Site. The Applicant noted that the natural and cultural values of the Site would help determine what this overarching theme or experience could be.

The Applicant gained an understanding of the key concepts and factors that would be important in the assessment of the Application, such as scale and nature, site suitability, impacts on natural and cultural values, and Best Practice Criteria.

The Applicant also read the Implementation Framework to obtain an understanding of the two stage assessment process.

Step 2: Undertake Site Suitability Assessment

The Applicant reviewed the nature and scale of the three options presented above and concluded that they were likely to be small, medium and large respectively. The Applicant reviewed the abridged LCS values for the Site and determined that while the Site is currently cleared for use by campers, beyond the Site and in the immediate surrounds there did not appear to be any sign of visitor impact. The Applicant concluded that the LCS value was likely to be 3 – 5 (or very natural) due to the existence of the campground and walking track access.

Using the Site Suitability Matrix, the Applicant determined that the eco-lodge experience on that Site was likely to be a risky proposition, whereas glamping and safari tent options may be more appropriate. The Applicant decided to focus on these two options going forward.

Step 3: Apply Best Practice Criteria and complete Stage 1 Application Form

The Applicant reviewed the Best Practice Criteria and Sample Questions on pages 13-17 that may be relevant to the two options. Through this process, the Applicant identified the following:

- Precluding access to the Site and beach to the public could be an issue as it may compromise the public interest requirements of the NC Act. Public consultation would likely be required.
- Cassowary traverse the Site: design and layout would need to facilitate their movement. Visitors would need to be informed of appropriate behaviour if cassowary are encountered. Protection of the endangered cassowary and their habitat could be the overarching conservation theme required for the operation. Safe visitor management in regards to crocodiles would also be important.
- Commitment to integrating the Ecotourism Facility into the landscape would need to be demonstrated in the application. The layout of the Site would need to incorporate climate sensitive design features such as capturing sea breezes and providing shading from the full sun.
- Clearing would need to be minimised and undertaken without large excavators. There may be the opportunity to purchase or locally construct pre-fabricated tents off site and then transport for assembly on site.
- There are opportunities to link in with existing regional tourism operations. There could be partnerships around the protection of cassowary and the opportunity to attract visitors to the Site who were already visiting the adjacent national park through offering rainforest exploration activities at the Site.
- Power, energy, water and waste would need to be provided on-site and there were tested technologies available as well as case study examples of how this could be achieved to best practice standards.
- In terms of a unique visitor experience, the Applicant considered the Ecotourism Operation would offer eco-accommodation in a rainforest, opportunities to learn about iconic wildlife such as cassowary and crocodiles, and guided walks of the surrounding area. Protection of the cassowary could be an interpretative theme for the operation including safety messages for visitors.

The Applicant sought initial advice on the likely approvals required for their proposed development. They then weighed up the best practice considerations against the commercial business model for the Site and determined that the project would proceed in two stages: commencing with the safari style tents and then, within 10 years, applying to the Department to develop the glamping option as the business grew.

The Applicant presented this information to the Department as part of the Stage 1 Application Form.

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