Social Reflections on the Ecocertification process and Protected Areas of Australia

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Ecocertification in Australia began with the implementation of the world's first National Ecotourism Accreditation Program（NEAP）in 1996 as a result of stakeholders and social pressures. It was a joint product of government, Protected Area Managers, tourism stakeholders, academics, and Australian society. Originally, a small voluntarily implemented system catering to a niche market, it is now a national $1.2 billion industry, encompassing Eco certified companies, guides, indigenous and climate change certification.

Recent tourism research indicates that as the generation shifts, there is a growth in conscientious travelling with an increase in volunteerism, environmentally friendly, authentic and experiential tourism. In 2012, nearly 30% of tourists indicated they would choose an eco-friendly option, and a majority of travellers（70%）expect travel companies to build sustainability into their products（CREST 2013）. The following paper looks at the sociological processes and events in the tourism industry that contributed to the development of Ecotourism – ecologically sustainable tourism, cultural understanding, education, and accreditation.

Keywords：Ecotourism, Ecocertification, NEAP, Ecoguides Australia, sustainable tourism, accreditation

Introduction

Ecotourism is defined by Ecotourism Australia（EA）as 'ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation`（EA 2016）. The accreditation process and industry evolved significantly from a voluntary niche market to that of a government requirement for access to protected areas. Initiated by stakeholders in the tourism industry in response to social demands, ecotourism offered a green alternative to mass tourism. The demand for environmentally friendly products, publication of the negative impacts of tourism, and a growth in cultural understanding resulted in the growth of the Ecotourism industry（CREST 2013）.

Historically, tourism catered to the higher socioeconomic market in search of adventure and relaxation. As technology improved however, travel became accessible to the general public – with beachside getaways, overland expeditions, and weekends away. Marketing focused on relaxation, social interaction, fun and adventure（Weaver 2007）. The introduction of mass air travel in the 1950s made

both national and international travel accessible, with up to a 5% reduction in costs per annum. Consequently, tourist numbers increased by over 10% per annum (Oxley 2015).

The 1960s saw environmental issues become socially popular, with famous publications such as Rachel Carson's, Silent Spring (1962) bringing a greater understanding of environmental issues. A reflection of the popularity of the subject was the creation of Environmental Science as a subject in Australian universities in 1962 (Robin 2014). In 1969, the environment emerged as a significant political issue when the Little Desert environmental protest of Victoria drew together the public, scientists, and business professionals in a much publicized court case. The result of which was the protection of the environment, loss of a parliamentary seat, creation of the Land Council of Victoria, publicity for environmental issues, and a realisation of the power of environmental lobbying (Hall 2006). At the federal level, the proposed damming of the Franklin River in the Tasmanian wilderness was the first time an environmental issue entered an election campaign (Hall 2006).

The media responded by covering environmental issues, academic research, and global conventions - the UN Biosphere Conference in Paris (1968), the first Earth Day (1970), the Club of Rome (1968), and the UN Conference on the Human Environment (1972). In the period 1984-7 alone, the Australian media covered the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl nuclear disasters; liquid gas tanks exploding in Mexico; 40 tons of methyl isocyanate gas killing more than 2,000 people in India; agricultural chemicals killing millions of fish in Switzerland; and a drought in Africa that killed more than 1 million people. The media also covered the release of the historic Brundtland Report (1987).

Environmental issues and Indigenous rights were reflected in governmental policies, with a 60.6% increase in spending on federal Aboriginal Advancement programs in the period 1983-9, totalling AUD$646.2 million dollars (Castles 1989). Social protects were held throughout the country, with support for environmental and indigenous rights extending to popular culture, with bands like Midnight Oil taking top ratings. The bombing of the Greenpeace boat - the Rainbow Warrior and death of one of its crew in New Zealand (1985) cemented Australian support for Greenpeace and the environmental movement. Indigenous rights came to the fore with the handback of Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park (UKTNP) to traditional owners on 26 October 1985, whilst the tourism industry promoted Indigenous products. In the media, Paul Hogan, 'Crocodile Dundee', brought Kakadu National Park and Australian culture onto movie screens and tourist itineraries.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics recorded that the growth in inbound tourists to Australia averaged over three times the international growth rate in the mid-1980s (Castles 1990). Numbers increased due to transportation and technological advances, additional air routes, increased tourism infrastructure, hosting of international conferences such as World Expo 1988. Promotions of Australian environment and World Heritage listings by the government generated international interest, and internally, the tourism industry created the Tourism for Tomorrow Awards, founded by the Federation of Tour Operators (1989), to publicly acknowledge efforts by global stakeholders towards 'their local natural and cultural environment' (Donald 2000).

Legally, the Australian government supported ecological development and tourism stakeholders through the creation of the Australian Tourist Commission Act 1987, restructuring the Australian Tourist Commission（ATC）, and assigning the Australian Commonwealth Bureau of Tourism Research （1987）to study, monitor and report on the environmental impacts of tourism within Australia（Castles 1989）. Publication and media attention regarding the negative impacts of mass tourism on natural resources（Lawrence 1997, Sun and Walsh 1998）promoted the creation of small Ecotourism companies, catering predominantly to the Japanese inbound tour market at the end of the 1980s（Castles 1989）. The companies invested in environmentally friendly technologies, biodegradable and alternative energy sources, reduced waste and water use. Guides underwent specialised training, often with environmental specialists, and worked in conjunction with National Parks and Protected Area Managers （PAM）. Stakeholders employed indigenous guides and staff, promoted cultural interaction and understanding.

As tourist demand increased for small scale, green, environmentally friendly, ethical operations there was a significant move away from mass tourism（Valentine 1993）. In response, numerous large companies began to 'greenwash' their products and marketing campaigns（Wight 1993）. Ecotourism was a lucrative business（Orams 1995）. Within the Ecotourism industry there was frustration at the inability to separate companies or products from the mass market, resulting in an internally driven demand for a tourism regulatory body and a need to define `Ecotourism`（Dowling 1991）.

Establishment of an Ecotourism Industry in Australia

Visitor numbers to Australia continued to increase, with over 3.1 million visitors recorded in 1990, more than four-fold over the last 25 years（Castles 1990,）despite a recession in the early 1990s and a pilot airstrike in 1989（DSTI 2003, DRET 2009）. Research shows that 50% of international visitors visited a national park or nature area（Sun and Walsh 1998）resulting in a growing demand for ecotourism or green products.

In 1991, the first Inaugural International Ecotourism Symposium was held in Brisbane in conjunction with the Global Classroom: an International Symposium on Educational Tourism - maximising turn out from the tourism industry, NGOs, government, academics, and stakeholders（Weller 1994）. Over 120 delegates from Oceania, Canada, the US, and Europe concluded that there was an urgent need to define Ecotourism, develop a Code of Ethics, and create an Ecotourism Association of the Indo Pacific Region （EAIPR）to support the development and promotion of ecotourism and its policies（Buckley 2013, Dowling 1991, Weiler 1992）.

Studies by the Australian Council in 1990 showed that 49% of international tourists were interested in Aboriginal culture（Altman 1993）with the tourism industry coming under public scrutiny for its access to and use of indigenous land and sacred sites, art and culture（Tremblay 2009）, particulariy after the historic native title court case, Mabo v Queensland（No. 2）（Whitford 2001）. Indigenous rights were a growing social issue and the government invested AUD$10 million in Indigenous tourism and training

programs after holding a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody（1991）（Sofield 2002）.

International support for Ecotourism continued to grow with the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development（Earth Summit）in Rio producing Agenda 21 and establishing global sustainable development and tourism guidelines. Agenda 21 called for the creation, support, and promotion of Ecotourism by governments, in response, Australia delivered its' National Tourism Strategy（Altman 1993）.

With the change in name from EAIPR to Ecotourism Association of Australia（EAA）（Weller 1994）, came the formal establishment of a Code of Practice. Industry stakeholders established 20 basic rules to support conservation, regulate the use of protected areas and natural resources, and respect other cultures（EAA 1992）. It was the first step taken by the industry towards self-regulation and accreditation.

Problems in the Tourism Industry

Australia continued to experience an inbound tourism boom with Japanese inbound tourism remaining the primary market until 1999. Japanese stakeholders invested in hotels, theme parks, golf courses, and infrastructure with much negative publicity occurring as a result of monopolies（Daikyo owned all the resorts and major hotels in Cairns）（Berry 1994）and published research by academics - Professor Buckley showed 96% of locations chosen for development required logging, whilst 18/115 sites 'were proposed in or immediately adjacent to national or marine park, with a further 18 in ...conservation areas'（Buckley and Warnken 1997）.

The move to protect Australia's environment from the negative impacts of tourism was further highlighted by the release of data showing an increase of 33%（1993-96）in visitor numbers to Australia's National Parks（1.2 - 1.6 million visitors）（STDA 1999, TIES 2000）. National Park staff numbers had to be increased to maintain primary conservation efforts（Lindberg and McKercher 1997, Buckley 1999）, whilst a survey conducted of parks staff showed that tourism was considered problematic as operators and guides were insufficiently trained（Moore and Carter 1993）.

Society continued to focus on the Japanese inbound tour operators and alleged controlled shopping, overcharging, unconscionable conduct and a monopoly of the industry（Roberts 2003）, resulting in public pressure to conduct a government investigative commission. Problems were further exacerbated when the Japanese Tour Wholesalers Committee of Australia submitted to bring in 2000 Japanese workers for the tourism industry（Legislative Assembly 2003）. With 140,000 students learning Japanese （南燕郭 2003）, and an unemployment rate of 10.5%, the hiring and support of Australians became a critical issue. The result was social and political backlash, the Anti-Discrimination Act（1992）and industry support of local guides and ecotourism operators.

The first Ecotourism annual general meeting and workshop held in November 1993, was attended by

250 delegates- including guides, operators, PAMAs, NPs, government, academics, and NGOs. Stakeholders created a Code of Conduct, worked on a definition of Ecotourism and created a foundation for an Ecotourism Accreditation program（Weller 1994）. In support, the Australian government allocated $10 million to create a National Ecotourism Strategy（Honey 2008）to address, support, and advocate the promotion of ecotourism and resource management. It called for ethical and responsible marketing procedures, effective monitoring of the industry, the creation of sustainable infrastructure, waste and energy minimisation, creating a government Eco Certification system, establishing professional standards, and the involvement of indigenous Australians（Dowling 2001）. It was 'one of the earliest and most successful examples of planned and supported development of ecotourism, which has been replicated elsewhere'（UNEP-WTO 2005）.

These policies were further supported when the Commonwealth Department of Tourism（DOT）released its National Tourism Strategy Progress Report No. 1（1993）highlighting the need for Indigenous tourism employment opportunities and the development of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Strategy（NATSITIS）（CAT 1993, Whitford 2001）, to which the Federal government provided $15 million in support（Tremblay 2009）. In addition, the government and tourism industry funded the establishment of the International Center for Ecotourism Research（ICER）, at Griffith University on the Gold Coast（1993）, head of the Cooperative Research Centre, to create a dynamic, internationally competitive and sustainable tourism industry. The government then went on to launch Australia's Tourism White Paper at a cost of $235 million（UNEP-WTO 2005）.

Introduction of an Accreditation System

National Parks of Australia continued to see a steady 33.3% increase in international visitor numbers between 1993 and 1996, the Sport and Tourism Division recording 1.6 million visitors in 1996（STDA 1996）. The impact of tourism on the environment was once again the primary topic at the second EAA meeting held in Alice Springs（November 1995）. A total of 150 members focused on accreditation, indigenous tourism, education, marketing, assessment, water and waste regulation, and progression in industry without compromising the environment. A workshop component involved the practical assessment of Ecotours in the region and the re-evaluation of accreditation protocols in preparation for the launch of a nation-wide accreditation program（Dowling 1996）.

The third National Ecotourism Conference（November 1996）saw the launch of the world's first National Ecotourism Accreditation Program（NEAP）, the result of years of trials and research by the industry. In support, the conference host – the Federal Office of National Tourism（ONT）provided a one-off grant of US$30,000 to help develop the accreditation criteria/program（Dowling 1997, Honey 2001）. To maintain low overheads and ensure the continuity of the organisation, conference stakeholders volunteered their staff and time to maintain NEAP, creating eight founding principles - best practice environmental management, education, contribution to local communities, sensitivity to different cultures, consistency of product delivery and ethical marketing（Dowling 1997, Dowling 2000）.

Research on and global awareness of Environmental issues continued to grow, Climate Change was confirmed globally by the IPCC causing much public concern and further support for Ecotourism. Domestically, the Ecotourism industry continued to support, fund and participate in research on ecotourism and presented findings at the 7th Australian Ecotourism Conference held on Fraser Island, Queensland. The conference, attended by 275 members from ten countries, focused on NEAP brand awareness, market research, visitor pressure on protected areas, greater use of private assets to reduce impacts on protected areas, partnerships, the role of interpretation, and indigenous tourism （Dowling 2001）.

Internationally, Ecotourism continued to grow with research stating that approximately 30% of all domestic travellers were Eco tourists （Honey 1999）, and approximately 1.7 million or 47% of all inbound tourists having visited the NPs （TIES 2000）.

Numerous accreditation organisations emerged, including Green Tourism Business Scheme (Scotland), Green Key （Denmark）, Certification for Sustainable Tourism （Costa Rica）, and The International Ecotourism Society （TIES 2000）. Domestically, stakeholders implemented NEAP strategies and Ecotourism was recognised as a separate market. It continued to grow with 600 ecotourism operators registered in Australia in 1998, and an estimated annual turnover of AUD$250 million （STDA 1999）. The focus remained consistently on the eight principles of Ecotourism, with both the Australian National Ecotourism Conferences and EAA meetings conducting workshops and field trips focusing on the training and accreditation of guides （Dowling 2000）.

In 2000, NEAP II split into three levels - Tourism, Ecotourism, and Advanced Ecotourism, with two new sectors added - Eco Guide and Nature accreditation （Buckley 2001）. NEAP II had a heavy ecologically sustainable focus and became the foundation for other global accreditation programs such as the International Ecotourism Standard （IES） of Green Globe 21 （GG21） （Bien 2007）.

The introduction of a Nature Tourism accreditation sector to NEAP expanded the accreditation process to include ecologically sustainable stakeholders who were not an Ecotourism business (Buckley 2001, Weaver 2001) e.g. accommodation providers, thus significantly increasing membership and consequently, brand recognition.

The Eco Guide certification was supported by the Federal government which contributed $95,000 towards its establishment （Honey 2001）. The certification consisted of five guiding categories: 1. Access to Interpretation 2. Accuracy of Information 3. Interpretive Planning 4. Staff Awareness and 5. Training （Buckley 2001, Weaver 2001）, bringing a higher level of professionalism to the industry.

> **Case Study: Aries Tours, Gold Coast, Australia - Advanced Ecocertification**
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> Aries Tours, Gold Coast, Queensland, was one of the founders of Ecotourism, Australia. The company specialised in the Japanese market, with then Managing Director, Clare McFarlane, an environmental scientist, working closely with Manager, Anji Nishiyama-Kemp to establish Ecotourism protocols throughout the industry.
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> Aries staff held posts as Chairman of EA, keynote speakers, provided financial and physical assistance, and provided a testing ground for Ecotourism protocols. It promoted strong relationships with NPs and PAMAs - employing two National Park Rangers, it was one of the first tour operators to receive Advanced Ecotourism Accreditation status under NEAP II, and led the way in Ecotourism (AT 2016, Dowling 2001).

Issues of reconciliation and aboriginal rights, gained momentum in Australian society and politics in 2000, with quarter of a million people supporting reconciliation by doing the Sydney Harbour Bridge Walk (Higgins-Desbiolles 2003). The issue gained further attention with the Aboriginal Tourism Australia brand ambassador and 400m runner-Cathy Freeman, who won gold and celebrated by controversially canying both the Aboriginal and Australian flags (Schmiechen 2006) . The Olympics resulted in a great promotion of Indigenous and Australian landscapes and cultures paralleled with international trade shows and marketing (Schmiechen 2007).

The establishment of the Mohonk Agreement (November 2000) by major industry stakeholders EAA and GG 21, TIES, Conservation International (CI) , WWF, Rainforest Alliance (RA) and UNEP (Buckley 2002) showed the level of global demand for sustainability in tourism with two tiers of criteria established for sustainable and Ecotourism (Medina 2005). Numerous accreditation programs emerged globally, causing much confusion, research and competition (Font 2001). Meanwhile, the WWF made a publically scathing attack on Green Globe, whilst strongly supporting NEAP (TIES 2000).

In 2001, NEAP became the sole product of EAA as ATON relinquished its ownership (Honey 2001). The Australian Ecotourism Conference saw an increase in participants, with keynote speaker Clare McFarlane, Managing Director of Aries Tours speaking on the need for partnerships between tourism operators and PAMAs. In Australia, some PAMAs were using NEAP certification in preferential permitting, stakeholders continued to work on a globally recognised certification process-the International Ecotourism Standard for Certification (IESC) (Buckley 2002a).

The attack on the World Trade Center (11 September 2001) saw a brief drop in inbound tourism numbers to Australia, with a 9% drop in Japanese outbound travel (Cooper 2005), although the impact was minimised due to Australia's reputation as a 'safe' location. Although the EU ratified the Kyoto Protocol on 31 May 2002, Australia continued to refuse, despite global and domestic pressure and continued reports of deforestation and global warming (Gascoigne 2008, Pezzey 2008).

The IESC was unveiled at the World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec (2002) , in the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE), a joint venture between GG21 and EAA utilising NEAPs criteria and Green

Globes' reach (Buckley 2002), whilst sharing ecotourism research became possible with the inaugural publishing of the Journal of Ecotourism (Fennel 2002).

The media focused on ecological disasters including the Prestige Oil Spill, coral bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef, dust clouds in Korea, smog levels in China, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development(South Africa). Academics published reports on carbon and ecological footprints(Gossling 2002), `greenwashing' and ecolabelling by tourism stakeholders (Buckley 2001a), generating an increase in demand for environmentally friendly tourism (Buckley 2001a).

Tourism numbers dropped globally in 2003 due to the deployment of Australian troops to the Solomon Islands and the Gulf (DSTI 2003, Eastgate 2016), political instability due to a no-confidence motion in February against Prime Minister John Howard over his handling of the Iraq crisis, and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak between November 2002 to July 2003 (DSTI 2003, Schabas 2004, Samaan 2004). Global tourism numbers remained low due to fears of terrorism, after the Sari nightclub bombing in Indonesia on 12 October 2003 (DSTI 2003, Beirman 2006). Research by Cooper (2005) indicates that the drop in the outbound Japanese market was only 25% in the three months from April to August 2003, with a loss in numbers being attributed to stop-overs in other countries en-route. despite tourism being diverted from the US and European routes where terrorism was a perceived threat to Australia (AICST 2006, Cooper 2005).

Nine days after the attack, the UN IYE Conference, was hosted by Ecotourism Australia Limited (EA) in Cairns. The conference, endorsed by the WTO, UNEP, CI, TIE, and RA, focused on ecotourism marketing, indigenous communities, management, standards, and accreditation. The 400 members produced the Cairns Charter on Ecotourism Partnerships IESC (Charters 2002, Dowling 2002a), which was criticised by international NGOs and intergovernmental agencies for politicking, with very little value (Buckley 2004).

Continued unethical tourism practices by large tourism organisations including JTB, Kintetsu, Chinese and Korean operators, resulted in the Regulation of Inbound Tourism Operators - Tourism Services Bill (RBR 2003/16) and the Tourism Services Act 2003 (LA 2003). The bill requires operator registration, adherence to a Code of Conduct, itinerary auditing, and guide accreditation. It also made controlled shopping, misrepresentation, over-charging or unconscionable conduct illegal in Australia (Dixon 2003, LA 2003).

With 500,000 visitors having an Indigenous tourism experience in 2003 (ATC 2004), there was great pressure on stakeholders to ensure a positive interaction and representation of indigenous culture (Fuller 2005). This was further accentuated by the deaths of an Aboriginal teenager and a man in police custody which resulted in the Cronulla Race Riots (11 December 2005) and a subsequent drop in tourism and the perception of Australian intolerance to immigrants, refugees, and other cultures(Manne 2004, Lyons 2012).

The government released a report focusing on the understanding of Indigenous communities often directly affected by tourism and park management, and further supported by the Federal Tourism in Protected Areas Initiative（2003）which provided $4.6 million to improve partnerships between stakeholders, traditional owner input, fee/site planning, development of a tourism and conservation agenda as well as accreditation support（UNEP-WTO 2005）.

A formal change from NEAP to Ecotourism Australia（EA）, brought funding from Tourism Queensland, changes in the assessment and auditing processes, streamlining of certification, and the creation of the Queensland Ecotourism Plan（Thwaite 2007, UNEP-WTO 2005）.

The issue of the environment remained at the forefront of politics and society globally in 2003, with the EU releasing its pollution register, protests to the Three Gorges Dam, public awareness of deforestation due to the landslides in Haiti and the release of statistics on the Amazon deforestation. Social and political support saw 15 of the world's largest mining and metal producing companies pledging not to mine the Arctic, the adoption of European climate emissions trading law and the release of a UN List of Protected Areas（IUCN 2005）. Domestically, Australians were acutely aware of environmental issues as they had some of the worst bush fires in 20 years which continued into 2005, as well as suffering from a severe water shortage（the Millennium Drought）- topics that won the Prime Minister his fourth term in Parliament. A global decrease in numbers occurred with the Indian Ocean Tsunami（26 December 2005）.

Domestically, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission（ATSIC）was abolished due to corruption charges and Aboriginal Tourism Australia（ATA）launched its Respecting Our Culture （ROC）accreditation programme, as well as an Indigenous Tour Guides Training Manual（ET 2007, Bradfield 2006, Rome 2006, Trau 2008）.

Ecotourism was significantly affected when Cyclone Larry seriously damaged more than 73 North Queensland parks and forests on 20 March 2006, causing more than $10 million in damages（BOM 2008, Prideaux 2008）. Two months later, the award winning climate change documentary - An Inconvenient Truth was released, featuring former US Vice President, Al Gore. Australian Prime Minister John Howard, drew much public criticism when he refused to meet with Al Gore and made a controversial speech at the Global Warming Policy Foundation in England（Howard 2013）.This was compounded by the release of the Stern Review（30 October 2006）which confirmed Global Warming and its economic impacts. The report estimated that the impact on the Great Barrier Reef, a $32 billion industry, was almost complete bleaching as well as a greater severity in cyclonic activity（Stern 2007）securing greater support for Ecotourism.

The EA Ecotourism Conference, 'Creating Unforgettable Natural Experiences'（28 November – 2 December）held in Hobart, Tasmania was again headed by Aries Tours - Clare McFarlane and covered the issues of sustainability, Antarctic tourism, interaction in Protected Areas and Climate Change（EA 2005）. It resulted in the creation of the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework（2007）, which

identified tourism stakeholders as vulnerable to Climate Change（COAG 2007）. Consequently, a National Tourism and Climate Change Taskforce was established（DRET 2008）.

The Global Ecotourism Conference（GEC07）held in Oslo, Norway（May 2007）was organised by TIES, Ecotourism Norway, and UNEP. Bringing together 450 global stakeholders from 70 countries, it summarised Ecotourism achievements as being: global awareness of climate change, poverty eradication, development of sustainable tourism and conservation. Future plans included strengthening stakeholder relationships, promotion of accreditation schemes, climate change action, focus on quantifiable standards, and respect for other cultures - in particular, Indigenous communities（TIES 2007）.

Issues of Climate Change and tourism were further discussed by the UNWTO, UNEP, World Meteorological Organisation（WMO）and other stakeholders in Davos, Switzerland, on October 2007. Conference stakeholders reported that tourism accounts for approximately 4-6% of total global emissions in their report 'Climate Change and Tourism: Responding to Global Challenges'（UNWTO 2008）. The report concludes that tourism stakeholders need to significantly reduce emissions in order to protect the environment as well as the industry. The report was presented for consideration at the UN Strategy for Climate Change Response in Bali, Indonesia generating awareness of Eco tourism practices and policies（UNEP 2007, UNEP 2008）.

Domestically, Prime Minister Rudd had a landslide win in the Australian Federal Elections（27 November 2007）. According to Betts（2008）, if all the environmental issues were combined-environment, global warming, water management, it would result in 25% of the voters listing it as the most important issue, 'dwarfing all other issues such as health and Medicare or the combined economic issues of tax and interest rates（16 per cent）'（Betts 2008）. In his first official act upon being sworn in on 3 December（Gascoigne 2008）, PM Rudd ratified the Kyoto Protocol.

The 2007 National Strategy for Indigenous Tourism（2007–2012）report identified a need for further market research, marketing and promotion of Indigenous tourism（Indigenous Tourism Australia 2007）. On 13 February 2008 PM Rudd issued a formal apology to the Indigenous People of Australia（Rudd 2008）recognising the past and moving forward indigenous relations.

In February 2008, EA took over the ROC Certification from ATA and introduced the Climate Action Certificate（CAC）from Aboriginal Tourism Australia. The ROC certification encourages the industry 'to operate in ways that respect and reinforce Indigenous cultural heritage and the living cultures of Indigenous communities'（EA 2016）. The CAC introduced a three level certification system designed for a wide range of tourism stakeholders, 'dedicated to reducing carbon emissions and assuring travellers that certified products are backed by a commitment to sustainable practices related to addressing climate change'（EA 2016）. The first awards for the CAC award were issued at the Inaugural Conference on Green Travel, Climate Change and Ecotourism, South Australia（BB 2008）.

In 2008, EA won the Tourism for Tomorrow Award for Conservation at the World Tourism and Travel Council Tourism（WTTC）. The WTTC, which established Green Globe in 1992, awarded EA for being a world leader in sustainable travel and ecotourism policies, its guide accreditation system and the Eco Certification Programme（AAP 2008, TTN 2016）. The award showed that ecotourism was no longer a niche market but as Costas Christ, Chairman of the judges summarised, 'Twenty years ago sustainable tourism was just an idea. Now it is entering the travel and tourism mainstream'（Telegraph 2008）. With over 64% of all international visitors to Australia wishing to participate in nature tourism, and visiting National Parks being listed as the most popular activity, the role of Ecotourism and the protection of our environment continues to be one of the most important aspects of domestic tourism（TRA 2010）.

Conclusion

As this paper has demonstrated, Australia can rightly claim to be the world leader in the establishment of Ecotourism accreditation. However, the current accreditation process is the result of two decades of preliminary and voluntary work by tourism stakeholders, working together to regulate tourism ventures, raise awareness of environmentally friendly travel and self-regulation of the industry.

This paper has shown how Ecotourism accreditation occurred as a response to demands by tourism stakeholders rather than an externally imposed measure of reformation. As awareness of environmental issues grows, climate change at a macro level and conscientious travel ethics at a micro level, the industry continues to expand and evolve to incorporate new technologies, ideologies and awareness in its accreditation system. The Ecocertification system continues to work in conjunction with and incorporate government and PAMA requirements into its regulatory processes, reinforcing public and industry recognition for stakeholders sustainability and conservation efforts. The current system is comprised of a five tier accreditation process with a broad range of products allowing representation and incorporation of individual Ecotours, accredited Ecoguides, use of environmentally friendly products and practices by industry members and affiliates, as well as recognition for EcoLodges, and Climate Action by service industry and logistics members, including restaurants and travel agents.

Despite Ecotourism principals generally incorporated by most tourism stakeholders at a fundamental level, accreditation remains a popular form of brand recognition and marketing. The industry appears to be moving away from the concept of a global, all-encompassing process, preferring to be brand accredited either locally or through national accreditation programs. This may be in response to recognition of varying governmental structures and focuses, socio-economics, differing environmental relationships and regulations, cultural norms, as well as access to education, technologies, effective assessment techniques, and ability for assessors to maintain and upkeep regulation changes and assessments.

The concept of Ecotourism remains a lucrative and growing industry globally. Ecotourism Australia, is well respected and well-known, membership continues to grow, with a combined revenue of more than $1.12 billion, indicating a continued demand for Ecotourism brand and products. The industry

continues to maintain and create alliances with PAMAs, national parks, academics, governments, tourism and marketing stakeholders and represents Ecotourism in the global environmental and tourism markets.

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