

Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism Fact sheet

Advice to tourism operators authorised by a commercial activity permit in QuEST locations

What is the Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism (QuEST) policy?

QuEST delivers a policy framework for ecotourism operators accessing high visitation national parks.

QuEST provides:

- business certainty
- best practice standards
- support for authorised operators
- opportunities for growth
- streamlined administration.

Under QuEST, all tourism operators currently authorised by a commercial activity permit (permit) to conduct guided tours in QuEST locations are eligible to transfer to 15-year commercial activity agreements (agreements). Operators will be offered the opportunity to transfer to an agreement prior to the expiry of their permit. The application fee will be waived for operators transferring prior to expiry of their permit.

When will QuEST be implemented?

QuEST will be implemented in stages at the following locations:

- Fraser Island Recreation Area
- Moreton Island Recreation Area
- Daintree National Park
- Cooloola Recreation Area
- Whitsunday Islands Area

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), a division of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (NPSR), will manage the implementation process. QPWS will communicate directly with all permitted operators in these locations to advise of scheduled dates for implementation.

Why are best practice standards important?

Ecotourism certification programs identify standards that contribute to ensuring sustainable environmental practices and high quality nature-based experiences. Minimum ecotourism certification standards will apply for tourism operators authorised under agreements to access national parks.

All agreement holders must commence application for ecotourism certification within 12 months and obtain accreditation within 18 months of the commencement of a QuEST agreement.

Can an operator continue under an existing permit?

Yes, operations can continue under a current permit but only until expiry of that permit. Upon expiry, an operator must be authorised by agreement.

It is preferred that all permitted operators at the same location are transitioned to agreements at the same time to ensure consistency, coordination of timeframes and the most efficient use of NPSR resources.

Given the complexity of tourism operations at some locations, it is anticipated that there may be issues requiring clarification. QPWS encourages operators to request a meeting to resolve any areas of concern and this can be done at anytime.

What fees will be payable under a commercial activity agreement?

Fees under agreements will be based on the number of passengers actually carried, and will be paid in arrears. Fees will be set at a level equivalent with fees specified under regulations relevant to that location. Operators will only pay an application fee upon renewal of a 15-year agreement rather than every three years with a permit.

Moving existing operators to agreements

Step 1

Introduction to QuEST

Operators will receive an information letter that will detail the timetable for implementation of QuEST in the location in which that operator conducts tours.

Operators will be asked to nominate their 'year of highest use' historically. The data from the nominated year will be used by QPWS in calculating capacities to be issued in agreements. The nominated year must be verifiable by official records submitted by the operator as commercial returns to QPWS.

Action:

Advise QPWS of nominated year to be used for QuEST capacity allocation.

When:

Within 20 business days of receiving the introduction to QuEST information letter.

Step 2

Capacity allocation

QPWS will collate the data relevant to the year nominated by the operator. The new allocation of capacity will include a margin for growth within sustainable limits. An information letter will be provided to the operator detailing the proposed capacity allocation under QuEST.

Action:

Consider the proposed capacity allocation information letter provided by QPWS and request a meeting if required.

When:

Within 40 business days of receiving proposed capacity allocation information letter.

Step 3

Commercial activity agreement finalised

On expiry of the 40 business days, a commercial activity agreement will be mailed to each operator for review and signature. Operators will have 20 business days to sign the agreement and return it to QPWS.

The commercial activity agreement will be for a term of 15 years, be transferable and will detail:

- capacity allocations
- location-specific conditions
- requirements about ecotourism
- requirements about existing subcontracting arrangements (if relevant)
- all other requirements of the operator under the agreement.

Action:

Sign the commercial activity agreement and return to QPWS.

When:

Within 20 business days of receiving the agreement.

Daintree National Park



Step 4

Expressions of Interest (EOI) for new opportunities

Once all tour operators in a QuEST area have transferred to agreements QPWS will assess whether there is additional commercial capacity available at sites, consider prevailing market conditions informed by industry advice and determine whether to make further capacity available to the market.

Whether or not an expression of interest process is required will be considered by QPWS no earlier than 12 months after all operators in a particular location have transitioned to agreements.

More information is available at www.npsr.qld.gov.au