

## **A National Tourism Accreditation Framework**

### **1. Proposal**

1.1 The Australian Government is seeking to improve the quality of the Australian tourism experience through the development of a National Tourism Accreditation Framework (NTAF) with the primary objective to ensure *a quality customer experience achieved through an accreditation and promotional framework that recognises sustainable and capable businesses*.

### **2. Background**

2.1 Accreditation programs have been adopted widely across a number of industries to improve quality through encouraging industry best practice. Under accreditation programs, businesses, products or service providers are certified as meeting a prescribed set of requirements. When working effectively, accreditation programs lift industry standards and provide consumers with assurance about product/service quality.

2.2 In recent years extensive work has gone into accreditation programs for the tourism industry. Moves to introduce a national approach began in 1997 and was re-examined during 2003/2004 as part of the Tourism White Paper. At this time, and by agreement with key stakeholders, Tourism Accreditation Australia Limited (TAAL) was established to manage the Australian Tourism Accreditation Standard, which would embrace a range of existing programs as well as providing a standard for assessing new programs. TAAL was intended to be the standard setting body while delivery of programs would be the industry's responsibility. Funding was provided by the Commonwealth to implement such a process and much work commenced to deliver outcomes agreed with the Commonwealth. A change of priorities by the Commonwealth saw the funding allocated elsewhere and TAAL no longer had the resources to deliver its business plan to grow accreditation across Australia. TAAL currently provides minimal services to its existing licence holders (the programs) which have accredited some 3000 tourism businesses to date.

2.3 Following the 2003/2004 process, a number of State and Territory Governments and Industry Associations continued to invest significant resources into their own accreditation priorities. Currently there are over 21 accreditation and ratings programs operating within the Tourism Industry. Twelve operate within the TAAL framework, with generic programs being operated in six of the states and territories and a number of sectoral programs also being recognised under TAAL. The programs that operate under the TAAL banner tend to have a primary focus on business continuity and processes. While quality is not a specific output of the core programs, it is considered a likely outcome if the prescribed standards are met. The other programs operate independently and are for the most part run by industry associations. Notable among these are the Restaurateurs Accreditation and Rating Schemes - with a focus on customer outcomes and the AAA Star Ratings program - with a focus on rating accommodation facilities. A number of programs also focus on the accreditation or certification of the skills and qualifications of individuals (rather than business entities) such as the Guides of Australia accreditation program. **Appendix (i)** provides greater detail on current programs.

### **3. Case for a National Tourism Accreditation Framework**

3.1 The achievements of existing tourism accreditation and rating programs are recognised, particularly in boosting standards and participation levels through marketing incentives. However, the large number of programs and schemes has given rise to a number of weaknesses in the current arrangements. The absence of an overall national approach with a common brand has resulted in lost promotional opportunity and a failure to influence consumer purchase decisions through brand recognition. The lack of emphasis on consumer

outcomes in some programs also makes it difficult to articulate the overall value to consumers - without an unambiguous link to increased market recognition and benefit, the incentive for participation may not be clear to businesses across the tourism industry.

3.2 The introduction of a National Tourism Accreditation Framework operating as an umbrella arrangement would provide for the continued operation of current programs, while working towards common goals and brand recognition by consumers. An umbrella framework also offers the opportunity to benefit from the achievements of the current programs, including related expertise and skills and provides the means through brand promotion to consumers for increased participation by industry in those programs. The existence of a common and recognisable standard for quality in tourism will also have the benefit of creating an environment in which it is difficult for 'rogue operators' to function.

3.3 It is noted that the main example for a successful tourism accreditation system overseas, Qualmark in New Zealand, operates as a single program under a central administration. However, given the number of accreditation programs currently operating in the Australian market, achieving consensus for this type of approach and subsequent agreement of current program administrators to relinquish authority over their individual programs is unlikely to be achieved. The option of instituting an overarching umbrella under which current programs can continue to operate has the greatest likelihood of achieving widespread cooperation and success in the near to medium term.

#### **4. Objective and Principles of a National Tourism Accreditation Framework**

4.1 A National Tourism Accreditation Framework which has the objective of ensuring *a quality customer experience achieved through an accreditation and promotional framework that recognises sustainable and capable businesses*, places the primary emphasis on the importance of meeting consumer expectations. It recognises that while good business processes are an important tool in ensuring this outcome, they do not on their own guarantee that consumer preferences are met. The NTAF would provide existing programs with recognition and incentives to participate and has the potential to also cater for programs that certify individuals.

4.2 To achieve this objective it is recommended that the framework be guided by six key principles:

**Accessible:** Programs recognised under the National Tourism Accreditation Framework should be accessible and affordable to businesses, particularly small business.

**Visible:** The National Tourism Accreditation Framework brand should be visible to consumers and business. If consumers are aware of accreditation and have a positive perception of it, it should influence their purchasing decisions.

**Credible:** The National Tourism Accreditation Framework should be credible, with a high level of integrity to provide consumers with confidence in the brand and to encourage business participation.

**Useful:** Programs recognised under a National Tourism Accreditation Framework should be useful to business and practical to use to maximise voluntary participation.

**Inclusive:** A National Tourism Accreditation Framework and its programs should have application for all sectors of the industry and all sizes and types of businesses.

**Sustainable:** A National Tourism Accreditation Framework should have a structure that is flexible enough to respond to the changing business environment and allows mid stream corrections. As such it needs to continuously improve and support its associated programs.

4.3 Under this approach, current programs may be required to reassess their processes and standards for consistency with the principles of the National Framework; however they will retain the ability to continue to focus on their areas of special interest. To achieve this it is likely that some form of transitional arrangement may be required. The Framework will also provide scope for future amalgamation and rationalisation of existing programs as well as being capable of embracing any new, innovative programs which sectors may seek to implement.

4.4 It is anticipated that the increased cooperation between tourism accreditation and ratings programs under the banner of a National Tourism Accreditation Framework will offer the opportunity to:

- Increase consumer confidence by ensuring a high level of awareness of accreditation in the market place;
- Improve business profitability and sustainability;
- Promote all programs under a consistent brand (leading to improved understanding and recognition of standards by businesses and consumers alike), and potentially provide cost savings for program managers through shared marketing, auditing and governance;
- Promote greater participation by business in quality programs, leading to improved practices and competitiveness;
- Stimulate demand for Australia's tourism product; and
- Provide a greater level of information about the standards and practices of different businesses, leading in particular to more efficient business-to-business dealings.

## **5. Governance and Sustainability**

5.1 It is envisaged that a national body will need to be established for governing the National Tourism Accreditation Framework. The national body would primarily be responsible for:

- *Brand Support* – including marketing, awareness raising, business and consumer education, and communication.
- *Standards* – including researching and in consultation with program managers, setting and maintaining appropriate standards, audits, and compliance functions.
- *Governance/Integrity* – Administration of the accreditation framework, its application, fees/charges and financial sustainability; the licensing and administration of the logo and brand; and establishing and administering complaints and appeals processes.

5.2 A number of options exist for a governing body. It is recommended that a business plan examine these options and assess the most appropriate mechanisms for governance. In considering the nature of a governing body the business plan will need to determine whether existing structures could be utilised for administering the framework, or whether new arrangements would need to be considered.

5.3 There is a general consensus within the industry that a National Framework would not be sustainable without some form of ongoing government and industry investment. It is proposed that a detailed business plan be developed which, in addition to examining governance, branding and standards, would need to clearly explore the financial implications and requirements of a National Tourism Accreditation Framework.

### **What are the next steps**

6.1 It is proposed that a steering committee is established to oversee the development of a detailed business plan for the National Tourism Accreditation Framework. The steering committee should be comprised of representatives from both Government and Industry and would work in close consultation with the Joint Working Group. It is expected that a consultant will also be required to develop the business plan. As at 26 May 2008, the Commonwealth, Victoria, Tasmania, Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia have given in principle agreement to contribute funds for this purpose.

6.2 It is expected that the Business Plan will include a comprehensive audit and assessment of what accreditation programs and frameworks currently exist; comprehensive risk analysis and in consultation, develop a best practice model for the NTAF.

The Business Plan should specifically make recommendations to assist the Steering Committee with respect to the optimal:

- **Framework model** - having consideration for the adopted six (6) principles of a NTAF.
- **Governance structure** - having consideration for the need for both public and private sector representation.
- **Financial requirements** - having consideration to non-government funded as well as government funded options.
- **Ongoing Operational costs** -having consideration for the need for extensive branding and consumer marketing and the income potential from participating programs and direct and indirect support / income from participating tiers of government.
- **Branding** – establishment of brand and implementation including marketing.

# Tourism Accreditation Australia Ltd Licensed Accreditation Programs



TAAL was established in July 1994 as part of the Tourism White Paper initiative. Despite withdrawal of Commonwealth support for the TAAL administered National Tourism Accreditation Program (NTAP), TAAL, State and Territory Governments and Industry Organisations continued to pursue accreditation systems.

The TAAL accredited business display the TAAL accreditation tick and have met a predetermined level of specific business criteria to enable them to provide a high level of quality customer service and best practice to industry standards. There are currently 12 programs holding a TAAL licence, thereby complying with the Australian Tourism Accreditation Standard. Six of these programs are Australia Tourism Accreditation programs (ATAP), which are 'generic', state/territory-based.

## ***Tourism Accreditation Australia State Based Generic Programs***

### **ATAP (ACT)**

The Australian Capital Territory TAAL program is administered by the Tourism Industry Council (TIC). The TIC website currently displays around forty ACT businesses, including Questacon and Parliament House.

### **ATAP (South Australia)**

The TAAL Program in South Australia is administered through the South Australian Tourism Accreditation Board. Currently the South Australian TAAL Website displays over 550 accredited businesses.

### **ATAP (Tasmania)**

Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania runs and administers the Tasmanian TAAL program. The program is designed to raise the professionalism of the industry through the implementation of business management practices and standards. There are over 1100 businesses accredited in the TAAL Tasmania Program.

### **ATAP (Western Australia)**

Tourism Council Western Australia operates the Australian National Tourism Accreditation Program in WA. This program is designed to establish and continually improve industry standards for conducting a tourism business. There are 622 businesses currently accredited on the TCWA Accreditation Website.<sup>1</sup>

### **ATAP (Northern Territory)**

Tourism NT administers ATAP NT, in the absence of an appropriate industry body. Tourism accreditation in the Northern Territory has been industry driven to ensure sustainability and best practice of local tourism operators. Industry members called for the introduction of a tourism accreditation program and the Northern Territory Tourism Accreditation Program has been operating since March 2001. There are over 100 businesses accredited in the Northern Territory Program.

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<sup>1</sup> The Tourism Council of Western Australia's NTAP works with the Western Australia Indigenous Tourism Operators Council accreditation.

## ATAP (Victoria)

Administered by the Tourism Accreditation board of Victoria (TABV) the Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program (BBTAP) is a generic tourism program based in Victoria and caters to accommodation providers, tour operators, attractions, visitor information centres, wineries, restaurants and transport operators.

## ***Sectoral Tourism Accreditation Australia Ltd licensed Programs***

### **Camping with confidence program**

The Camping with confidence program is a national accreditation program designed to ensure the camping or outdoor experience can be conducted in a manner where the safety of participants and staff is assured. There are around 140 campsites listed in the Accreditation program.



### **Caravan Industry Australia National Accreditation Program**

The Camping, Recreational Vehicle and Accommodation Association (CRVA) undertakes a sectoral accreditation program. Accreditation provides caravan parks with a framework of quality business practices in the areas of business planning, risk management, environmental management, human resources management, marketing and customer service.



### **Eco Certification Program**

The Eco Certification Program was developed to identify genuine ecotourism and nature tourism operators in Australia. Eco-certification focuses on the development of environmentally sustainable tourism business practices.



### **EcoGuide Australia Program**

The EcoGuide Australia Program provides a credential that endorses the recipient as a guide who will deliver an authentic, environmentally responsible and professional Ecotourism experience.



### **Events Industry Association Inc. Accreditation Program**

The EIA Accreditation program aids in the development of professional management systems that lead to reliability, consistency and predictability in the business's operations, which in turn result in improved customer service and satisfaction.



### **Museums Accreditation Program (MAP)**

Museums Accreditation Program is an initiative of the Victorian State Government through Arts Victoria. Museums use the MAP standards to develop and improve museum practices. There are over 40 museums currently participating in MAP with more working towards accreditation.



### **Respecting Our Culture Program (ROC)**

ROC certified businesses are recognised in the industry as having addressed cultural protocols of Australia's Indigenous people and have in place sustainable environmental and business practices.



## Independent Accreditation and Rating Programs

### AAA Tourism Star Rating Programs

The Star Rating scheme provides consistent star ratings for approximately 10,000 accommodation properties located throughout Australia. Over 500 criteria are used to assess a property and determine its rating between one and five STARS.



### Accredited Visitor Information Centre

Businesses displaying the information logo of the Accredited Visitor Information Centres encourage the professional distribution of accurate travel and tourism information and value-added services. This assists the travelling and touring public in Australia.



### Australian Tourism Export Council

The Australian Tourism Export Code of Conduct is a self-regulatory code applying to inbound tour operators and any other agent responsible for the delivery of ground content arrangements for international visitors to Australia. The Code is an integrated system designed to raise and regulate the standards of practice and service in the tourism export industry.



### GreenGlobe Program

The GreenGlobe Program is an international program. The Standards are based on the principles of Sustainable Development. Green globe helps organisations to meet global environmental challenges.



### Guides of Australia Accreditation

Guides of Australia accreditation provides tourist visitors with an assurance that a tourist guide has met specific standards and has a commitment to the best practice standards. The accreditation encourages best practice in services to tourists visiting Australia.



### Meeting Industry Accreditation Program

MEA Accreditation demonstrates a proven competency in the meeting industry and endorsement of business commitment and ability to achieve high standards and ethical practices.



### Restaurateurs Accreditation, Certification and Rating Program

The Restaurant Accreditation and Certification Program is run through the Restaurant and Caterers Association of Australia. Two of the key R&CA programs are the Certified Professional Restaurateur program and the Accredited Restaurants program. To become accredited, restaurants and cafes must be managed by a Certified Professional Restaurateur. They also have to provide evidence of legal compliance in business practice.



Savour Australia is a rating scheme developed by the Restaurant and Caterers Association of Australia. Savour Australia rates restaurants with a 'plate' rating out of five based on a set list of criteria. Savour Australia rated over one thousand restaurants in 2007.



## **Savannah Guides**

Savannah Guides is a network of professional tour guides with a collective in-depth knowledge of the natural and cultural assets of the tropical savannahs of Northern Australia.



## **WAITOC Accreditation Program**

The Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators (WAITOC) Council businesses demonstrate that the business provides an authentic Indigenous experience<sup>2</sup>.



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<sup>2</sup> WAITOC uses a bolt-on program developed in conjunction with WA Tourism Council's NTAP program.