

A. Entity responses

As mandated in Section 64 of the *Auditor-General Act 2009*, the Queensland Audit Office gave a copy of this report with a request for comments to the Department of Environment and Science; the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport; and Tourism and Events Queensland.

This appendix contains their detailed responses to our audit recommendations.

The heads of the entities are responsible for the accuracy, balance, and fairness of their responses.



Comments received from Minister for Tourism, Innovation and Sport and Minister Assisting the Premier on Olympics and Paralympics Sport and Engagement



Minister for Tourism, Innovation and Sport and
Minister Assisting the Premier on Olympics
and Paralympics Sport and Engagement

Our ref: CTS 05164/23
Your ref: PRJ02073

Mr Brendan Worrall
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Dear Mr Worrall

Thank you for your email of 24 March 2023 and subsequent meeting on 14 April 2023, regarding your report titled *Growing ecotourism in Queensland*. I acknowledge Mr Andrew Hopper, Director-General, Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport (DTIS) has provided a response to the report recommendations and outlined DTIS' support and approach to implementing the recommendations.

Protecting and presenting Queensland's exceptional natural assets is critical to maintaining our attractiveness and competitiveness as a global tourism destination on the Green and Gold Runway towards the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. With visitors world-wide increasingly seeking genuine nature-based recreation and transformational experiences in nature, ecotourism provides a significant opportunity and competitive advantage to showcase Queensland's natural beauty in a sustainable and regenerative way.

This is why the Queensland Government's *Towards Tourism 2032 (TT2032)* tourism industry strategy prioritises the opportunity for the state to become a global leader in sustainable tourism and ecotourism experiences and seeks to support a thriving nature-based tourism sector that balances tourism development with environmental preservation, protection and interpretation.

To achieve this ambitious vision for the future of ecotourism in Queensland, the Queensland Audit Office report recognises opportunities to further define and improve effectiveness in developing sustainable ecotourism in Queensland. I am pleased to note DTIS' immediate progress in implementing key ecotourism-related actions under *TT2032* including the Activate Ecotourism Infrastructure funding initiative to develop new nature-based tourism experiences adjacent to protected areas, and the Eco-certified Tourism Destination Program helping to position Queensland to become a leader in sustainable tourism and leverage the growth potential in nature-based tourism experiences.

Under the *TT2032* strategy, we have also established a whole-of-government committee to review aspects of ecotourism and consider the most effective legislation, policy and implementation frameworks, guidelines and approvals processes. This early action places DTIS on a strong trajectory towards addressing the report's recommendations and supporting a thriving ecotourism sector in Queensland. DTIS will continue to work closely across government and industry to position Queensland ecotourism for future success in the lead up to and beyond 2032.

If you require any further information, please contact [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

STIRLING HINCHLIFFE MP
Minister for Tourism, Innovation and Sport and
Minister Assisting the Premier on Olympics
and Paralympics Sport and Engagement

4 May 2023



Comments received from Director-General, Department of Environment and Science



Department of
Environment and Science

Our Ref: CTS 05224/23
Your Ref: PRJ02073

12 April 2023

Mr Brendan Worrall
Auditor-General
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Dear Mr Worrall

Thank you for your email of 24 March 2023 regarding the proposed report to Parliament titled *Growing ecotourism in Queensland*.

The Department of Environment and Science (DES) welcomes the report, its findings and recommendations, and has completed the formal response as requested (attached).

DES works with the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport (DTIS) and other agencies to implement tourism projects and supports an overarching Queensland Government policy position regarding ecotourism to provide clarity and a unified direction for future projects and investment.

DES is committed to providing ecotourism opportunities within protected areas and will implement the priority areas and associated actions outlined in the Ecotourism Plan for Queensland's Protected Areas 2023-2028. I also acknowledge the role the Queensland Government's Ecotourism Cross-Agency Working Group can play in advancing the recommendations identified in *Growing ecotourism in Queensland*.

On behalf of DES, I would like to thank the Queensland Audit Office for its detailed review. We look forward to continuing to work across government to advance ecotourism in Queensland.

Should your officers require any further information, they may contact [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jamie Merrick".

Jamie Merrick
Director-General

Encl. (1)

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Responses to recommendations



Department of Environment and Science

Growing ecotourism in Queensland

Response to recommendations provided by Jamie Merrick, Director-General, Department of Environment and Science on 12 April 2023.

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>1. We recommend that the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport and the Department of Environment and Science, in consultation with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, develop an overarching state-wide policy position on ecotourism for both on and off protected areas that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly defines ecotourism, and the scales and types of ecotourism development acceptable to the state identifies the state's priorities for ecotourism opportunities both on and off protected areas. This should include any differences in priorities and tolerances for developments within and outside national parks sets a clear direction for achieving the vision of Queensland becoming a world leader in ecotourism, providing improved consistency and clarity for government entities, industry operators and potential developers in understanding and implementing government's ecotourism priorities. 	Agree	Q2 2024/2025	<p>The Department of Environment and Science (DES) recognises the benefit of a state-wide policy position regarding ecotourism and the involvement of a central agency to coordinate consultation.</p> <p>DES notes that the Cross Agency Working Group (CAWG), chaired by Department of Premier and Cabinet, is an appropriate mechanism to progress this work.</p>
<p>2. Following the development of a state-wide policy position on ecotourism, we recommend that the Department of Environment and Science leads the implementation of ecotourism in protected areas through their <i>Ecotourism Plan for Queensland's Protected Areas 2023-2028</i>.</p>	Agree	Q1 2023/2024 to Q4 2027/2028	<p>DES will lead the implementation plan associated with the Ecotourism Plan for Queensland's Protected Areas 2023-2028 (EPPA) and coordinate reporting on the progress of actions.</p>



Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>3. We recommend the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport, the Department of Environment and Science; and Tourism and Events Queensland develop, finalise, or update individual plans that clearly define how they will achieve the government's vision of Queensland becoming a world leader in ecotourism, within their area of responsibility.</p> <p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aligning individual ecotourism-related strategies and plans with the <i>Towards Tourism 2032 – Transforming Queensland's visitor economy future</i> strategy and the state-wide policy position on ecotourism and ecotourism roadmap (once developed) developing investment priorities to ensure government funding is directed to/aligned with the vision and policy position on ecotourism using available information on nature visitor preferences for planning and prioritising ecotourism facilities, activities, and projects having clear goals, measurable indicators of success and performance targets in all strategies and plans and regularly monitoring and reporting on progress. 	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Subject to implementation of recommendations 1 and 2.</p>	<p>The implementation plan and reporting associated with the EPPA will include a narrative explaining how the objectives and actions implemented contribute to the government's vision of Queensland becoming a world leader in ecotourism. DES also notes the CAWG has identified investment attraction as one of the key areas of priority to pursue for ecotourism. Based on visitor trends and park visitation, DES is investing significantly in facilities to enhance the visitor experience in priority locations. Progress will be reported through the EPPA.</p>



Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>4. We recommend the Department of Environment and Science, in consultation with the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider ways to further reduce the complexity of obtaining government approvals for ecotourism facilities provide greater support to proponents in navigating the legislative, engagement and approval processes for ecotourism facilities. 	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Subject to implementation of Recommendation 1 and subject to further consideration by government and progress by the CAWG. Q4 2024/2025</p>	<p>DES acknowledges this recommendation and has supported processes to reduce complexity while ensuring strong environmental, cultural heritage and governance remains.</p> <p>The Queensland and Australian Government legislative requirements and consultation processes provide important protections for threatened species and habitats.</p> <p>Significant focus is being placed on facilitating ecotourism facilities, adjacent to protected areas, which helps to mitigate impacts, provides greater certainty for investors and offers faster pathways for approvals.</p> <p>DES will work with DTIS to provide improved information and support to proponents in navigating the approvals process.</p> <p>DES notes a dedicated Planning and Regulation Working Group is being established under the Queensland Government's Tourism Inter-Departmental Committee and will engage with the working group in progressing this recommendation.</p>



Comments received from Director-General, Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport

Our reference: CTS 05164/23
Your reference: PRJ02073



Department of
Tourism, Innovation and Sport

28 April 2023

Mr Brendan Worrall
Auditor-General
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Dear Mr Worrall

Thank you for your email of 24 March 2023, and subsequent meeting on 14 April 2023 regarding your proposed report to Parliament titled *Growing ecotourism in Queensland*.

The Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport (DTIS) welcomes the findings of the report and the identified opportunities to improve effectiveness in developing sustainable ecotourism in Queensland. The report provides valuable information to focus forward efforts and priorities across government, and DTIS is pleased to accept the recommendations. Please find DTIS' response to each of the recommendations enclosed.

The Queensland Government's *Towards Tourism 2032* tourism industry strategy recognises the opportunity for the state to become a global leader in sustainable tourism and ecotourism experiences, identifying initial ecotourism related actions and commitments over the first implementation phase. DTIS is committed to continuing to work across government and with industry to achieve the right balance between conservation and sustainable economic development and tourism growth. Achieving this balance is essential in supporting a thriving ecotourism sector while ensuring a long-term focus on environmental protection.

DTIS supports further clarity from development of an overarching Queensland Government policy position on ecotourism within the state. This will provide clearer direction in aligning and implementing ecotourism planning, development and investment priorities and deliver greater certainty for government and industry. DTIS recognises the need for close collaboration between relevant agencies, and the benefit of strong central agency leadership in developing and confirming the state-wide policy position for ecotourism both on and off protected areas.

Also supported are the recommendations to continue to strengthen approaches to facilitate private investment in ecotourism, identify and prioritise ecotourism projects, and support proponents to navigate approval processes. I am pleased to note that the Queensland Government's Ecotourism Cross-Agency Working Group has already identified investment attraction and planning / development streamlining as key areas of priority to pursue. Implementation of these recommendations and priorities will be closely informed and driven by firstly developing a state-wide policy position on ecotourism.

DTIS thanks the Queensland Audit Office for their detailed review, insight, and recommendations, and has valued the opportunity to provide information and input throughout the process.

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2.

DTIS looks forward to continuing to work collaboratively across government to support a thriving nature-based tourism sector that balances tourism development with environmental preservation, protection and interpretation.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Hopper
Director-General

Encl.

Responses to recommendations



Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport

Growing ecotourism in Queensland

Response to recommendations provided by Mr Andrew Hopper, Director-General, Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport (DTIS) on 26 April 2023

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>1. We recommend that the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport and the Department of Environment and Science, in consultation with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, develop an overarching state-wide policy position on ecotourism for both on and off protected areas that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly defines ecotourism, and the scales and types of ecotourism development acceptable to the state identifies the state's priorities for ecotourism opportunities both on and off protected areas. This should include any differences in priorities and tolerances for developments within and outside national parks sets a clear direction for achieving the vision of Queensland becoming a world leader in ecotourism, providing improved consistency and clarity for government entities, industry operators and potential developers in understanding and implementing government's ecotourism priorities. 	Agree	Q2 2024/2025 (subject to required consultation processes and consideration by Government)	<p>DTIS recognises the need for close consultation and strong leadership from a central agency perspective to inform and ensure a whole-of-government policy position is reached.</p> <p>DTIS notes the potential role of the Ecotourism Cross-Agency Working Group (CAWAG) (chaired by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet) in leading implementation of Recommendation 1.</p>
<p>2. Following the development of a state-wide policy position on ecotourism, we recommend that the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport leads the development and implementation of an ecotourism roadmap for Queensland (aligned under the <i>Towards Tourism 2032 – Transforming Queensland's visitor economy future strategy</i>), with a focus on supporting private investment and development in ecotourism outside Queensland's protected areas.</p>	Agree	Subject to implementation of Recommendation 1	<p>Requires agreed state-wide policy position on ecotourism prior to progression.</p> <p>Likely to form a key action under Phase 2 of <i>Towards Tourism 2032</i> implementation (2026-2028).</p>



Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>3. We recommend the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport; the Department of Environment and Science; and Tourism and Events Queensland develop, finalise, or update individual plans that clearly define how they will achieve the government's vision of Queensland becoming a world leader in ecotourism, within their area of responsibility.</p> <p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aligning individual ecotourism-related strategies and plans with the <i>Towards Tourism 2032 – Transforming Queensland's visitor economy future</i> strategy and the state-wide policy position on ecotourism and ecotourism roadmap (once developed) developing investment priorities to ensure government funding is directed to/aligned with the vision and policy position on ecotourism using available information on nature visitor preferences for planning and prioritising ecotourism facilities, activities, and projects having clear goals, measurable indicators of success and performance targets in all strategies and plans and regularly monitoring and reporting on progress. 	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Subject to implementation of Recommendations 1 and 2</p>	<p>DTIS notes that the Ecotourism Cross-Agency Working Group (CAWG) has identified investment as one of the key areas of priority to pursue for ecotourism.</p> <p>In line with this priority, a dedicated Infrastructure Facilitation and Investment Working Group is being established under the Queensland Government's Tourism Inter-Departmental Committee.</p> <p>This Working Group may be an appropriate forum through which ecotourism investment priorities under Recommendation 3 can be considered.</p>



Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>4. We recommend the Department of Environment and Science, in consultation with the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider ways to further reduce the complexity of obtaining government approvals for ecotourism facilities provide greater support to proponents in navigating the legislative, engagement and approval processes for ecotourism facilities. 	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Subject to implementation of Recommendation 1 (and consideration by Government)</p>	<p>The Department notes that the Ecotourism Cross-Agency Working Group (CAWG) has identified planning / development streamlining as one of the key areas of priority to pursue for ecotourism.</p> <p>In line with this priority, a dedicated Planning and Regulation Working Group is being established under the Queensland Government's Tourism Inter-Departmental Committee.</p> <p>This Working Group may be an appropriate forum through which ecotourism facility approvals under Recommendation 4 can be considered.</p>



Comments received from Chief Executive Officer, Tourism and Events Queensland

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26 April 2023

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Dear Mr Worrall

Thank you for your email of 24 March 2023 providing the proposed report to Parliament titled *Growing ecotourism in Queensland*, and the subsequent email from Queensland Audit Office on 24 April 2023 which outlined further changes to the report. I have considered the proposed report and its findings and welcome the suggestions put forward to enhance the progression of sustainable ecotourism in Queensland.

As noted in the report, Tourism and Events Queensland's (TEQ) *Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2021-2024* guides TEQ in creating demand and generating sustainable growth in nature-based tourism and ecotourism. Ecotourism is seen as an important part of the nature-based tourism spectrum, providing immersive engagement in nature to guests as well as integrating elements of appreciation and environmental conservation.

TEQ is committed to continuing to work with the Queensland tourism industry and broader Government through the delivery of experiences that meet the nature travellers' needs and promotion of Queensland's natural and cultural wonders.

TEQ supports the development of a Whole of Government comprehensive ecotourism policy, which will offer greater clarity and guide related initiatives in the state. This will provide a clear position for ecotourism development both on and off protected areas. It will also allow TEQ to align future strategies and plans, including future Nature-based Tourism strategies with *Towards Tourism 2032* and the overarching policy position to help achieve the vision of Queensland becoming a world leader in ecotourism.

TEQ's detailed response is enclosed and addresses the recommendation you have identified for consideration. Thank you again for your letter and the Queensland Audit Office's ongoing work with TEQ.

Yours sincerely,



Patricia O'Callaghan
Chief Executive Officer

Encl.



