Sustainable Tourism Toolkit

A practical guide for Australian tourism businesses
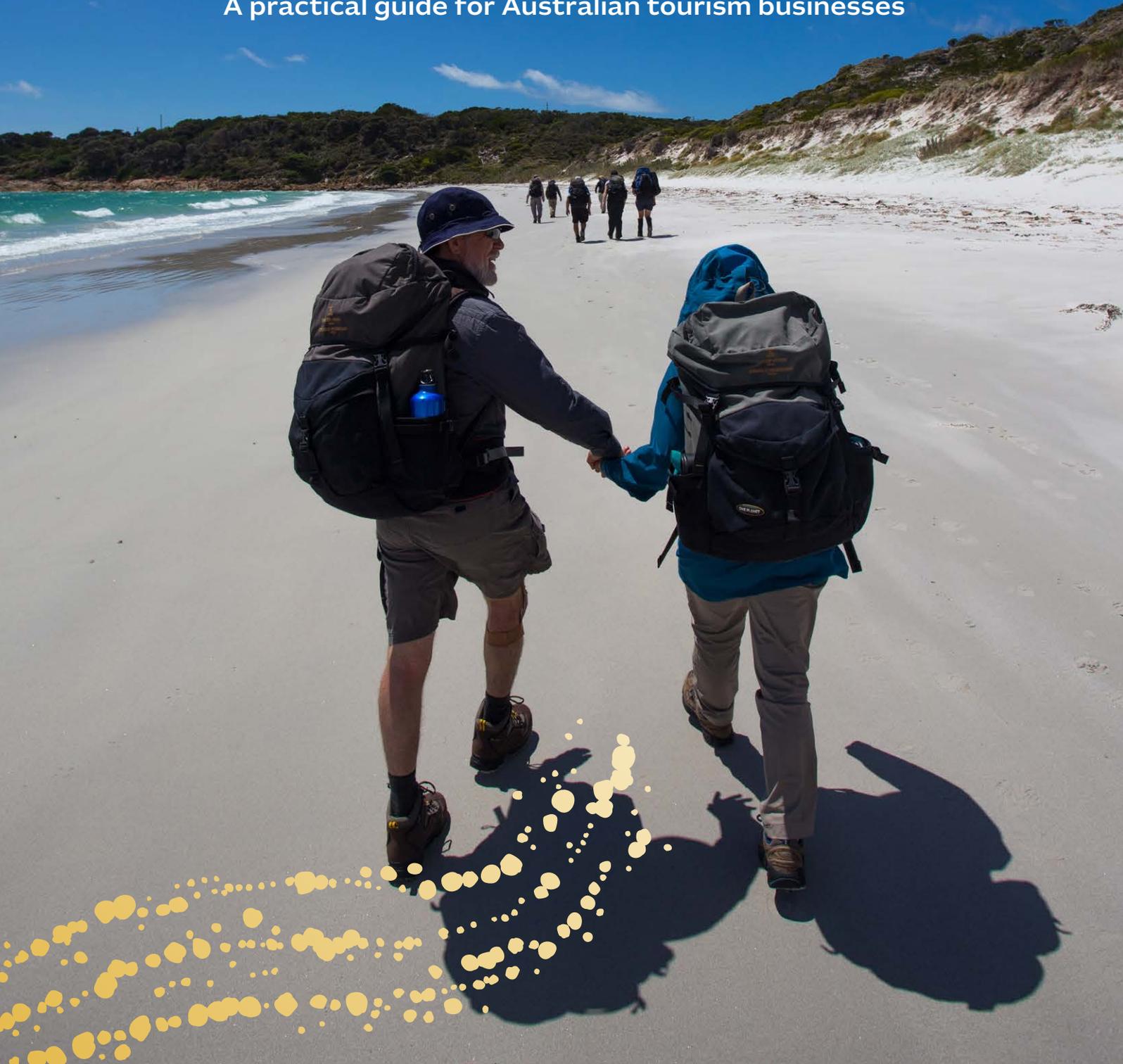
Acknowledgements

The Australian Government values the important contribution by stakeholders in developing the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit. This toolkit was developed collaboratively by Austrade in partnership with all State and Territory Governments, Tourism Australia, and with input from a wide range of industry, First Nations, and government stakeholders. Austrade wishes to acknowledge the invaluable partnership and contributions by the State and Territory Governments, Earthcheck Pty Ltd, and other industry and government colleagues who assisted throughout the development of the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit.

Cover image: Bay of Fires Lodge Walk, Tasmania.
Image courtesy of Tasmanian Walking Company/Great Walks of Australia.

All images courtesy of Tourism Australia, unless otherwise stated.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of lands throughout Australia and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We recognise the enduring connection of First Nations people to land, sea and waters, and their deep care for Country over 65,000 years. We honour the enormous contribution First Nations culture and traditions make to the visitor experience in Australia, and commit to protecting and nurturing these cultures in partnership with First Nations communities.

Contents

Introduction

Welcome to the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit.

The Toolkit is a practical guide to help Australian tourism businesses understand sustainability and the actions they can take over time to become more sustainable.

The Sustainable Tourism Toolkit is a partnership between the Australian Government and all State and Territory governments. The Toolkit has been prepared to provide information relevant to tourism businesses across Australia, while recognising more specific information is available at the State and Territory level.

A condensed, digital version of this Toolkit is available on **www.business.gov.au**. *Business.gov.au* provides information on tools, grants, and support available across government to help Australian businesses succeed.

What is sustainable tourism?

Sustainable tourism is defined as *"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"*. [1] Here in Australia, that means taking action to protect and conserve our unique environments, build resilience to climate change, respectfully engage with our rich and diverse cultures, and working collaboratively with local communities, employees and suppliers to ensure tourism benefits everyone.

The Toolkit supports the vision in the **National Sustainability Framework for the Visitor Economy** (the Framework) where *"Australia is a world leader in sustainable tourism, delivered by thriving businesses that protect and enhance the environment, respect and nurture our diverse cultures, and empower local communities"*. The Framework reflects a unified commitment and signals a partnership with industry to realise this vision.

Sustainability is no longer optional – it is essential for the success of every business in the visitor economy. Sustainable practices will often help businesses become more efficient, thereby improving profitability and making businesses stronger and more resilient over time. The important thing is to recognise that becoming more sustainable is a step-by-step journey and not a single action.

Visitors are increasingly expecting businesses to be more sustainable, and local communities expect businesses to protect the environment and to work collaboratively so that tourism is done "with them" rather than "to them".

The **Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)** sets out four areas, or pillars, in a sustainability journey:

1. Taking a **managed approach to sustainability** – embedding business practices and policies to ensure sustainability goals are achieved.

2. Implementing **environmental and climate action** – taking action to protect wildlife and nature, reduce carbon emissions, adapt and build resilience to climate change and responsibly use resources, including energy, water and waste.

3. **Respecting culture** – acknowledging and engaging appropriately with First Nations peoples and other cultural groups and helping to protect and preserve cultural heritage.

4. **Creating positive social impact** – working cooperatively and inclusively with visitors, employees, suppliers, and local communities.

Implementing sustainability is an exciting opportunity to transform your business for the better, while also benefitting your community and the environment.

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1. United Nations Environment Program and World Tourism Organisation, *Making tourism more sustainable A Guide for Policy Makers*, 2005

How to use this Toolkit

The Toolkit sets out practical advice, guidance and actions your business can take to improve your practices across the four pillars of sustainability.

An additional chapter is included on how to **promote** your sustainability story and credentials.

Under each pillar you will find:

- An **introduction** on why the topic is an important part of sustainability and the **benefits** your business can gain from taking action.

- **Top tips** on actions to take.

- **Key terms** to familiarise you with commonly used words and phrases.

- **Links to sources** for further advice, tools and templates.

- **'First steps' actions** to start you on your sustainability journey.

- **'Next steps' actions** offering more advanced and best practice advice to take you further on your sustainability journey.

Sustainable tourism information specific to your state or territory is available here:

- **Australian Capital Territory** – Visit Canberra

- **New South Wales** – Destination NSW

- **Northern Territory** – Tourism NT

- **Queensland** – Tourism and Events Queensland

- **South Australia** – South Australian Tourism Commission

- **Tasmania** – Tourism Tasmania

- **Victoria** – Victorian Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions

- **Western Australia** – Tourism WA

Why embrace sustainability?

Embracing sustainability will help your business to:

- **Improve profitability** and reduce costs by optimising resource use.

- **Enhance your reputation and build a competitive advantage** by appealing to a growing market of sustainability-minded customers. Taking action to improve the sustainability of your business can also improve your reputation within your community, including your employees.

- **Build staff satisfaction and appeal to potential employees**. Sustainability actions can support your business to attract and retain staff with a shared passion and commitment.

- **Reduce your carbon footprint** and create a cleaner environment. Your business can play its part in contributing to Australia's emission reduction targets, as well as becoming more resource-efficient and saving money over the long-term.

- **Adapt to and increase resilience** to climate change by adopting strategies that adapt to and mitigate against the impacts of our changing climate. You can also think of action in this area as contributing to future-proofing your business.

- **Respond to changing customer expectations.** Your customers are seeking to do less harm and more good across the environment, communities, and culture. Visitors are becoming more interested in the sustainability of the places they visit. Tourism Australia's **Future of Demand Research** highlights that sustainability is front and centre for visitors to Australia. Visitors want to travel lightly, leaving the places they visit better than how they found them.

TOP TIP

Make it easy for consumers to find sustainability achievements on your website. Sustainable options are a priority for travellers, with up to 23% of consumers willing to pay more for sustainable experiences.
(Booking.com)

Online travel agencies like Booking.com and Expedia publish annual sustainability reports. Booking.com's 2023 report notes that 74% of visitors are actively seeking sustainability when they travel. Furthermore, 7 in 10 have actively avoided an experience or destination questioning its green claims.

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- **Government policy and regulation.** The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has released **Making Environmental Claims: A Guide for Businesses** which explains the obligations under Australian consumer law which businesses must comply with when making environmental and sustainability claims.

- Mandatory sustainability reporting, such as climate-related financial disclosure, will be required of some corporations in Australia from 2024. While reporting requirements at this stage are limited to large businesses, it is expected that reporting will also be required from smaller businesses in the future. Think about:

  - As larger businesses start to report on climate change actions, they may pass on some of these requirements to their supply chains. This means smaller businesses may be asked about their sustainability commitments, measurement and management processes.

  - Being able to back up statements on environmental action or sustainability commitments.

Global commitments – the role your business plays

Global commitments such as the United Nations **Sustainable Development Goals** highlight where your business can play a role in advancing sustainable action.

In 2015, Australia, along with 195 other nations, pledged its commitment to the Paris Agreement. This landmark agreement aims to keep global average temperatures below a 2°C increase from pre-industrial levels, with a more ambitious target of limiting the increase to 1.5°C by the end of the century.

While these global commitments may seem distant from your business, they are intrinsically linked to the future success of the tourism industry. All tourism businesses have a responsibility to combat climate change, reduce poverty and create a brighter future.

Image courtesy of Austrade

Taking a managed approach

Taking a managed approach to sustainability

This chapter of the Toolkit helps support your business to embed systems and structures to drive ongoing sustainability improvements and get recognised for your achievements.

This chapter of the Toolkit covers:

1. Embedding sustainability principles and practices through a statement and action plan.

2. Measuring business inputs and outputs such as energy, water, and waste to understand impact and drive continuous improvement.

3. Complying with applicable legislation.

4. Getting recognised for your achievements.

Why take a managed approach to sustainability?

Taking a managed approach to sustainability ensures your actions are not random and ad-hoc but are aligned with a consistent and well-structured strategy that adds value to your business.

Taking a managed approach allows you to:

- Strategically plan your actions.
- Set clear sustainability goals.
- Track your progress.
- Adapt to changing circumstances.

By managing sustainability effectively, you can ensure long-term success, minimise risks, and contribute positively to your local community and the environment.

Commit to sustainability

Your journey to become more sustainable starts with a **statement**, **commitment**, or **policy** that signals you are taking action to improve sustainability.

Consider including the following in your sustainability statement:

- An **overview** of your business and your product or service offering.
- What you do or plan to do to protect the **environment**.
- What you do or plan to do to work with your **local community**.
- How you **build local culture**, stories, and heritage into your experience.
- How you will work to **continually improve** your sustainability performance over time.

Remember, you can evolve your commitment over time and as your priorities change. As you go through each section in this Toolkit, you will learn more about where you can make positive changes. Update your commitment as you make progress.

TOP TIP

Once you have your sustainability commitment or policy document finalised, make it easy for your customers to find. You can display it on your website, in the lobby of your premises, and on the wall of your office.

Here's an example of a sustainability commitment:

At Business X, we understand the importance of sustainability. Our team is committed to reducing negative impacts and developing positive impacts for the environment and community.

We are committed to:

- Reducing our electricity usage by 30% from 2022 levels by 2030.
- Hiring staff locally where possible and working with the local education providers to offer training pathways for students.
- Working in partnership with First Nations-owned companies to showcase native ingredients across our menus.
- Reviewing our sustainability action plan annually to assess our progress and identify areas for improvement.

Measuring to manage

By measuring your impacts, you will be able to better understand your performance across different areas of your business, allowing you to set meaningful targets and track progress against them.

Measuring your impacts leads to:

- **Targeted sustainability actions** – Once you have data, you can clearly see where you are performing well and prioritise areas for improvement.
- **Cost savings** – Data will help you identify the potential for energy, water, or waste cost savings. It can also support your purchasing decisions, and discussions with suppliers.
- **Ability to monitor progress** – Sustainability is a journey which you should track over time. Measuring provides legitimacy and evidence for communication and creates a narrative to talk about with your employees, suppliers, and visitors.

Environmental measures – the resources your business uses

Start by considering the resources you use in your business. Think about:

Energy – review your energy bills, and monitor diesel and petrol used by business vehicles.

Water – review your water bills to assess the volume of water your business is using.

Waste – monitor the volume of waste sent to landfill, recycled, or composted.

Use the Energy, Water and Waste Tracker template at Appendix 1 to help monitor your resource use.

See the **Environment and Climate Action chapter** for more information on environmental terminology and measuring energy, water and waste.

Socio-economic measures

Consider measuring the social and economic factors that are important to your business. As a starting point, these can include:

- The number of volunteer hours given to local clubs and charities.

- The number of local people you employ (e.g. from within 20km of your business).

- The hours of training that your staff complete each year.

- The proportion of supplies that you source locally.

The Measures of Social Impact template at Appendix 2 has a selection of measures to get you started.

By measuring your progress over time and benchmarking (or comparing) your results against similar businesses, you will gain an understanding of how your actions are affecting your performance.

If you do not have access to a benchmark, you can measure your own progress over time. If you are not seeing the changes you had planned at the end of a specified time period, review the material in this Toolkit and change your approach where necessary.

Develop your sustainability action plan

In its simplest form, your sustainability action plan is your roadmap for reducing your negative impacts and increasing your positive impacts. Your action plan identifies the actions that are important to you, based on your data and business priorities.

Whether it relates to energy, water, waste, risk reduction, or social and cultural impact, your sustainability action plan should identify the actions that you can take now to do more good and less harm, as well as some more ambitious actions that you can work towards over the long-term.

Example of planning for sustainable action

Business X started their sustainability journey by measuring their energy, water, and waste.

When they looked at the data across a year, they noticed they were using almost double the amount of energy per visitor night in the shoulder season than they were during peak season. This was in part attributable to higher occupancy levels in peak season, but also to the nature of the property which required similar levels of core heating and cooling irrespective of the level of trade. Based on this data, the team decided to focus on energy reduction as their core sustainability priority.

Image courtesy of VisitCanberra

The business had ample green space so was able to add solar panels without changing the amenity of the property. Next, they looked at high-energy machinery, such as the swimming pool pump, air conditioning units and fridges. Management looked at opportunities through government grants to replace some machinery and put a plan in place to replace them over time. As an interim measure, servicing was conducted on all equipment to maximise the efficiency.

These actions not only created cost savings but also enhanced their climate resilience.

When developing your plan, think about the actions you need to take, who will lead them, the timeframe, and the financial resources required to realise action. Remember, sustainability is a journey, not a single action. Your targets should be S.M.A.R.T.

Specific
Targets that give you a clear intention of what you want to achieve.

Measurable
Targets that you can measure over time.

Achievable
Targets that balance your ambition with what you can realistically do with the time and finances you have available.

Relevant
Targets that reflect your sustainability commitments.

Time-bound
Targets that set a time period to complete your task.

A template to assist you to prepare a sustainability action plan is included at Appendix 3.

As you go about achieving your targets, think about:

- **Celebrating** your efforts when you reach your goals, and then setting the next ones.

- **Identifying** what went wrong if you don't reach your target. Find ways to do things differently next time.

- **Reviewing your sustainability commitment** when you have completed your action plan to make sure it matches the action you are taking.

TOP TIP

Laws and regulations change regularly. Make sure you are signed up to industry newsletters and work closely with your Tourism Industry Council and State, Regional and Local Tourism Organisations to keep up to date.

Follow the law

Operating a sustainable business includes following national, state, and local laws. Laws change often and evolve over time, such as the use of single-use plastics. Make sure you stay up to date with the requirements for your business. Laws will differ according to your location, but some to consider include:

- False and misleading statements (communication).

- Data protection.

- Permit requirements in ecologically sensitive areas.

- Waste management practices.

- Biodiversity protection and management.

- Anti-discrimination, fair work and modern slavery.

- Workplace health and safety.

Get accredited or certified

After you have made progress in implementing sustainability practices, you may consider undertaking formal training or seeking formal recognition by getting accredited or certified.

Industry recognised programs can lead to many benefits including:

- **Increased credibility and trust:** providing external validation of your commitment to sustainable practices.

- **Competitive advantage:** setting you apart from competitors by connecting you with like-minded customers.

- **Improve operational efficiency:** providing you with a framework to plan action that makes a difference to your business.

- **Encouraging continuous improvement** through regular auditing requirements.

There are many accreditation and certification schemes available to tourism businesses in Australia, some of which have received Australian Government support. These programs can be either designed specifically for tourism businesses, or available to business across many industries.

Tourism-specific programs include:

- The Australian Tourism Industry Council's **Sustainable Tourism Accreditation** to assist small and regional tourism businesses enhance their quality, accessibility and sustainability.

- Specialist sustainability certification programs. In Australia, these include programs run by **EarthCheck**, and **Ecotourism Australia**.

Other sustainability certification programs include:

- Sustainable architecture and building design standards such as **NABERS**.

- Cross-sector sustainability programs such as **B Corp**.

- Environmental and climate action certification programs, such as **Climate Active**.

- Industry programs for ESG (environmental, social, and governance) certification.

- **ISO standards** for a wide range of topics including quality standards, energy management systems and sustainable events.

To help choose a program that best meets your business needs, think about the following:

1. Is the program credible? Is it reviewed regularly, does it encourage continuous improvement, and offer a holistic approach to sustainability?

2. Does the program include audit requirements? Ask about the frequency of audits and whether in-house or independent auditors are used to review and assess your progress and data.

3. What is the cost? Are the costs one off or ongoing? Does the cost represent good value for your business?

4. Look at the other businesses who are participating in the program – are there lots of similar businesses to yours?
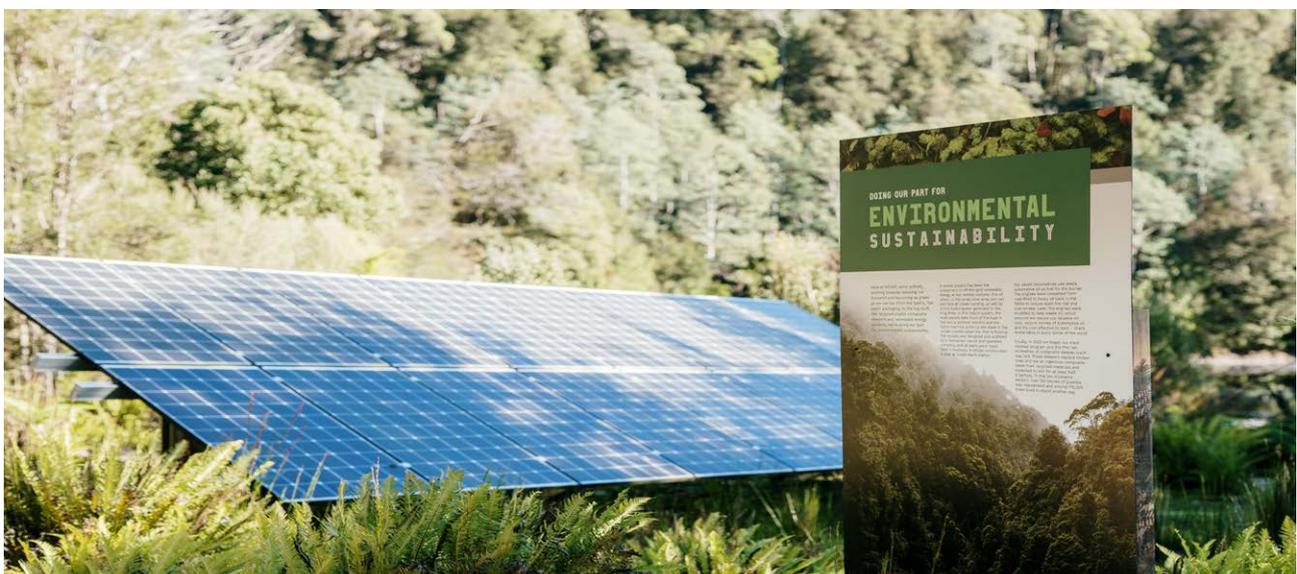
Recap on first steps

Start with the following simple steps to sustainability management:

First steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	
Make a sustainability commitment that includes your approach to environmental, social, and cultural sustainability.	Lower Cost	☐
Measure to manage. Start with energy, water and waste measurements and then explore opportunities for social and cultural practices that you can track over time.	Lower Cost	☐
Stick to the law. Follow your national, state and local laws. Monitor changes in important areas for your business.	Lower Cost	☐
Take action based on the data you have collected. Set yourself targets to track your progress over time.	Medium Cost	☐
Get recognised for your achievements. When you are ready, get recognised through an accreditation or certification scheme to back up your commitment.	Medium Cost	☐

Next steps

The first steps provide a great starting point. When you are ready, take the next steps on your sustainability journey:

Next steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	
Compare your business's performance – for instance, on a year-on-year basis and think about benchmarking against similar businesses. Talk to your local or regional tourism organisation, or chamber of commerce about opportunities to set up a benchmarking group.	Lower Cost	☐
Communicate your efforts with customers and trade partners.	Lower Cost	☐
Embed your sustainability commitment (policy) within the business. Think about including it in your business plan and employee position descriptions and in their development plans.	Lower Cost	☐
Sustainability is a journey with a focus on continuous improvement – evaluate performance and options in your business plan and set out actions that aim for continuous improvement.	Medium Cost	☐

Chapter 2

Environmental and climate action
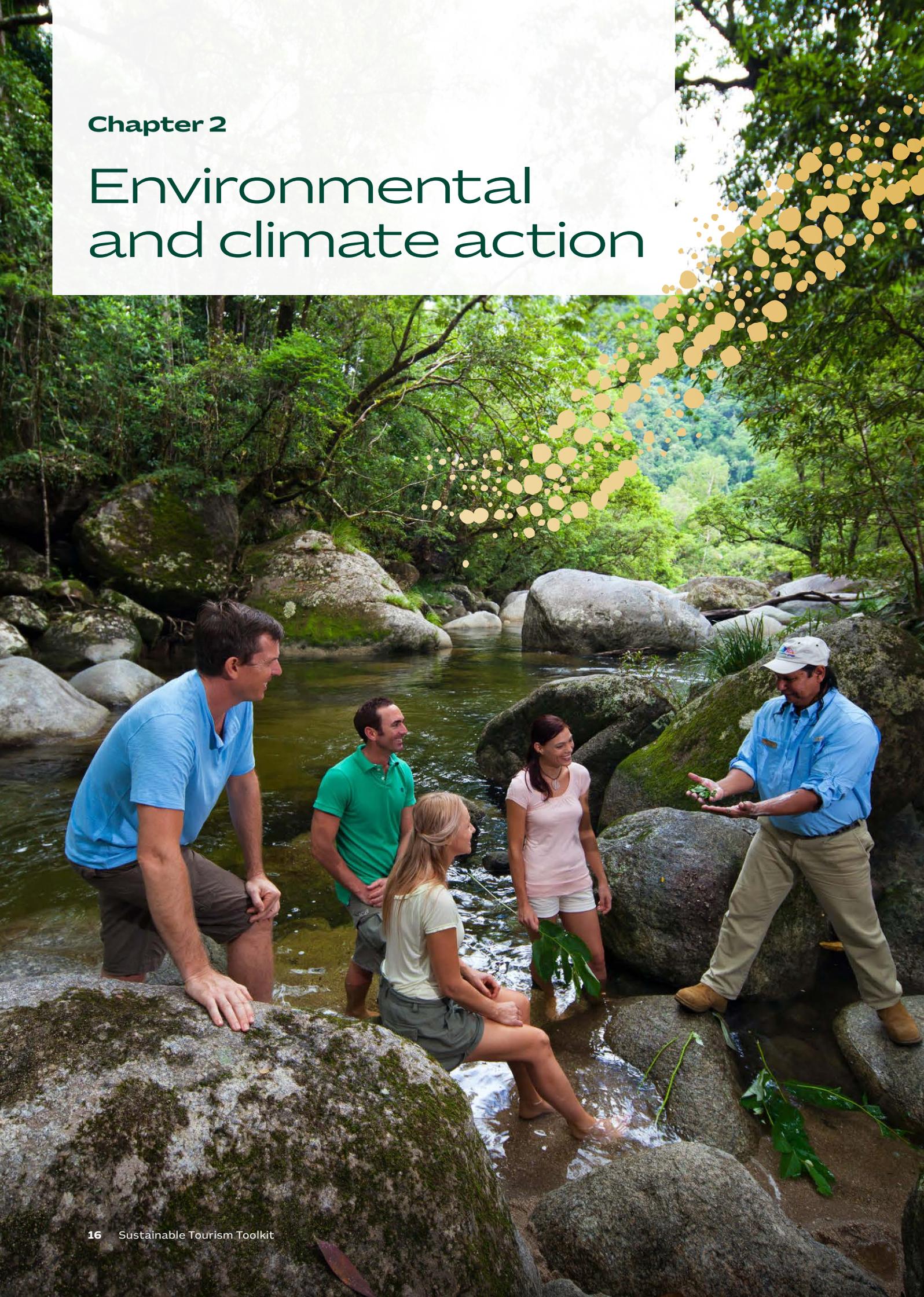
Environmental and climate action

Everyone has a role to play in reducing their impact on the environment, including reducing their greenhouse gas emissions (also known as your carbon footprint) and contributing to protecting biodiversity.

This chapter provides insights into actions you can take to reduce your emissions and manage your overall impact on the environment.

This chapter of the Toolkit covers:

1. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including through energy reduction and use of renewable energy.

2. Minimising water use and waste production.

3. Adapting and building resilience to a changing climate.

4. Conserving and contributing to biodiversity, including protecting native wildlife.

5. Shaping responsible visitor behaviour through storytelling and education.

Why take environmental and climate action?

As customers become more aware of how their actions contribute to climate change, they are increasingly demanding that businesses in all industries, including tourism, track and report their impact and take action to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Benefits of taking action include:

- **Cost savings.** Over the long term, use of energy-efficient technologies, waste reduction measures, and sustainable supply chain practices can lower your operating costs.

- **Regulatory compliance.** Climate-related regulations and reporting requirements are becoming more prevalent. By proactively addressing climate issues now, your business can make a head start on these likely requirements.

- **Risk mitigation.** Taking climate action can help to mitigate some of the risks associated with extreme weather events and supply chain disruptions, helping your business become more resilient.

- **Reputation and customer loyalty.** Demonstrating a commitment to climate action can enhance your reputation, helping your business to attract environmentally conscious consumers. By taking climate action, you can build trust and loyalty among your customer base, potentially leading to increased sales.

Measuring and reducing greenhouse gas emissions

Measure to manage

A good place to start is by identifying the carbon footprint of your operations. You can't manage what you don't measure!

Measuring your footprint, starting with your energy usage, water consumption, and waste production, enables identification of opportunities to reduce both your environmental impact and your operating costs. Water use and waste production, as well as energy use, contribute to your carbon footprint.

Use the template at Appendix 1 to help you measure and manage your energy and water usage and your waste.

Key terms

A business's **carbon footprint** is the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions (including carbon dioxide) that is directly and indirectly caused by their activities. Carbon footprints are usually described in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents per year. A business's carbon footprint is made up of its **Scope 1, Scope 2, and Scope 3 emissions.**

Greenhouse gas emissions are gases that trap heat in the atmosphere such as carbon dioxide (CO2), methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gases. The more greenhouse gas emissions in the air, the more heat gets trapped and raises temperature leading to climate change. Often the terms 'greenhouse gas emissions' and 'carbon emissions' are used interchangeably, as carbon usually makes up the majority of a business's emissions.

Scope 1 emissions are the direct emissions from your business. These are within your control like the fuel for driving your bus or boat and onsite electricity generation.

Scope 2 emissions are indirect emissions from purchased electricity, heat, and cooling produced outside your business but used within your business such as the electricity you purchase from the grid.

Scope 3 emissions are all indirect emissions that occur as a result of the activities of your business but occur from sources outside your control. Scope 3 emissions include indirect emissions generated by your visitors and supply chain, for example, external laundry providers, transportation of produce, and visitor travel to and from your business.

Put simply, Scope 1 can be thought of as what you burn (such as coal or LPG); Scope 2 is the electricity you buy; and Scope 3 is everything beyond that.

Check out the **Climate Active website** for more information on greenhouse gas emissions.

Reduce your energy consumption

Reducing your energy consumption may seem like a huge undertaking, however, progress is achievable for most businesses. There are technology and process changes you can make that will have a real impact on your energy consumption, which will also help save you money over time.

As a first step, review your equipment and identify high energy-use items that may need servicing or upgrading over time. These include:

- Airconditioning and heating systems
- Hot water systems
- Laundry equipment – washers, dryers, presses
- Cooking appliances – stoves, ovens, steamers, blenders
- Pumps – swimming pool filters
- Lighting
- Vehicles/boats

Visit here for more information on energy ratings and **labelling**.

Whilst implementing new energy-efficient technology may not be an immediate option for smaller businesses, there are other changes you can implement to reduce your energy consumption and carbon footprint.

TOP TIP

Reducing usage is a great way to save money. Research shows that energy saving projects can save businesses as much as 50% in energy costs.

Remember not all energy projects are created equal.
Focus on where you can find the best savings for your business.

Once you have measured your energy use and identified the areas that use the most energy, consider **technology or process** changes that can help reduce usage. Simple steps you can take include:

› **Compare energy contracts:** Review your current energy contract to make sure you are getting the best value. Options include entering into a green energy contract, negotiating a better rate with your current supplier, or investigating alternative providers. **Visit here for further assistance on reviewing your energy contract**.

› **Use renewable energy:** Examine renewable energy sources, either through generating your own electricity (with solar panels for example) or with green power agreements through your electricity supplier. **Visit here for more information on renewable energy**.

› **Lighting:** Upgrading lighting systems to include energy efficient bulbs like LEDs, or lighting systems on timers or sensors. If you are not able to change all at once, consider replacing on a gradual basis. Also, make use of natural lighting so you can reduce the use of artificial lights during the day. **Visit here for more information on lighting**.

› **Use of shade:** Use blinds, curtains, and awnings to control direct sunlight on windows. Plant native plants and vegetation to provide shade for buildings and customers.

› **Energy efficient appliances:** Upgrading your appliances to newer, more energy efficient models can reduce energy consumption. Energy ratings and energy rating labels are a good way to compare the efficiencies of appliances. **Visit here for more information on energy ratings and labelling**.

› **Maintain your equipment:** Regular maintenance can enhance energy efficiency. Clean the filters of air conditioning and heating units regularly and conduct regular services on major equipment and vehicles.

› **Temperature settings and timers:** Review and change temperature settings on hot water systems and air-conditioners. Install timers on high-energy equipment.

- **Building Management Systems (BMS):** Implementing a BMS can help efficiently monitor and control heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC), lighting, and water. Visit the Australian Government's Energy **website** for more information on minimising business equipment electricity use.

- **Vehicles and fuel:** Choosing energy efficient vehicles can save money, reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Consider the impact and cost of fuel and maintenance when selecting which vehicle is right for you. Visit **here** for more information.

- **Education:** Educate your staff and visitors on energy efficiency practices, such as switching off lights, turning off computers at the end of shifts and not leaving plugs in wall sockets. These are all simple actions that can add up.

- **Buildings** vary in their energy efficiency. When you are looking at renewing a lease, consider if the premises are still well-suited to your needs. You may want to explore moving to a more energy efficient building. Ask your real estate agent about the energy ratings of the building you are looking at.

A range of government grant programs are available to assist businesses with funding energy efficiency projects. **Visit the Australian Government's energy website** for more information.

Minimising water use

Reduce your water use

Managing water usage is a simple way of reducing your environmental impact, as well as reducing costs.

Your first step is understanding your current total water usage, and how it is used. Measuring your water use and identifying trends or patterns will help you spot ways to improve water efficiency.

Use the template at Appendix 1 to help you measure your water use.

Simple steps to reduce your water usage include:

> **Monitoring:** Establish a water usage baseline (which may vary season to season) which can help you identify inconsistencies and leaks. You could consider using submeters for more accurate reporting.

> **Retrofitting:** Retrofit taps, shower heads and cisterns to more water-efficient options.

> **Implementing water efficient appliances:** Upgrade your appliances (such as washing machines and dishwashers) to more efficient and water-wise models.

> **Implementing water-saving devices:** Install flow restrictors, timers, and other water-saving devices to reduce consumption.

> **Identifying leaks:** Regularly check for visible leaks with taps and toilets. Employ a technician to check for leaks in less visible areas such as pipes, watering systems and swimming pools.

> **Landscaping**: Plant drought-tolerant, native plant species that will reduce water requirements.

> **Collecting water:** Install rainwater tanks or other water collection technologies to help water conservation and water availability for times of drought.

> **Using grey water:** Where practical, implement greywater recycling to reuse water for non-consumptive purposes such as irrigation or toilet cisterns.

> **Educating:** Educating visitors and staff on efficient water practices is an incredibly easy and cost-effective way to save water.

Savings example

By replacing a low rated shower with a flow rate of 15 litres per minute, with a 4 star WELS rated shower (with a flow rate of 6 litres per minute) a family of four staying in a hotel room would use 105KL less of water and save your business $315 per year per shower on your water bills.

For every litre per minute difference, the average saving is 3,000 litres of water and $12 off your bill each year.

Manage your waste

Managing your business waste is an essential part of your environmental sustainability responsibilities. Waste management is a significant problem due to rapid generation of waste, improper disposal, and the environmental and health hazards associated with mismanaged waste.

Tourism businesses often operate in beautiful, natural environments, and effective waste management is essential to keep these places in pristine condition.

There are several simple ways to improve your waste management:

› **Measure your business waste:** Measuring your waste will help you understand the volume, types, and sources of waste, and how it is disposed of.

Visit here for tips on how to measure your waste, or use the template at Appendix 1.

› When measuring your waste, consider:

– How much waste is going to landfill.

– How much waste is recycled.

– How much waste is composted.

– Which areas of the business generate most waste.

› **Review your products and purchasing policies:** Review supplier arrangements to identify the potential for waste reduction. Support suppliers that design products to account for the whole of lifecycle environmental costs, and companies that implement product stewardship programs.

› **Seek co-benefits in your purchases:** You cannot always eliminate waste, but look for co-benefits where opportunities arise. For example, finding a paper supplier that donates part of the price to social or environmental causes.

TOP TIP

Review your standard operating procedures.
- Do you have standard operating procedures around waste in place?
- Are they designed to reduce the amount going to landfill?
- Can they be better designed?
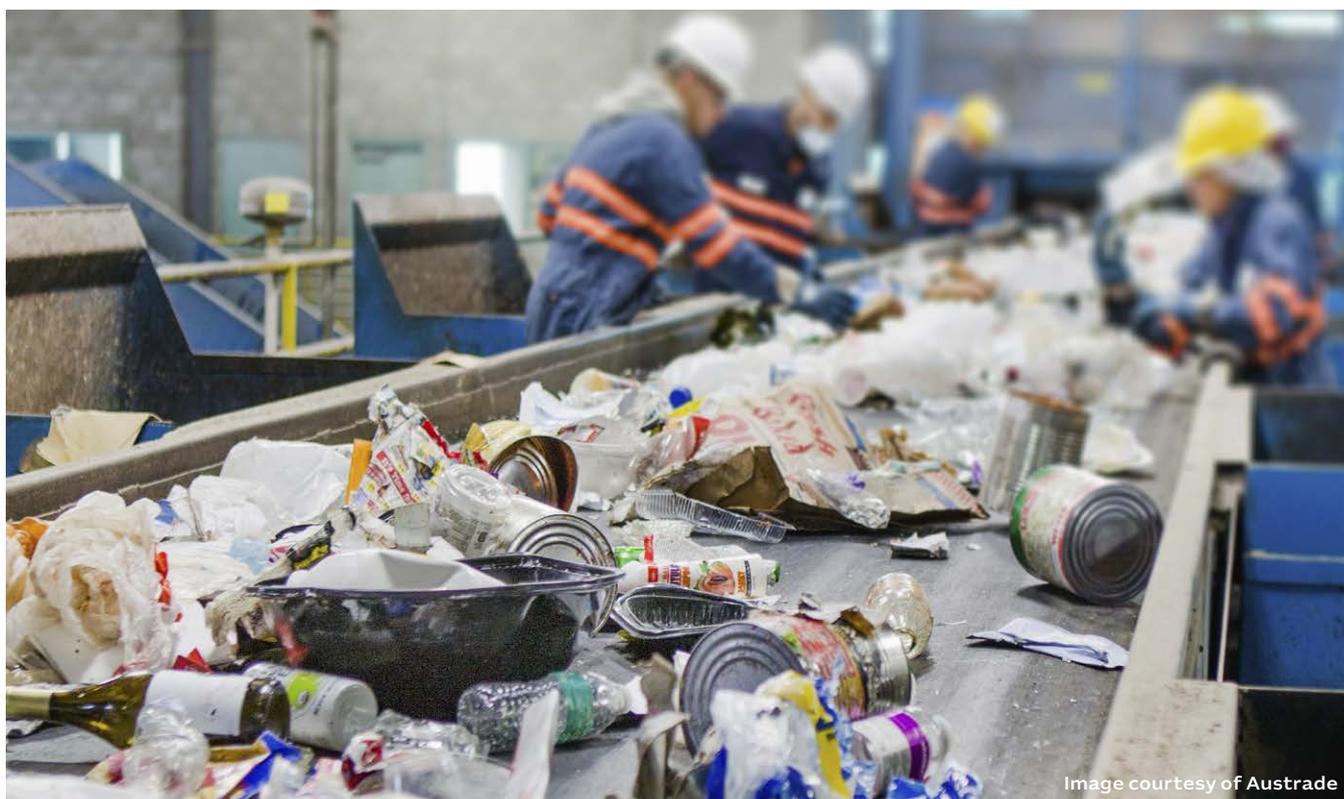
Image courtesy of Austrade

Example of food waste management

A hotel introduced food separation. All scraps were put into bins that have biofilters and air circulation systems that decompose the contents and turns the scraps to mulch. The mulch was then shared with a local nursery.

Waste management is not just about how you handle waste, it is about understanding how to use resources more efficiently.

› **Eliminate**

– Review your purchases – are they really needed? For example, do you need to supply bottled water? Find ways to transition away from single-use plastics (e.g. shampoo and conditioner bottles, straws, water bottles, plates and cups) and offer more sustainable alternatives. For example, shampoo and conditioner can be supplied in larger refillable bottles.

– Consider the entire lifecycle of a product or service, including where they are from, how they reach your business and how they are disposed of. Can you eliminate the waste from your supply chain by bulk purchasing, or think about how you can use less?

– Try to purchase items that can be composted, repurposed or recycled.

› **Reduce**

– Introduce a waste reduction program. Engage your staff by appointing coordinators to identify some quick wins to get you started.

– Where possible, compost your food scraps. Consider partnering with businesses in your community or working with local farmers.

– Reduce the amount you print by using digital alternatives.

– Talk to your suppliers and identify ways to reduce the waste that is brought into your business. You could reduce unnecessary packaging or shift to a more responsible material like cardboard over plastic.

– Consider longevity in any materials you produce – for example, by not putting a date on event collateral, the materials can be reused.

› **Reuse**

– Provide refill stations for water bottles and encourage visitors to bring reusable coffee cups (or have a library of borrow cups).

– Consider buying secondhand or repairing items rather than purchasing new products. If they are not at end of life and safe to use, sell items you no longer need or give them away rather than send them to landfill.

– Reuse packaging for your own purposes.

› **Recycle**

– Make it easy! Provide bins and signage in places that are accessible. Think about your reception area, rooms, vehicles, as well as in back of house sites for your team to use. Provide separate bins for bottles and cans, paper, coffee pods, coffee cups and other streams.

– Educate your team about what can be recycled.

– Incentivise action by providing an award or reward for the team member making the biggest impact.

Managing chemicals

Good chemicals management protects our environment and communities.

Ways you can decrease the release of chemicals to our environment include:

- Research the chemicals you use, and seek to replace with alternative practices, safer chemicals or non-chemical alternatives.
  - For example, some sunscreens contain chemicals which can damage coral reefs. Look for reef-safe sunscreens.
  - Herbicides can affect non-target plants and also animals. Targeted steam weed control avoids the use of herbicides.
- Find appropriate collectors of waste chemicals, e-wastes, plastics and other wastes that may contain hazardous chemicals.
- Ensure chemicals are stored, used and disposed of according to the product safety information.
- Consult your dangerous goods / environmental regulator about your activities and identify the need for licenses and permits.
- Have an emergency chemical management plan in place so your staff have the tools available to respond to accidents, such as by containing or neutralizing spills.
- Always report spills and accidents to your work health and safety regulator.

Legal requirements

Make sure you comply with environmental regulations regarding waste.

Safe Work Australia has information on management of chemicals in the workplace.

Some activities may require environmental permission. Find licensed collectors of waste chemicals, e-wastes, plastics and other wastes that cannot be recycled through your municipal recycling program. There are e-waste collection programs available in most states and territories, and specialised waste businesses can be contracted to accept hazardous wastes.

The export, import and transiting of hazardous waste is regulated by **law**.

Consider your transport activities

Transport is one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. Due to the nature of tourism and the distances people travel to destinations, transport makes up a large part of the sector's emissions.

Actions to improve the sustainability of your transport activities include:

- **Education:** Educating staff and visitors on the impact of travel and how they can reduce their carbon footprint. This could be encouraging public transport, cycling or walking. Provide information on your website about low-emission transport alternatives, such as public transport for visitors to use during their stay.

- **Alternatives:** You can provide sustainable transport options for your visitors. For example, provide or recommend shuttle services with electric or hybrid vehicles, bikes for customer use, and information on public transport.

- **Evolve drive tourism:** Consider providing electric vehicle (EV) charging ports, or information on local charging points and on major routes to and from your destination. Think about ways to get your visitors to leave their car behind after they arrive. For grants and incentives to install EV chargers, visit **business.gov.au**.

- **Vehicle renewal:** When renewing vehicles, look at alternative fuel options including hybrid and electric vehicles.

- **Staff transport:** Talk to your staff about how they can minimise vehicle emissions – for example through car-pooling, using bikes and providing secure areas to store their bikes and equipment.

- **Signage:** If you have electric charging ports, include information on your webpage, social media and have visible signage.

TOP TIP

'Range anxiety' is a major concern for EV owners. Assurance is needed to give travellers confidence they will reach their next charging station. Providing tried and tested routes (with charging locations) and clear information about the number of ports you have, will reduce anxiety and encourage travel by EV.

Adapt to a changing climate – preparing and managing your risk

Climate change is not a "future problem"; it is here now, and the effects are being felt worldwide.

There are steps you can take to improve your resilience to climate change:

› **Prevent**: The first stage in disaster management is prevention. This means understanding the risks your business faces and taking action to reduce that risk. To achieve this:

– Conduct a risk assessment of your business for its exposure to climate events (such as floods, fires, droughts and cyclones) and make sure to include your supply chain. More information is available at **business.gov.au** to help you assess and manage risk.

– Once you have identified your risks, determine the risks most likely to occur, and those that would have the greatest impact. The more likely and bigger the impact, the more important it is to take action immediately.

– Mitigate the risk, by reducing or lowering the likelihood of it happening or its impact, or by transferring the risk (e.g. check with your insurance company you are covered).

› **Prepare**: The next step is to prepare your disaster management team and plan.

– Identify who in your team will have a role in disaster situations and their responsibilities.

– Train your team and run regular exercise drills.

– Have some communication templates in place to take the stress out of your response to staff, visitors and the media.

– Pack a go-kit with important documents and resources that you will need if evacuating your business and operating remotely.

› **Respond**: Have a planned response for evacuation, response and pivoting your business to new circumstances

› **Recover**: Having a recovery plan in place can help your business get back on its feet more efficiently. You might want to pre-plan some changes to your business that will help you build back better. This might be raising power points, using different materials or changing the orientation of buildings.

TOP TIP

Pre-planning your communication takes the stress out of the disaster response. Although every disaster will not be the same, having some simple statements ready for your visitors, staff and the media means you will not have to scramble to prepare these as the stress of responding takes over.

The 'Don't Risk It Manual' has been specifically designed for the tourism and hospitality industry. It guides you through steps to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disaster situations.

Image courtesy of Austrade

Offset carbon as a last resort

There is a lot of discussion about the rights and wrongs of offsetting carbon emissions.

Key Term

Carbon offsets – a way to compensate for the greenhouse gas emissions you produce through purchasing 'carbon credits'.

Carbon credits represent emissions reductions from projects that reduce, remove or avoid emissions, where the reduction would not have occurred in the ordinary course of events. Carbon credit projects capture and store carbon from the atmosphere, such as tree planting, active regeneration of soils, renewable energy or energy efficiency, restoration and conservation of forests, or the establishment of wetland ecosystems.

The *Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme* is Australia's carbon credit scheme that regulates eligible projects and registers carbon credits for trading in Australia. International carbon credit schemes also exist.

Before buying carbon offsets, you should research the company selling the credits and the project generating the credits. This is to ensure the credits are of high integrity, and that the project aligns to your business values. An offset is not always something you can physically see (it is work that often happens elsewhere), so you need to make sure the company you choose is well-established and trustworthy.

Reducing your business emissions should be the first step prior to considering offsetting. Offsetting should only be used while you transition to a lower carbon model, or as a last resort where your business is unable to reduce its emissions further. It is an *additional* effort and should not be the *main* method for your business to reduce its carbon footprint in the long run.

Shape visitor behaviour

While tourism businesses can make changes to become more sustainable, a collaborative effort is required. This means visitors must also think about their activities and choices while travelling. Regardless of the products or services your business offers, you play an important role by educating visitors about their responsibilities. You can do this by:

> **Leading by example:** Your sustainability reporting, goal setting and visible actions will show your values and commitments. This will help visitors think about their consumption and make better choices.

> **Using a variety of communication channels:** Think about the most effective ways to communicate with your visitors. For example, think about the messages you have on social media, your website, in your rooms or on tours, and the conversations you have with your visitors.

> **Providing signage:** Signage can be effective in two ways. Firstly, it helps educate your customers on the challenges your business faces. Secondly, it acts as a reminder on behaviours. For example, a hotel or resort can display garden signage telling visitors about the native species growing, and how they can help conserve and protect them when exploring the local area by keeping to the paths.

> **Rewarding good behaviour:** Providing rewards such as discounts, complimentary items, rewards points, or a simple thank-you card to acknowledge customers' behaviours will be appreciated. For example, hotel visitors who choose not to have their towels replaced during their stay could be rewarded with a complimentary coffee.

> **Changing your approach:** Small changes to your operation can really change visitor behaviour. For example, rather than putting big water bottles on tables or prefilling glasses, have a refill station that allows visitors to self-serve. If you run a buffet, reducing plate size is shown to reduce the amount of waste.

Example of water saving

Business X poured water for customers when they came into their café, as waiting staff presented the menu. They found that around 45% of visitors did not touch or finish the water they were poured.

In response, the café initially used the unused water to water plants. Then they stopped pouring water and put a water station on the counter. Staff were trained to tell customers about their "water saving challenge" and to note that water was available on the counter.

Image courtesy of Visit Victoria

BOTANICAL WATER

Revive with fruit infused water

Support biodiversity and regeneration

Your responsibility to help the planet does not stop with reducing your greenhouse gas emissions. You should also actively help conserve and restore biodiversity and natural ecosystems. Even the smallest business can do its bit to help support biodiversity and regeneration.

Some simple and cost-effective ways you can help include:

› **Replacing introduced and invasive plant species with native species:** They look good, save water, encourage pollinators, create natural ecosystems, and provide vital food sources for animals.

› **Creating habitats for native wildlife:** Implement revegetation, use nesting boxes for birds, ponds for frogs, and hives for native bees.

› **Reduce easily managed light and noise pollution:**

 – At night, shutter your blinds or turn off unnecessary lighting.

 – If using outdoor lighting, shut off anything unnecessary and minimise light usage where practical.

 – Educate visitors about the importance of dark skies for wildlife.

› **Reviewing use of chemicals:** The cleaning products, gardening supplies, and pest control products that your business uses can be devastating to biodiversity and ecosystems. Switch out harsh and damaging chemicals for natural, harm free, and biodegradable options where possible.

› **Organising volunteer days** such as tree planting or picking up rubbish is a great way to get to engage your staff and support the local community. You could also get your visitors involved!

› **Educating your staff and visitors** on the importance of responsible practices such as appropriately disposing of rubbish, staying on established paths, and the importance of not taking anything from the natural environment home with them.

Improve air quality

Regardless of the services your business supplies, your actions can help to improve air quality. Consider the following steps and consider how you can implement them over time:

› **Track and reduce the emissions of your business.** Understanding where your biggest sources of emissions are, and then implementing goals and projects to mitigate them, will help improve air quality.

› **Go electric.** Transport emissions are one of the largest global contributors to air pollution. Where possible, start transitioning from diesel and petrol to electric vehicles. You may even be eligible for **government support** to assist your transition.

› Encourage your staff and customers to choose **public transport** options over private cars. You could consider offering rewards and benefits for those who do so.

› **Plant more native trees and plants.** Not only will this help with biodiversity in your area, but it will also support cleaner, fresher air.

Interact with wildlife carefully

Wildlife engagement allows visitors to witness animals in the wild and learn about their habits, environment, and threats. It is important wildlife interactions, whether planned or not, follow responsible practices.

Responsible wildlife practices include:

• Being aware of state and national rules on wildlife interactions, both on land and on the water.

• Partnering with responsible, reputable operators.

• Educating visitors on the importance of maintaining a safe distance, not aggravating or baiting animals, and not feeding wildlife (either intentionally or by leaving food out or accessible).

• Knowing who to contact to report irresponsible behaviours, suspicious activity, or to report wildlife sightings or injured wildlife.

TOP TIP

Check out Tourism Australia's page on **How to experience Australia's wildlife responsibly** for more information.

Recap on first steps

To take some initial first steps, consider the following actions:

First steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	♻
Planning • Measure to manage – track your energy, water and waste over time and take action where you can make a difference. • Set reduction targets for energy, water and waste and share them with your customers and community. • Prepare an action plan to achieve your targets. There is a template at Appendix 3 to help you.	Lower Cost	☐ ☐ ☐
Energy • Review your high-use energy equipment and organise regular servicing. • Turn equipment off at the mains when not in use (including computer monitors and laptops). • Use shading, blinds and curtains to keep things cooler. • Set your thermostats to 18-20°C in winter and 24-26°C in summer. • Train your team.	Lower Cost	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Water • Log the amount of water used on a monthly basis and identify inconsistencies. • Check regularly for leaks. • Install low-flow taps and showers. • Capture rainwater in tanks and use for irrigation. • Train your team.	Lower Cost	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Adapting and building resilience to changing climate conditions. • Prevent – Assess risks and take steps to reduce them. • Prepare – Prepare your disaster management team and plans. • Respond – Have a planned response for evacuation, response and pivoting your business to new circumstances. • Recover – Having a recovery plan in place helps you get back on your feet more efficiently.	Lower Cost	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

| First steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	♻
Waste • Analyse your waste and identify opportunities to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost. • Eliminate single use plastics. • Work with your suppliers to reduce the waste entering your business. • Donate rather than dispose where possible. • Train your team.	Medium Cost	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Transport • Educate staff and visitors on alternative transport options. • Evolve drive tourism experiences, like building itineraries around charging infrastructure. • Consider sustainable options when renewing vehicles. • Encourage staff to car-pool or use low emissions transport. • Have clear signage and information for visitors on the sustainable transport options available to them.	Medium Cost	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Shape visitor behaviour • Lead by example. • Understand your communication channels and how you communicate with your visitors. • Utilise signage as an educational resource and as a reminder or call to action. • Reward and incentivise visitor behaviour change. • Adapt your services to minimise waste.	Lower Cost	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Support biodiversity and regeneration • Replace introduced and invasive plant species with native species. • Create habitats for native wildlife. • Review the chemicals in your operations and supply chain. • Engage staff in regeneration and biodiversity initiatives. • Educate your staff and visitors on the importance of responsible practices.	Medium Cost	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Improving air quality • Track and reduce the emissions of your business. • Transition to electric vehicles. • Encourage staff and customers to choose public transport options over private cars. • Plant more native trees and plants.	Higher Cost	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Next steps

Take the next steps on your sustainability journey with the following:

Next steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	♻
Energy Install motion sensors for lighting in areas with low usage.	Lower Cost	☐
Undertake a detailed energy audit – sub-metering equipment to understand how your energy is being used, and benchmark how usage changes, depending on season and visitor numbers.	Medium Cost	☐
Improve building insulation to increase efficiency of heating/cooling – this can include door seals, roof, and floor insulation.	Medium Cost	☐
Implement efficient heating/cooling systems, such as a heat recovery system, or a solar powered hot water system.	Higher Cost	☐
Investigate solar power and consider investing in a battery to increase your use of renewable energy and reduce reliance (and cost) on the grid – in some cases you can become a microgrid and support your surrounding community.	Higher Cost	☐
Water Create benchmarks for water usage – for instance divide the total amount of water by the total number of visitor nights, numbers or restaurant covers (can be daily, weekly, quarterly, or annually). This gives a more accurate performance measure than total water used.	Lower Cost	☐
Determine the flow rates for your taps, toilets, and showers, and compare against benchmarks.	Lower Cost	☐
Think about effective communication options to influence visitor behaviour and how they use water. For example, if your customer base includes a large number of children, think about gamification options, such as making a game or competition about water usage in showers or sinks. Gamified solutions for water conservation tap into natural competitive behaviour.	Lower Cost	☐
Install water valves. This allows you to close usage in the part of the business where a leak has been spotted but allows water provision to continue elsewhere.	Medium Cost	☐
Choose native plants that are suited to your climate – they usually use less water and are suited to your local conditions. Add interpretation that lets your customers know.	Medium Cost	☐

Next steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	☐
Install sub-meters to understand how your business uses water across its functions.	Higher Cost	☐
Choose new kitchen and cleaning appliances wisely - modern equipment will have datasheets that specify typical water usage. Efficient equipment may be more expensive to purchase, but payback over time may offer best value. Think about the balance of up-front costs vs payback on reduced water usage.	Higher Cost	☐
Waste Consider adapting your menu to reduce food waste by using fewer perishable items, or options for smaller portions to reduce wastage. Reducing plate size has been shown to reduce food wastage at buffets.	Lower Cost	☐
Challenge your team to come up with upcycling options for waste items, with a prize for most creative. Do not forget to let your visitors know about your changes.	Lower Cost	☐
Hold an event with **Clean Up Australia** to reduce waste in your area and encourage education of staff and visitors.	Lower Cost	☐
Consider investing in a commercial composter if you have a large quantity of compostable products – this can include compostable plates and cups.	Higher Cost	☐
General Consider purchase of carbon credits only as a last resort to reach your carbon reduction targets. Consider gaining certification through a trusted standard that offers carbon measurement and benchmarking	Medium Cost	☐
Support biodiversity and regeneration Work with other businesses in your local area to build itineraries around low impact or responsible travel.	Lower Cost	☐
Find your local conservation group or land management group and explore ways your business can contribute to their goals.	Lower Cost	☐
Run tree planting initiatives in your local community and include staff, visitors and locals.	Medium Cost	☐
Identify citizen science programs close to your business and identify ways your customers can get involved.	Medium Cost	☐

Chapter 3

Respecting culture

Respecting culture

This chapter of the Toolkit explores how your business can protect, nurture, and share Australia's unique cultural traditions, diverse multicultural communities and sites. It outlines how to form respectful partnerships with First Nations people, as well as how tourism businesses can celebrate the diversity of our multicultural nation.

This chapter of the Toolkit covers:

1. Engaging respectfully with, and learning from, First Nations people.

2. Incorporating First Nations' cultures and perspectives into visitor experiences in partnership with First Nations Custodians only where permission has been given.

3. Respecting the cultural and intellectual property rights of First Nations people.

4. Embedding sustainable building design practices that are sensitive to cultural heritage and the environment.

5. Championing the multicultural diversity of your local community.

Why include cultural sustainability in your business?

Australia is home to the world's oldest living cultures. We are also a nation of migrants who have origins and links to countries around the world. Tourism businesses can offer visitors an insight into this unique cultural and ethnic diversity.

Sustainability involves respectfully acknowledging and including the different cultures in your destination. Working cooperatively with local First Nations and multicultural communities will bring out the best of your destination and give visitors an authentic and high-quality experience.

Ensuring your business is fair, respectful, and inclusive of different cultures is not only good for business, but the right thing to do.

Embracing cultural sustainability can help your business by:

- Reaching new markets and expanding your customer base by catering to unique preferences and values.

- Fostering creativity and innovation.

- Strengthening regional identity and creating unique and authentic experiences.

TOP TIP

The environment is often top of mind when you think about sustainability. But alongside the environment, respectful engagement with our diverse mix of cultures is an essential part of the overall sustainability of your business.

Incorporating and demonstrating your values of diversity, inclusion, well-being, and recognition and respect for people of all backgrounds is an important part of your social licence to operate (how supportive your community is of your business), and therefore to the long-term success of your business.

Key terms

Acknowledgment of Country – A respectful statement that shows you are aware of who the Traditional Owners are of the Country that you are on. Anyone can conduct an Acknowledgment of Country.

Welcome to Country – A Welcome to Country is a ceremony that receives you on Country and can only be delivered by the Traditional Owners. It will vary based on the customs and traditions of the Traditional Owners of the Country that you are on.

Understanding and Acknowledging whose Country you are on

To start, it is important to understand and acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Country that your business operates on. The Australian Institute of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies (AIATSIS) website** can help you find out who the Traditional Owners of the Country you are on.

An **Acknowledgement of Country** is a statement that recognises the First Nations people of the land which you are on. Anyone can conduct an Acknowledgement of Country, to demonstrate their awareness of, and respect for, local First Nations people.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be placed on your website, in your office and used as part of your welcoming of visitors.

If you are hosting an event, like opening a new building or holding a conference, you can invite a local Traditional Owner to conduct a **Welcome to Country** ceremony. Only Traditional Owners of the Country that you are on can perform this ceremony.

Head to **Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country – Reconciliation Australia** for information on when, where, and how to provide an Acknowledgement of Country.

Make connections with the Traditional Owners in your area

Meeting with local Traditional Owners in your area is a good way to build relationships, learn about their culture and heritage and, where appropriate, work in collaboration to include First Nations culture in your experience. It is also good practice to meet with Traditional Owners before starting any new development or creating a new experience that involves exploring the environment.

For advice on contacting Traditional Owners in your area, speak to your local council or **National Indigenous Australians Agency regional office**.

Before engaging with First Nations people and communities you should consider:

- The intent of your connection and what are you seeking to achieve or understand. Be clear in your purpose.
- Who in the community you should be connecting with.
- Their preferred communication method.
- How often to communicate.
- How you can show your thanks and appreciation for their time and knowledge. Often, this will include payment.

Understand the practice of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent

Any engagements with First Nations people needs to follow the principles of **Free, Prior and Informed Consent**. Free, Prior, and Informed consent (FPIC) respects Indigenous Peoples' rights when it comes to being informed of, providing input on, and giving approval to projects and issues that would impact their land and resources.

As with any relationship, it takes time to build trust and identify shared opportunities, and work towards outcomes that suit all parties.

Important terms to know

- **Free, Prior, and Informed consent (FPIC)** is about inclusion, disclosure, and respect for Traditional Owners' decision-making processes.

- **Free:** Consent has been provided freely without fear, coercion, threats, or manipulation.

- **Prior:** Any information or plans for a project are provided to the First Nations stakeholders with sufficient time to review and decide prior to commencement of activity.

- **Informed:** Information, method of delivery (such as the language and format), and engagement about a project is transparent, truthful, balanced, and accurate.

- **Consent:** The right of the community to make the decision about a project.

More information on FPIC can be found **here**.

FPIC establishes rights and sovereignty to Indigenous Peoples, ensuring they are fairly included in decisions that impact their land. Following FPIC principles will help you minimise any risks of disputes and misunderstandings.

TOP TIP

Building long-term relationships and trust takes time. Spend the time getting to know people and to understand how you can work together in a way that suits you both.

Respecting cultural intellectual property

Intellectual property rights cover people's artwork, traditional knowledge and cultural expressions.

By selling unethically sourced or fake First Nations art, businesses deprive artists and their families of income and recognition. Visitors often don't know that what they're buying is either unethically sourced or fake.

There are things you can do to make sure you're supporting artists and their communities:

> Where possible, buy art directly from the artist or from suppliers that are members of the **Indigenous Art Code**.

> Only buy and sell authentic Indigenous products from reputable businesses. The seller should be able to tell you where the products came from and who the artists are, and give you a certificate of authenticity.

> Seek permission from the artist before you take any photos or video, and written permission before you publish photos or videos of their art. Check you have their permission to publish content on social media or elsewhere.

> Don't copy or adapt any art without the artist's permission.

> Check that you have permission to use traditional knowledge.

> Credit authors, creators, contributors or custodians of ceremonies, dance or songs.

> Ask permission to touch or handle objects of cultural significance.

> Don't take or sell anything from areas of cultural significance such as rocks, shells or plants.

Find out more about the ethical trade of First Nations art here.

Reflecting place in your experience

Including cultural designs, interpretation or elements within your experience can enhance the sense of place, connect visitors with your unique community and create a point of difference for your business.

Reflect on your business and if and how you have included the following:

› **Employ local:** Where possible, aim to employ local people.

› **Describing culture and storytelling**: How can you provide a platform for First Nations peoples and multicultural communities to tell their stories? For example, consider commissioning a mural or a certified artwork.

› **Landscaping:** Consider using flora that is native to the area to restore ecosystems, help mitigate weather events (such as vegetation to reduce flooding risks), and conserve water, ultimately reducing the demands on scarce local resources.

› **Food gardening:** Try switching out lawns and decorative (and often introduced) plants for community-access food gardens including native varieties. This can help with food security and builds stronger community relationships.

› **Community engagement:** Talk with your local community partners and organisations to seek feedback and input on the development of your business or experience. For example, if you offer historical tours, talk with the community (Traditional Owners, and/or your local historical/conservation organisation) to ensure that the tour provides a full, transparent, and inclusive perspective on historical events.

› **Collaboration for economic distribution:** Collaborative projects can raise awareness of economic benefits that tourism generates among the community. For example, create a product package that encourages people to stay, eat and tour locally.

› **Building design:** Where possible, retrofit your building, or design new buildings to work with the local environment and weather patterns. For example, the installation of water tanks to capture rainwater, or solar panels to generate solar electricity. This can help reduce your business' reliance on shared community resources, reduce your environmental impact, and save you money.

› **Language:** Include dual naming or local First Nations peoples' words in your signage and communications that reflect the Country you are on.

TOP TIP

Certified buildings leave a legacy of sustainability, health, and community in the places they are built. Programs like NABERS, BREEAM, EarthCheck Building Planning and Design, Greenstar and LEED offer support for adding sustainable practices into the design, construction and fit out of your business.

Image courtesy of Visit Victoria

Championing diversity

Australia is well known globally for our incredible natural landscapes, unique experiences, warm hospitality and friendly people.

Engaging with all visitors with warmth and respect helps to create a positive impression and welcoming environment. There are many ways to respectfully engage with your visitors including:

› **Staff training:** Provide your staff with training on the importance of respectful communication, including how this may differ across different cultural backgrounds. For First Nations cultural competency, **AIATSIS** provides online training.

› **Language assistance:** There are many options available for language translation. Find out how to use these tools to reduce language barriers. If you have visitors from certain countries that visit you regularly, consider translating key documents, signage and interpretative materials.

› **Clear points of contact:** Provide clear points of contact for visitors so they know where to go for help.

› **Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)** to help you learn about First Nations cultural practices and protocols. A RAP can help you build relationships, respect and opportunities through collaboration with First Nations peoples. **To learn more about RAPs, head to the Reconciliation Australia website**.

› **Work with local communities:** Look for opportunities to work with First Nations businesses. For example, you could use the **Supply Nation website** to find a local Traditional Owner to conduct a Welcome to Country or speak at an event you host for NAIDOC Week.

› **Understanding your market:** Know who your key customers are to meet their needs – these could be dietary, religious or language needs. This can help to improve their experience with your business, and their overall experience with your destination.

› **Walk-the-talk:** Your business should walk-the-talk when it comes to demonstrating its values and efforts to create a diverse and inclusive environment. Creating a safe, welcoming and accepting environment extends beyond your workplace, and encompasses your whole community and your visitors.

Recap on first steps

Considering culture as part of your sustainability journey demonstrates respect for diverse perspectives and traditions, creating a welcoming environment for both employees and visitors. Start with these actions:

First steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	
Understand and acknowledge the Country your business is on.	Lower Cost	☐
Speak with your Traditional Owners and explore how you can respectfully embed First Nations culture within your business. This may be through the employment of a First Nations guide, displaying artwork, purchasing from First Nations suppliers or an Acknowledgement of Country.	Lower Cost	☐
Use the FPIC principles when you are working with Traditional Owners.	Lower Cost	☐
Understand your visitors and support their needs – dietary, cultural, religious, ability and/or language.	Lower Cost	☐
Think about using local artists, products and stories to add to your experience or tourism business.	Medium Cost	☐

Next steps

The first steps provide a great starting point for embedding respect for culture and the heritage of your destination as part of your tourism business. To take the next steps on your sustainability journey consider these actions:

Next steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	
Include respect for culture as part of your overall approach to accessibility and inclusivity, and how you communicate this as part of your overall marketing – on your website and in other marketing initiatives.	Lower Cost	☐
Think about how you can use cultural celebrations and dates as an opportunity to promote your business and become involved in these celebrations.	Lower Cost	☐
Check your employment policies and procedures – are they inclusive to people from all backgrounds?	Lower Cost	☐
Create and offer itineraries for your visitors, providing them with options for experiences throughout the destination that share similar values.	Lower Cost	☐
Talk with your local council, visitor information centre or tourism association about opportunities to showcase your business's cultural credentials.	Lower Cost	☐
Integrate respect for culture in staff development and training.	Medium Cost	☐

Creating positive social impact

Creating positive social impact

Your business can be a force for good in your community. How you operate your business can create positive impacts beyond the services and experiences you deliver to visitors.

Why create positive social impact?

Regardless of the size of your business, your impact can stretch much further than your employees and customers.

Creating positive social impact can:

- Strengthen the reputation and brand of your business in your community.

- Increase staff retention and appeal of the business when recruiting new team members.

- Reduce stress and absenteeism among team members.

- Enhance efficiencies.

- Create a competitive advantage.

- Increase customer willingness to choose your business, due to shared values and ethical practices.

Contributing to your community

You can create trust, well-being and community support ("social licence") for your business by actively working with and contributing to your local community.

Key Term

Social Licence means having community support for your business.

To build your business's contribution to your local community, consider:

› **Being an active and engaged member of your tourism network.** Working with your local or regional tourism organisation, being a member of your local chamber of commerce or tourism industry council can support advocacy efforts to demonstrate positive impacts for your local community.

› **Fostering a sense of partnership with the community.** This can be achieved through collaborations with local organisations, including voluntary, sporting and conservation groups or cultural institutions. The focus is on embedding your business in the community.

› **Providing employment and skills development opportunities** for local people, which not only bolsters the community's economic well-being but can also establish a sense of pride and ownership in the success of your business.

> **Investing in sustainable practices** that go beyond your business, and reduce environmental impact, respect local customs and traditions, and support community initiatives, such as education or healthcare programs.

> **Reviewing the impact your business** has on the community. For instance, think about your visitors' impact on the surrounding areas – do they shop locally? Do they eat in local restaurants? Does visitor traffic create congestion or parking problems at busy times?

> **Supporting local clubs and not-for-profit organisations.** For example, sponsoring the local junior footy team or identifying a local charity which benefits by receiving a donation from a proportion of your bookings.

TOP TIP

Showing a genuine commitment to your community by supporting local clubs and charities can create goodwill, trust, and long-term support from residents.

Creating an accessible and inclusive customer experience and workplace

Your community and customers are made up of people from different backgrounds, with different life experiences, skills, and abilities. Taking action to meet the needs of your customers and your employees will support the long-term success of your business.

Key Terms

Accessible refers to the ease with which individuals, regardless of their physical, sensory or cognitive abilities or limitations, can participate in and enjoy tourism-related activities and destinations.

Inclusive refers to the practice of ensuring all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or characteristics, have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from tourism-related activities and experiences.

Accessibility and inclusivity with your customers

People with accessibility needs make up a large portion of your potential customer base, with some estimates putting this at approximately 20 per cent.[2] Bear in mind these customers are a much larger group than people with a visible physical disability. They also include people with sight, hearing and cognitive impairments that may not be readily obvious. Other potential customers with accessibility needs include older people and parents with young children. Making your venue and experiences accessible demonstrates to both customers and the community your commitment to be inclusive.

Consider the following steps to improve accessibility within your business or experience:

> **Assess your business's accessibility:** Start by assessing the current levels of accessibility of your products and experiences. Identify physical, sensory, and cognitive barriers that may hinder potential visitors from purchasing from you. For example, common physical barriers include stairs and steep gradients, loud audio in a confined space, and overly complex signposting or interpretative information can create cognitive barriers.

> **Engage with a diverse range communities and groups:** Consult with individuals and advocacy groups representing people with disabilities, seniors, and other diverse communities. Understand their specific needs and preferences and involve them in your planning processes where appropriate.

> **Accessible information and communication:** Consider how people access information about your business, including website and marketing materials that are readable by screen readers, offering alternative formats for printed materials, and providing employee training on accessible communication techniques. Accessible communication techniques may include an audio version of interpretative material for your visitor attraction, and/or ensuring web-reader optimisation or providing tactile maps.

> **Inclusive design and infrastructure:** Where required, invest in physical improvements and design modifications to remove barriers. This may include installing ramps, accessible restrooms, and pathways, and providing braille signage, hearing loops, and tactile maps. Ensure your facilities and services are designed to accommodate a wide range of abilities.

You can find more information on the benefits and opportunities of an accessible tourism industry on the **Austrade website**. Tourism Australia has also created a **great resource** to help the industry understand the expectations and opportunities for accessible tourism. To evaluate how inclusive your experience offering is for people with a disability, check out the **Accessibility online assessment program** available through the Australian Tourism Industry Council.

Image courtesy of Visit Victoria

Example of accessibility action

Business X took the following steps to make their space more welcoming and accessible to their customers. They:

- Installed an entrance ramp, allowing easier access for customers using wheelchairs, mobility aids or prams.

- Revamped their website to include detailed information on access such as parking options and entrance details, and ensured all information was in a web-reader friendly format.

- Renovated their bathroom to provide a gender-neutral and accessible facility, including installing changing tables to assist parents and caregivers with young children.

- Provided training to staff on accessibility and inclusivity, including on appropriate communication techniques and disability awareness.

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2. University of Technology Sydney, *Inclusive Tourism: Economic Opportunities*, 2017

Accessibility and inclusivity with your employees

Being an equal opportunity employer can bring a range of benefits to your business like:

- Better employee performance and productivity.
- Improved health and wellbeing of your employees.
- Decreased workplace complaints.
- A better understanding of different cultures.
- Accessing new markets and opportunities.

As an employer, who and how you employ is important. It is essential that you provide equal employment opportunities to potential team members. **Business.gov.au provides further information about equal opportunity, diversity, and your responsibilities as an employer.**

Diversity and inclusion should be incorporated in every element of your business, and through your recruitment process. **The Australian Human Rights Commission provides a step-by-step guide**.

Offer great working conditions

Attracting, hiring, and retaining great people is an ongoing challenge for tourism businesses.

Engaging and retaining great employees helps to cut the time and cost of hiring and training, provides consistency for your customers, and helps your business retain valuable knowledge and skills.

At a minimum, you must meet your legal obligations to employ people on fair terms and pay them appropriately. **Business.gov.au provides additional information on this important area**. However, a truly sustainable tourism business will look to go beyond these legal requirements to establish a working environment where their employees thrive.

Consider the following opportunities to help establish a welcoming work environment for your staff:

› Ensure you understand your legal responsibilities as a starting point.

› Ensure your working environment is safe and free from physical risks, bullying, and harassment. Examples of actions to achieve this include fostering a culture of open communication and respect, implementing a harassment policy and regularly assessing and mitigating risks in your business.

TOP TIP

Implementing staff support and recognition measures is a great way to build commitment and motivation. Think about flexible hours, team lunches, staff awards, bonuses and sending them to events.

› Encourage and provide training and career growth opportunities for your staff.

› Provide flexible and consistent work hours.

› Consider offering additional financial and non-financial rewards such as allowances/bonuses, staff and family discounts, and regular staff social functions.

› Provide regular recognition of hard work through staff awards or celebratory team lunches, or organising social activities.

› Take action to reduce the gender pay gap by reviewing your pay scales.

Example

Business X was having trouble retaining their staff. The team noticed that younger employees would stay for a few months and then move on. This was costly for the business as they had to recruit and train new staff on an ongoing basis.

To address this issue, management spoke with staff and found the minimum wage and lack of career advancement opportunities made the business less appealing than some neighbouring businesses.

So, the business overhauled its approach. The team identified a clear career path and promoted this to existing staff and in their recruitment program. Staff were upskilled and trained through online micro-credential programs. A once a month staff lunch was introduced, combining a staff update with a meal provided by management.

Attracting visitors at the right time – managing seasonality

Key Term

Seasonality means the occurrence of peaks and troughs of customer demand at different times through the year. Seasonality can impact your social licence to operate and how willing your community is to support your business.

You may need to manage seasonality where peaks and troughs in demand affect your local community and place pressure on your staff. Your business and community can experience labour shortages and overcrowding during peak times, potentially impacting the overall liveability and quality of life in your destination.

Your local tourism organisation can play a role in managing seasonality by introducing initiatives such as seasonal events or special offers which seek to grow trade in the shoulder and off-peak periods.

There are also some other steps you can take:

› **Understand your market:** Understanding who your visitors are, and when and why they travel, will help you to identify opportunities to reduce peaks and increase appeal in the 'off' season. For example, if your destination attracts families with children during school holidays but attracts young child-free couples in shoulder seasons (quiet times), understanding this will enable you to refine your marketing efforts to reach the right people at the right time. **Tourism Australia** and state tourism organisations publish detailed visitor profile information which can help you investigate these opportunities further.

› **Product offerings:** Consider reviewing and evolving your products and experiences to encourage business in shoulder seasons. For example, if your hotel is usually full during summer holidays but then operates at lower occupancy during shoulder periods, you could consider working with tourism partners in

your community to encourage visitation to the destination in the shoulder periods. Similarly, if you have a rainy season, think about the types of activities you can offer to visitors during this time.

› **Education:** Educating your visitors on the sustainability challenges your destination faces during high visitation times, and subsequently the benefits of off-season travel, can help encourage visitation during non-peak periods. You can use communication channels such as social media and newsletters to share the perks of off-season travel (such as cheaper rates, fewer people) which can help guide them to make informed choices when choosing their next trip.

Supply chain management

Visitors are becoming increasingly aware of their environmental and social impacts, and as a result they are more conscious of how they spend their money while travelling. The days of only being responsible for your business's immediate operations are gone, and it is expected that you have a good understanding of your supply chain and its impacts.

Key Term

Your **supply chain** is all of the individuals, organisations, resources, activities and technology involved in the creation and sale of your product, service or experience.

Examine your supply chain and purchasing arrangements to help:

• **Decrease risk.** Understanding the risks through your supply chain means you can identify and address potential risks before they occur. This can support efficient recovery if the worst happens, and the risk materialises. For example, the further away the produce for your restaurant travels, the more likely are transport disruptions and delays. Reviewing your supply chain presents the opportunity to work with local suppliers, build community relationships and to reduce some of your business risks.

- **Save you money.** Conducting a thorough review of your supply chain can lead to efficiencies and cost savings. For example, when renewing supplier contracts you can look at switching out your lightbulbs and electrical appliances for more energy efficient options, leading to reduced energy costs over time.

- **Minimise environmental impact.** Your supply chain and purchasing procedures can be a mechanism for positive change. As the demand for transparency along the supply chain increases, suppliers are becoming aware of the need to become more sustainable. You can take the opportunity to review what you are asking from your supplier. For example, if the cleaning products are brought to you by a freight company, you can request they start tracking, calculating, and reducing their transport emissions or identify a local supplier.

- **Strengthen community relationships.** Establishing a strong local supply chain can build and strengthen your relationships with your community. For example, your restaurant could look to change its menu and provide options from local suppliers. This would build relationships with local farmers and producers, reduce the carbon footprint of your menu, and help distribute the benefits within your community.

As a minimum, you should ask your suppliers the following:

- What are their sustainability commitments (or policies)?

- What action are they taking to reduce negative environmental and social impacts?

- What is their carbon footprint and are they taking steps to measure their footprint?

TOP TIP

Ask your regular suppliers if they can provide sustainable alternatives to the usual supplies, for example cleaning materials and pesticides.
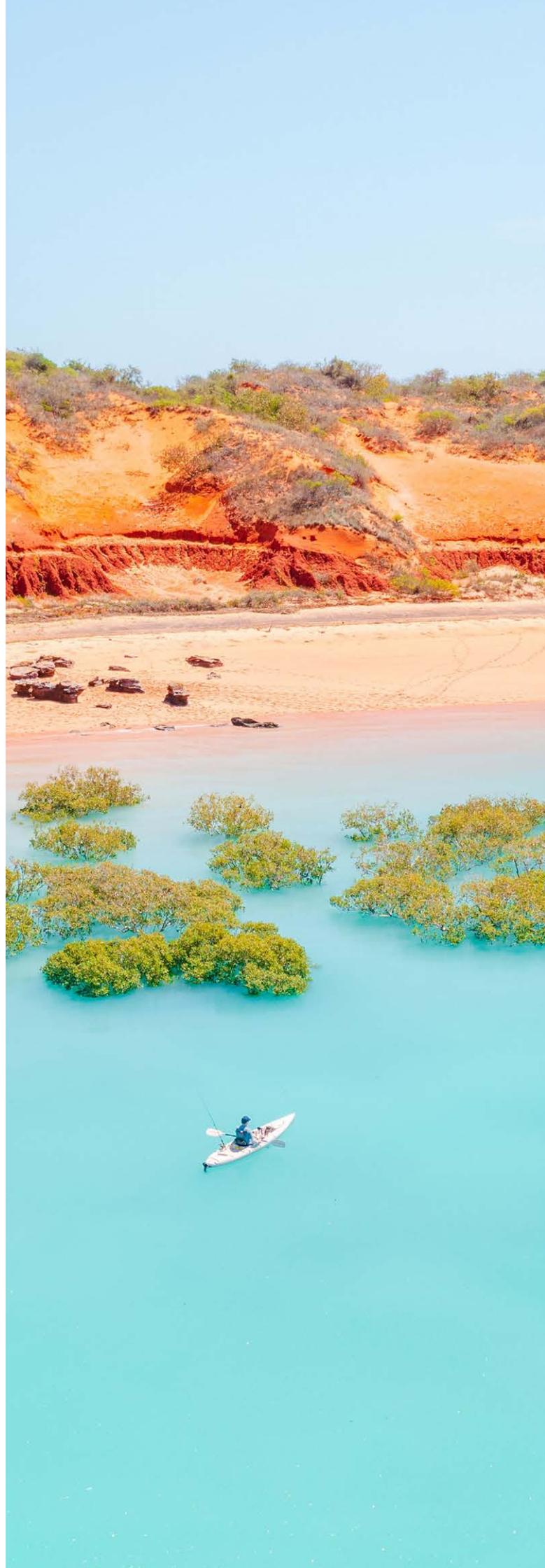
Recap on first steps

The following actions can help your business build connection with local community.

Start with the following actions:

First steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	
Review the accessibility and inclusivity of your business – identify where improvement is required, include it in your sustainability action plan, and budget and commit to a timeframe to implement.	Lower Cost	☐
Ask your suppliers about their sustainability journey, their commitments, carbon footprint and action plan. Align with suppliers who share your values.	Lower Cost	☐
Treat your staff fairly – offer upskilling opportunities, career pathways and rewards for good performance.	Medium Cost	☐
Assess the wages you pay. Take action to reduce the gender pay gap if there is one.	Medium Cost	☐
Provide value adds for your staff – for instance, meals on shifts, laundering of uniforms or subsidised accommodation.	Medium Cost	☐

Next steps

The first steps provide a great starting point to improve your social impact. Take the next steps on yoursustainability journey:

Next steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	
Talk with your local TAFE, Registered Training Organisation, or schools – is there an opportunity to be a case study for courses or on curriculums? This can help with staff recruitment and building links with the community.	Lower Cost	☐
When recruiting, communicate employee benefits over and above the salary being paid.	Lower Cost	☐
Write a sustainable procurement policy that preferences local suppliers.	Lower Cost	☐

Next steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	
Work with your local or regional tourism destination on off-season promotions to reduce seasonality in your destination. Think about what value adds you can offer to attract visitors. Is it possible for your business to create a virtue of off-season conditions?	Medium Cost	☐
Go the extra mile in embedding your business in the local community. Consider discount rates or open days for local residents. If your destination has a large proportion of people visiting friends and relatives, this can be a good business opportunity.	Medium Cost	☐
Identify opportunities to attract visitors with differing abilities. Identify opportunities to adapt your business products or experiences to meet the needs of visitors with varying physical, sensory and cognitive impairments.	Higher Cost	☐

Image courtesy of Visit Victoria

Chapter 5

Promote your sustainability story

Promote your sustainability story

Talking about your sustainability achievements with your customers and community can establish a competitive advantage where your sustainable practices become a point of difference. Communicating about sustainability also helps your employees, customers and wider community understand your values so you can work collectively towards common goals.

This chapter of the Toolkit covers:

1. Talking about your sustainable practices across the visitor journey.
2. The importance of making truthful and accurate claims.
3. Getting your staff involved.

When talking about sustainability, you need to have **evidence** to back up your claims. Make sure you are **measuring** to manage – it is important to walk the talk when it comes to sustainability.

This chapter steps you through how you can do this without risking claims of *greenwashing* or *greenhushing*.

Why communicate your sustainability journey

When you have done the hard work to be more sustainable, you should communicate your commitment, actions, and results.

Key Terms

Greenwashing: Making unsubstantiated or misleading claims about the environmental benefits of a product, service, or company.

Greenhushing: Staying silent about genuine sustainability achievements, often due to fear of criticism for not doing enough.

Communicating about your sustainability actions can:

- Build trust with customers and staff.
- Create buy-in among staff who deliver the sustainable actions.
- Help differentiate your business in a competitive market.
- Attract more consumers.
- Demonstrate your commitment to responsible business practices.

Visitor demand for sustainable tourism experiences and their expectations for sustainability practices has been growing steadily for a number of years. **Booking.com research** demonstrates that while quality, price, location and experience remain key factors, sustainability has also been growing in importance as part of visitors' decision-making choices.

As such, good communication on sustainability is more important than ever!

Image courtesy of Destination NSW

TOP TIP

Embed sustainability across all your communications and products and make your sustainability achievements easy to find on your website and promotional materials.

Planning – have accurate information on your website backed up with evidence so your potential visitors can see the action you are taking.

Booking – if you have data on how much you have saved with your sustainability actions, this is a great place to include it. Or alternatively, think about using sustainability messaging post-booking to remind your visitors that you are a sustainable operator. For instance, you could request they bring refillable water bottles.

Experience – from the moment you greet your visitors through to the farewell, you have plenty of opportunities to engage them with your sustainability storytelling. And remember – whether it is your team talking about initiatives or signage through your experience – it needs to be backed up with data!

Sharing – pick up when your visitors are sharing or talking about sustainability in their reviews and engage in the conversation. If your visitors took part in any initiatives with local conservation, heritage, or environmental organisations, this can be a great way to maintain conversations, and hopefully incentivise repeat visits. Or, they may just love the smell of your locally sourced amenities. Get them talking!

Promoting your sustainability actions across the visitor journey

Sustainability is not something to be buried away on your website. It should be an integral part of your ongoing marketing and communications. You can show your sustainability efforts on each sustainability pillar and through all parts of the customer journey.

Dreaming – use images on your social media like a plant-based menu or bicycle hire to make your sustainable actions aspirational.

Dreaming – exploring options for next trip

Planning – narrowing down selection and finalising details

Booking – making a commitment to a destination and activities

Experience – the trip itself

Sharing – the good and the bad with friends and family

The importance of making accurate and truthful claims

When promoting your sustainability efforts, honesty and accuracy are very important – you should be walking the talk.

To make truthful claims, refer to your sustainability action plan and the action you are measuring (refer to the chapter on Taking a Managed Approach). Identify practices and policies that show you are taking action, like reducing energy consumption, conserving water, supporting local communities, or minimising waste. Talk about what you do, but do not exaggerate the impact of your actions.

When you communicate these initiatives to potential customers, be transparent about your achievements and ongoing commitments. You should also highlight any certifications you have achieved.

Have evidence to back up your claims

Track your progress over time and use the data you collect to support your communications.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's **guidance on greenwashing** recommends that, where you can, your evidence is scientific and independently verified. While this guidance is targeted at larger companies, its principles are good practice for all businesses.

If you do not have evidence to support what you are saying, consider whether you should be talking about it. Focus on where you do have the data and evidence.

Do not leave out or hide important information

Be open about your sustainability goals, the action you are taking and any setbacks that you may have. Do not be afraid to talk about your learnings along the way.

Sustainability communications should not stand alone – you can include them in all your normal communication channels. This could be your social media, website, brochures, and newsletters. Consider the type of messaging at each phase of the customer journey and what will inspire visitors that align with your values. The imagery or information at the dreaming phase of decision-making will be different than the booking phase.

At this point your visitors will want to make informed decisions about where they are travelling and the information you provide should be comprehensive and reliable.

Explain any condition or qualification on your claims

If claims are only true in some circumstances, you will need to let potential visitors know this. For example, if your business is powered by 100% solar only when the business is running at 50% capacity, then this needs to be clearly stated.

Avoid broad and unqualified claims

Claims like being "eco-friendly" are broad and lack real meaning. Ensure that you clearly qualify the claims that you make. Remember, if you can't back up your claims, then you should not be making them.

Use clear and easy-to-understand language

Not all your visitors have a technical background, so use language that is as simple and easy to understand. If there are technical terms that you cannot escape, then try to explain them in a way your visitors will understand.

Visual elements should not give the wrong impression

Avoid visual elements – pictures, logos, packaging, or other imagery – that give the wrong impression about what you are doing and the achievements you have made. Imagery is a great communications tool; however, care needs to be taken that it is representative of your sustainability actions.

Be direct and open about your sustainability transition

When you are making aspirational claims about where you want to be in the future, make sure that you back up your claims with a pathway of how you will get there – the steps and actions you are taking to achieve your goals.

Often sustainable action brings challenges. If this is the case, be open with your visitors and staff about your challenges as well as the actions that you are taking.

Tourism Australia's **Sustainability Storytelling guides** are a great source of further information to help you with your sustainability communications.

Example of sustainability communications

Business X involved its team members from the very start of their sustainability journey. Although small, a 'Green Team' of two was set up to drive sustainability outcomes. The team was responsible for developing policies, measuring the carbon footprint, and identifying priority actions to take. They worked closely with the Disaster Management team who identified the risks to the business and the actions required to reduce disruption – they soon found these actions were often aligned.

The Green Team raised sustainability challenges and priorities in the fortnightly team meeting, keeping all staff up to date with initiatives underway.

When they were comfortable with the action underway, they reviewed their website and social media to add more detail about their sustainability practices and progress. This is now also regularly updated.

Image courtesy of Austrade

Get your staff involved

It is not just your visitors that you need to share your story with. Your staff also need to understand your ambitions and the actions you are taking, as well as what their role is in achieving the goal and in sharing with your visitors. Some ways to engage your staff include:

› **Staff training:** Run a training program to explain what sustainability is and why it is important to your business.

› **Develop a green team:** A green or sustainability team will become your champions. They can lead sustainable action, identify risks, prioritise actions and coordinate any certification you decide to progress. Having a green team is a great way of building staff engagement, thinking of creative new actions, and championing action and engagement across your organisation.

› **Include sustainability in your internal newsletter:** Build staff awareness and knowledge through regular communication. This also highlights the importance of your commitments.

› **Add a sustainability update to your staff meetings:** This creates the opportunity for staff input into the actions you are taking and demonstrates its importance to your business.

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Photographer: Cameron Laird**

Recap on first steps

Authentically telling your sustainability story helps build trust with customers, differentiates you in a competitive market, and demonstrates a genuine commitment to environmental and social responsibility.

Start with the following first steps:

First steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	🌍
Look at the visitor journey for your business and how you can communicate your sustainability story.	Lower Cost	☐
Develop accurate and honest statements about your sustainability to use in your promotional materials	Lower Cost	☐
Engage your team about sustainability, reinforcing why it is important, and encouraging them to get involved and share your business's story.	Lower Cost	☐
Integrate sustainable management into your communications strategy.	Lower Cost	☐

Next steps

The first steps provide a great starting point for sustainability communications. To take the next steps in communicating your sustainability activity, consider the following:

First steps	Lower, Medium or Higher Cost	🌍
Work with your local Destination Management Organisation to identify how your sustainable actions fit with the destination's sustainability story.	Lower Cost	☐
Review your Australian Tourism Data Warehouse listing to ensure your sustainable practices are included.	Lower Cost	☐
Explore storytelling as a tool to share your sustainability actions. Think about how your visitors arrive, experience, and depart and what stories are best told where.	Lower Cost	☐
Build a network of likeminded businesses in your area to create itineraries that support and grows the destination.	Lower Cost	☐
Run staff training to build capacity and ensure that your staff understand what you are trying to achieve and how to tell your story.	Medium Cost	☐
Identify touchpoints where you can install signage to tell your sustainability story.	Medium Cost	☐

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Energy, water and waste tracker

Measures	Month or quarter (or other)	Time period 1	Time period 2	Time period 3	Time period 4	Time period 5	Time period 6	Time period 7	Time period 8	Time period 9	Time period 10	Time period 11	Time period 12	Total
Energy	Purchased electricity – grid (kWh)													
	Purchased electricity – green (kWh)													
	Onsite renewable generation (solar, biomass) (kWh)													
	Natural gas (kWh)													
	LPG (kg)													
	Business travel (petrol) (L)													
	Business travel (diesel) (L)													
	(Other type of fuel or energy)													
	(Other type of fuel or energy)													
Water	Total potable water used (kl – 1 kilolitre = 1000 litres)													
	Captured water used (rainwater, greywater) (kl)													
	Total water used (kl)													
Waste Use the same unit of measurement for all waste in order to understand the total diverted from landfill	Waste sent to landfill (kg or L)													
	Waste recycled (kg or L)													
	Waste composted (kg or L)													
	Waste donated (kg or L)													
	Reusable containers donated (number of units or weight)													
	Total waste generated (kg or L)													
	Waste diverted from landfill (kg or L)													

Appendix 2 – Measures of social impact

1. Benefit to communities – procuring goods and services locally	• Percentage of value of goods and services procured locally (e.g. 50km). • Percentage of suppliers that are least 50% locally owned. • Contributions to local community groups or not-for-profit (time, volunteering, in-kind or financial).
2. Benefits to communities – employment for locals	• Percentage of locals employed (e.g. staff living within a 50km radius). • Training of staff. • Staff satisfaction surveys. • Staff retention percentage. • Publish statistics around equal opportunity and inclusivity (e.g. gender balance).
3. Benefits to communities – satisfying the local community	• Community satisfaction survey through a regular survey (consider having your local regional tourism organisation deliver this).
4. Inclusiveness – accessibility for customers	• Results of an accessibility audit or participating in an accessibility assessment. • Checklist of actions taken to improve accessibility (physical, sensory etc.). • Certifications.

Appendix 3 – Sustainability Action Plan template

[Enter your business name] sustainability action plan

Vision

[A short statement describing how you're committed to improving your sustainability. You might want to write your statement after you fill out the tables.]

Our commitment to sustainability	*Example: At Business X, we understand the importance of sustainability for the future of our environment, community and business.* Our team is committed to reducing negative effects and making a positive impact on the environment and community. We will do this by: • working with local farmers to compost our waste and source 40% of our food within 100 km of our business • working with local Traditional Owners to improve our understanding of First Nations cultures and include their stories in our customer experiences • using 100% renewable energy to power our business by 2030 • working with the local high school to provide training for local students • partnering with local First Nations businesses to include native food ingredients on our menu • regularly reviewing and updating our sustainability action plan and assessing our risks and performance each year.

Actions

Follow these steps to help you fill out the tables on the following pages.

1. Consider the main areas of sustainability – environment and climate, culture and people (social impact).

2. Set an objective or overall change you can make in your business for the good of the planet and people around you.

3. Measure and record your baseline – your current state.

4. Set a target to achieve to help you reach your objective. Make sure it's specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

5. Think of actions you can take to achieve your target.

6. To help you choose the actions to take, calculate the cost, benefits and savings of each one. Try to be as accurate as you can.

7. Assign a team or person to be responsible for each action. Sustainability is a team effort, so make sure you bring your staff on the journey and they know what they need to do and why.

Sustainability area: environment and climate – energy use

Objective	Baseline	Target	Actions	Responsible	Costs	Benefits and savings
[Example: Reduce annual office energy use through changes to lighting]	[387KwH each year]	[5% reduction in 12 months]	[Change all lights to LED Communicate to staff about turning off lights Promote the use of natural light]	[Person's name]	[$200 in LED light bulbs Staff training – internal costs only]	[Savings = $855]

Sustainability area: environment and climate – water use

Objective	Baseline	Target	Actions	Responsible	Costs	Benefits and savings
[Example: Reduce annual room water use through water-efficient equipment]	[400 litres for each guest each night]	[5% reduction in 12 months]	[Incrementally change shower heads in hotel rooms to low-flow shower heads Communicate to guests to be water-conscious]	[Person's name]	[$150 for each unit Signs in bathrooms]	[Savings = $150 for each room annually]

Sustainability area: environment and climate – waste

Objective	Baseline	Target	Actions	Responsible	Costs	Benefits and savings
[Example: Reduce use of office paper]	[85 reams of paper (17 boxes)]	[10% reduction in 12 months]	[Encourage staff not to print Sign contracts digitally Set the printer to print on both sides and in black and white by default]	[Person's name]	[$0 Staff training – internal costs only]	[Savings = $180]

Sustainability area: environment and climate – greenhouse gas emissions

Objective	Baseline	Target	Actions	Responsible	Costs	Benefits and savings
[Example: Reduce business travel]	[12 trips each year]	[9 trips total in 12 months 25% reduction of emissions from business travel in 12 months]	[Encourage virtual rather than face-to-face meetings Communicate with partners to build understanding]	[Person's name]	[$0]	[Savings = 25 % reduction in greenhouse gas emissions generated through business travel]

Sustainability area: respecting culture

Objective	Baseline	Target	Actions	Responsible	Costs	Benefits and savings
[Example: Build a deeper understanding of the local First Nations cultures]	[Limited knowledge]	[50% of staff have completed cultural competency training by June 2024]	[Engage a First Nations specialist to provide cultural competency training]	[Person's name]	[$220 for each participant]	[Increase in staff satisfaction scores Increase in visitor satisfaction scores since staff are able to respectfully share cultural insights]

Sustainability area: positive social impact

Objective	Baseline	Target	Actions	Responsible	Costs	Benefits and savings
[Example: Increase support to local community groups]	[0 hours of staff volunteering, $0 donated]	[144 volunteered hours in 12 months $300 donation in 12 months]	[Offer each staff member (6 people) 24 hours each year to volunteer for a local cause Donate to a local community group]	[Person's name]	[$5,760 worth of staff hours $300]	[Increase in staff satisfaction scores Increase in number of local customers]

Appendix 4 – Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Accessible	The ease and inclusiveness with which individuals, regardless of their abilities or limitations, can participate in and enjoy tourism-related activities.
Acknowledgement of Country	A respectful statement that shows you know the First Nations land you are on. Anyone can Acknowledge Country.
Biodiversity Loss	The decrease in the number and types of plants and/or animals in a community.
Carbon Footprint	The total amount of greenhouse gas emissions (including carbon dioxide) that is directly and indirectly caused by the activities of an organisation. Carbon footprints for businesses are usually described in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents per year (CO2-e).
Carbon Offset	A way to compensate for the greenhouse gas emissions you produce through purchasing 'carbon credits'.
Climate Change	The long-term change in weather patterns.
FPIC Principles (Free, Prior, Informed, Consent)	Free, Prior and Informed Consent offers guidance for respectful engagement with First Nations People.
Greenhushing	Staying silent about genuine sustainability achievements, often due to fear of criticism for not doing enough.
Greenwashing	Making an unsubstantiated or misleading claim about the environmental benefits of your actions.
Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHGs)	Gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. They include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gases.
Inclusive	The practice of ensuring all individuals have equal access to participate in tourism related experiences.

Term	Definition
Scope 1, 2 & 3 Emissions	**Scope 1 emissions** – direct emissions from a business that are within its control like fuel and onsite electricity generation. **Scope 2 emissions** –indirect emissions from purchased electricity, heat, and cooling produced outside a business but used within it such as the electricity purchased from the grid. **Scope 3 emissions** – all indirect emissions that occur as a result of a business' activities, but occur from sources outside its control and includes the emissions generated by your visitors and the supply chain. For example, external laundry providers, transportation of produce, and visitor travel to and from your business.
Seasonality	The occurrence of peaks and troughs of customer demand at different times through the year.
Social Licence	The community support for your business.
Supply Chain	All the individuals, organisations, resources, activities, and technology that are involved in the creation and sale of your product, service, or experience.
Sustainable Tourism	Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, industry, environment, and host communities.
The Paris Agreement	An international agreement with the aim to keep global average temperatures below a 2° Celsius increase from preindustrial levels and to limit the increase to 1.5° Celsius by the end of the century.
Visitor Economy	Anyone who provides or promotes services to Australia's domestic and international visitors.
Welcome to Country	Delivered by Traditional Owners of the land, a Welcome to Country ceremony receives visitors on Country. It will vary based on the customs and traditions of the Traditional Owners.

Whilst the following terms did not feature in this guide, you may hear them used when it comes to talking about sustainability:

Term	Definition
Benchmarking	The process of comparing a measure (eg. greenhouse gas emissions) relative to an average or to others within the same sector (peers) or climate zone (geographic). It provides a comparison to enable understanding of relative performance.
Circularity / Circular economy	A systematic approach to development that is designed to benefit communities, businesses, and the environment. It is based on three principles: Eliminate waste and pollution; Circulate products and materials (at their highest value); Regenerate nature. Underpinned by a transition to renewable energy, the circular economy is a resilient system that is good for business, people, and the environment.
Decarbonisation	The process by which countries, individuals or other entities aim to achieve zero fossil carbon use. Typically refers to a reduction of the carbon emissions associated with electricity, industry, and transport.
Eco-Tourism	A form of nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.
Emissions Reduction	The lowering of greenhouse gas emissions generated by the business.
Nature-Based Tourism	A sector of the visitor economy that is primarily concerned with the direct enjoyment of some relatively undisturbed phenomenon of nature. Nature-based tourism is not necessarily sustainable, rather it reflects where the visitor activities take place.
Net Positive	Refers to the ability to make a positive contribution to the environment beyond carbon neutrality.
Net zero	The state in which the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere is equal to the amount removed or offset, resulting in no additional contribution to climate change.

Term	Definition
Reconciliation	Reconciliation refers to the strengthening of relationships between First Nations people and non-Indigenous peoples.
Regenerative Tourism	A process where the tourism sector stakeholders collectively, exert care and guardianship (through decision-making and practices) for the improvement and enhancement of natural, human, and human-made [built] elements when moving to, visiting, living, or operating in a destination.
Responsible Travel	Is the behaviour and style of individual travelers. The behaviours align with making a positive impact to the destination rather than negative ones.
Science Based Targets	Science-based targets are designed to demonstrate how much and how quickly greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction is required to prevent the worst climate change impacts. Targets are set in line with strict criteria.
Sustainable Development Goals	The United Nation's 17 priorities to achieve sustainable development across the world. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership (Australia is a signatory). The SDGs emphasise that ending poverty and other deprivations must align with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

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