

# PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

YOUR NEXT STEPS TOWARDS  
A GREATER GOOD

FEBRUARY 2023

CAIRNS &  
GREAT  
BARRIER  
REEF



# OUR PROMISE OF GREATER GOOD

Our Promise of Greater Good is about continually improving as an industry and region, as well introducing how our community has been making great efforts in sustainable business (tourism) practices to limit our footprint and proactively give back through research, conservation and regeneration projects.

*We all have a desire to stay connected. To others. To the world. To nature.*

*Our people have been connected to this country for thousands of years.*

*We have protected these fragile environments with care and respect – from the bordering savannah lands, to the oldest tropical rainforest on earth, and out there on the Great Barrier Reef.*

*Things have changed over the course of time, and in Tropical North Queensland, the change continues. As does our promise to keep adapting for the greater good of our planet, wildlife, communities, and people.*

*Protecting the earth is up to all of us and your travels here have a greater positive impact than you realise.*

*Your visit helps fund vital research and programs, which contribute to the ongoing preservation of these globally significant environments.*

*Highly trained guides, passionate scientists, and Traditional Custodians act as stewards of all these places. They not only share in-depth knowledge with you, they also collaborate on cutting edge environmental projects.*

*For decades, science and conservation has been behind the scenes, now experiences encourage interactive participation in wildlife monitoring, reef research, rainforest regeneration, and cultural knowledge-sharing.*

*Our promise is to ourselves, to each other, to country, to protect one of the most important and biodiverse natural regions in the world for current and future generations.*

*Together we can do more.*

*This is Our Promise of Greater Good.*

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*Tourism Tropical North Queensland acknowledge the custodianship of the land and sea country by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, whose rich cultures, heritage values, enduring connections and shared efforts protect our natural assets for future generations. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.*



# FINDING A PATHWAY

**The are as many pathways to sustainable tourism as there are experiences in the region, but there are some common paths businesses use on their journey to sustainable tourism - recognising it is a journey and not a destination.**

With consumers increasingly concerned about the impact of climate change, people are now travelling more thoughtfully and with much greater intent. Travel industry reports indicate that 90% of consumers already look for sustainable options when travelling. There is growing respect for local communities and culture, understanding of the environment and biodiversity, and a regenerative philosophy that is starting to influence decision making. Particularly as international travel resumes, consumers will demand that tourism evolves to be more than sustainable- it is restorative, reconciliatory and ultimately regenerative.

## WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?

Sustainable tourism is defined by the United Nations (UN) Environment Program and UN World Tourism Organisation 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." The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underpin the programs mentioned above. Find out more below:

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS?

For travel providers this is the opportunity to future-proof your business, by adopting sustainable business practices, making climate positive operational changes and actively engaging your community in local projects, which have positive outcomes across the four sustainable tourism pillars outlined on the next page >>

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PILLARS

The **Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)** manages the GSTC criteria and global standards for sustainable travel and tourism; as well as providing international accreditation for sustainable tourism certification bodies such as Ecotourism Australia and EarthCheck in Australia. The GSTC have created a global baseline of sustainable travel and tourism standards to help guide businesses and destinations with effective and measurable ways to create positive impacts through tourism.

The four pillars of sustainable tourism – *Effective Management*, *Social & Economic*, *Environmental* and *Cultural* – are the main themes which form the basis of criteria for certification. Aspiring to satisfy criteria under each of these pillars is the minimum that any tourism business should be striving to achieve. Questions under each of these pillars have been designed to help you understand how sustainably your business is currently operating, and to provide prompts and examples of businesses which have demonstrated leadership in these areas for you to look towards.

## EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

How are you implementing and managing sustainable practices across your business?

Do you have a nominated green leader or green team? What measurement tools do you have in place? If you are not measuring, you may not even be aware of what you already have in place.

Great Examples:

- Sailaway Port Douglas
- City Terraces

## SOCIAL & ECONOMIC

How are you helping the communities where your tourism product operates? Is there economic benefit to the local community? How are you minimising negative impacts? Does your business support diversity within your organisation, and within the community it operates?

Great Examples:

- Citizens of the Great Barrier Reef: The Great Reef Census
- Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre

## FOUR PILLARS

## ENVIRONMENT

What are you doing to protect, conserve, educate and to be a net positive steward of the environment in which you operate? Are you mitigating damage? Applying restorative solutions? Are the community you operate in, and your visitors, participating in these? How?

Great Examples:

- Skyrail Rainforest Cableway
- Ocean Freedom / Ocean Free
- Daintree Discovery Centre

## CULTURAL

How does your business support cultural heritage? Do you have a Reconciliation Acton Plan (RAP)? Does your business adhere to the QTIC Best Practice Guide for working with First Nations Tourism in Queensland?

Great Examples:

- Reef Unlimited
- Mandinglbay Ancient Indigenous Tours
- Down Under Tours



A person with a backpack is walking across a large, moss-covered fallen log in a dense, lush forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a dappled light effect on the forest floor. The scene is vibrant with green foliage and a small stream or waterfall visible in the foreground.

# HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY BUSINESS?

By developing more sustainable business plans you will be consciously implementing policies, strategies and procedures which can be measured and refined annually. There are several ways you can begin this process, the simplest of which is to undertake the Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland [ecoBiz](#) program. This free program for small to medium businesses provides personal coaching, site surveys, training, and tools to help improve resource efficiency, environmental sustainability and lower operating costs. Data collected will assist you in establishing your business footprint, providing baseline data against which your performance can be measured annually.

Launched late in 2022 the Ecotourism Australia [Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard](#) measures where a tourism business or operator is up to in their sustainability journey based on the GSTC four pillars of sustainable tourism. The scorecard is a quick, affordable, personalised and practical business development tool designed to assist you in developing a genuinely sustainable business for yourself and your customers. A score of five can also be listed on your Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) listing.

Both programs mentioned above can be seen as a first step in your business journey towards a more sustainable business and ultimately starting you on the journey to eventually operate at Net Zero. They are not mutually exclusive and in fact together will provide you with the knowledge and baseline data to encourage continual improvement. Eco-certification would be the next step should you choose.

## CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS IN AUSTRALIA

### ECOTOURISM AUSTRALIA

[Ecotourism Australia](#) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation that promotes and supports the ecotourism industry in Australia. Their key program - ECO Certification – was launched in 1996 and was the world's first national ecotourism certification program of its kind. Ecotourism Australia is acknowledged globally as a credible body for nature-based and sustainable tourism certification. Ecotourism Australia offers a variety of [programs](#) and have certified over 500 operators and 1,700 experiences in Australia.

### EARTHCHECK

[EarthCheck](#) has been working with governments, businesses and destinations globally for over 30 years and is a world leading certification, consulting and advisory group for sustainable destinations and tourism organisations. EarthCheck's certification programs operate in over 70 countries. They are science-backed, people-focused, and are respected by travellers, brands and destinations globally; helping consumers make informed decisions about the tourism experiences they choose.



## YOUR CUSTOMER'S JOURNEY

You are no doubt aware of the customer journey funnel. But it's more important than ever to understand how your customers are engaging with your business across your experience – before, during and after arrival.

Interest in sustainable travel is growing rapidly every year – customers want to know they are participating in ethical travel and even contributing while they're travelling. Being sustainable is not only crucial for the environment, culture and community, but showcasing this is essential for your customer's journey – customers need to see you are following through with actions.

Understanding the customer journey ensures that you are able to offer relevant information throughout each stage of the journey. Not only does this support you in delivering an experience that customers expect, but it helps increase your exposure through networks such as your Local Tourism Organisation, Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Tourism and Events Queensland and Tourism Australia. The knock-on effect of this helps generate positive publicity and interest in your operations.

I would like to provide a more sustainable experience.

I am / would like to be eco-certified.

I am / would like to measure my footprint.

I am tapping into publicity opportunities.

I have / would like to have sustainability projects in place.

My website and social media showcases my stories and passion.

I have a positive online presence.

My customers can access the facts on what my business is achieving and contributing (e.g. Net Zero, Circular Economy).

I am clearly telling customers what sustainability initiatives my business is undertaking.

Customers know how they can be involved.

I am clearly showcasing my partnerships (e.g. Reforest, Coral Nurture Program, etc.).

I offer upgrade options that support my business' sustainability (e.g. marine biologist guided tour).

I have reduced my footprint or had a positive impact on my operations as a result of customer interactions.

I am actively encouraging my customers to leave reviews.

I am listening to feedback from my customers and staff and making sustainable improvements.

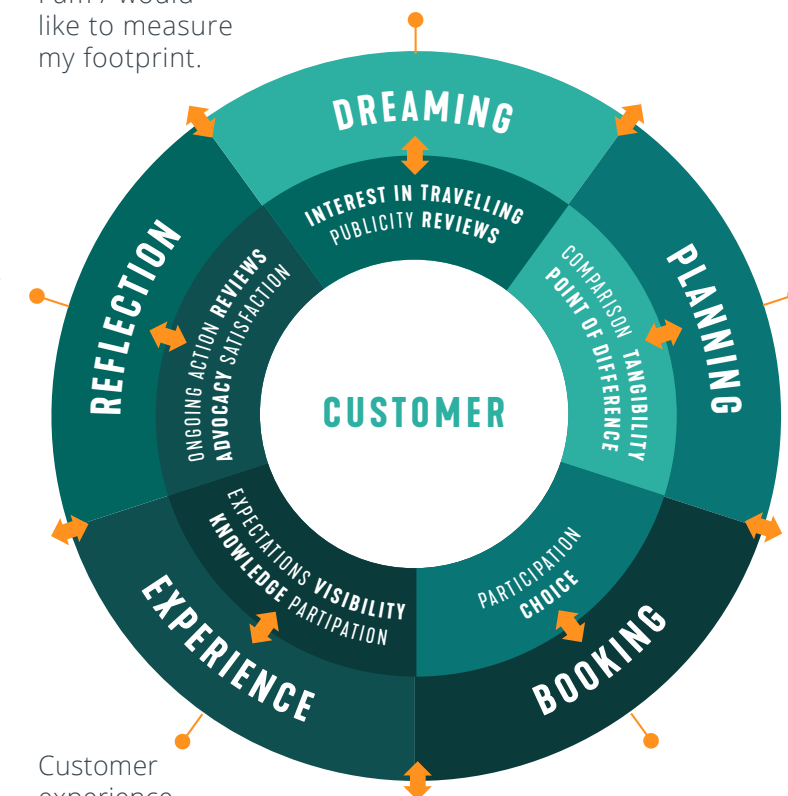
I have offset my customer's carbon footprint.

My business achievements/ accreditation are highly visible.

My staff are highly involved and highly trained.

Visitors can engage with / in eco experiences.

I am actively reducing and offsetting my footprint.



Customer experience was delivered as promised.

I am actively looking for new opportunities to make my business more sustainable.

I am educating my customers.

My customer can clearly see that my business and staff are passionate and care greatly about the environment, cultures and community.

Customer is offset or can choose to offset their experience.

My business has certification and qualified staff, and this information is clear to customers.



# YOUR BUSINESS & YOUR CUSTOMER FUNNEL

## DREAMING

I would like to provide a more sustainable experience.

I am eco-certified (or would like to be).

I am measuring my footprint (or would like to).

I have regenerative projects in place (or would like to).

I am tapping into publicity opportunities.

My website and social media showcases my stories and passion.

I have a positive online presence.

**Publicity:** Customer learns about your experience through various channels including social media, print media, radio, etc.

**Reviews:** Customer receives feedback through various networks including word of mouth, social media, etc.

**Interest:** Customer is interested in travelling but hasn't made a decision on which operator they will be travelling with.

## CODE

- My business
- My customer

## PLANNING

My customer can access the facts on what my business is achieving and contributing (e.g. Net Zero, Circular Economy).

I am clearly telling customers what my business is doing.

Customers know how they can be involved.

**Comparison:** Customer seeks information on various destinations and experiences.

Customer seeks products with recognisable sustainable practices and certification.

Customer visits operator, destination and third party websites and social media for information to help in decision making. Customer learns about sustainability practices.

Customer reads reviews through a variety of resources (social media, TripAdvisor).

## BOOKING

Customer is offset OR can choose to offset their experience.

I am clearly showcasing my partnerships (e.g. Reforest).

I offer upgrade options that support my business' sustainability (e.g. marine biologist guided tour).

My business has accredited and qualified staff.

**Choice:** Customer chooses experience based on reviews, experience quality, price, availability, etc. Sustainability story plays a deciding factor.

**Participation:** Customer can actively participate in sustainability activities (either optional extras or included).

## EXPERIENCE

My business achievements are highly visible.

My staff are highly-involved and highly-trained.

Visitors can engage with / in eco-experiences.

I am actively reducing my footprint .

I am educating my customers.

Customer experience was delivered as promised.

My customer can clearly see that my business and its staff are passionate and care greatly about the environment, cultures and community.

I am offsetting my footprint.

I am actively looking for new opportunities to make my business more sustainable.

**Expectations:** The experience was as described or exceeded customer expectations.

**Visibility:** The customer saw that I was committed to my sustainable practices. It was demonstrated through education and my actions.

**Knowledge:** Staff were highly trained.

**Participation:** The customer participated in my sustainable practices.

## REFLECTION

I have reduced my footprint or had a positive impact on my operations as a result of customer interactions.

I am actively encouraging my customers to leave reviews.

I am listening to feedback from my customers and staff and making sustainable improvements.

I offset my customer's / operations carbon footprint.

**Advocacy:** Customer leaves as a custodian of your experience and the region.

**Satisfaction:** Customer felt like they made a difference / contributed.

**Reviews:** Customer left positive reviews (WOM, online forums, etc.).

**Return:** Customer starts planning on returning.

**Action:** Customer has made changes to their own daily life as a result of visiting the region (visible via socials, reviews, feedback).

**Ongoing:** Customer has committed to an ongoing project or program in region (e.g. Reforest).



# THE BIGGER PICTURE

On a regional level Tourism Tropical North Queensland is partnering with a number of projects to ensure our tourism industry aligns with state and federal government commitments to minimising the climate impact of all industries in Australia. However, for this to be effective it is vital that our tourism operators take stock of their business operations and implement changes in a timely manner.

On the next page is a visual of how many of the programs and projects fit together >>

## NET ZERO BEFORE 2050

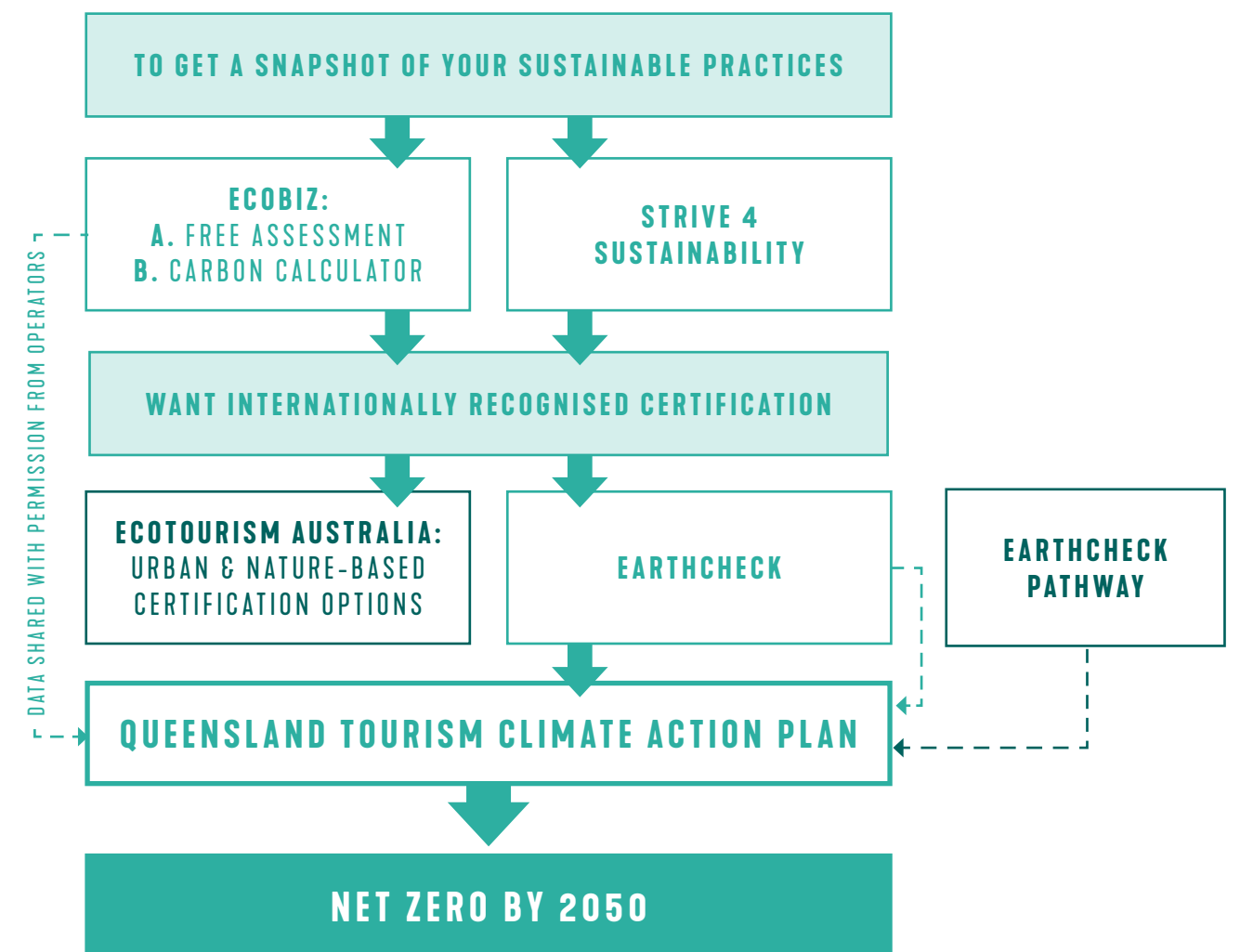
The Queensland Government is committed to reducing its carbon emissions by 30% on 2005 levels by 2030. This will lay the foundation for our ultimate goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050, and help ensure the long-term viability of our economy, communities, and industries in a low carbon world.

## QUEENSLAND TOURISM CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

This is a Queensland Government funded statewide project to develop pathways to Net Zero emissions for the tourism industry before 2050. EarthCheck and Griffith University have been commissioned to undertake this three-phase project to establish carbon emissions benchmarks, identify operational actions to reduce industry footprint, and establish cost to offset and reduce emissions to Net Zero at state and regional levels.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland is an integral part of the steering committee for this project – which is comprised of *Queensland Tourism Industry Council, Tourism and Events Queensland, Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport* and *Queensland Tourism Regional Network* – and will work with our members to understand and implement the recommendations of this plan.

Data collected through the ecoBiz program (with operator permission) can be shared with EarthCheck which will assist our region in establishing baseline carbon emissions data for tourism. This information then feeds into the Queensland Tourism Climate Action Plan which drives the strategies being developed, and implemented by industry, to reduce carbon emissions associated with tourism in Tropical North Queensland.







# STEPS THAT TTNQ ARE UNDERTAKING

## OUR VISION

TO BE A GLOBAL LEADER IN SUSTAINABLE NATURE-BASED AND ECO-TOURISM, DRIVING VISITOR SPEND. SUPPORTING OUR DESTINATION GOAL THAT EVERY VISITOR LEAVES AS A CUSTODIAN OF OUR REGION AND ITS STORIES, SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCE GLOBALLY TO DRIVE FUTURE VISITATION.

## MARKETING AND PARTNERSHIPS OVERVIEW 2020-2023

- TTNQ began targeting the eco-luxury market with domestic campaigns that included content and advertising in high-end print media, targeted social ads and a ground-breaking webinar with host “Kochie” from Sunrise titled “The Greater Purpose of Travel”. The selected panel of speakers included high profile journalists Lee Tulloch and Quentin Long who spoke about the shift in travel attitudes globally and the need for the tourism industry to innovate and adopt sustainable practices to survive. Other guest speakers included leaders from local tourism businesses who have demonstrated their commitment to sustainable tourism development.
- Following on from this campaign TTNQ partnered with Qantas and online lifestyle publisher Concrete Playground to turn their website ‘green’, and simultaneously launch the Qantas Loyalty program “Green Tier”. This campaign was designed to educate consumers and promote sustainability in the region. It included a competition to win an eco-holiday to Tropical North Queensland. Results of the campaign exceeded all expectations with both reach and impressions 200% over target.
- Working with Travelyst in the UK to create consumer facing video ‘sustainability in action’.
- TTNQ continues to develop sustainability messaging which is being pushed out via PR/ media teams domestically and internationally and seeking partnerships with brands based on their sustainable positioning, that can be leveraged. Members who have eco-certification and are actively developing sustainable business practices will be considered more favourably for inclusion in future campaigns and activities.
- Strategic partnership with Tourism Australia to produce Sustainable Travel Documentary launched in the UK and USA for World Tourism Day 2022.
- Launch of brand video “Promise of Greater Good” supports an integrated approach to tourism. The script was developed collaboratively and voiced by local Traditional Owner. The video is designed to educate trade, media and consumers, while an industry toolkit supports businesses in their transition to more sustainable tourism practices.
- FY 21/22 Partnership with Ecotourism Australia to assist selected members to become eco-certified through mentoring program. This assisted operators already on the pathway to eco-certification with onsite consultation, audit, and document submission.

## SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN TTNQ

- Membership: Currently 16% of TTNQ members hold eco-certification. TTNQ aims to increase this to 30% by 2030.
- Media purchasing: working with media agency to understand how to measure and offset media footprint for all campaign activity.
- Launch of [Accessibility Hub](#) and developing further inclusivity integration.
- Strategic partnerships with regional stakeholders including environmental organisations.
- Actively seek out opportunities for CEO to be guest speaker or panel member for relevant events i.e. International Media Marketplace (IMM) Singapore 2022.
- Business Events partnership with Reforest to offset carbon emissions of TTNQ held events such as the Simon George Tourism Excellence Awards & ATEC Meeting Place 2022.
- Completed ecoBiz program resulting in actionable recommendations to reduce our business footprint, and have begun to be implemented in the TTNQ office. Aiming to operate carbon neutral by 2026. Base data will be reviewed annually by ecoBiz.
- Member of the Tourism Climate Action Plan advisory panel.
- Contributor to the Queensland Tourism First Nations Tourism Reconciliation Action Plan.
- The organization undertook culture training with local indigenous cultural group Minjil.





# INITIATIVES IN OUR COMMUNITY

## ECOBIZ QUEENSLAND

A free program for small to medium businesses, funded by the Queensland Government. After providing some background information a local expert will visit your business to conduct a thorough assessment and provide you a report with recommendations and tangible solutions to lower your footprint. Sustainability Star Partners can also input data to the carbon calculator for more enriched data-led decision making.

## ABORIGINAL CARBON FOUNDATION

Established in 2010 as a not-for-profit entity, the foundation aims to be a catalyst for community prosperity of Traditional Owners and non-Aboriginal carbon farmers through carbon farming, cultural fire, and community development. Purchasing carbon credits from the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation is a simple and effective way to make a positive impact on the planet, and the everyday lives of those living in Aboriginal and remote communities.

## GREEN CAFFEEN

A FREE swap and go reusable coffee cup system that makes it easy for business and customers to be green. Starter packs for businesses can be ordered directly from Green Caffein who provide all the collateral, information and number of cups needed. Customers purchase coffee in the green cup for free provided the cup is swapped or returned within 30 days to any participating cafe.

## REFOREST

Reforest is a ground-breaking new platform that is changing the way businesses and consumers interact with the planet, by offering tangible and meaningful ways to remove emissions and restore ecosystems. Reforest only works with officially registered restoration projects to ensure trees are planted locally in the Tropical North Queensland region and cannot be removed for at least 100 years.

## GREEN COLLAR: REEF CREDITS

A global-first initiative which pays for improved water quality resulting from land stewardship, helping address the second biggest threat to the future of the Great Barrier Reef, after climate change. Reef Credits are sold to businesses, investors, philanthropists and governments and the revenue collected is injected into projects focused on reducing the flow of nutrients to the reef. Each credit is a tradeable unit representing a quantifiable amount of nutrient or sediment prevented from entering the Great Barrier Reef.

## RAINFOREST RESCUE

A not-for-profit organisation that has been protecting and restoring rainforests since 1999 by providing opportunities for individuals and businesses to protect rainforests forever. Rainforest Rescue projects strategically buy back at-risk rainforest properties and restore degraded rainforest in the Daintree, protecting the regions high conservation value and preserving its biodiversity.

## CIRCULAR ECONOMY FNQ

Have started food organics and garden organics (FOGO) bin trials in Port Douglas where auditors are working with restaurants to establish baseline data using GreenKPI and reducing business costs. The strategy includes taking FOGO waste out of restaurant bins and selling it through participating schools and community groups as part of their fundraising strategy. Cairns and Palm Cove are set to begin in 2023.

## PLASTIC FREE CAIRNS (& DOUGLAS SHIRE)

Is a community project under the national program: Boomerang Alliance Plastic Free Places. They work directly with local food retailers, councils, suppliers, manufacturers, and composters to deliver real solutions by assisting them in switching from single-use plastics to better alternatives. There are 122 members in Cairns and 55 members in Douglas Shire. Water Refill Network is also an initiative under this program and has produced a Water Map to set up a station and join contact Plastic Free directly.

## BOOMERANG BAGS

A not-for-profit initiative which is committed to eliminating plastic bags in the community. These original fabric bags made from recycled and reclaimed materials are constructed by volunteers at the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC), and are designed to create conversation about the importance of caring for the planet while fostering sustainable behaviour. Contact CAFNEC to order bags for your business.



# WHAT YOU CAN DO



## UNDERSTAND YOUR CLIMATE RISK

- What risks are you facing right now?
- What risks will you face in the future as climate continues to change?
- Are there any regulatory changes that affect your business?
- Do you have a risk management/ adaptation plan?



## DEFINE YOUR PROJECT TEAM & INTERNAL SUPPORT

- Is there someone in your business who wants to take the lead?
- Could a small team be more effective?
- Do you need to seek approvals internally?



## ASSESS YOUR BUSINESS IMPACT

- Does your business follow the principles of sustainable tourism development?
- Have you considered the Strive 4 Sustainability scorecard?
- Have you completed an ecoBiz assessment?
- Have you considered becoming eco-certified?
- Does your business support cultural heritage?
- Do you have a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)?
- Does your business adhere to the QTIC best practice guide for working with First Nations Tourism in Queensland?



## ESTABLISH & IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO MEASURE, REDUCE & OFF-SET

- Define goals and select programs and / or projects that will support you in achieving them.
- What are you measuring? Why?
- Repeat measurements annually.
- Support local projects where possible.



## TELL YOUR STORY: COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS & INDUSTRY

- Keep it concise, easy to understand and show clear impact.
- Back your messages up with data to prove authenticity.
- Illustrate value and positive impact of making more conscious choices.



