



## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

# Ecotourism Australia (EA) Member Audit

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Ecotourism Australia (EA) conducted Secret Shopping surveys recently, from May to June, on a sample size of one-third (150) of our members. Our operator's services were anonymously experienced through online assessments and points of contact, via e-mail and telephone queries.

This Statistical Analysis Report is a summary of our conclusive findings on key Ecotourism business fundamentals. These include online presence, commitments to sustainability, and communications. Other areas of assessment of our certified operators were their certification category, EA logo visibility, other logos and certifications visible, and booking systems.

EA aims to encourage committed tourism operators to become more sustainable, through approaches such as developing standards for sustainable practices, and assisting operators to improve the quality of interpretation offered to visitors. Through the comparative results of our Secret Shopper surveys, our certified operators can gain insight into quantified benchmarking and marketing benefits.

Ecotourism Australia has significantly contributed to long term environmental sustainability on a national and global level through its ground-breaking and world class ECO Certification Programs.

We have maintained a strong focus on the facilitation of environmental best practice, and a sustainable approach to tourism resulting in Australia gaining global recognition as a leading ecotourism destination.

Our mission is about encouraging ecotourism and other committed tourism operations to become more sustainable, through approaches including:

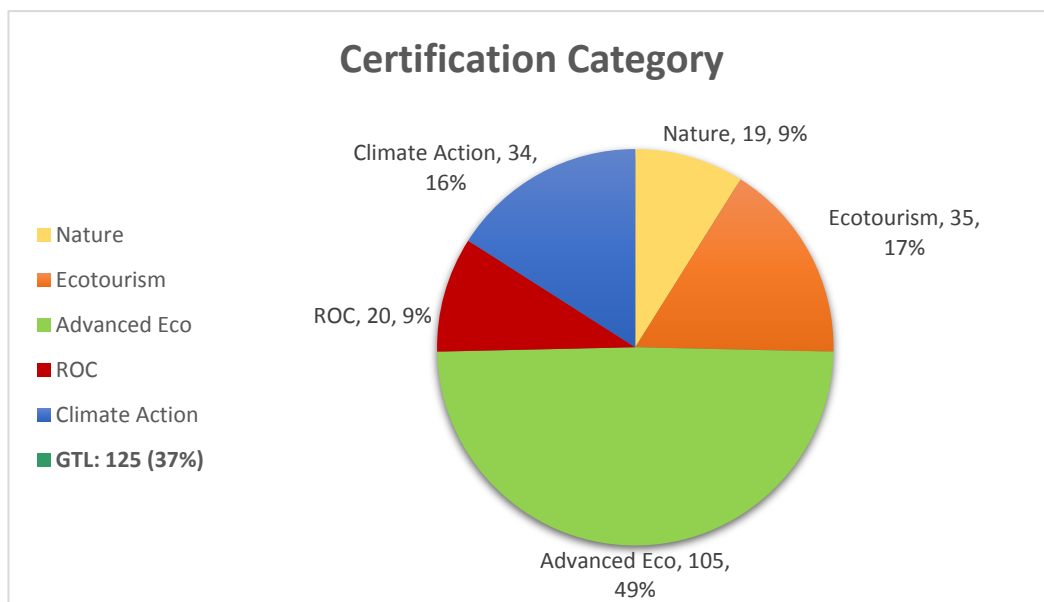
- Developing standards for sustainable practices
- Increasing the professionalism of those working within the tourism industry
- Assisting operators to improve the quality of interpretation offered to visitors
- Marketing the principles of sustainability to increase awareness across the tourism industry

These approaches are in alignment with our Secret Shopper Auditing that was conducted. The benefits of utilising the findings and results of our audit include:

- Operator credibility and industry recognition, throughout Australia and Internationally
- Improved marketing and promotion potential
- Building strong, trusted and recognised branding; demonstrating commitment to environment, community and quality business
- Increased utilisation of the benefits of ECO certification
- Improved quality of business services, communications, and connectivity to tourism consumers

Out of 41 essential categories assessed, an average benchmark score of 0.56 was attained for one third of members audited. 71 out of 150 members are performing above average as a result. Ecotourism Australia continues to support the tourism industry and our certified members by setting the benchmark for high quality standards of customer experiences, business practices, and commitments to sustainability.

## Certification Category

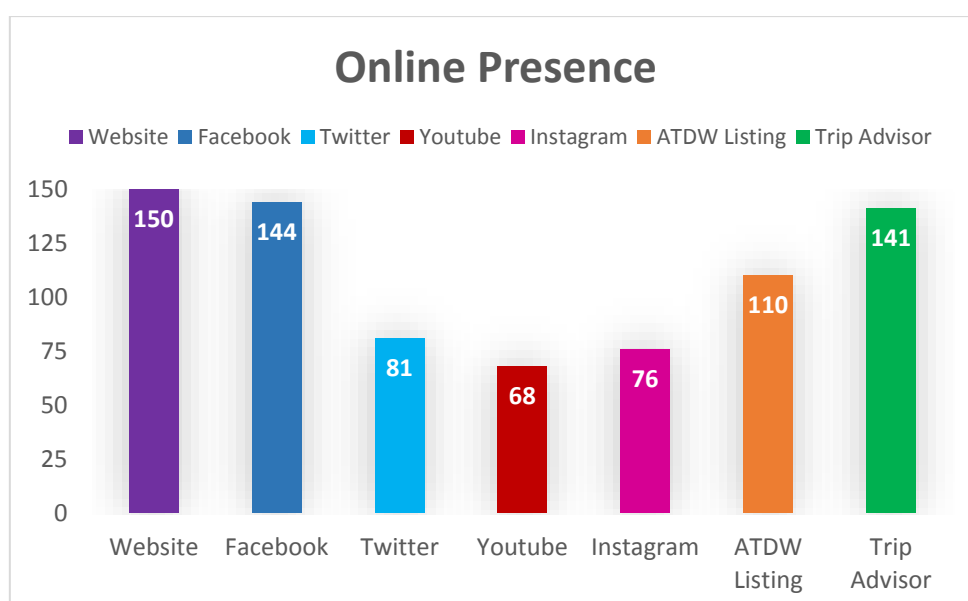


105 (31%) out of one-third (150) of our members hold Advanced Eco Certification.

125 (37%) of members hold Green Travel Leader (GTL) status. Green Travel Leader status identifies members as being certified for 10 years or more, demonstrating longevity within our programs. All our Green Travel Leaders make up approximately 30% of all our certified members in total.

Therefore, a large majority of certified operators are longstanding members of Ecotourism Australia, and are highly committed to sustainable ecotourism best practices. Others still maintain standards that commit to leaving minimal impact on the environment, conserving and respecting cultures, and offering quality tourism products, services, and interpretive materials. Ecotourism and Climate Action members are on par, together averaging 20% (10% each), equally producing effective and positive outcomes which focus on optimal resource use and reduction of emissions.

## Online Presence



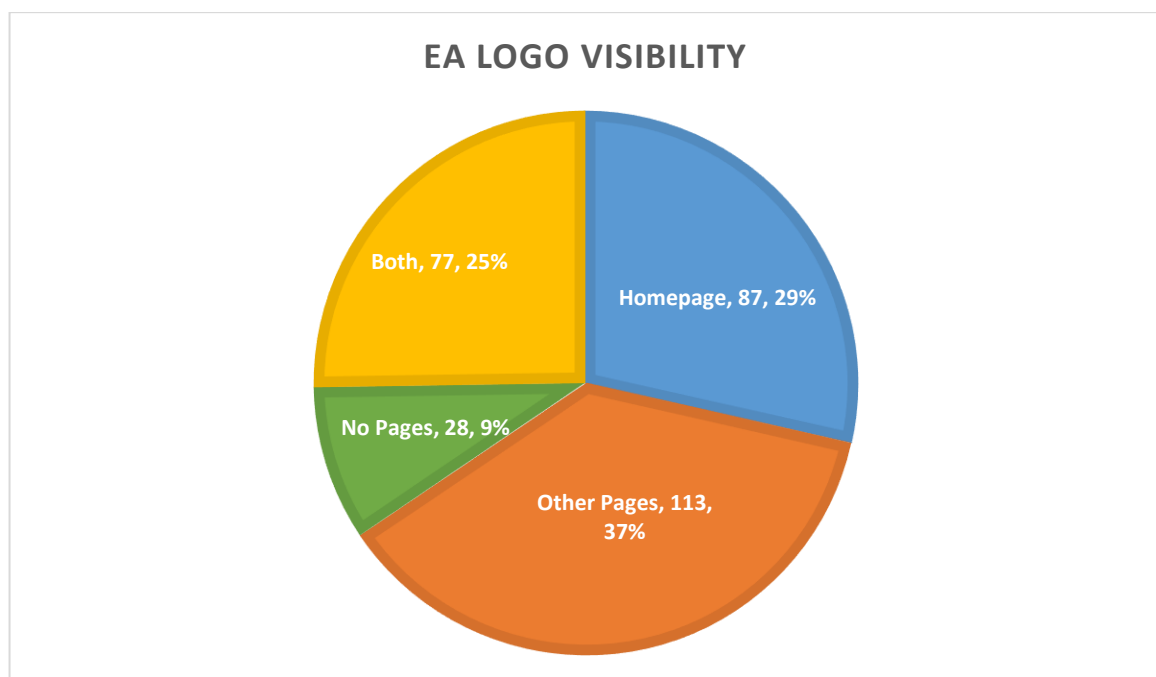
144 out of 150 members use Facebook, 141 have a Trip Advisor listing, and 110 use the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) to list their business and products. ATDW holds over 40,000 tourism listings, and is a widely used database for sharing information on tourism businesses.

Facebook is the most utilised social media outlet; however, an increasingly popular media plug is Instagram. Instagram has more than 500 million active users, and has direct correlation between the increases in tourist influx and tourism businesses post activity, as stated by the [National Geographic](#). Our findings show only 76 members are on Instagram, with more (81) currently [utilising Twitter](#). Both media plugs have their advantages in the tourism industry.

68 members have a Youtube Channel available for public viewing. Youtube is a widely used platform, with billions of users spending hours online daily. For Ecotourism, Youtube is an appealing media source for sharing outstanding cinematography of tourism products and connecting with travellers globally.

## EA Logo Visibility

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More certified operators include an Ecotourism Australia logo on other pages aside from the home page on their dedicated website. Displaying the certified logo on the first page visible to the public is encouraged, as when tourists can see upfront that the business operates certified products, this delivers immediate identification and appreciation for having sustainable environmental standards. Many operators displayed their logo on a dedicated environmental, accreditation page, or alongside certified products, which are all also ideal locations.

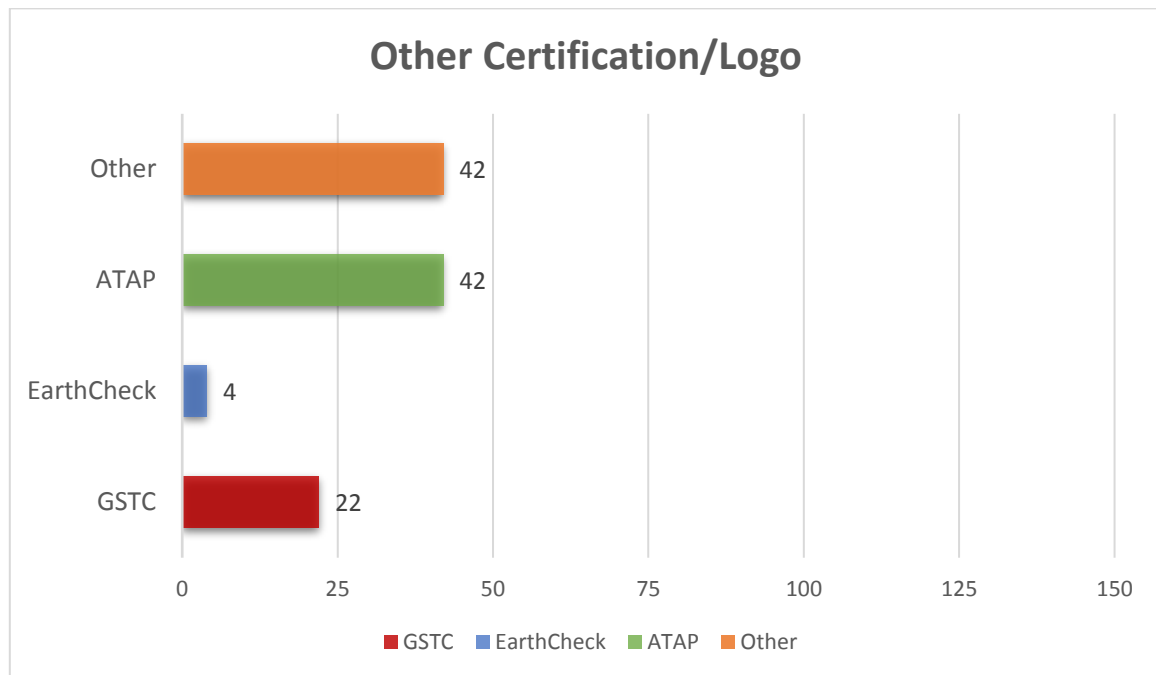
Our certification logos are recognised and valued by industry and travellers internationally and all-around Australia. Certification logos help to display your achievement. By displaying your logos and certificate in prominent places, and on your marketing collateral you make it easy for your guests to see that you're certified.

It is a core requirement to display the certified logo for certified products, and an advanced requirement to include explanations of ecotourism. People love to hear what you do to achieve your certification, so be

sure to tell your story too. Ecotourism Australia recommends that the certification logo be displayed prominently on the website’s homepage, and additionally on another page accompanied by details of the certification, products covered by certification, and further information about the program and the company’s ecotourism initiatives.

### Other Certification Displayed

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\*\* Please note: ‘Other’ includes T-QUAL, an expired accreditation.

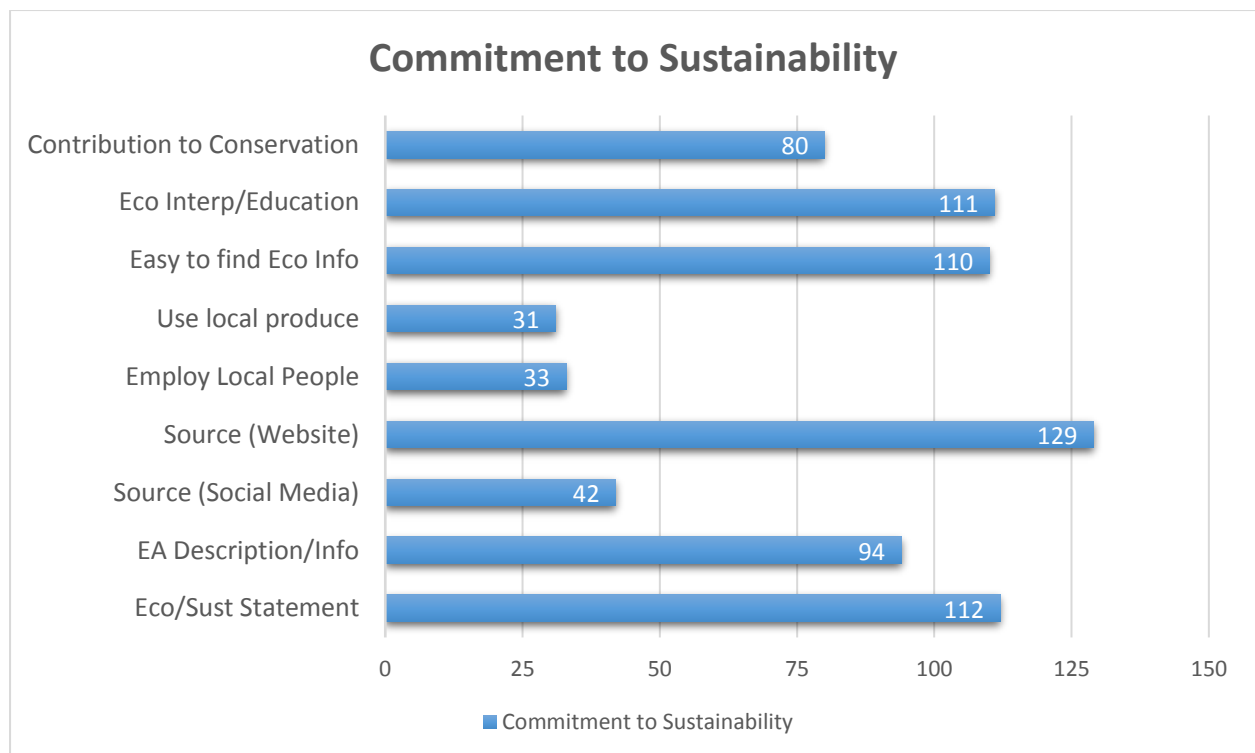
#### ATAP – Australian Tourism Accreditation Program

“The Australian Tourism Accreditation Program (ATAP) is a business development program that is based on Quality Assurance principles.”

#### GSTC – Global Sustainable Tourism Council

[GSTC](#), an internationally recognised body “represented by a diverse and global membership, including UN agencies, NGO’s, national and provincial governments, leading travel companies, hotels, tour operators, individuals and communities – all striving to achieve best practices in sustainable tourism”.

In 2015, Ecotourism Australia achieved GSTC-Approved status for ECO certification through the GSTC Integrity Program. This means that the program standards and criteria are recognised by the GSTC, have been reviewed by GSTC technical experts and Accreditation Panel, are deemed equivalent to the GSTC Criteria for sustainable tourism, and is following processes and procedures that have been reviewed and approved by the GSTC.



### Contributions:

80 members displayed their contributions to conservation on their website and social media outlets. Operators of ecotourism products are required to provide constructive contributions to the management of natural areas, contributing to local, national or global causes that significantly benefit conservation initiatives. Highlighting and displaying contributions to conservation demonstrates to the public the physical actions being taken by the operator to support sustainability of the environment and wildlife, and backs environmental statements.

Contributions to conservation make operators stand out from others to guests. Marketing your contributions also show the operator is proud of their achievements and sustainable initiatives.

### Interpretation and Education:

A substantial number of Ecotourism operators include interpretive and educational materials and experiences within their websites, social media, and services. Meaning members help to communicate feelings and ideas which contribute to a better understanding of one's environment and the people themselves. This was particularly visible with members who provide marine wildlife and environment services, who educate guests on what they will see, experience, and interact with; and the importance of conserving marine habitats and wildlife species. Interpretation and Education is fundamental for growing awareness and respect for ecologically sensitive environments.

### Easy to find information:

Marketing provides clients with information that increases respect for the natural and cultural environments visited. Having this information easily visible and accessible is a best practice standard, which when adopted is a rewarding and beneficial aspect for operators as it makes it easy for guests to see the business is committed to supporting the environment. 111 members information was easy to find, which is an exceptional number of those audited.

Promoting your environmentally friendly methods can set your business apart from your competitors and attract new customers who want to buy products and services from an environmentally friendly business.

### Local Produce and Employing Locals:

31 operators demonstrated their support for purchasing local produce, and 33 shared they employ local people. Supporting local farmers, and purchasing local produce, not only shows guests the operator is using fresh ingredients in their menus, but is also an important environmental initiative.

Employing local people means the business provides employment opportunities for local members of indigenous groups and cultures, or local members of the public in the specified region. The results were indicative of operators stating and showing they employ locals on their media outlets.

### Sources:

Displaying your commitment to environmental sustainability is ideal for websites, but also beneficial for social media outlets. Further highlighting, and sharing with more members of the public, your passion for nature conservation. 42 members included information on their Facebook profiles, and 129 on their website.

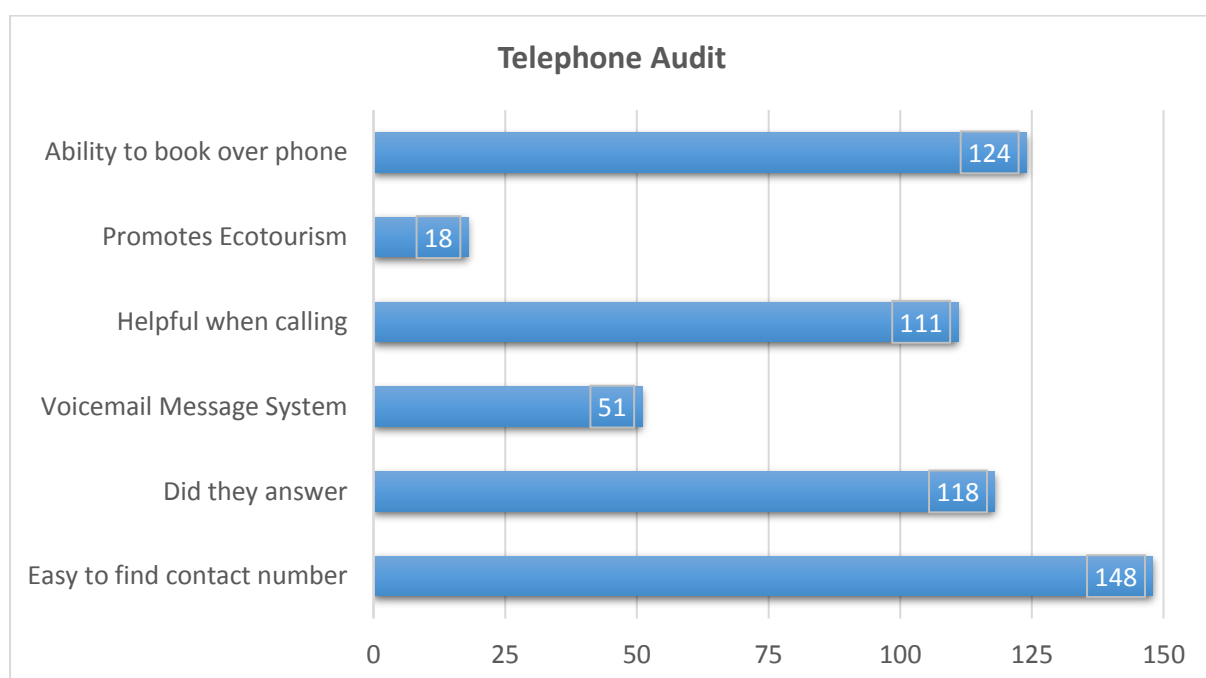
### Ecotourism Australia Information:

Our results are indicative of members who display information regarding EA, including their involvement, what it means to be certified, and what we stand for. This information establishes an understanding of the meaning of certification with us, and the standards of which the members products and services operate from.

### Environmental Statements:

Eco and Sustainability statements show operations are developed and managed to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural environments in which they operate, through the recognition and application of ecologically sustainable practices. Thus, providing customers with an accurate and responsible depiction of what to expect from the product and how to respect the natural and cultural environments visited. 112 members displayed statements as to their commitment to sustainability, and the nature of their products.

## Telephone Audit



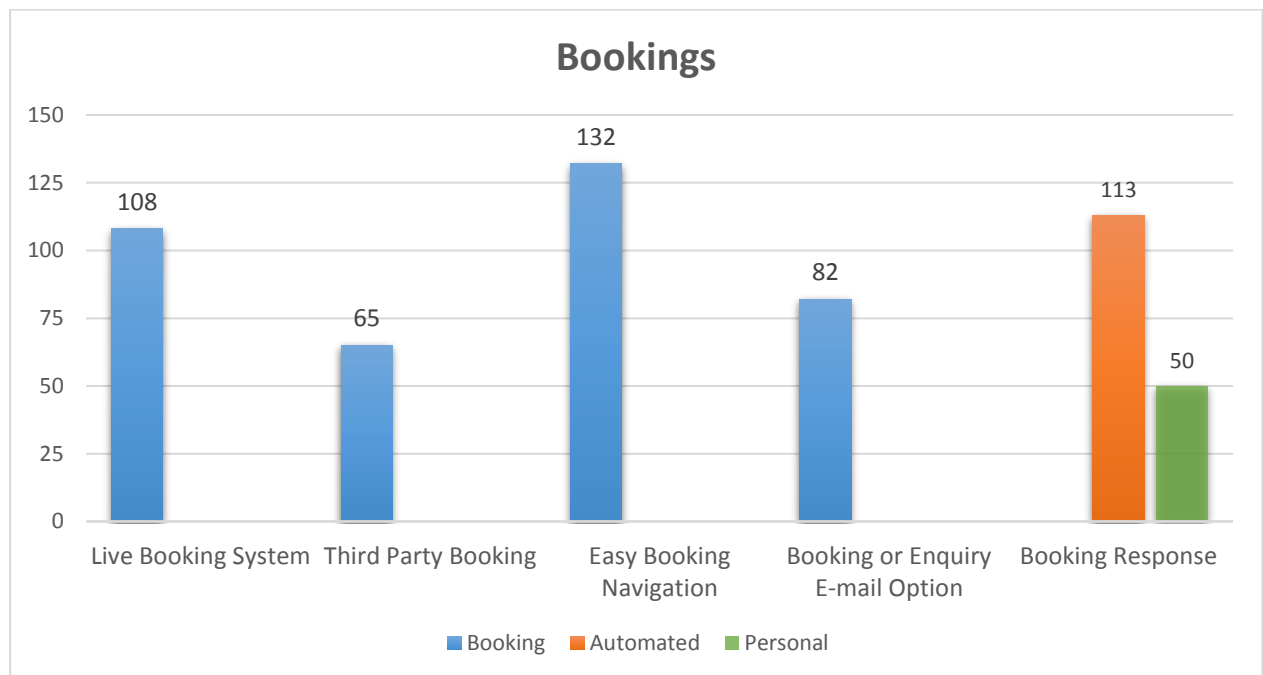
A major point of contact for tourists, and members of the public overall, is via calling. Often this is to enquire about a booking, a specific query relating to a tourism product or service, or a general enquiry. Increasingly however, tourism businesses do provide a sufficient amount of information and detail on their websites regarding their operations as to limit the necessity for enquiring over the phone.

Providing a voicemail message system is a standard benefit to members of the public as they can record their contact details and query so their message can be responded to. Some operators use automatic voicemail message systems to guide tourists to an appropriate person to speak to, so they have been counted as utilising this system even if the call was answered.

Ecotourism Australia supports increased professionalism of those within the tourism industry. We aim to ensure customers receive quality assured assistance by our members. Thus being *Helpful When Calling* involves the operators ability to assist tourists in a friendly, helpful manner as to answer their query, and provide them with additional information if necessary.

We were also interested in whether certified operators *Promote Ecotourism* in their interactions by either communicating their environmental standards, or educational components of their operation, products and services. For example; marine products involving wildlife interaction and reef experiences, are tourists informed about reasons for conservation amongst chances to see wildlife?

### Booking System Audit

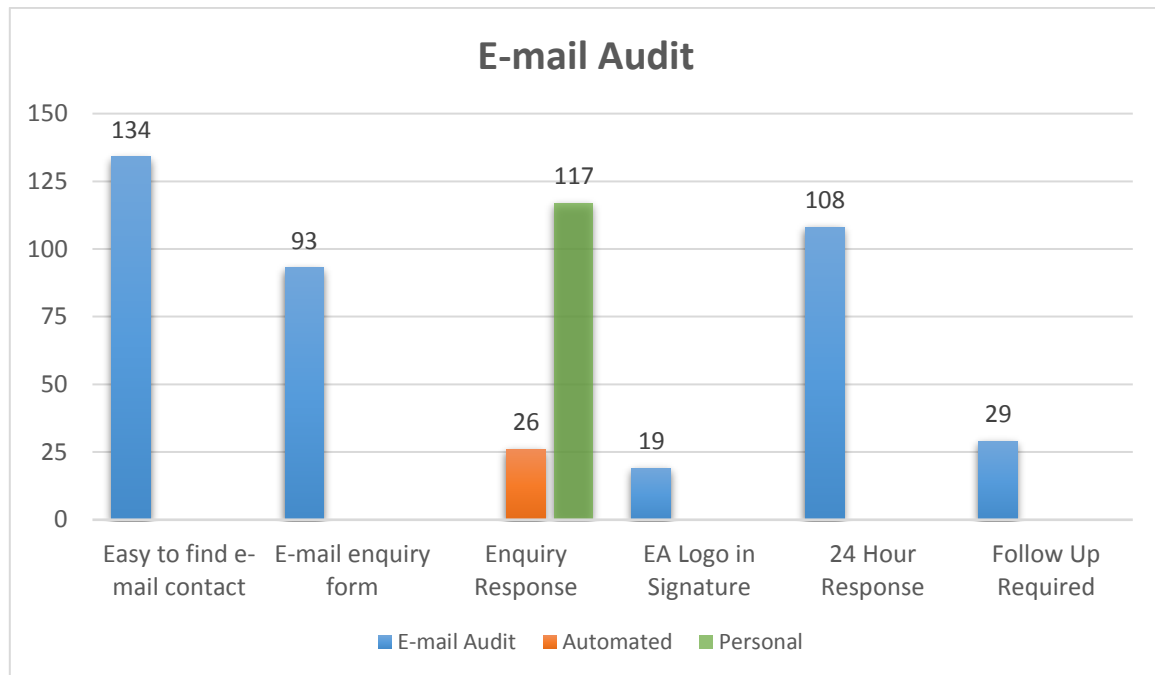


Almost all members audited provide customers with a live booking system option. This can be an efficient way to receive product payments and an easy option for guests wishing to make a simple booking. 65 members have third party booking availability, meaning sites including Expedia, or Booking.com can also take bookings for your business. The areas of easy navigation, enquiry options, and booking response were deemed essential for tourism businesses and thus were considered. Easy booking navigation means guests can quickly and simply have access to booking facilities. This also shows optimal visibility and user friendliness for bookings. 82 members had an enquiry option available on their website, meaning guests could ask about specific products and listings through message systems.

Enquiry options are great time savers for businesses as less time is spent taking phone calls, and customers can appreciate the flexibility for having their queries answered.

113 out of 150 members provided automated responses, and 50 responded to booking specific enquiries personally. Automated responses are ideal for guests as they are aware their enquiry has been received. However promptly personally responding is essential for a quality customer service experience.

## Email Audit



A substantial number of e-mail responses were received during our Secret Shopper Audits, with 117 out of 150 personally responding, and 108 responding within a 24 hour period. 24 hours is an ideal time frame as operators are viewed by guests as being efficient and prompt, resulting in quality customer service. 29 members required a follow up e-mail, meaning messages were not responded to either within a 24 hour period or at all.

Majority of members provided easily visible and accessible e-mail contacts, and 93 members included an enquiry message form on their website. Utilising enquiry forms on your website is mutually beneficial for guests and operators. They are an easy way to contact operators regarding general or specific queries, and guests can then send a message directly on the website rather than from their e-mail accounts.

19 certified operators include an Ecotourism Australia, general or certification specific, logo in their e-mail signature. Whilst not a requirement, displaying logos is an effective marketing tool which further increases visible professionalism, credibility, and commitment to sustainable practices; and is just another way of showing your tourism operations are backed by quality business and environmental standards.



## Conclusions

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### **What is the Importance and Relevance of these findings?**

These results assist Ecotourism Australia in evaluating how certified members take advantage of their certification, their sustainable business practices, and established business operations. The results show a comparative summary of where ecotourism operators are in relation to the general benchmark of high quality business standards.

Conducting the Secret Shopper Audit allows us to assist members in optimising the outcomes of their business, and environmental, initiatives.

### **How can members take advantage of the results?**

Members can take advantage of the results by seeing where a third of all EA certified operators fall in the categories of assessment from this audit, consider how they themselves perform, and how these findings can be utilised to further improve key areas of their own business operations. This also includes certification benefits and requirements, and assists operators in maximising their certification outcomes.

By following the best practice standards offered by Ecotourism Australia you will be able to provide a high-quality recognisable product to consumers, improving the image of your organisation and establishing closer connections with your local tourism and protected area management organisations. The process of Secret Shopping provides a practical guide for implementing sound business principles, ecologically sustainable practices and culturally responsible initiatives.

For all Certified operators, ECO certification provides recognition for consumers to be assured of your commitment to environmental best practice, quality experience and customer service. Being an Ecotourism Certified business demonstrates a business's commitment to sustainability and assures travellers your products and services are backed by quality assurance.

### **Ecotourism Australia Benchmarking**

Ecotourism Australia sets a benchmark for certified members that complies with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, and demonstrates industry and internationally recognisable standards for ecotourism best practice.

“Best practice ecotourism standards support delivery of world class experiences and encourage the protection of the natural and cultural environment. Industry certification programs provide effective standards, and sends a strong message to the market that tourism operators are best practice, providing competitive positioning...”

“Eco-certification programs identify standards that contribute to the quality and sustainability of tourism experiences. When an operator is eco-certified visitors are assured of their commitment to sustainable environmental practices, best business practice and high-quality nature-based experiences. There is widespread industry support for minimum compulsory standard” – *Queensland Government, QuEST, Dep. National Parks, Sports and Racing.*

Our certification programs also include specific requirements for standards such as commitments to sustainability, and EA logo visibility. All for assisting operators to establish best practice principles that are relevant and aligned with our benchmarked standards. These differ for core and advanced criteria, however generally are ideal for businesses to adopt regardless of requirements.