



National Sustainability Framework for the Visitor Economy



Acknowledgements

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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 cultures and traditions make to the visitor experience in Australia, and commit to protecting and nurturing these cultures in partnership with First Nations communities.



Tourism Ministers' Statement on sustainability for the visitor economy

It is with enthusiasm and optimism that we release the National Sustainability Framework for the Visitor Economy.

The National Sustainability Framework outlines a shared understanding of sustainability in relation to the visitor economy to bring all participants together behind a consistent approach. It also marks an intention by all tourism ministers to provide leadership and to collaborate on making the visitor economy more sustainable.



We all know and appreciate the significance of the visitor economy to Australia's prosperity and wellbeing, with visitor expenditure including long-term students reaching \$191.4 billion for the year ending 2022-23. In addition to its economic importance, the visitor economy is socially, culturally and reputationally important as it portrays our national identity and influences how others in the world see and engage with us.

It is critical we take action now to make Australia's visitor economy more sustainable.

We must conserve and enhance our environment, culture and heritage for the generations and visitors to come. We must engage with local communities and First Nations people by working together to strengthen, support and grow their local economies sustainably. We need to authentically communicate our actions on sustainability to continue to be a trusted destination and remain globally competitive. As priorities, we must act to decarbonise our visitor economy, and to increase efforts to respectfully recognise and embed First Nations' cultures and perspectives, with appropriate permission, into the sector's operations.

It is also important to our international reputation and credibility for visitor economy businesses to play their part in delivering on Australia's international climate change and environmental protection commitments.

These include achieving our national targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 43 per cent over 2005 levels by 2030, to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, to protect 30 per cent of our land and oceans by 2030, to accelerate our transition to a circular economy by 2030, and to sustainably manage 100 per cent of ocean areas within our national waters by 2025.



As Tourism Ministers we will work with each other and with industry to ensure Australia is a world leader in sustainable tourism, by:

- Providing leadership and direction on sustainability.
- Sharing knowledge and practical insights to build industry capability on sustainability.
- Developing targets and measures to assess the sector’s sustainability progress, particularly on decarbonisation.
- Promoting the sector’s sustainability credentials domestically and internationally.
- Working with international partners to progress sustainability in the sector.

We encourage all businesses in the visitor economy to embrace sustainability. Sustainability is no longer optional or a feature of niche tourism products – it is an imperative for the future success of every business in the visitor economy. To be successful today and into the future, operators must demonstrate that our world-class services are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the environment, to our culture, and to our communities’ needs.

Together, we will work across governments and with industry to achieve this outcome and realise our sustainability vision.

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Our vision for a sustainable visitor economy

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.

What is sustainability?

Making tourism more sustainable has been the subject of much discussion in recent times. The escalating urgency of climate change and environmental protection has heightened attention and added complexity for business. With a multitude of different terms connected to sustainability, this Framework has been developed to address the need for a single, clear and concise understanding of sustainable tourism and what it means for businesses in the Australian visitor economy.

The national strategy for the visitor economy, *THRIVE 2030*, is a strategy centred on sustainable growth that seeks to appropriately balance economic, social and environmental factors to achieve long-term success. It notes financial prosperity is essential for ongoing success, but that economic gain needs to be managed alongside protection of our environment, culture and communities. Sustainable tourism is central to the visitor economy's competitiveness and guaranteeing the sector's long term viability.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, **sustainable tourism 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

Sustainability goals and priorities for visitor economy businesses are set out under the four pillars of sustainability outlined in this Framework.

For the Australian visitor economy to be sustainable, all businesses in the visitor economy have a responsibility to take actions that protect and conserve our unique environments, build resilience to climate change, respectfully engage with our rich and diverse cultures, and work collaboratively with local communities, employees and suppliers to ensure that tourism benefits everyone.



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

Why embrace sustainability?

Customer demand, pressures on the environment, ethical considerations, operational efficiencies, and government regulation are all driving tourism to become more sustainable. These drivers mean that sustainability is the new normal – it's the way everyday business is conducted.

It is important that action on sustainability happens now and continues into the future to protect Australia's unique natural and cultural assets. Sustainability should be looked at as a journey and, for those who haven't started, it can happen with manageable and incremental steps. For those already on the journey, continuing to make improvements ensures your business remains competitive, complies with evolving regulatory requirements, and leads by example.

Embracing sustainability will help visitor economy businesses by:

- Improving profitability and reducing costs.
- Increasing reputation, customer and employee satisfaction, competitiveness, and appeal to customers and employees.
- Lowering their carbon footprint.
- Adapting to and increasing resilience to climate change.

- Reducing environmental impact through reuse, repair, recycling and waste reduction.
- Improving relationships with customers, employees, local communities and suppliers.
- Assisting to preserve iconic natural attractions that draw visitors to Australia.

Sustainability can be embraced by all businesses in the visitor economy regardless of size, location, or product offering – not just those who operate nature-based activities. Embracing sustainability will transform visitor economy businesses to ensure they are competitive, while delivering benefit to their communities and environments.

Taking action on sustainability

Establishing the National Sustainability Framework is the realisation of Action 4.4 of the THRIVE 2030 Phase 1 Action Plan. The goals and priorities established in the National Sustainability Framework will inform and be reflected in THRIVE 2030 action plans for the remaining phases of the strategy. State and Territory Governments' respective visitor economy strategies may also seek to align with the priorities of the Framework.





Image courtesy of Southern Ocean Lodge / George Apostilides

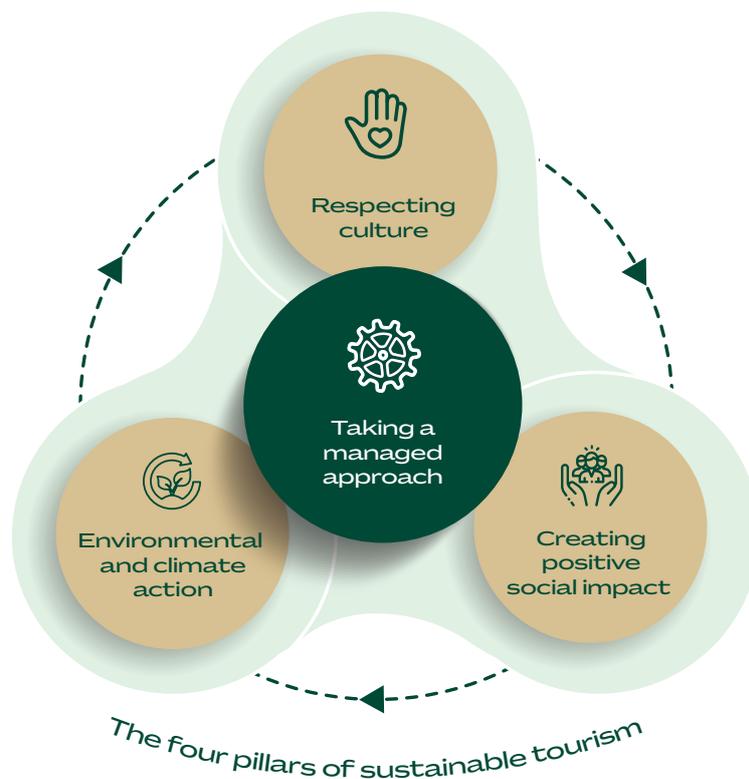
The four pillars of sustainable tourism

Action on sustainability in tourism is guided by the four internationally recognised pillars established by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.²

Together, the pillars provide a holistic approach to sustainable action. This Framework adapts those four pillars into the Australian context as follows:

- **Taking a managed approach to sustainability** – this involves embedding business practices and procedures to ensure sustainability goals are achieved.
- **Implementing environmental and climate action** – by taking action to protect wildlife and nature, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt and build resilience to climate change, responsibly use resources, reduce waste and recycle.
- **Respecting culture** – by acknowledging and engaging appropriately with First Nations people and other cultural groups, and by helping to protect and preserve cultural heritage consistent with the principles of self-determination.
- **Creating positive social impact** – by working cooperatively and inclusively with visitors, employees, suppliers and local communities.

Each business will approach its sustainability journey in a different way, however the pillars provide guidance for all businesses. Businesses are also encouraged to approach sustainability holistically, linking actions across pillars and not treating them in isolation. For example, some environmental actions (pillar 2) can be taken via engagement with First Nations peoples (Pillar 3). More information on how businesses can adopt sustainable practices is available in the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit.³



2. Global Sustainable Tourism Council, *GSTC Industry Criteria Version 3, 2016*

3. Available at www.austrade.gov.au/sustainabletourism

Taking a managed approach

Goal

Visitor economy businesses embed systems and structures to drive ongoing improvements and communicate their sustainability performance.

Priorities



1. **Embedding sustainability principles and practices** through a vision, goals and action plan.



2. **Measuring business inputs and outputs** to understand environmental and social impacts and drive continuous improvement.



3. **Engaging with employees, suppliers, local communities, First Nations people, and customers** to implement sustainability actions, including learning from First Nations people about caring for the environment.



4. **Complying with all applicable legislation** including regulations relating to health, safety, labour and the environment.



5. **Communicating sustainability actions and performance** honestly to customers and stakeholders, including in marketing materials, and pursuing relevant certification, where possible, to provide assurance of ongoing sustainability performance.

Environmental and climate action

Goal

Visitor economy businesses, along with their supply chains, embed nature-positive approaches to protect and regenerate Australia's unique natural environments, and take action to combat, mitigate, and adapt to climate change and meet our net zero emissions by 2050 commitment.

Priorities



1. **Measuring and reducing greenhouse gas emissions**, including through the use of renewable energy.



2. **Minimising water use, avoiding waste**, and embedding reuse, repair and recycling practices.



3. **Adapting and building resilience** to changing climate conditions, including with new construction.



4. **Conserving and contributing to biodiversity**, including by protecting our World Heritage areas, and native fauna and flora.



5. **Shaping responsible visitor behaviour** through storytelling and education and, where appropriate, regenerative practices.

Respecting culture

Goal

Visitor economy businesses protect and share Australia's unique cultural heritage, traditions and sites through respectful partnerships with First Nations people, and by celebrating the diversity of our multicultural communities.

Priorities



1. **Protecting and preserving cultural assets** consistent with principles of self-determination, values and traditions including World Heritage areas, natural sites of significance, buildings of cultural and historical importance, and traditions that make a community distinct.



2. **Engaging respectfully with and learning from First Nations people**, including Acknowledging Country and incorporating First Nations' cultures and perspectives into visitor experiences in partnership with First Nations Custodians where permission has been granted.



3. **Respecting First Nations' people enduring traditional knowledge**, and complying with appropriate protections and ethical considerations when engaging with their cultural and intellectual property (including their art and stories), and only where consent has been given.



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



5. **Celebrating Australia's diversity and multicultural communities** as inherent to our destination's value.

Creating positive social impact

Goal

Visitor economy businesses create positive social and economic impacts through creating jobs, purchasing from local suppliers, and supporting community development.

Priorities



1. **Creating economic opportunity** through jobs and increased business for local communities.



2. **Purchasing from and promoting local suppliers** to support other businesses and grow regional economies.



3. **Delivering an inclusive and equitable workplace** free from discrimination, and providing great working conditions and remuneration to position the visitor economy as a career of choice.



4. **Providing accessible experiences and services** to visitors with diverse needs.



5. **Maintaining a social licence** to operate through collaborative community engagement, and implementing visitor management strategies to reduce pressure on local communities.



www.austrade.gov.au/sustainabletourism

