



Introduction of Responsible Tourism Operations Criteria

Background information

27 May 2008

Launch of Qualmark Green

Qualmark Green was launched on 27 May 2008 by the Minister of Tourism, the Hon. Damien O'Connor. It is the enhancement and extension of environmental criteria in Qualmark's quality accreditation system. The criteria is called Responsible Tourism Operations. It will apply to all Qualmark licence holders as part of their quality accreditation assessments from 1 August 2008.

Importance of environmental performance for tourism

Qualmark's Responsible Tourism initiative is partly about ensuring that quality assured tourism businesses are meeting a number of minimum requirements in this area. These minimum requirements are designed to reflect sound environmental practices and visitor expectations. Equally important though is that the new criteria is also about recognising initiatives (or actions, behaviours, programmes, monitoring etc.) that are under way in tourism businesses and making these part of the quality assurance system.

Development of the criteria

Qualmark has been assessing against environmental since 2003 in the 'endorsed' category for visitor services, transport and activities. With over 2100 licence holders, the quality assurance agency has been working with industry participants and associations on the enhancement and extension of the criteria for some time.

Following a global best-practice review of environmental accreditation and verification schemes, Qualmark engaged the Green Tourism Business Scheme (UK) Ltd to work with Qualmark on developing the criteria for New Zealand tourism businesses. This also helped in ensuring the criteria (and levels of recognition) are aligned with overseas schemes and expectations.

Consultation with industry associations has shown a high level of support. Earlier this year, consultation involved a half day workshop with representatives from a number of industry associations. All supported the need to reflect increasing expectations in this area, and agreed with Qualmark's overall approach. There have also been numerous one-on-one meetings with industry associations, stakeholders and operators.

The result is the introduction of the Responsible Tourism Operations – environmental and social criteria, along with a range of support material for operators. This will become part of all Qualmark assessments, including accommodation and visitor activities, transport and services categories, from 1 August 2008.

Piloting the criteria

Part of the initiative has included 'piloting' the Responsible Tourism Operations criteria on over 20 tourism businesses in a range of sectors. The response from the industry so far has been positive.

The tourism businesses who participated in the pilots represent a number of tourism sectors, including accommodation and visitor activity categories. Scores showed that a range of different tourism businesses have adopted some level of environmental performance through actions and behaviours that suit their type of business and its size.

The term Responsible Tourism and what it includes

Qualmark is describing the criteria and support material under the 'Responsible Tourism' concept. It is about tourism businesses running their businesses in an environmentally and socially responsible way.

The five key areas that the Responsible Tourism Operations criteria recognises are in energy, waste, water, conservation and community activities, initiatives, programmes and monitoring. This is on top of a set of minimum requirements that represent the 'must haves' in this area.

Put into practice, tourism businesses will find opportunities to introduce and enhance environmental performance in their premise, in their product (offering to guests/customers), in their transport, in their office, in the wider natural environment surrounding their business, and in their local community.

What the new criteria means for tourism businesses

The criteria includes not only environmental practices related to energy, waste and water, but also allows for recognition of any conservation and community initiatives that tourism businesses may support. Businesses can choose how far they want to go in these areas— but because the scoring in Responsible Tourism Operations criteria contributes to their overall score, they will be incentivised to do well in this area. There is also additional branding available to those who score above a certain level.

The minimum requirements and the scoring works

Mandatory minimum requirements include operators having all necessary licences, permits and consents to run their business, that operator's land use complies with all regional, district and conservation management plans and that facilities are in place for all guests and staff to use recycling where available in the region. Completing a checklist is also a minimum requirement.

Minimum requirements will apply to all Qualmarked operators.

The next level attributes quality scores, for example start between 0 and 2 for those businesses able to demonstrate efforts made to reduce water, energy and water consumption or that the business has developed a Responsible Tourism plan of action developed to create a long term Responsible Tourism Plan.

Scoring at the top end requires evidence that the operator is monitoring its performance (for at least 6 to 12 months), that their staff understand and can communicate the business' plan, that it is publicly displayed so that guests can offer feedback on it, that an individual or team within the organisation has responsibility for it, that the business has evidence of improvement and is contributing to things like a conservation or community activity.

Environmental performance standards and branding

Once operators have met minimum requirements, additional scoring in the Responsible Tourism Operations criteria will contribute to their overall Qualmark score. Qualmark is working on a range of activities that will promote and leverage this aspect of the Qualmark criteria, including marketing communications and website information. Part of this work has included the development of additional branding (logos) available to operators to score above 3 out of 5 in the criteria. There are three levels of logos for this (shown alongside the existing Qualmark identity as an example):



Example only - the three levels of Qualmark's environmental verification are shown above. Based on scoring a certain level within the Responsible Tourism Operations criteria, these logos are available to operators once they are assessed from August 2008. The relevant logo is designed to be used alongside (not in place of) existing Qualmark star grading and Endorsed logos on websites and in collateral such as brochures.

Operators who score above 3 out of 5 in the criteria are eligible to apply for the use of the Enviro-Bronze logo; those that score 4 out of 5 can apply for use of the Enviro-Silver logo; and the highest performers (achieving 5 out of 5) can apply for the use of Enviro-Gold. The logos have been tested on international visitors staying in a range of accommodation categories.

Support material for operators – Qualmark licence holders

Qualmark licence holders will start receiving their Responsible Tourism Guide the week following TRENZ. This outlines the Responsible Tourism Operations criteria and is full of tips, ideas, websites and examples to help operators on their journey towards sustainability. The resource will be accompanied by a checklist that is designed to help operators review their business from an environmental and social perspective. Online resources have been developed, including a monitoring tool to help operators manage energy, fuel, waste and water use. Qualmark licence holders will also have the opportunity to attend a workshop on Responsible Tourism. Workshops will take place in a number of regions throughout New Zealand and dates will be announced shortly.

For more information:

Visit www.qualmark.co.nz

Carolyn Gibson, Communications Manager, Qualmark New Zealand, Phone 64 9 377 7153, Mobile 027 687 8993, carolyn@qualmark.co.nz