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## MEDIA RELEASE:

### Gladstone Region earns coveted ECO Destination Certification

The Gladstone region proudly announced its ECO Destination Certification at the Nature Tourism level with Ecotourism Australia, underscoring its commitment to sustainable tourism. This significant milestone was led by the Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Limited (GAPDL) and supported by the Gladstone Regional Council.

Gladstone is the 10th ECO Destination across the nation certified by Ecotourism Australia.

The ECO Destination Certification adheres to global best practices through international partner, Green Destinations. The Certification recognises a region's commitment to the four pillars of sustainability: environmental, socio-economic and cultural impact and sustainable business management.

It involves third party auditing of 73 criteria across seven sections including: Destination Management, Environment and Climate, Culture and Tradition, and Business and Hospitality.

"We congratulate the Gladstone Region on achieving ECO Destination Certification," said Ecotourism Australia's Head of Destination and Member Services, Alyssa Sanders.

"This recognition underscores the region's unwavering commitment to sustainable tourism and sets a benchmark for future efforts. We are immensely proud to see Gladstone leading the way in promoting responsible travel practices and showcasing the incredible natural beauty and biodiversity of Central Queensland."

The region is committed to offering eco-friendly and sustainable tourism products that align with international best practices. There are six certified operators championing sustainability in the region with Lady Elliott Island, 1770 LARC! Tours, Broadwater Haven, Wilson Island, Heron Island Resort, 1770 Reef and Dive Spear and Sport all holding global best practice ECO Certification.

1770 LARC! Tours and Lady Elliott Island are recognised in Ecotourism Australia's Hall of Fame for holding 20 years of continuous ECO Certification.

GAPDL have built on the industry's foundation of sustainable tourism and lead the stakeholder collaboration to achieve this destination wide recognition.

"We are so proud of our beautiful region for achieving this significant milestone, which is a testament to the community's collaboration and dedication to preserving our stunning natural environment. Attaining ECO Destination Certification will establish Gladstone as a world-class destination, highlighting the region's dedication to continuous improvement in sustainable practices and its provision of high-quality nature-based tourism experiences," said GAPDL's CEO, Nicola Smith.

The certification process, initiated in early 2023, was funded through the Queensland Government's [Department of Tourism and Sport's Eco-certified Tourism Destination Program Grant Fund](#). This grant supports councils and tourism organisations in achieving high-level ECO Destination Certification.

Member of Gladstone Glenn Butcher said the certification was a fitting reward for the region's tourism businesses who have focused on making their operations as sustainable as possible.

"Achieving ECO Destination Certification will help highlight to visitors from around the world the natural wonders and sustainable tourism operators the region has to offer," said Mr Butcher.

"As part of our Towards Tourism 2032 strategy the Queensland Government is working with industry to position the state and our tourism destinations as leaders in sustainable tourism.

"This program provides up to \$150,000 to eligible applicants to achieve certification and it is a worthwhile investment, as we strive to meet a growing demand from tourists for places that have a genuine commitment to sustainable low impact travel."

Tourism and Events Queensland CEO, Patricia O'Callaghan said this is fantastic news for Queensland.

"Congratulations to the Gladstone region on this major milestone of becoming an ECO Certified Destination.

"The region has some world-class operators who are doing incredible work to promote and embody sustainable tourism.

"Gladstone is the fourth Queensland destination to become ECO Certified which highlights our industry's dedication to environmentally responsible management of our stunning natural resources, while also providing visitors from across the globe the opportunity to immerse themselves in the beauty of our state."

To achieve this certification the Gladstone region underwent rigorous onsite auditing involving interviews with council and GAPDL staff, community and conservation groups, business representatives and First Nations representatives, along with site visits to key tourism and environmental areas. To maintain certification, ongoing sustainability commitments are essential, with audits conducted every two years to track progress and implement recommendations.

The Council's support to their community in achieving a sustainability-driven future for tourism has been clear throughout the application process.

"We are delighted to obtain the ECO Destination Certification and join an established global network of over 200 destinations working towards ecotourism excellence. The certification assures visitors to our region that we are committed to the continuous improvement of sustainable practices and to providing high-quality nature-based tourism experiences," said Gladstone Region Mayor Matt Burnett.

Situated along the stunning coastline of Central Queensland, Gladstone is a gateway to two iconic natural wonders: the Southern Great Barrier Reef and the pristine waterways of the Gladstone Harbour. This region is renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty, with a significant portion of its area dedicated to protected natural landscapes that support rich biodiversity.

Gladstone is also home to the world-famous Heron Island, a prime destination for marine life enthusiasts, and the ecologically significant Capricorn Coast National Park. These areas offer visitors unparalleled opportunities to explore and appreciate the diverse ecosystems that make Gladstone a premier nature-based tourism destination.

Discover Australia's latest ECO Destination, Gladstone: Green Travel Guide [link](#)

Ecotourism Australia's Head of Destination and Member Services, Alyssa Sanders, is in Gladstone today at the ECO Destination Certification Announcement event to award Gladstone Regional Council with their official certificate and present to key stakeholders.

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**About Ecotourism Australia**

Ecotourism Australia is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation, established in 1991, that promotes and supports the ecotourism industry in Australia through building capacity and actively promoting sustainable tourism operations and systems. We are recognised as the credible, national peak body for sustainable and nature-based tourism in Australia.

Our foundational program – ECO Certification – was the world's first national ecotourism certification program. We have more than 1,900 certified experiences in our ECO, Sustainable Tourism, Climate Action, and Respecting Our Culture Certifications. Ecotourism Australia's certification programs, including the new Sustainable Tourism Certification, are acknowledged and recognised globally. We have a consumer-facing website that features every Sustainable Tourism Certified operator, ECO certified operator, and certified ECO certified Destination in Australia: <https://greentravelguide.org>

The ECO Destination Certification was developed by Ecotourism Australia using the international Green Destinations standard, which is recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. The Certification assesses a region across the four pillars of sustainability and the destination must pass an on-site audit conducted by a third-party auditor before Certification can be granted.

In late 2022, a new Sustainable Tourism program was launched including a pre-certification benchmarking tool in the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard with founding partner Tourism Australia to support the broader tourism industry to demonstrate their commitment to, and be recognised for, the four pillars of sustainability: environmental, cultural, financial/business, and socio-economic impact.

Ecotourism Australia has global partnerships, working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Green Destinations (an international organisation for sustainable destination development); and key partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region including with WWF-Australia, Parks Australia and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA). Ecotourism Australia is also a member of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)