

MEDIA RELEASE



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Tourism Minister encourages tourism business to 'Go for Gold'

The Minister of Tourism, the Hon, Damien O'Connor, encouraged tourism businesses to 'Go for Gold' at the launch of Qualmark Green.

Qualmark Green – the enhancement and extension of environmental criteria in Qualmark's quality accreditation system – was unveiled to the tourism industry by the Minister at an event in Rotorua today.

"I congratulate Qualmark on establishing the new environmental criteria and I would encourage all tourism businesses to 'Go for Gold'. Protecting our environment is really important if we are to ensure that the tourism industry is sustainable now and into the future and we are delivering on our 100% Pure New Zealand brand."

The new criteria contributes to one of the important outcomes in the New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 which highlights the need for the tourism sector to take a leading role in protecting and enhancing New Zealand's environment, he added.

Qualmark Green is about criteria called Responsible Tourism Operations being introduced into Qualmark assessments from August this year. It will apply to all Qualmark licence holders as part of their quality accreditation assessments from 1 August 2008.

The introduction of the criteria marks a 'world first'. New Zealand will be a world leader – the first country to have a fully integrated quality and environmental performance tourism assurance system.

This means that environmental actions will contribute towards the star gradings that Qualmark accommodation providers have. Visitor activity, service and transport providers with Qualmark 'endorsed' licenses will also be assessed on this criteria.

Qualmark Chief Executive, Geoff Penrose, says the industry has responded positively to the initiative so far.

"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."

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 actions, behaviours, programmes, monitoring etc. that are under way in tourism businesses and making these part of the quality assurance system," said Mr Penrose.

Tourism New Zealand chief executive George Hickton said the natural environment underpinned New Zealand's tourism industry and many other major foreign exchange earning industries.

"New Zealand's landscapes and scenery is what brings international visitors to New Zealand, so protecting it for the future is vital," Mr Hickton added.

Peter Blackwell from the Automobile Association identifies Qualmark Green as a powerful tool in allowing consumers to make informed decisions. Qualmark has always been about allowing consumers to choose consistent standards and, as we encourage people to explore New Zealand, they will be better able to match their holiday requirements with their travel options.

The Minister also officially released the Responsible Tourism Guide at the event, along with logos that represent three levels of environmental performance – Enviro-Gold, Enviro-Silver and Enviro-Bronze. The guide forms part of a set of support materials, also available online, for Qualmark licence holders to help them prepare for the upcoming introduction of the criteria. Licence holders are due to start receiving their guides the week following TRENZ.

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 the 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.

For more information:

Visit www.qualmark.co.nz

Refer **Qualmark Green – Background Information document**

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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. Electronic versions available for media on request.

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.

Background on Qualmark

Qualmark® is New Zealand tourism's official mark of quality. All accommodation and tourism businesses that carry the Qualmark® means they've been independently assessed as professional and trustworthy, so travellers can book and buy with confidence.

The Qualmark® can help travellers identify quality places to stay, things to do and ways to get around no matter where you are in New Zealand. From the North Island to the South Island, Auckland to Christchurch, Rotorua to Queenstown, Wellington to Dunedin – Qualmark® assured businesses can be found across the country.

Qualmark® is jointly owned by Tourism New Zealand and the AA.