



Media release

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Qualmark launches major changes in business

Qualmark today announced a new direction for 2011 and beyond to ensure it is fully focused on quality assurance. Seven major areas of change to its business plan are involved, including new processes for developing assessment criteria, new assessment options, a new pricing structure and changes to the Enviro Awards.

“Our sole focus as an organisation is and must be quality assurance in New Zealand’s tourism industry,” Paula McCallum, General Manager of Qualmark, said today. “These seven major areas of change mean we can make sure we’re adding value to all Qualmark licence holders, travellers, shareholders and the industry by having the most efficient and effective systems and processes in place.”

Ms McCallum said the changes now reinforce that a Qualmark licence is earned by first applying, and then being assessed to establish if an operator is reaching industry standards and deserves to be a Qualmark licence holder. She said there was a perception that a Qualmark licence is bought by paying a licence fee which is completely wrong. “Qualmark licence holders who have earned the right to carry the Qualmark logo are extremely valuable to the industry. We owe it to them to uphold standards and these new changes mean we can get on with the business of doing just that.”

The new business plan and direction is a result of nine months of review and consultation. It has been launched to the industry through December in a series of presentations around New Zealand.

Ms McCallum said Qualmark would continue to review its business practices but today’s announcement would go a long way to addressing industry frustrations with Qualmark. “The review identified that some of our processes, such as criteria reviews, were taking an unacceptable amount of time. We had a pricing structure that was inequitable and needed more options for assessments. We also knew the industry wanted changes to the Enviro Awards. This was all excellent and valuable feedback and we have responded to it with the seven major areas of change.”

Changes will start to take effect from 1 April 2011.

“I’ve been delighted with the industry response to our new direction,” Ms McCallum said. “Everyone has not only accepted that the changes were necessary but there has been huge enthusiasm about how the new business model will benefit the industry in the coming years to make sure we deliver a world class experience to international and domestic travellers through quality assurance.”

One of the major areas of change is the Qualmark Enviro Awards. Qualmark has seen a steady uptake of licence holders who can see the benefit to their business of having a Qualmark Enviro Award, Ms McCallum said. “The Enviro Award logo signals to visitors that they are using operators with strong environmental values and this is something we know is important to an increasing numbers of visitors. The changes we are announcing will make the environmental elements of Qualmark’s work more transparent and stronger.”

The major new changes are:

New Assessment criteria

- The assessment criteria review process will now take place on an annual basis
- This review process is being implemented for all sectors
- All operators and industry will have the opportunity to contribute and review. This ensures Qualmark will hear the wider industry’s feedback and not just from existing licence holders

New assessment options and compulsory pre-assessment material

- Qualmark quality assurance assessors will now have a menu of assessment options available to them to complete the onsite assessments
- These include visual assessments, add-on assessments and mystery assessments
- Operators will now be required to complete all pre-assessment material, which includes presenting evidence of minimum requirements, and return to assessors within 30 days to avoid having their licence terminated
- Qualmark licence holders will now have more contact with assessors than previously, and all licence holders will have at least one visit from their assessor each year.

New pricing structure

- New rewards for long tenure and loyalty will be introduced
- Fees will change to reflect size and scale of operators and reduce financial barriers to small operators
- A non-refundable application fee for all new operators is being introduced
- A base fee plus relevant variables will be introduced

New Terms and Conditions

- Licence expiry dates will now fall at the end of the current month (rather than the existing anniversary date)

- Failure to pay licences within timeframe will result in the removal of rewards and then the immediate termination of licences
- If their licence is terminated, operators will need to reapply to join Qualmark and pay a new application fee. They will also lose all rewards

Independent establishment of Enviro Awards

- This will now be applicable to all sectors from 1 April 2011 (Hotels and Holiday Parks were implemented in August 2010)
- Qualmark licence holders will have the option whether they want to be assessed for an Enviro Award
- Responsible Tourism/Enviro minimum requirements remain part of all Qualmark assessments. However, Enviro Award quality criteria, no longer effect the score or grade achieved
- A application fee applies along with an annual renewal licence fee
- Changes will take effect for new applications from 1 April 2011 and existing licence holders from 1 July 2011

Branding review

- The Quality Mark is being reviewed to ensure it differentiates between sectors and is easily identifiable to all visitors
- Revised brand standards will be introduced to the industry for consultation during February 2011

Marketing and Communications

- Leveraging international and domestic trade marketing opportunities
- Developing closer relationships with Regional Tourism Organisations to leverage positive opportunities
- Increased use of media opportunities
- Targeted, cost-effective marketing

All Qualmark licence holders will have access to a copy of the new direction presentation at www.qualmark.co.nz

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For more information, please contact Cathy Wood, Qualmark Communications on 021 304540 or communications@qualmark.co.nz

About Qualmark

- Qualmark is New Zealand tourism's official quality mark. The Qualmark logo identifies businesses that have been through independent onsite assessments using a set of national quality standards developed with the industry. The Qualmark logo helps international and domestic travellers select places to stay, things to do and ways to get around.
- There are currently 2,300 businesses which are Qualmark licenced and more than 600 have received Enviro sustainability awards.
- Qualmark NZ is a joint venture company owned by Tourism New Zealand and by the Automobile Association (AA) and is backed by leading tourism industry associations.