

MEDIA RELEASE



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**Responsible tourism initiative gains momentum**

**The development of Qualmark's sustainable tourism initiative is gaining momentum.**

As New Zealand tourism's official mark of quality, Qualmark will introduce enhanced sustainability criteria into its assessment systems from early 2008.

"We have made significant progress in the past fortnight as we've had the benefit of working with two specialists in environmental tourism – Andrea Nicholas and Jon Proctor of the Green Tourism Business Scheme, which is a national sustainable tourism accreditation scheme operating in the UK," says Qualmark chief executive officer, Geoff Penrose.

Along with a number of New Zealand-based organisations, the Green Tourism Business Scheme is assisting Qualmark in ensuring that the criteria being developed for New Zealand tourism businesses is best-practice and reflects standards already tested and adopted in a key market for NZ . The new criteria will form part of the existing quality assurance assessment criteria.

"Working with the Green Tourism Business Scheme has gained us further insight into what 'responsible tourism' really is. We've also focused on learning how tourism operators can benefit from introducing business practices that have both environmental and economic benefits. The experience that Andrea and Jon bring to New Zealand's tourism industry is particularly relevant, especially in terms of how environmental management relates to the tourism sector," says Mr Penrose.

The Green Tourism Business Scheme's 'Green Tourism' programme has been operating in the UK for ten years.

"Over that time, we've witnessed a huge increase in the demand for tourism that manages its impacts on the environment in key areas such as waste reduction and energy use. We've also seen an increasing number of tourism businesses getting involved in their communities and supporting them through sourcing locally made food for example," says Green Tourism Business Scheme manager, Andrea Nicholas.

Jon and Andrea's New Zealand trip has included site visits to a number of accommodation and activity providers in the South Island.

"It's been really encouraging to see the commitment your tourism industry has in protecting and promoting the natural and cultural assets of New Zealand," says Ms Nicholas.

Qualmark is also working with a number of New Zealand experts, including the Ministry for the Environment, the Sustainable Business Network, the Ministry of Tourism and the Sustainable Tourism Charter Groups.

"Importantly, the tourism industry itself is playing its part in the development of the assessment criteria – a critical success factor in implementing the initiative," says Mr Penrose.

Completion of the new assessment criteria is expected by later this year, but initial support materials for businesses are currently available and additional material will be released to Qualmark licence holders in the coming months. Further advisory material for tourism businesses on sustainability, including templates, are also under development, and additional resources for operators are already available at <http://www.tourism.govt.nz/sustainability/>

The new criteria will apply to all accommodation sectors and visitor activities, including services and transport. It is designed to assist tourism businesses to improve their sustainability, across environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects of their operations.

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### **Background on Qualmark's 'responsible tourism' initiative**

Environmental content has been included in Qualmark's assessment programme since 2002. The Honourable Damien O'Connor, Minister of Tourism, announced funding for the extension and development of this criteria in August 2006.

Qualmark is now working to develop additional materials to assist New Zealand tourism operators implement sustainability practices and good environmental management within their organisations. The Draft New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 reinforces that at an industry level the country needs to demonstrate it is as environmentally sustainable as possible. Visit [www.qualmark.co.nz](http://www.qualmark.co.nz) for more information.

### **Information on the Green Tourism Business Scheme**

Since its inception in 1997 the Green Tourism Business Scheme has been championing sustainable tourism in the UK. The organisation currently has over 1300 members throughout England and Scotland. Visit [www.green-business.co.uk](http://www.green-business.co.uk) for more information.