



# Environmental Standards and Certification

## Description

Environmental standards and certification processes cover any approach designed to systematically maintain or improve the quality of development or the environment, by applying a process to a number of enterprises across an industry or sector. These processes are sometimes referred to as 'quality control strategies'.

These processes are widely used throughout the tourism sector. They typically operate through *performance standards*, or 'legal restrictions that regulate a physical or measurable aspect of development'. Types of performance standards include:

- *Development design* density, setbacks, etc.
- *Building standards*: floor areas or coverage, building height, energy efficiency standards
- *Architectural or design standards* (individual buildings or groups of buildings) Landscape standards and site controls for view protection, noise etc.

There are three basic steps in development of standards:

1. Identify goals
2. Select development policies that promote goals
3. Development technical standards/thresholds to describe the policy in measurable terms.

Certification is a process that enables developments and businesses to achieve the required environmental standards, and to provide regulatory or market incentives to reach those standards. Certification has been operating in New Zealand tourism for a while through service-oriented codes, e.g. Qualmark, New Zealand Way.

## How and when the tool is used

*Performance standards* are widely used in New Zealand district and local planning, especially under the [Resource Management Act \(RMA\) framework](#) 🌿. Most performance standards are not specific to tourism, but many apply to tourism development. For example, they are widely used for development (e.g. subdivision) and building control, for which they would apply to many tourism developments. Performance standards are also widely used for water and air quality, for which they would apply to tourism infrastructure development. Standards can be qualitative or quantitative.

National policy statements and standards under the RMA set a national framework for any district or regional plans. The New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS) has major implications for tourism as it strongly influences developments in the coastal zone. The NZCPS is the only National Policy Statement under the RMA at present and is currently being reviewed. There are also National Policy Standards now in place for air quality and human drinking water, and further national standards being developed, all of which indirectly affect tourism development or landscape quality. Voluntary *accommodation-based standards* (especially for energy savings) are becoming quite wide-spread especially through the environmental programmes and energy conservation initiatives. Several large hotel chains participate as part of certification programmes (see below).

[Zoning](#) 🌿 can be seen as a type of qualitative control approach in that it generally aims to segregate land uses and activities, to maintain specific areas of higher environmental quality. Standards are also an integral part of other limits-based approaches to tourism management. Standards will usually vary between different zones. Standards may reflect the existing quality or be set higher than existing standards to provide a "buffer" or a target for restoring or rehabilitating an area. For example in the Limits to Acceptable Change ([LAC](#) 🌿) approach, specified standards are the level beyond which further change is unacceptable. They are selected for each indicator.

*Green Globe certification programme*: Green Globe 21 is an international programme for sustainable tourism. It has been strongly supported and promoted by the NZ tourism industry, especially the Tourism Industry Association, which has an alliance with Green Globe Asia Pacific that runs the NZ programme. Green Globe Asia Pacific has other alliances with national and regional tourism organisations including the Australian Ecotourism Association and the Australian Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre. Green Globe



## RECOGNISING AND SETTING LIMITS Environmental Standards and Certification

certification encourages tourism operators and organisations to improve their environmental and business performance. It uses a three stage process to move participants towards top environmental performance.

1. *Affiliation* involves producing an environmental plan: a one-page statement outlining the organisation's commitment towards environmental improvement. It identifies environmental impacts and addresses them in a business performance context through an action plan.
2. *Benchmarking* involves development of an environmental management system (EMS) tailored to the business.
3. *Certification* involves implementation of the EMS to reach agreed standards. The process builds in compliance with all relevant statutory provisions, and has an annual performance appraisal.

### Application

The development of standards can be very expensive (usually public costs). Certification processes (public or private) are also expensive while implementation usually involves private costs. As well as better environmental outcomes, benefits may include either the avoidance of compliance costs (for example if certification or achievement of standard gives permitted activity status); or a marketing advantage if the certification is marketed. In either case, to be effective for more sustainable management these tools need to have wide buy-in among industry and stakeholders. This can only be achieved with the participation of both types of groups in the development of relevant standards through various [participation models](#) and processes. The Parliamentary Commissioner for Environment (PCE) investigation considered tourism industry standards and codes of practice. They concluded that these can contribute significantly to better environmental outcomes, although in some cases a totally voluntary approach will not be sufficient to achieve those outcomes. The PCE recommended there should be compulsory membership of an industry association in sections of the industry where critical environmental, health or safety consideration were at stake, with powers for the industry association to impose minimum standards or codes of practice.

### Our evaluation

Standards, certification and quality control processes are strongly established into New Zealand's environmental management system, primarily through the district and regional planning processes under the RMA. They are becoming even more widespread through national environmental standards and industry certification programmes. Effective programmes are some of the most direct ways in which tourism businesses can participate in tourism sustainability. However, most of the industry programmes are process oriented at present and there is a question about whether the standards can be specific enough to deliver environmental improvement. Both standards and certification apply mainly to biophysical standards, and may not be capable of integrating social and economic aspects of tourism management. Any standards or certification process is dependent on continuous or regular monitoring to assess the achievement of standards. Industry or governmental compliance monitoring is also an integral part of this type of process.