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Green thumbs up for tourism conference

Working towards a cooperative approach to an environmentally sustainable international tourism industry will be on the agenda when the 2006 Ecotourism Australia International Conference begins in Townsville next week.

The conference brings expert speakers from all over the Asia Pacific region to Townsville in a bid to tackle the major issues surrounding the ecotourism industry.

Townsville Enterprise Chief Executive, Glenys Schuntner wants local tourism operators to take advantage of this opportunity.

“We have an international conference bringing speakers from all over the world into our backyard. I’d urge anyone involved in the tourism industry to attend this conference which will provide invaluable insight to developing an environmentally sustainable approach to tourism.”

“Our region is rich in natural resources. We have the Great Barrier Reef, World Heritage listed wet tropics rainforest, the outback and pristine tropical islands.”

“It’s our responsibility to think through how we can protect these resources for future generations while also opening them up for visitors from around the world to experience,” she said.

Ecotourism is a growing tourism market being nurtured by state and national tourism bodies and conference host Ecotourism Australia is the official eco certifying body for Australian tourism operators.

ECO Certification was introduced 10 years ago and is recognised internationally as the world’s leading eco certification program.

Ecotourism Australia CEO Stephen Pahl said the ECO Certification program was very solid in the state’s north.

“We have a high concentration of members based in north Queensland because of the beautiful reef and rainforest natural environments,” Mr Pahl said.

“All our operators provide a consistent high quality service, which is helping drive the significant growth of the ecotourism market,” he said.

Members of the North Queensland tourism industry attended a certification program earlier this year and these businesses will receive their official recognition at the conference.

Deputy Mayor and Chair of the Sustainable Development Committee, Ann Bunnell said ecotourism has an important role to play in Townsville as the city strives to be clean and green.

“This conference gives us a real opportunity to tap into the expertise of delegates from all over the world,” Cr Bunnell said.

“Ultimately we want to gain insights and ideas on how to balance our goal of protecting our

natural resources with our desire to give tourists the chance to experience these beautiful attractions.

“Townsville itself has a lot of expertise in this field. There's no doubt sharing our knowledge will only be beneficial to the wider environment.”

High profile representatives of the international tourism community will attend the conference alongside leaders of the national tourism industry, and representatives from within the region.

This high calibre group of speakers will ensure the some 300 delegates attending the conference receive a comprehensive overview of the issues facing the tourism industry as it looks for ways to develop sustainable practices for taking advantage of the world's natural resources.

The conference will provide an engaging forum for lively and informative discussion of new ideas, best practice case studies and a vibrant, entertaining social program.

Delegates will have the opportunity to participate in one of four regional themed streams during the conference. These streams will visit Magnetic Island, Charters Towers, or Townsville.

Registrations are open up to the start of the conference, conference details and registration forms can be found online at www.ecotourism.org.au/conference.

The 2006 Ecotourism Australia International Conference was secured in a joint bid by Townsville City Council and the Townsville Enterprise Convention Bureau.

ENDS

For more information contact Nathan Campbell on (07) 4726 2753 or 0434 182 765

A list of key Conference speakers follows:

- ● United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)
Director of the Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences, Natarajan Ishwaran
- ● India's Ministry for Tourism Joint Secretary, Amitabh Kant
- ● Cambodia's Tourism Minister, Dr Thong Khon.
- ● Federal Minister for Small Business and Tourism Fran Bailey
- ● Chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Virginia Chadwick
- ● Local MP and Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism, Lindy Nelson-Carr
- ● Townsville City Council Deputy Mayor, Councilor Ann Bunnell