

# *SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CERTIFICATION:* A CASE STUDY OF NOOSA BIOSPHERE RESERVE

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## **Statement of original authorship**

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted either in whole or in part for a degree at CQUniversity or any other tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the material presented in this thesis is original except where due reference is made in text.

Date: 7 July 2015

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# Abstract

Tourism is the world's largest and fastest growing industry (UNWTO, 2012). It is a global phenomenon with widespread impacts that are both positive and negative. In this context, there is increasing pressure on tourism providers and destination managers to demonstrate sustainable practices and efforts to protect and conserve the natural environment upon which most tourism depends. Eco or sustainable certification has been highlighted as a key tool in sustainable tourism management (Bien, 2007; Font, 2009; Honey, 2008), but after nearly 30 years in the marketplace, uptake of certification remains low (Dodds & Joppe, 2009b).

The aim of this research is to gain an insight into how sustainable tourism certification is currently viewed, implemented and promoted as a tourism management tool in a biosphere reserve setting.

The case study setting of this research is Noosa Biosphere Reserve in Australia. One hundred tourism firms were surveyed and in-depth interviews were conducted to gain a comprehensive insight into the activity system of sustainable tourism certification. Cultural Historical Activity Theory was used as a methodological analysis framework to assist in the identification of expansive learning opportunities from the surfacing 'tensions' and 'contradictions'.

The study found that certification uptake is limited by internal and external constraints faced by the tourism operator. As well, the voluntary nature of certification coupled with an absence of leadership from destination management organisations and government, has compounded operator perception that certification is not a particularly valued sustainable development management tool. It emerged that the development and expansion of motivational drivers would be useful to encourage uptake of certification by tourism operators.

Knowledge generated from this research has contributed to further understanding of the operationalisation of certification as a sustainability management tool in a biosphere reserve setting. Arising from this research is the identification of the potential for further research using a change laboratory approach to initiate a cycle of expansive learning where stakeholders work together to use contradictions as a springboard for innovation and growth.

The research reveals potential for biosphere reserves to act as learning sites for development of sustainable practices. However, this will only be fully embraced where there is a significant stakeholder engagement. Education and consultation along with cooperation and communication should be clearly focused on ensuring any tourism within biosphere reserves is sustainable and considers the protection and conservation of environment and local community.

# Table of contents

Statement of original authorship .....	i
Copyright statement .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
List of figures .....	vii
List of tables .....	viii
Acknowledgements .....	ix
List of abbreviations .....	x
Glossary .....	xi
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background.....	2
1.2 Context.....	4
1.3 Purpose.....	10
1.4 Significance .....	11
1.5 Scope.....	12
1.6 Thesis outline.....	13
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	15
2.2 Origins and development of the sustainable tourism agenda .....	15
2.3 Tourism certification as a sustainable development tool.....	19
2.4 Background of the biosphere reserve concept.....	35
2.5 The research challenge .....	40
2.6 Frameworks and theory used in sustainable tourism research .....	41
2.7 Chapter summary .....	44
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>47</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	47
3.2 The Social constructivist research paradigm.....	47
3.3 Qualitative research strategy .....	49
3.4 The case study as a research method .....	50
3.5 Data collection methods .....	54
3.6 Analysis methods.....	66
3.7 Research limitations .....	74
3.8 Ethical considerations.....	76
3.9 Chapter summary .....	76
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....</b>	<b>77</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	77
4.2 Participant profile .....	77
4.3 Theme analysis.....	81
4.4 Chapter summary .....	99

<b>CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>101</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	101
5.2 Description of the activity system and interrelated components.....	101
5.3 Presentation of activity system vignettes .....	108
5.4 Contradictions occurring in the activity system .....	114
5.5 Proposed framework of motivational drivers to encourage goal-oriented action.....	120
5.6 Facilitators of change – Opportunities for innovation.....	123
5.7 Learning outcome of certification .....	126
5.8 Chapter summary.....	127
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>129</b>
6.1 Empirical findings in relation to research questions.....	129
6.2 Conclusions about the research problem .....	132
6.3 Research contribution and possibilities for the future .....	136
6.4 Limitations and implications for further research .....	138
6.5 Concluding remarks .....	139
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>163</b>
Appendix A – Sustainable tourism certification programs available in Noosa Biosphere Reserve .....	163
Appendix B - Sustainable tourism certification program matrix.....	169
Appendix C – Changing priorities and policies of federal, state and local government in Australia.....	172
Appendix D - Online survey.....	174
Appendix E - Email Invitation to participate in research project.....	191
Appendix F - Research participants information sheet .....	192
Appendix G - Interview question sheets.....	195
Appendix H - Interview introduction sheet.....	198
Appendix I - Interview participant matrix .....	199
Appendix J - Ethics approval .....	200
Appendix K - Participants consent form .....	202



# List of figures

Figure 3.1 Survey design, development and administration process .....	57
Figure 3.2 Development and administration of interviews .....	62
Figure 3.3 Thematic coding process .....	68
Figure 4.1 Features of a typical tourism business operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve .....	79
Figure 4.2 Certification programs used by tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve .....	80
Figure 4.3 Expected and perceived benefits of certification as ranked by survey respondents.....	82
Figure 4.4 Barriers to certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve .....	86
Figure 5.1 Interacting components of the tourism certification activity system in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.....	102
Figure 5.2 Contradictions in the activity system of certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve .....	115
Figure 5.3 Expected benefits vs delivered outcomes of certification.....	116
Figure 5.4 Framework of motivational drivers of certification .....	121

# List of tables

Table 2.1 Features of process-based and performance-based certification programs .....	23
Table 2.2 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers of certification .....	30
Table 2.3 Barriers faced by business in relation to sustainable tourism certification.....	33
Table 3.1 Qualitative research approach linkages with this research.....	50
Table 3.2 Case study research design.....	53
Table 3.3 Key themes used for interview question development.....	63
Table 3.4 Coding systemisation table .....	69
Table 3.5 Steps used to inform analysis of the certification activity system .....	74
Table 4.1 Summary of survey respondents' key business characteristics.....	78

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To my three boys: Rod, Rio and Bon. You are my world. This is for you.

# List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AusMAB	Australian Network of Biosphere Reserves
CCIQ	Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland
CHAT	Cultural Historical Activity Theory
CREST	Centre for Responsible Travel
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DMO	Destination Management Organisation
EMS	Environmental Management Systems
LTO	Local Tourism Organisation
LTA	Local Tourism Association
MAB	Man and the Biosphere
NBL	Noosa Biosphere Limited
NBF	Noosa Biosphere Foundation
NBR	Noosa Biosphere Reserve
NEAP	National Ecotourism Accreditation Program
RQ	Research Question
RTO	Regional Tourism Association
TIES	The International Ecotourism Society
TN	Tourism Noosa
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNESCO	United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development

# Glossary

A range of terms and definitions\* associated with the research topic are used throughout this thesis. In order to avoid ambiguity and to ensure clear understanding of terms within the context of this research, the most commonly employed terms have been defined below.

## **Accreditation\***

Accreditation is a process of qualifying, endorsing, and "licensing" entities that perform certification of businesses, products, processes, or services. In other words, an accreditation program certifies the certifiers.

In Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Fiji and some other places, accreditation has been used synonymously with certification, but in this study, they have distinct meanings. Accreditation is the term used for the higher stage process whereby a body not associated with any particular certification scheme, certifies that the certification schemes themselves meet an appropriate standard. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council is recognised as the global accreditation agency for sustainable tourism certification.

## **Activity system**

This describe the collective activity of multiple participants engaged in related activity as they work towards achieving a certain object or goal over time. Activity Systems describe the configuration of key components of human activity used to achieve objects by subjects. (Davis, 2010). Activity systems analysis (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) acknowledges the diversity of collective activity and recognises interactions, contextual and cultural factors.

## **Activity theory**

A body of theory that has its roots in Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology. This theory recognises that cognition and learning are grounded in human activity. Frameworks are used to analyse the cultural and technical mediation of human activity, through tools and instruments to achieve objects or goals (Davis, 2010).

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\*Denotes terms sourced from Honey & Rome, 2001 as cited in (Bien, 2007, pp. 24-26).

## **Biosphere reserve**

“Biosphere reserves are areas of terrestrial and coastal ecosystems promoting solutions to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use. They are internationally recognised, nominated by national governments and remain under sovereign jurisdiction of the states where they are located” (UNESCO, 2009a, p. 1).

## **Best practice**

A term used to designate excellence, the highest quality, or superior practices in a particular field by a tourism operator (Honey, 2002).

## **Certification\***

Certification is a voluntary procedure that assesses, monitors, and gives written assurance that a business, product, process, service, or management system conforms to specific requirements. It awards a marketable logo or seal to those that meet or exceed baseline standards. UNEP & UNWTO (2005, p. 102) more broadly define certification as a “mechanism for ensuring that an activity or product meets certain standards that may be set by government or agreed upon within an industry sector.”

## **Corporate social responsibility (CSR)**

Corporate social responsibility is a management concept whereby businesses integrate social and environmental concerns in business operations and interactions with stakeholders (Van Marrewijk & Werre, 2003).

## **Ecotourism**

Ecotourism is a type of sustainable tourism that is usually conducted in natural areas and has a focus on education and interpretation. The core difference in the definitions of ecotourism and sustainable tourism is the requirement that ecotourism takes place in predominately natural areas. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the wellbeing of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015, p1).

### **Ecotourism certification\***

Ecotourism certification programs cover businesses, services, and activities that describe themselves as involved in ecotourism. They focus on individual or site specific businesses, have standards that are tailored to local conditions, and are often largely or totally performance-based. Ecotourism Australia provides the ECO Certification program that certifies ecotourism products in Australia.

### **Environmental management system**

An environmental management system (EMS) “forms part of an overall management system that includes the organisational structure, responsibilities, practices, procedures, processes, and resources for determining and implementing the environmental policy. An environmental management system includes tools such as environmental impact assessment, environmental auditing, and strategic environmental assessment” (Synergy, 2000, p. viii).

### **Greenwash**

Greenwashing is where an environmentally unsustainable tourism product is promoted misleadingly as an environmentally sustainable product (Weaver, 2008). Many tourism products are ‘greenwashed’ by using the term ‘ecotourism’ incorrectly to describe a product based in nature, but not sympathetic to that product’s impact upon the environment and culture of the destination. Some certification programs have been accused of greenwashing due to their lack of independent auditing and non-specific criteria.

### **International Organization for Standardization (ISO)\***

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is a world federation based in Switzerland that develops voluntary standards designed to facilitate international manufacturing, trade, and communications. There are two international standards that can be associated with tourism certification. They do not solely address tourism. However, ISO standards do have relevance within certification programs. ISO 4001, which addresses environmental

impacts and ISO 9001, which addresses quality assurance. Most certification programs today will contain elements of these standards.

### **Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB)**

MAB is a UNESCO intergovernmental scientific program that aims to establish a scientific basis for the improvement of relationships between people and their environments. It combines the natural and social sciences, economics and education, to improve human livelihoods and the equitable sharing of benefits, and to safeguard natural and managed ecosystems, thus promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate, and environmentally sustainable (UNESCO, 2014b, p. 1).

### **Mass tourism\***

Mass tourism is commonly but loosely used to refer to popular forms of leisure tourism that involve the movement of a large number of people, usually on standardised, packaged-tour holidays or cruises.

### **Microbusiness**

The ABS defines microbusinesses as those that have less than 5 employees. Many also have the owner-managers as the only employees.

### **Process-based certification**

Process-based certification programs use environmental management systems (EMS) that are tailored to the specific business to assess and evaluate sustainable progress. The steps (i.e. process) are certified, not the outcome of those steps.

### **Performance-based certification\***

Performance-based certification programs use a set of externally determined environmental and usually socio-cultural and economic criteria (or benchmarks) to measure the sustainable performance of companies, services, tours and attractions.



## **Responsible tourism**

This term is often used interchangeably with sustainable tourism. It is used to describe tourism that maximises the benefits to local communities, minimises negative social or environmental impacts, and helps local people conserve fragile cultures and habitats. (Responsible Tourism Partnership, 2002).

## **Small business**

The ABS defines a small business as one that employs fewer than twenty people. This business is typically independently owned and operated. The owner-managers who run the business will also tend to be the principal decision makers.

## **Standard\***

A standard is a document approved by a recognised body that provides a model for the common and repeated use of a prescribed set of rules, conditions or requirements.

## **Sustainable development**

The Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, defines sustainable development as: “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UNWCED, 1987 p. 15).

## **Sustainable tourism**

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as: tourism that takes into account the full, current and future economic, social and environmental impacts. It addresses the needs of visitors, the industry, environment and host communities (UNEP & UNWTO, 2012, p. 1).

## **Sustainable tourism certification\***

Sustainable tourism certification is a process by which an independent agent verifies that a tourism product or service meets set criteria or standards. Criteria or standards measure a range of environmental, sociocultural, and economic equity issues both internally (within the business, service, or

product) and externally (on the surrounding community and physical environment).

**Tourism\***

Tourism is travel undertaken for pleasure or business with at least one overnight stay away from home.

**Voluntary initiatives\***

Voluntary initiatives within the tourism industry are usually focused on achieving environmental and social benefits beyond what the law requires. They may include certification, ecolabels, awards, and self-commitment initiatives.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

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Tourism is the world's largest and fastest growing industry, international tourist arrivals reached one billion in 2012 (UNWTO, 2012) and are predicted to grow at 3.8% per annum to 2020 (UNWTO, 2015). Tourism accounts for roughly one tenth of global employment and capital development (Dodds & Joppe, 2005). The economic benefits of tourism are widespread and well documented. Tourism also produces significant impacts upon natural resources and social systems. With such a globally diverse and rapidly growing industry there is pressure on tourism providers to take responsibility for the negative impacts of tourism and work towards long-term sustainable tourism development across all areas of impact; economic, environmental and social. There is now a focus on the corporate social responsibility (CSR) of tourism businesses to address not only economic concerns, but also those of a social and environmental nature.

The tourism industry is a dynamic and complex system, which includes many interacting components. The majority of tourism businesses are small and medium sized enterprises. Collectively, they are energy, carbon, water and waste intensive. Tourism involves diverse stakeholders, who all have different management objectives, which, Van Mai and Bosch (2010) state, makes it difficult to manage the industry as a whole in planning to promote sustainability. If sustainability objectives are to be met at a global level, there is a need to understand what factors lead individual tourism businesses to operate in a more socially and environmentally responsible manner (El Dief & Font, 2010). Additionally, there have been calls for research to address 'how' the concept of sustainability can be operationalised successfully by tourism businesses across the spectrum (Buckley, 2012b).

One mechanism of change suggested to assist in the global tourism sustainability challenge is the implementation of industry standards and processes via certification programs (Buckley, 2012a; Font, 2005; Honey, 2008). Sustainable tourism certification is considered a learning process. The educational component of participating in the certification process helps to

improve businesses' sustainability (Bien, 2007). The certification process provides a framework for businesses to develop, implement and report CSR practices.

A case study research strategy based upon cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and activity systems analysis is used in this research to investigate how tourism operators perceive and implement certification as a sustainable management tool. Noosa Biosphere Reserve is the case study site for this research. Noosa is one of Australia's most visited holiday destinations. It has a well developed tourism industry that has identified the need to move towards more sustainable practices (Tourism Noosa, 2012). Certification of tourism businesses has been identified as a possible tool to prompt this change. However, there is a need to interrogate 'how' certification is understood, perceived and initiated by the tourism business operator in this context.

This research provides a deeper understanding of the process of certification from the tourism business operator's perspective. Using activity theory as an analytical framework, we investigate motivations, experiences and perceptions of the certification process as a tool to enhance sustainability. We identify the factors and interactions that prompt business operators to choose or not choose certification and discuss the outcomes of sustainability certification in light of perceived benefits. The results and identified contradictions within the system are useful in identifying 'how' certification might be encouraged and supported to improve uptake and ultimately deliver an improvement in sustainable business practices in biosphere reserves.

This chapter outlines the background and selection of the topic, the context of the research and describes the case study site. The purpose and significance of the research are discussed, along with the scope and limitations of the study. An outline of the remaining chapters of this thesis is also provided.

## **1.1 BACKGROUND**

This researcher has a keen interest in the development of a more sustainability focused tourism industry. As a tourism professional for the past

twenty years and business owner and operator of an advanced certified tourism business within Noosa Biosphere for the past eight years, I have considerable industry experience and understanding of the goals of biosphere reserves, as well intimate knowledge of the certification process.

After working on a sustainable tourism development project for Noosa Biosphere Limited, I identified that eco and sustainable certification could be a viable tool to assist in the development and promotion of Noosa Biosphere Reserve as a sustainable tourism destination. However, further research was considered necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the processes and interactions involved; in particular understanding the barriers and catalysts for businesses to gain or not gain certification, and the business changes that result from the certification process. The ultimate goal of the research is to promote a more sustainable and marketable tourism destination that clearly articulates how sustainable tourism activities can deliver on the community vision through leadership and industry participation.

A review of the relevant literature highlights that, currently, there is limited research linking sustainable tourism and the biosphere reserve concept. Interestingly, the role of biosphere reserves is to foster, develop and promote sustainability. However, insight into ‘how’ this is achieved in practice is lacking. Also absent in recent studies is any understanding about tourism and the role it plays in biosphere reserves. This research aims to link the sustainable development aspirations of Noosa Biosphere Reserve with the operationalisation of certification as a tool to help develop and promote sustainability in tourism.

Noosa Biosphere Reserve was identified as an appropriate site for this project for a number of reasons. Firstly, the community has historically demonstrated a focus on sustainable development and environmental protection. Secondly, there is a developed tourism industry and an active destination management organisation (DMO), who have indicated a desire to improve sustainability. Thirdly, the local Noosa Biosphere Reserve management organisation is committed to working with community and industry to achieve improvements in sustainable outcomes.

## 1.2 CONTEXT

Sustainability is one of the tourism industry's major contemporary objectives (Ko, 2005). The UNWTO (2013) describe tourism as an economic and social phenomenon that generates employment and produces economic benefits. Tourism generates more than US\$1.5 trillion in export revenues (UNWTO, 2014c). In many countries and regions of the world tourism is the primary source of foreign exchange, employment and economic growth. However, there is increasing acknowledgment by the industry and stakeholders of the negative environmental, socioeconomic, and sociocultural impacts of tourism (Murphy & Price, 2005).

Tourism is based on a finite supply of attractions and places rich in scenic beauty and culture. Climate change and overuse of water and land resources is leading to the loss of natural and cultural environments upon which tourism depends. Furthermore, current tourism economies are based on mass consumption and growth. Consumers are groomed to expect access to cheap and frequent travel. Tourism businesses are faced with dwindling margins, rising costs and homogenisation of the tourism product. Local communities of tourism destinations are confronted with rising land, water and infrastructure prices, along with congestion, loss of amenity and social dislocation. Pollock (2013) maintains that despite the increase in the number of tourism businesses claiming to be sustainable, the fact is that the current system of mass tourism growth is unsustainable. The UNWTO (2014b) has identified that sustainable tourism is at the heart of tourism's future.

The very success and sustainable future of tourism is implicitly reliant upon CSR initiatives being implemented. The focus is on seeking a balance between economic, environmental and social imperatives. Promoting the uptake of CSR amongst tourism businesses requires approaches that fit the respective needs and capacities of individual businesses. CSR mechanisms are based upon the 'triple bottom line' approach where a framework is used for measuring and reporting business performance against economic, social and environmental performance. The perspective taken is that a sustainable business will be: financially secure; minimise negative environmental impacts; and conform to social expectations (UNIDO, n.d.).

One CSR mechanism of change suggested by tourism industry experts to assist in the global sustainability challenge faced by tourism is the implementation of industry standards via certification programs (Buckley, 2012a; Font, 2005; Honey, 2008). Certification within the tourism industry refers to the procedure of auditing and giving “written assurance that a facility, a product, service or management system meet specific standards” (Honey, 2002, p. 4). Generally, it is considered to be a mark of high quality as well as an indication of environmentally, economically and socially sound products (Haaland & Aas, 2010).

Certification is not the end product but rather, it is a tool that can assist in catalysing businesses to improve their environmental, social and economic performance. Bien (2007) suggests that it is the educational component of participating in the certification process that helps to improve businesses’ sustainability. Furthermore, Buckley (2012b) contends that certification is a useful voluntary CSR reporting tool.

Central to this research is an understanding of the operational issues faced by the tourism businesses implementing certification. Given the important role that tourism businesses play in the sustainable tourism agenda, it is crucial to understand, from the operators’ perspective, how certification is perceived and operationalised. The research context for this study is also influenced by current global shifts towards the development and promotion of sustainability within the tourism industry.

The current sustainable tourism landscape is characterised by:

- A commitment from the United Nations General Assembly to promote the development of ecotourism and sustainable tourism (2013);
- A plethora of certification programs that vary widely in their standard, application and credibility (Bien, 2007; Font, 2005; Font, Sanabria, & Skinner, 2003; Haaland & Aas, 2010);
- The creation of globally recognised standard criteria from which to evaluate and certify the sustainability of individual tourism businesses (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2012);

- An emphasis by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on the importance of the role of biosphere reserves as learning sites for local and regional sustainable development (UNESCO, 2009b); and
- The establishment of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism, which includes United Nations (UN) member bodies of United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and UNESCO. A core goal is to establish and implement innovative, multi-stakeholder projects that support sustainable tourism development (UNWTO, 2011).

This drive is qualified by other complicating factors including:

- low levels of certification of tourism businesses, despite global efforts to promote sustainable and eco-certification programs over the past twenty years (Dodds & Joppe, 2005); and
- scepticism among businesses regarding the relevance and benefit of certification schemes (Jarvis, Weeden, & Simcock, 2010).

This concerted global focus on improving the sustainability of the tourism industry is complemented by the development of the biosphere reserve program. Biosphere reserves are intended to act as incubators for local sustainable development projects and to share this information and learning with other biosphere reserves. UNESCO (2002, p. 2) states that the “World Network of Biosphere Reserves is a unique tool for international cooperation aiming at tracking the path of sustainable tourism through sharing of knowledge, best practices and experiences”. The Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program suggests that biosphere reserves are ideal places to test and develop innovative tourism models that aim to benefit local people and maintain culture, biodiversity and associated values. This research has implications for the development of sustainable tourism within biosphere reserves globally through the sharing and fostering of knowledge exchange as promoted by the MAB concept.



### 1.2.1 The case study site – Noosa Biosphere Reserve

Noosa Biosphere Reserve (NBR) was recognised by UNESCO in 2007 and encompasses the area of Noosa Shire. It covers 150,000 hectares of land and sea on Australia's Sunshine Coast (see Figure 1.1) and was the first biosphere reserve in Queensland (Noosa Biosphere Ltd, 2009). Noosa Biosphere Limited (NBL) was the inaugural management organisation, which has recently been replaced by the Noosa Biosphere Foundation (NBF). This management group contributes to coordinating activities with a focus on sustainable development and conservation of the natural, cultural and heritage environments of the region.

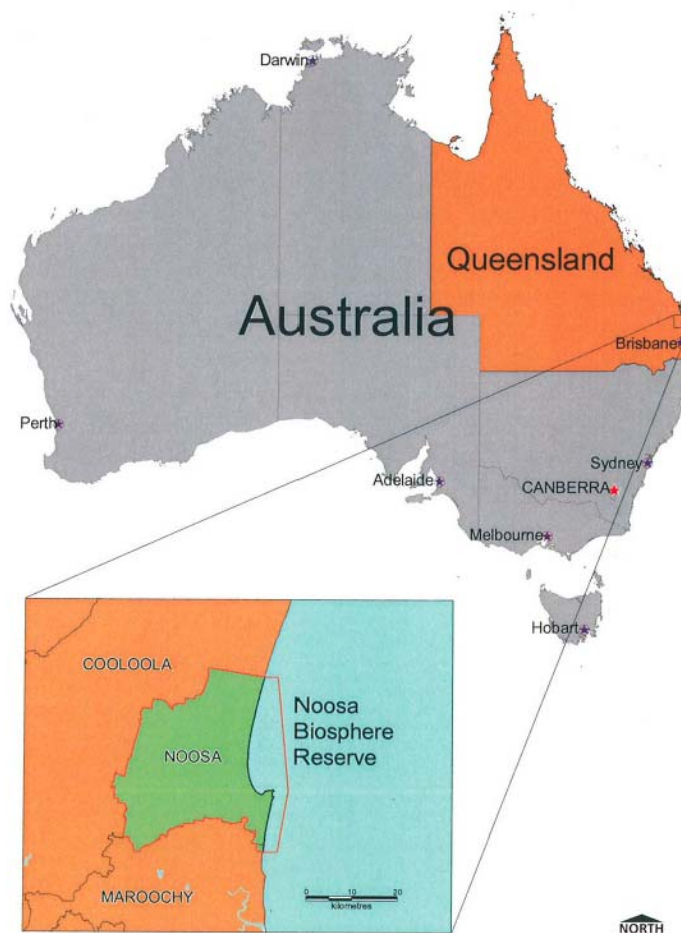


Figure 1.1 Noosa Biosphere Reserve Map

Historically, Noosa's community has placed a strong emphasis upon preservation of the natural environment and biodiversity. This has been achieved through thoughtful strategic planning and strict environmental and development controls (Gloster, 1997). The community advocates for

development that is sympathetic to the natural environment and in keeping with the local aesthetics. Noosa's stunning pristine environment and wealth of nature-based activities has led to continued tourism growth and recognition of Noosa as one of Australia's most popular holiday destinations.

Currently, tourism is recognised as the single biggest economic contributor to the Noosa region, attracting nearly 2.1 million visitors annually and contributing almost \$869 million into the local economy (Tourism Noosa, 2015). The industry provides an estimated 8,000 full time equivalent jobs, which equates to at least 14,000 people employed in the industry (Tourism Noosa, 2012). Noosa's tourism success is based upon its pristine natural environment, rich biodiversity and safe, relaxed atmosphere. Noosa's tourism industry has enjoyed many years of continual growth and success. However, as a destination, it is close to the stagnation phase described in Butler's Destination Lifecycle model (Butler, 1980). Times are changing for tourism in Noosa. The local community of Noosa is becoming increasingly aware of the impact of tourism on the natural environment and amenity of the area. Traffic congestion and access to beaches is becoming problematic. Waste disposal and water use costs are rising. Economically, the reliance on sun-and-sand tourism creates an unstable economy that is at the mercy of good weather and favourable economic conditions. Consumers are increasingly cost-sensitive and more aware of the importance of businesses' corporate social responsibilities.

If Noosa's tourism industry is to rejuvenate and meet the demands of the changing marketplace then it is important that the industry work collectively to develop and implement best practice CSR initiatives and continuous improvement business strategies. Tourism consumers and the local community are becoming increasingly aware of the impacts caused by mass tourism. Growth in ecotourism and responsible tourism is occurring rapidly (Mullis & Figart, 2013). It is estimated that global spending on ecotourism is increasing at about six times the industry-wide rate (UNEP & UNWTO, 2011). Consumers are beginning to understand and demand information and the demonstration of sustainable business practices, and are making travel choices based on this information.

A 2009 study by the consulting firm, Mintel International (as cited in Esparon, 2013), found that 80% of respondents would be more likely to purchase a holiday from tourism enterprises with a sustainable tourism policy. Seventy-one percent of respondents in the same study were strongly of the view that visitors should not damage the environment. Additionally, Bergin-Seers and Mair (2008) found that consumers sought environmental information about tourism products across different stages of their holiday: while booking (29.3%), prior to departure (25.8%), and after arrival at their holiday destination (44.9%). A recent Conde Nast Traveller 2009 survey (Center for Responsible Travel (CREST), 2013) also found that 87% of respondents feel it is important that a hotel is environmentally friendly. Almost 75% of respondents said they are influenced by a hotel's environmental policies when deciding on their accommodation.

In 2013, Tourism Noosa, the official local tourism destination management organisation (DMO) took action and developed, in partnership with the industry, their *2013 – 2016 Sustainable Destination Action Plan*. This plan set out a new strategic vision for the leadership and management of the tourism industry within Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The destination vision is to:

Redefine sustainable luxury: The Noosa region will exceed expectations in each of our sophisticated villages by delivering outstanding and friendly service in a unique natural environment where visitors can actively participate and engage to re-energise, reconnect and relax. (Tourism Noosa, 2012, p. 4)

Tourism Noosa's organisational vision was restated to be:

Lead by example: Tourism Noosa with the support of industry will be seen as a community leadership organisation that works with the community to achieve economic, social and environmental sustainability for tourism in the Noosa region. (Tourism Noosa, 2012, p. 4)

A key aim of this plan is to “position Noosa as a leader in corporate social responsibility that delivers real conservation outcomes” (2012, p. 14). The plan outlines a commitment to link certification programs with sustainable industry development. A pilot study commissioned by Noosa Biosphere Ltd in

January 2013 identified that while there is a low rate of certification among tourism businesses currently, there is a relatively high level of interest from operators to learn more about certification.

The stage has been set strategically with the development of this action plan. Critically, it is the translation and operationalisation of these destination goals at the individual tourism business level that will dictate the success of the action plan. Accordingly, this research has undertaken to explore and extend knowledge about the operationalisation of these sustainability goals through the use of certification as a tool.

### **1.3 PURPOSE**

The present research is concerned with examining certification of tourism businesses within Noosa Biosphere Reserve. It aims to benefit the tourism industry, destination management organisations, protected area management agencies, and the biosphere reserve host communities where tourism is crucial for socio-economic wellbeing. The research also aims to inform planning and policy development by government at all levels.

The aims of this research project are to:

- Explore tourism industry perception, engagement and interaction with sustainable tourism certification programs in Noosa Biosphere Reserve; and
- Investigate linkages between certification and the biosphere reserve concept to foster and promote sustainability of tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

The following research objectives (ROs) have been used to address the research goals:

**Research Objective 1:** Explore the perspectives, experiences and motivations of business operators in relation to sustainability certification.

**Research Objective 2:** Investigate and identify any tensions and contradictions inhibiting the implementation of certification as a sustainable business development tool.

**Research Objective 3:** Identify interactions and opportunities for innovation to enhance linkages between certification and the biosphere reserve concept to foster and develop a sustainable tourism industry.

The stated research aims and objectives were addressed by the following research questions (RQs):

**Research Question 1:** How is certification currently operationalised by tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve?

**Research Question 2:** How do the biosphere reserve concept and certification link to promote the sustainability of tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve?

#### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE**

This research is significant for a number of reasons. Namely it fills some of the identified gaps in current research surrounding sustainable tourism, certification and biosphere reserves by providing a real-world case study. The research explores the practical implications of the global push for sustainability within the tourism industry and identifies tensions and contradictions in the operationalisation of sustainable tourism certification. Furthermore, this research identifies the necessary elements and interactions required to induce improved sustainability performance through certification of tourism business. The researcher's professional background and involvement in the tourism industry firmly places this applied research in the area of operationalising and reflecting on the concept of sustainability for small tourism businesses. The focus on individual business operators' perceptions and implementation of sustainable development tools has been identified as lacking in recent tourism research (Buckley, 2012b).

The process and methodology employed in this project have a high potential to be applied globally. The extensive network of 631 biosphere reserves across the world promote sharing and knowledge exchange to develop initiatives for sustainable development. The research also adds to the body of knowledge concerning the practical implementation of CHAT as a framework to explore and analyse activity systems in order to unveil assumptions, tensions and contradictions.

Additionally, there is evidence of a dilution of knowledge from academic research to the practical application of this knowledge by the industry (Cooper, 2006). The mechanism of the MAB program's network of biosphere reserves can be a solution to the challenge of transferring this knowledge between researchers and tourism operators.

The research aims to benefit the tourism industry, protected area management agencies, and biosphere reserve host communities where tourism is crucial for socioeconomic wellbeing. The research also aims to inform planning and policy development by different levels of government and destination management organisations.

## **1.5 SCOPE**

The scope of this research is the case study site of Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The research explores tourism operators' perceptions and operationalisation of sustainable tourism certification programs in the biosphere reserve context.

As with all research, there are certain unavoidable limitations. This case study utilises a sample of over one hundred tourism businesses. They have provided input of their lived, real-life experiences. However, the scope of the research is limited to the case study site of Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The ratio of certified businesses to non-certified businesses included in the sample is higher than the industry average, with less than one percent of tourism businesses across the industry achieving certification (Dodds & Joppe, 2005). The higher than average response from certified operators may be attributed to their interest in the study because they have achieved certification. Tourism businesses that have not attained certification may have less interest in the topic and therefore may not have participated in the study. This skew in the sample population may mean the results of the survey are not generalisable across the tourism industry, but rather are reflective of this individual case study site. It is therefore acknowledged that this case study is exploratory, as its small scale prevents it from being fully explanatory (Yin, 2009).

## 1.6 THESIS OUTLINE

In this chapter an introduction to the background of the topic and the case study site of Noosa Biosphere Reserve has been given. The purpose and scope have been defined and the research questions identified. The proceeding chapters are outlined below.

*Chapter 2* provides a review of the literature that contextualises this study in relation to previous research and literature on the topic. Gaps in knowledge and further research areas are identified. Implications from the review of the literature are drawn and the research framework for this study, based on cultural historical activity theory, is introduced.

*Chapter 3* details the research strategy and methodology used to examine the stated research questions. The components of case study research method and the administration of the data collection are explained. Analysis methods are discussed and the CHAT based activity analysis process detailed. Finally, the limitations of the research and ethical considerations are noted.

*Chapter 4* considers the results of the research with a particular focus on findings from the survey questionnaire. A profile of the participants is provided. The results are discussed through seven themes emerging from the research.

*Chapter 5* presents the findings based on the CHAT analysis framework used. The activity system components are described and two case study vignettes provided. Contradictions are then identified in the activity system and discussed. A framework for the development of motivational drivers of certification is proposed and opportunities for innovation and facilitation of change are detailed. Finally, the learning opportunities presented by the biosphere reserve concept are discussed.

*Chapter 6* presents the conclusions of the research and relates this back to the research objectives and questions. Limitations identified through the research process are detailed and opportunities for further research are discussed. Finally, concluding remarks are provided.





# Chapter 2: Literature review

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is a critical issue in the tourism industry. Businesses, governments, destination management organisations and visitors, are all searching for ways to reduce environmental and social impacts, while simultaneously continuing to enjoy the economic and experiential benefits that tourism can bring. This chapter reviews the literature across three main topic areas related to this research. These topic areas are: sustainable tourism; certification in tourism; and biosphere reserves. It begins with an introduction to the origins and development of the sustainable tourism agenda, before the use of tourism certification programs to promote and achieve global sustainability objectives is detailed in Section 2.3. Then decisional factors, drivers and challenges encountered by operators in choosing to operate more sustainably and implement certification are explored in Section 2.4. The biosphere reserve concept and its 'learning laboratory' approach to exploring and promoting sustainable development initiatives are introduced in Section 2.5. Section 2.6 highlights the implications from the literature and Section 2.7 develops the analytical framework for the present study using cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) as a conceptual and methodological approach.

## 2.2 ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUSTAINBLE TOURISM AGENDA

The concepts of sustainable development and sustainable tourism have been on the tourism industry's agenda for close to thirty years (Mair & Jago, 2010). The sustainability concept originates from articulated concerns about humanity's impact upon the environment and the importance of limiting this impact for future prosperity. The 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report, *Our Common Future*, known as the Brundtland Report, identified sustainable development as a major global concern. The deteriorating condition of the world's natural environment inspired agreement amongst world leaders that sustainable development

should be a central priority of governments, private institutions, and organisations (UNWCED, 1987). Here the concept of sustainable development was defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p. 43). Unlike previous notions of development, sustainable development incorporates ecological, social and economic aspects. The Brundtland Report emphasised: holistic planning and strategy making; the need to protect both human heritage and biodiversity; and for development to occur in such a way that productivity can be sustained over the long term for future generations (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Hall, 2010). Sustainability can also be perceived as a dynamic balance. This balance comprises the ecosystems capacity to maintain resilience while meeting demands of human economic and socioeconomic activity (Haberl et al., 2006).

Sustainable tourism has its origins in these notions of sustainability. The environmental and social impacts of tourism have come to the forefront since the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED, also known as the Rio Earth Summit), was held in 1992. Weaver (2006) claims it was the development of *Agenda 21* at this conference that catalysed the concept of sustainable tourism becoming more broadly institutionalised by global organisations such as the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). At this event, tourism was identified as one of the five main industries in need of achieving sustainable development (Budeanu, 1999; Murphy & Price, 2005).

Following this global event, three international organisations, the WTO, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and the Earth Council, joined together in 1996 to release *Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry*, which contained priority areas for action with defined objectives and practical suggestions to businesses and governments for implementing sustainable tourism. It was this document that emphasised the importance of partnerships between government and industry, and demonstrated the benefits of making all forms of tourism sustainable, rather than just the niche ecotourism sector.

This focus on sustainable tourism by the leading international organisations resulted in over two hundred different definitions of sustainable development and sustainable tourism (Graci & Dodds, 2010). McCool and Moisey (2008) claim this created a level of confusion and added to the challenge of operationalising and implementing the sustainable tourism concept. Despite the number and variety of definitions and conceptualisations, there is, however, general consensus regarding the key principles of sustainable tourism (Ayuso, 2007). Sustainable tourism considers a wide array of social, environmental and economic conditions along with the capacity to sustain those conditions and tourism experiences and opportunities over time (Weaver, 2001).

The WTO and UNEP, in their publication, *Making Tourism More Sustainable, A Guide for Policy-Makers*, propose a comprehensive definition of sustainable tourism:

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability. Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005, p. 11).

This definition incorporates not only the idea that sustainable tourism can be applied to all forms of tourism, but that in order for it to be successful it must include the participation of all stakeholders and strong political leadership. It also indicates the importance of ongoing monitoring and continuous

improvement for success, and notes that for tourism to be sustainable, a high level of visitor satisfaction and engagement with sustainable practices is necessary (Graci & Dodds, 2010).

This study into certification of tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve is based upon this definition. This approach not only focuses on the impacts of tourism, but also incorporates management of tourism development and knowledge transfer as key areas of sustainable tourism.

It should be noted that nature-based tourism, responsible tourism and green tourism are all terms often used interchangeably with sustainable tourism. They can all be applied to the gentler, more socially and environmentally sensitive type of tourism. McCool and Moisey (2008) describe this type of tourism as more in keeping with the shifting global focus from mass consumption to one more focused on sustainability principles. In this study, the term sustainable tourism is used to cover all forms of tourism that seek to limit environmental and social impacts and provide benefit to host communities.

At face value the notion of sustainable tourism is incredibly successful. Globally, it now appears every governing body, tourism business, destination and academic seems to refer to sustainable tourism in one manner or another. There has been widespread adoption of the term in policies, statements and marketing of governments, industry organisations and individual tourism firms. But researchers are finding that, in reality, tourism is less sustainable than ever. Buckley's recent meta-analysis of seven academic case studies, relating to sustainability and praxis to industry implementation and reporting, concludes that the tourism industry is "far from sustainable" (Buckley, 2012b, p. 534). Some academics contend that sustainability in tourism is generally an aspirational goal, rather than a measurable or achievable objective. Ko (2005) argues that the application of the concept of sustainable development as an achievable and practical objective for tourism has not yet evolved. Others maintain that sustainability is increasingly being conceived of as a transition and learning process (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2005). Here it is perceived as a dynamic rather than

static goal that needs to be managed adaptively, where continuous and collective learning is facilitated.

There are increasing calls for research which links academic and government interests in pursuing more sustainable tourism development with front-line practitioners, such as the tourism business operators (Mair & Jago, 2010; Rivera, 2002; Roberts & Tribe, 2008; Russillo, Honey, & Rome, 2007; Tzschentke, Kirk, & Lynch, 2008; Waligo, Clarke, & Hawkins, 2012). The recent literature highlights the need for new research to address 'how' the concept of sustainability can be operationalised successfully by tourism firms in a practical and feasible fashion. Furthermore, Graci & Dodds (2010) state there is a need to understand what is impeding successful implementation and how these impediments can be overcome. Central to this understanding is identifying the factors that contribute to the gap between attitude and action.

Tourism certification programs are seen as one way to encourage sustainable tourism and harmonise the conceptualisation of sustainable practice into everyday business (Bowman, 2011). Certification programs provide a valid framework for tourism business to develop sustainable practices through education, adaption and continuous improvement. Certification is also proposed as a useful tool to encourage CSR practices and reporting. Certification is viewed as a learning process that stimulates action and knowledge generation. It is this practical implementation and the learning process associated with the sustainability concept that this study focuses on, through using certification as a mechanism to explore the operationalisation of sustainability in tourism.

### **2.3 TOURISM CERTIFICATION AS A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TOOL**

Certification for *quality* in tourism has existed for nearly a century and has achieved significant market recognition. The five-star rating system of hotel quality took decades to build, and today is accepted worldwide as a recognisable and useful standard. *Sustainable tourism* certification on the other hand, has existed for around thirty years and has faced many

challenges relating to its credibility and legitimacy in the marketplace (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a; Font, 2002b).

Beginning with the Earth Summit in 1992 through to the International Year of Ecotourism in 2002, there were more than sixty tourism certification programs developed (Bien, 2007; Hansen, 2007). Originally these programs focused mainly on environmental business performance and many were targeted specifically at eco-tourism businesses. The international *Mohonk Agreement* in 2000 was the first consensus agreement that clearly differentiated between sustainable tourism and ecotourism. This agreement noted that sustainable tourism products are products which operate in harmony with the local environment, community, and cultures, so that these become the permanent beneficiaries (Rainforest Alliance, 2000). Sustainable tourism principles can be applied to any kind of tourism at any scale. Ecotourism is considered a subset of sustainable tourism with a clearly defined relationship between the business and its clients with nature, conservation and local culture. Ecotourism products contain an important element of interpretation and learning. This document also advanced a proposal for an international certification program for sustainable tourism and ecotourism.

### **2.3.1 Global standards for sustainable tourism certification**

Today there are more than 170 certification programs globally that focus on sustainable tourism, through criteria and standards, which endorse commitment and performance regarding environmentally sound and socially responsible business practices (ECOTRANS, 2015). Over the past ten years there has been a focus on the development of global standards for tourism certification (Buckley, 2002; Dodds & Joppe, 2005; Font, 2005; Hamele, 2002; Rainforest Alliance, 2000; Tjolle, 2008). It had been feared that the concept would become diluted due to the sheer number of programs in existence, resulting in confusion for both the tourism operator and the tourist (Font & Sallows, 2002; Haaland & Aas, 2010; Honey, 2002; Klintman, 2012).

These global standards are now in place with the establishment of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and the development of a set of

internationally recognised criteria for hotels, tours and destinations. The GSTC is charged with the responsibility for issuing accreditation for certification programs that meet the GSTC criteria. To date, twenty programs have been recognised as having criteria that align with the GSTC standards (ECOTRANS, 2015). Two of these programs, EarthCheck and Ecotourism Australia's ECO Certification, are promoted as available to Australian tourism businesses. However, Buckley (2012a) claims some multilateral government organisations have not been satisfied with the approach of the GSTC being a consultative mechanism with voluntary evaluation criteria. Most notable amongst these is the UNEP Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism that has established parallel mechanisms of their own. Additionally, various other organisations have established websites and programs with similar names to capitalise on the publicity of these initiatives for commercial purposes. The net effect of this has been to create further confusion for tourism operators and consumers in the already heavily muddled waters of tourism certification.

Added to this confusion is the misapplication of the terms *certification* and *accreditation*. These terms are often used interchangeably, but are in fact two distinctly different processes<sup>2</sup>. *Certification* is the formal process under which an independent body assesses, audits and gives written assurance that a facility, product, process or service meets a specific standard (Buckley, 2002; Font et al., 2003; Honey & Rome, 2001). Recognised businesses are awarded a logo or eco-label for meeting or exceeding baseline standards (Honey, 2002). Generally, this is considered to be a mark of high quality as well as an indication of environmentally, economically and socially sound products (Font, 2002b; Haaland & Aas, 2010; Toth, 2002). Certification programs may be operated either by private or public agencies.

*Accreditation* is the higher-level process where a body not associated with any particular certification program, certifies that the certification programs themselves meet an appropriate standard (Black & Crabtree, 2007; Buckley, 2002; Font & Sallows, 2002). This accreditation sets quality standards for both industry and markets and adds credibility and validity to accredited

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<sup>2</sup> In Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Fiji and some other places, accreditation has been used synonymously with certification, but in this study, they have distinct meanings.

certification schemes (Font, 2003; Klintman, 2012). Accreditation is considered particularly necessary in tourism to legitimise sustainable tourism certification where the sheer number of programs and variety of standards results in potential for accusations of 'greenwash' (Font, 2001; Haaland & Aas, 2010) and consumer scepticism (Jarvis et al., 2010; T. Roth, 2010).

### **2.3.2 Process- and performance-based certification programs**

Tourism industry stakeholders have an interest in assuring that tourism operators implement high standards and achieve certification. This is because it is seen as a valuable tool, which helps to define and communicate sustainable and responsible practices to consumers across the broader marketplace (Bendell & Font, 2004; Russillo et al., 2007). Certification proponents generally consider that the more a certification program takes account of the natural and social environment (of economy and culture), the more effectively it can contribute to sustainable development at the global and the local level (Hamele, 2012).

While certification programs all share common principles and aims, they are distinguished by whether they use a process or performance methodology. Certification programs in the tourism industry can be divided into two main types: process-based and performance-based (Honey, 2003). There are rationales both for and against both types of programs. Increasingly, certification programs are adopting elements from both approaches. It is important to understand the different approaches. They affect how a program is implemented and sustainable performance is measured and reported. Table 2.1 details the difference in methodology between process- and performance-based certification programs.



Table 2.1 Features of process-based and performance-based certification programs

Process-based Certification Programs	Performance-based Certification Programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based upon environmental management systems (EMS)</li> <li>• Management establish systems for monitoring certain criteria through procedures and processes</li> <li>• Generally requires outside consultants</li> <li>• Relatively expensive</li> <li>• Emphasis on internal cost saving and environmental impact reforms</li> <li>• No universal standards: cannot compare across businesses and industries</li> <li>• Certification awarded for setting up process not for achieving fixed goals</li> <li>• Best suited for large businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set criteria that permits comparisons among certified businesses</li> <li>• Measures achievement, not intent</li> <li>• Can include checklist intelligible to both business and consumers</li> <li>• More transparent and less expensive</li> <li>• Can include environmental and socio-economic criteria</li> <li>• Can involve a variety of stakeholders</li> <li>• Can offer different levels of achievement / logos</li> <li>• Suited for small, medium and large businesses.</li> </ul>

Adapted from (Honey & Bien, 2005)

Process-based schemes place an emphasis on the implementation of environmental management systems (EMS) to monitor and improve performance. Process-based certification programs do not set performance standards, but rather offer management and policy solutions. Process-based programs are widely used to help management conduct baseline studies, train staff and set up systems for ongoing monitoring. Process-based programs are more concerned with procedure than result, meaning they focus on how a business operates, not just outputs, with the intention to help improve business practices. Proponents of the process-based approach contend that it is more collaborative and responsive to the individual needs of businesses of all sizes and types. Critics counter that process-based programs cannot guarantee sustainability because they focus on the grey characteristics of process rather than the green characteristics of measurable outcomes. Additionally, process-based schemes tend to be expensive for small businesses, as the development of an EMS can be costly if external consultants are involved. It is also claimed that they are more difficult to measure and compare to industry standards (Bien, 2007; Chan, 2011; Honey, 2002). The best known process-based standard is the ISO 4001 standard for 'green' hotel certification. In Australia, process-based certifications include, the ECO Certification (also known as NEAP) programs managed by Ecotourism Australia, the Gumnut Award program for the

caravan and camping sector and Eco-Friendly STAR Certification, operated by AAA Tourism. (Refer to Appendix A for a listing and details of certification schemes available to tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.)

Performance-based schemes focus on the measurement of indicators and achieving benchmarks in areas such as water and energy consumption, and waste production (Font, 2007). This type of certification allows for comparison between businesses, as there is a common unit of measurement. They are also useful for allowing accurate reporting and year-on-year analysis. However, Bowman (2011) maintains that performance-based programs can also be expensive to implement, maintain and monitor, where they require ongoing auditing and development of continuous improvement strategies. Nevertheless, for this reason they are considered the most useful and beneficial type of certification programs. Performance-based programs available to Queensland tourism businesses are the GSTC recognised and internationally applied EarthCheck program (known as Green Globe until 2009), and the locally developed and operated Queensland ecoBiz program. (Appendix B provides a matrix for comparison details of certification programs available to tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.)

Research concluded that the combined approach is the most successful because it:

encourages business to establish comprehensive environmental management systems that deliver systematic and continuous improvements, include performance targets and also encourage business to invest in technologies that deliver the greatest economic and environmental benefits within a specific region. (Synergy, 2000, p. 39).

They are most effective when they combine performance criteria to ensure minimum requirements are met, with a process-based approach to ensure the business is proactive towards making future improvements. Additionally, certification schemes are considered more legitimate when they are recognised in government legislation and are independently audited. Credible certification programs openly publish both the standards and the evaluation

process (Black & Crabtree, 2007; Buckley, 2002; Font, 2005; Font & Sallows, 2002).

### **2.3.3 Benefits and criticisms of sustainable tourism certification**

In an industry such as tourism that remains largely unregulated, the adoption of voluntary programs such as certification is seen to be especially crucial in ensuring the supply of high quality sustainable products (Tepelus & Cordoba, 2005). Prominent tourism expert Buckley (2012a) contends that, eco and sustainable certification remains a relatively neglected area in the literature of tourism research. There have been research projects that have analysed and evaluated particular certification programs. Hansen (2007) studied the Sustainable Tourism Education (STEP) certification Program; Hamele (2002) discusses eco-labels (certification) in Europe and the establishment of the VISIT certification program. Blackman, Naranjo, Robalino, Alpizar, and Rivera (2012) explored the economic benefit to communities arising from Costa Rica's Blue Flag Program. Font and Harris (2004) reviewed five programs from different countries in relation to their socioeconomic criteria, and Haaland and Aas (2010) examined three national certification programs from Australia, Costa Rica and Sweden by comparing their standards, organisation, and management with a view to developing a Norwegian certification system.

Significantly, Ayuso (2007) conducted a study into the effectiveness of voluntary sustainability instruments, including codes of conduct, certifications and awards, environmental management systems and performance indicators, for the hotel sector in Spain. This study found that formal certification systems appear to be the most effective instruments to guarantee an improvement of businesses' sustainable performance and offer a wider range of tangible and intangible benefits. However, much debate has taken place regarding the merits and criticisms of certification and whether the 'proposed' benefits of certification actually translate into demonstrated outcomes.

### ***Benefits of sustainable tourism certification***

A significant body of literature indicates that sustainable tourism certification not only provides direct benefits to the certified business, but also to consumers, governments, local communities and the environment. However, there is limited literature exploring the extent to which these benefits are actually delivered as demonstrated outcomes.

For tourism businesses the literature identifies two main benefits from certification: improved business practices and sustainability performance; and improving the market performance of certified businesses (Font & Epler-Wood, 2007). As a management tool, certification can assist businesses to improve quality, productivity and environmental and social management processes. Certification is also viewed as a useful CSR reporting tool, because it helps businesses to establish a consistent set of procedures, policies and practices to steer business operations (Dodds & Joppe, 2005). Bien (2007) contends the main point to consider is that certification is not the end product, but rather it is the educational component of participating in the certification process that is seen as a significant benefit. In particular, certification is noted as helping business operators become more environmentally aware, protect sensitive environmental areas, reduce resource use and communicate their sustainable initiatives to the community and visitors (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b; Haaland & Aas, 2010; Russillo et al., 2007). While the process has its own benefits, the result of improved business performance and increased resource efficiencies is generally cost savings and improved economic performance (Bien, 2007; Graci & Dodds, 2015).

As a marketing tool, certification is said to provide benefit to business by providing a mechanism for certified businesses to differentiate themselves from competitors (Font, 2002a, 2003). Certification is also said to provide a competitive advantage through links with distribution channels and consumers via marketing efforts, and is seen also as a way to showcase sustainable tourism best practice (Graci & Dodds, 2015).

The benefits of certification extend beyond the individual tourism businesses to management organisations, government, the local community and the visitor. For governments and management organisations, certification helps to protect market niches and provides destination marketing opportunities (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b; Font & Epler-Wood, 2007; Jarvis et al., 2010). It can also help to lower the cost of regulatory environmental protection through the encouragement of voluntary initiatives utilising the certification framework. Additionally, it can also be used as criteria by regulatory agencies to grant permits and access, and by insurance underwriters to issue policies and set premiums (Bergin-Seers & Mair, 2008; Buckley, 2002). For the local community improved business efficiencies and operator learning may also provide enhanced economic benefit to the region, greater awareness of societal and cultural impacts, along with improved environmental outcomes (Bien, 2007; Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b).

Despite these claims of the benefits of certification, little insight has been given to the tangible outcomes of the certification process. There is limited information as to whether the purported benefits of certification are actually being experienced by certified businesses. There is a noticeable gap in the research exploring 'how' tourism operators translate the certification process as a knowledge gaining and learning mechanism. Haaland & Aas (2010) call for more studies that document the changes and improvements resulting from certification in order to more effectively assess the value of certification and Font (2007) also claims that more research is needed to explore the extent to which certified businesses achieve the promoted benefits.

### ***Criticisms of sustainable tourism certification***

Certification programs and the push for global harmonisation of certification standards has attracted considerable discussion and disquiet in recent times. There is an emerging argument that globalisation of certification is creating inequity for small tourism business and less developed tourism destinations (Bowman, 2011; Dodds & Joppe, 2009b). Globally recognised certification programs are criticised for their high entry and implementation costs, technically difficult and time consuming processes, and high level of bureaucracy (Font, 2001; Jarvis et al., 2010) Also, Carlsen, Jago, Harris, &

de Sliva (2006) found many small tourism businesses are disadvantaged as they lack the knowledge and awareness about certification and the skills and time required to complete the certification process. Font (2007) contends there is consensus that small to medium firms are typically treated unfavourably in global certification programs. This is generally because they face more constraints than larger businesses in terms of resources, knowledge and motivation to meet certification criteria and achieve certification.

This means it is difficult to uphold the values of the Mohonk Agreement (2000, p. 1) that “the development of a certification scheme should be a participatory, multi-stakeholder, and multi-sectoral process”. There is evidence of small tourism firms being marginalised from the development of certification programs. Therefore they are more likely to be disengaged and hold certification in low esteem (Ingram, 2007; Medina, 2005; Thwaites, 2007; Vivanco, 2007). In light of this discord, researchers are now calling for more recognition to be placed on stakeholder engagement and local decision-making participation in the setting of criteria and systems for certification (Bowman, 2011; Jamal, Borges, & Stronza, 2006; Klintman, 2012).

Certification programs have also been criticised in the past for focusing too much on accommodation and ecotourism providers, and for being weighted too heavily in favour of environmental benefit (Font, 2002b; Font & Buckley, 2001), with many early schemes ignoring sociocultural issues (Font & Harris, 2004; Tepelus & Cordoba, 2005). There is also consensus that they are generally too focused on management processes rather than performance outcomes (Buckley, 2012a).

Notwithstanding the divergent views noted above, certification is still considered a valuable tool to assist in the achievement of sustainability goals for the industry. However, if certification in the tourism industry is to grow and become the useful tool it is heralded to be, there is a need to further explore and understand the motivational drivers and barriers to businesses seeking or not seeking certification.

### **2.3.4 Motivational drivers of sustainable tourism certification**

Tourism operator motivation towards the implementation of certification as a sustainable management tool is influenced by their perceptions of drivers, benefits and constraining factors. Motivation refers to the factors that activate, direct, and sustain goal directed certification action. Motives are the needs or wants that drive what we do; they are the 'whys' of behaviour. A motive cannot actually be observed; rather one is inferred to exist based on the behaviour exhibited (Nevid, 2013).

Motivation is described as either being intrinsic or extrinsic. Extrinsic motivation arises from outside the individual and is often dependent upon perceived rewards or benefits. Extrinsic motivations are concerned with competition, evaluation, recognition, money and other tangible incentives. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, arises from within the individual. It is self-determined and is generally not driven by reward or benefit apart from personal satisfaction, enjoyment and interest (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994). When considering motivation in the context of tourism businesses and their implementation of environmental and sustainable instruments, such as certification, Ayuso (2007) refers to motivation as being either ethical or strategic. Ethical motivation comes from within the tourism operator or manager and is influenced by personal awareness and values. Strategic motivation is driven by perceived benefits to the business such as competitive advantage, image enhancement, financial gain and regulatory compliance. These benefits are known as drivers of motivation. Drivers are the factors that lead businesses to take sustainable action, even when they do not see an intrinsic need to do so (Okereke, 2007).

These driving factors of motivation for the 'greening' of tourism business are described and investigated in many recent studies. The drivers of ethical motivation are described as personal values, knowledge and attitudes surrounding the sustainability concept. Drivers of extrinsic motivation are such things as: image enhancement; the opportunity to gain competitive advantage; and cost savings as a result of lower and more efficient use of resources, such as energy and water.

There are also other contextual drivers that influence tourism operators to implement more sustainable business practices. These include responding to stakeholder pressure, such as visitor and community demand, media influence, institutional pressure from associations and business organisations and complying with regulations. Table 2.2 summarises the motivational drivers to sustainable action of tourism businesses identified in the literature.

Álvarez Gil, Burgos Jiménez & Céspedes Lorente (2001) report that much of the research in this area has only produced lists of drivers, which are open to criticisms of reductionism. They emphasise the need for further research that focuses on the process of 'greening' rather than just listing drivers. In response to this conclusion, Mair & Jago (2010) proposed a conceptual model of the corporate greening process in the organisational context of business events in the tourism sector. They developed this model based on the earlier research of Bansal & Roth (2000); Marshall, Cordano, and Silverman (2005) and Lynes & Andrachuk (2008). The model not only refers to drivers noted above, but also includes barriers faced by tourism businesses in the process of greening their businesses. This model takes into account the organisational and external contexts of the tourism setting.

Table 2.2 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers of certification

Motivational Drivers	References
<b>Intrinsic motivational drivers</b>	
Ethical drivers – personal values, knowledge and attitudes	(Anderson & Bateman, 2000; Bansal, 2003; Bansal & Roth, 2000; Bramwell & Alletorp, 2001; Lynes & Dredge, 2006; Marshall et al., 2005; Tzschentke et al., 2008)
<b>Extrinsic motivational drivers</b>	
Image enhancement, profile	(Bramwell & Alletorp, 2001; Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b; D'Souza, 2004; Harris, 2007; Sheldon & Park, 2011)
Gaining competitive advantage	(Bansal & Roth, 2000; Bramwell & Alletorp, 2001; Claver-Cortés, Molina-Azorín, Pereira-Moliner, & López-Gamero, 2007; Lynes & Andrachuk, 2008; Marshall et al., 2005)
Cost savings	(Bohdanowicz, 2005; Pizam, 2009; Rivera & De Leon, 2005; Tzschentke et al., 2008)



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Pressure from stakeholders – visitor, community, media and institutions	(Álvarez Gil et al., 2001; Bohdanowicz, 2005; Bramwell & Alletorp, 2001; Claver-Cortés et al., 2007; Lynes & Dredge, 2006)
Regulatory compliance	(Bansal & Roth, 2000; Bramwell & Alletorp, 2001; Marshall et al., 2005; Raviv, Becken, & Hughey, 2013)

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Other factors that impact motivational drive to seek certification arise from the organisational context and external operating environment in which the tourism business operates. Organisational context refers to business type, size and sector, and has significant implications for how businesses perceive, plan and implement sustainable business practices and certification. Most tourism businesses in Queensland are small to medium enterprises. Many are owner-operated (Tourism & Events Queensland, 2014). The decision making process and barriers faced by owner-operators of small tourism businesses in relation to environmental engagement and sustainability are complex (Sampaio, Thomas, & Font, 2012b; Thomas, 2015; Tzschentke et al., 2008) and significantly different from their larger counterparts (Thomas, 2000).

Additionally, the operating environment in which the business is conducted has an influence upon if and how a tourism business chooses or is encouraged to implement more sustainable practices. Also noted in the literature, is that financial instruments such as government grants, tax concessions, and subsidies can provide benefit to sustainability leaders and act as incentives for laggards to adopt sustainable practices and seek certification as a means of validation (Graci & Dodds, 2015). The organisational context and external environments can contribute motivation for, or produce barriers to, certification.

### ***Barriers to sustainable tourism certification***

Barriers faced by businesses in implementing sustainable business practices and certification can also be internal or external. Barriers faced by the business can influence and constrain motivational drive towards certification. Barriers that hinder motivational drive towards certification noted as internal to the tourism business in the Mair & Jago (2010) model (and other research

exploring corporate sustainability of the small to medium business) are: the lack of time available due to the day-to-day management focus of small businesses, owner-operators' unfamiliarity with the environmental and social consequences of their operations along with their perceived low levels of environmental awareness. Also noted as barriers faced by small businesses are the limited availability of information and advice to assist in the implementation of sustainable measures and a lack of financial resources available to invest in sustainability improvements.

The external context within which the tourism business operates relates to those factors that are outside the immediate control of the individual tourism business, but have an impact upon the business. They are factors such as: the current economic situation of the industry and global markets; political and institutional leadership, rules and governance; lack of consumer demand; and available tools and technology (Mair & Jago, 2010). These external factors can serve to stimulate or constrain business operators' motivation to achieve certification. Jarvis et al. (2010) in their case study of the benefits and challenges of sustainable tourism certification in the west of England identified external constraining factors such as: lack of supportive funding, from, for instance, grants and subsidies; poor consumer knowledge; poor marketing support; economic effects of the global financial crisis and the inflexibility of the certification programs.

The literature notes that external *institutional* factors influence businesses' sustainability decisions as well. These include government policy and leadership, destination priorities and industry acknowledgement. It is acknowledged that the influence of institutional factors upon certification uptake remains an area that is particularly underexplored (Jarvis et al., 2010; Thomas, 2015; Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011; Tzschentke et al., 2008). Drawing together the literature and this discussion, Table 2.3 summarises the barriers faced by businesses in relation to sustainable tourism practices and certification implementation.

Table 2.3 Barriers faced by business in relation to sustainable tourism certification

Barriers	References
<b>Internal business barriers</b>	
Lack of time	(Kusyk & Lozano, 2007; Mair & Jago, 2010; McKercher & Robbins, 1998; Raviv et al., 2013)
Low level of awareness of environmental and social consequences of business	(Bohdanowicz, 2005; Chan, 2011; Clarke, 2004; Jarvis et al., 2010; Sampaio, Thomas, & Font, 2012a; Tilley, 2000; Tzschentke et al., 2008; Vernon, Essex, Pinder, & Curry, 2003)
Limited information and advice	(Carlsen et al., 2006; Chan, 2011; Hansen, 2007; Jarvis et al., 2010; Revell & Rutherford, 2003)
Lack of financial resources	(Bohdanowicz, 2005; Bramwell & Alletorp, 2001; Claver-Cortés et al., 2007; Jarvis et al., 2010; Kusyk & Lozano, 2007; McNamara & Gibson, 2008; Sampaio et al., 2012a; Tzschentke et al., 2008; Vernon et al., 2003)
<b>External barriers</b>	
Low consumer demand	(Bohdanowicz, 2005; Carlsen et al., 2006; Dodds & Joppe, 2009a; Font, 2009; Font & Epler-Wood, 2007; Graci & Dodds, 2015; Mair & Jago, 2010; Medina, 2005; Reiser & Simmons, 2005)
Poor support from external institutions	(Bohdanowicz, 2005; Carlsen et al., 2006; Hansen, 2007; Jarvis et al., 2010; Mair & Jago, 2010; Thwaites, 2007)
Lack of leadership from government	(Bohdanowicz, 2005; Carlsen et al., 2006; Coles, Fenclova, & Dinan, 2013; Dodds & Joppe, 2005; Font, 2009; Proto, Malandrino, & Supino, 2007)
Variety of programs	(Carlsen et al., 2006; Medina, 2005; Proto et al., 2007; Reiser & Simmons, 2005)

Some insight in relation to institutional views of certification programs are provided by Buckley (2012a, p. 10) in his review of seven recent sustainable tourism certification case studies. He found that most private tourism businesses and industry associations want 'cheap and easy certification' and view it as a minor component in marketing strategies. He also contends that as most government tourism agencies are concerned mainly with marketing, they want certification programs that are 'technically weak but politically powerful', to attract more international visitors and gain access to protected areas. He found that it was only businesses with good environmental performance or personal interest in improved environmental management

that have an interest in effective certification programs, so they can be clearly differentiated from their competitors.

Consumer demand for sustainably certified tourism products is another external contextual factor that influences operators' motivational drivers for certification and can present as a barrier. There is conflicting evidence over "whether consumers are sufficiently interested in sustainable tourism and hospitality products to change their purchasing behaviour" (Jarvis et al., 2010, p. 9). For example, barriers to consumer demand have been attributed to: the large number and complexity of certification programs; the limited information offered about certification; lack of consumer awareness; and the price of the product, which is generally perceived as higher than other non-certified services. However, Burns & Bibbings (2009) suggest that recent societal changes have taken place, and as a result, there is increased awareness and expectation from the consumer regarding the social and environmental responsibilities of businesses to improve their sustainability.

The voluntary nature of certification also creates implied barriers to operators choosing to participate in certification. The tourism industry relies upon self-regulation of sustainable activity. This means that informal strategies for achieving compliance are used, and that these rely on participants' commitment to rules and subtle social sanctions via informal and formal mechanisms (Dietz, Ostrom, & Stern, 2003). The legitimacy of these enforcement mechanisms impacts on tourism operators' motivation to achieve certification. The legitimacy of compliance mechanisms and informal rules associated with certification of tourism businesses is a factor of considerable importance in relation to certification of tourism businesses. The changing political environment and resulting inconsistency in policy, management and promotion of certification has had a significant impact upon operator understanding and support of certification. (See Appendix C for insight into the history and nature of the changing political commitment of governments in Australia in relation to the promotion and support of certification as a sustainable development tool.)

The cost of certification in relation to the perceived benefits also acts as a constraining factor affecting uptake of certification by small tourism

businesses. Blackman et al. (2012) contend that due to certification being voluntary, industry participation will remain low unless it can be shown to generate economic returns greater than the costs to achieve certification. Recent research by Esparon, Stoeck, & Gyuris (2013) found that the inability to 'prove' the tangible outcomes of certification hinders operator and customer confidence in either partaking in such programs or in buying certified products.

This research study therefore seeks to contextualise the motivational drivers and barriers to certification by exploring the factors that both enhance or inhibit utilisation of certification as a sustainable management tool. The research draws upon the goal of biosphere reserves to act as learning centres for sustainability. The key to this is exploration of the current situation and potential for Noosa's biosphere reserve status to provide motivational drive and support for tourism businesses to advance sustainability. The next section provides a brief history of the development of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program, and introduces the concept of biosphere reserves acting as learning laboratories for sustainable development.

## **2.4 BACKGROUND OF THE BIOSPHERE RESERVE CONCEPT**

Biosphere reserves are internationally recognised sites of significant terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems. Since biosphere reserves are exemplary regions by nature, which have an incredible natural and cultural heritage, they also tend to be popular tourist destinations. Currently, there are 631 biosphere reserves in 119 countries (UNESCO, 2014b). Biosphere reserves act in some ways as 'living laboratories' for exploring and demonstrating approaches to sustainable development. They are concerned with the interaction between humans and the environment.

The origin of biosphere reserves goes back to the Biosphere Conference of UNESCO in 1968. This conference was the first intergovernmental meeting that examined "how to reconcile the conservation and use of natural resources, thereby foreshadowing the present-day notion of sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2009a, p. 1). This conference resulted in the development of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program. MAB

is an intergovernmental scientific program that aims to establish a scientific basis for the improvement of relationships between people and their environments. One of the first MAB projects consisted was to establish a coordinated world network of sites representing the main ecosystems of the planet. In these sites genetic resources would be protected, research and monitoring as well as training work could be carried out. These sites were named 'Biosphere Reserves'.

When the MAB program was launched in 1971 and the first biosphere reserves were recognised in 1976 they were established primarily to provide another category for protected areas. During the first twenty years, the sites were designated principally based upon their biodiversity values and capacity to support research and scientific monitoring (Ishwaran, Persic, & Tri, 2008). Since 1995, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress for Biosphere Reserves was held in Seville, Spain, biosphere reserves have evolved. The focus for biosphere reserves now is on finding concrete ways for people and nature to coexist and interact that demonstrate sustainability in action for the future (Clusener-Godt, 2012). Furthermore, in February 2008 in Spain, the Madrid Action Plan plotted the strategy for the MAB program for 2008-2013. This action plan promotes biosphere reserves as "the principal internationally designated areas dedicated to sustainable development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (UNESCO, 2009b, p. 3).

Each biosphere reserve is intended to fulfil three basic functions, which are complementary and mutually reinforcing: a conservation function, which is to contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation; a development function, to foster economic and human development which is socioculturally and ecologically sustainable; and a logistic function, to provide support for research, monitoring, education and information exchange related to local, national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development." (UNESCO, 1995, p. 1)

These functions are both didactic, in that they have an educational focus, and scientific in their purpose.

Biosphere reserves have three interrelated zones that help to achieve the three functions of biosphere reserves. There is a core area that is mandated as highly protected ecosystems, such as national park or conservation areas. This core zone contributes to landscapes, ecosystems and species conservation. There is a buffer zone, which surrounds or adjoins the core area. This zone is used for activities that are compatible with ecological conservation and practices that can reinforce scientific research, monitoring and education. The final one represents a transition zone, which comprises the area of the reserve where the greatest activity occurs. This zone aims to foster sustainable economic and human development (UNESCO, 2014a).

Biosphere reserve status is similar to World Heritage listing. However, biosphere reserves do not have the national legislative responsibilities of World Heritage designation. Biosphere nomination is by national governments and the sovereign jurisdiction of the area remains with the states where the biospheres are located. Biosphere reserves operate within the UNESCO scientific program. They respond to the 'soft law', and the statutory framework of the MAB program that governs them. Biosphere reserve designation does not require a change in law or ownership. Each biosphere reserve has its own system of governance to ensure it meets its functions and objectives. The management system of biosphere reserves are required to be "open, evolving and adaptive" (UNESCO, 2009a, p. 4) in order for the local community to better respond to external political, economic and social pressures, which affect the ecological and cultural values of the area.

#### **2.4.1 Biosphere reserves as learning sites for sustainable development**

Biosphere reserves are now described as "learning sites for sustainable development" (Kušová, Těšitel, Matějka, & Bartoš, 2008; Price, Park, & Bouamrane, 2010; Stoll-Kleemann & Welp, 2008; UNESCO, 2014a). During the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD, 2004-2013), a special responsibility given to biosphere reserves was to function as learning laboratories or learning sites, where evidence-based knowledge, iterative and practical principles could be utilised to ensure sustainable development (Habibah et al., 2013). Biosphere reserves were to be viewed as special places for testing interdisciplinary approaches to

understanding and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems. Biosphere reserves provide the context in which communities can explore and demonstrate approaches to conservation and sustainable development on a regional basis (Ishwaran et al., 2008; UNESCO, 1995). They also aspire to develop collaboration between scientists, conservationists and the government, as well as business and communities (UNESCO, 2010).

The concept of biosphere reserves is closely linked to the idea of socio-ecological systems (Turner et al., 2003), in that there is a strong focus on human interaction within the system. However, there appears to be a lack of a systematic approach to research into biosphere reserves, with an imbalance between scientific and social research. The scientific research concerned with nature conservation still strongly prevails, a Google Scholar search revealing over 17,000 academic articles being published in sciences on the topic of biosphere reserves in the last ten years. While the social dimension of sustainability within the biosphere reserve concept is beginning to gain recognition, it is less evident (Ishwaran et al., 2008; Kušová, Těšitel, & Bartoš, 2008; Oszlanyi, 2001). Scientific research dominates and is also focused on the protected areas of biosphere reserves, or core zone. It tends to not include the transition zone of the reserves, which is the area where most human activity takes place.

Hanley (2003) predicted that between 2003 and 2013, a pool of data, information and knowledge about local practices within biosphere reserves would inform and give context to the global concept of biosphere reserves. The fulfilment of this prediction has not been accomplished. Specifically, there is limited research surrounding the interactions and learnings of people and communities living and working in biosphere reserves.

#### **2.4.2 Biosphere reserves and sustainable tourism**

The recognition of biosphere reserves as tourist destinations, and the use of biosphere reserve status as a tourism marketing tool is becoming increasingly evident (Ryan, Silvanto, & Seitz, 2013). Use as a marketing tool



to demonstrate the sustainability of a destination means framing the biosphere reserve concept in the context of the international tourism market.

Coupled with the use of biosphere reserve status as a tourism marketing tool, there is the need for biosphere reserves' management organisations to report that tourism development is sustainable and aligned with the biosphere reserve concept. This link between sustainable tourism and the commodification of biosphere reserves as tourism destinations is only just beginning to be observed across the global network of biosphere reserves (Kušová, Těšitel, & Bartoš, 2008).

Linked with commoditising biosphere reserves is the need to brand or signify biosphere endorsed products and services. From a tourism perspective this relates to certification of tourism businesses. Some recent studies conducted in biosphere reserves refer to sustainable tourism certification. However these studies do not investigate the intricacies of operationalising and implementing certification as both a sustainable development tool and marketing tool. For example, Ishwaran (2012b) briefly refers to the success of the Institute for Responsible Tourism in Spain in certifying tourism businesses under the Biosphere Responsible Tourism scheme. Additionally, the Green Belt Biosphere Reserve in São Paulo City, Brazil, is working in partnership with the Brazilian Sustainable Tourism Certification project (Pires et al., 2002) to prepare and implement a certification strategy for sustainable tourism in the biosphere reserve. But there is little evidence of further studies in English relating to the use of sustainable tourism certification in a biosphere reserve setting.

Spain is the exception. There is some information in English that details work being undertaken to link certification, sustainable tourism and biosphere reserves. The La Palma tourism cluster has brought together fourteen municipalities through the La Palma Club and is a part of the broader Biosphere Reserves Tourist Product Club. This club is a "self-committed platform for knowledge, networking and exchange" (González, 2015), where tourism businesses can access information, tools and events, and best practice examples are highlighted and promoted.

Exploring biosphere reserves as learning destinations for sustainable tourism is a key goal of the biosphere reserve concept. However, to date, few empirical studies have been conducted. Habibah et al. (2013) refer to the importance of having a learning community to drive sustainability of tourism in biosphere reserves. They also contend “that existing literature has yet to provide a holistic mechanism that elucidates the roles of the stakeholders in initiating, inventing and developing the biosphere reserve experiences as the foundation of tourism learning destinations” (Habibah et al., 2013, p. 2) Furthermore, Ishwaran (2012a) asserts that a primary platform in learning for sustainable development is the ability to discover new ways of deepening communications and interaction between local residents, private businesses and public authorities.

It cannot be disputed that the basic principles of sustainable tourism and the concept and objectives of the MAB program are mutually harmonious. However, there is a further need to study and provide insights into the links between these concepts. Most notably, knowledge is required on ‘how’ the community of a biosphere reserve learns and interacts to promote, value and implement the sustainable development aspirations of the MAB concept. This research study will contribute to knowledge in this area by focusing on the learning and actions of tourism operators in relation to the conceptualisation and implementation of certification as a sustainable management tool in one biosphere reserve.

## **2.5 THE RESEARCH CHALLENGE**

The literature has shown that there is an increasing recognition of the complex, multidimensional nature of the challenges involved in developing sustainable tourism. Sustainability is increasingly being conceived as a transition and learning process, where the goal is constantly moving and changing, rather than static (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2005). The key issue regarding sustainability is primarily concerned with the operationalisation of the concept. Therefore, new research needs to focus on ‘how’ participants learn and adapt collectively and continuously in the context of this changing environment.

The sustainability challenge has created a need for traditional research to go beyond conventional, disciplinary scientific research to produce knowledge that can guide society and businesses toward more sustainable practices. Science can inform sustainability decisions, but cannot in itself determine those decisions or actions. In addition to scientific knowledge, experiential and emotional forms of knowledge may contribute to more informed decision-making (McCool & Moisey, 2008). Also important in understanding experiential and emotional knowledge is the relationship between personal and social knowledge (tactic/explicit) about tourism business owners' sustainability decision-making (Kayes, 2002). Research by Tzschentke et al. (2008) promotes the concept of contextual definition of the decision making. This approach focuses research on the examination of small business operators motives when balancing sustainability and environmental actions.

Traditionally, tourism research has been founded upon the theoretical perspectives of post-modernism, structuralism and post structuralism, however there is evidence to support to use of social theory, such as CHAT, as this type of theory allows the researcher to "expand the focus of tourism research" (Davis, 2010, p. 1). This research study therefore adopts a sociocultural approach by exploring motivations, experiences and challenges faced by tourism operators in initiating sustainable business practices through the use of sustainable tourism certification. It intends to fill some of the gaps in knowledge identified by generating new knowledge about 'how' tourism operators and stakeholders in a biosphere reserve setting interact and function to achieve more sustainably focused outcomes.

## **2.6 FRAMEWORKS AND THEORY USED IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM RESEARCH**

In seeking to reconcile the need for new knowledge that explores and extends understanding related to motives, perceptions, decisions and action towards sustainability goals, recent research has employed a number of different theoretical frameworks and concepts. Approaches stemming from organisational theory were used by Ayuso (2007) to understand and explain the facilitators and barriers to the adoption of environmental tools in the Spanish hotel sector. In this work the perspectives of competitive advantage, stakeholder influences and human cognitive processes were used. Similarly,

Byrd (2007) and Kuysk & Lozano (2007) used the principles of stakeholder theory to help understand the determinants of CSR in small to medium size businesses. Adopting another approach, Font (2009) explored the adoption of tourism certification from an economic and cost benefit perspective by using Ecological Modernisation Theory (EMT). Others, such as Deng-Westphal & Beeton (2011), claim that this type of research fails to examine certification from an organisational and external environment context, and contend that research into tourism certification has not adequately engaged research strengths from other disciplines and industries. Their study makes use of Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory to propose a framework to explain the slow adoption rates of sustainable tourism certification in Australia.

Some work has adopted systems thinking approaches, with Nguyen, Bosch & Maani (2011) and Van Mai & Bosch (2010) using such an approach to explain the complexities of the tourism system – in this case, in relation to Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve. They also believe this process may provide a mechanism for group learning and decision making in relation to sustainable tourism development. Habibah et al. (2013) stress the importance of biosphere reserves as learning destinations focusing on sustainability learning for businesses, locals and visitors. Ishwaran (2012b) promotes a practice-based approach and stresses the importance of site specific sustainable development applications in biosphere reserves to fully embrace the potential of the learning laboratory concept of biosphere reserves. A practice-based approach refers to the entire range of actions and activities that facilitate the expression and implementation of sustainable development tools in biosphere reserves. Ishwaran et al. (2008) call for more data, information and knowledge about local level practices in site-specific biosphere reserves.

There is clearly a need for further research that is biosphere reserve site specific and takes a practice-based approach to sustainability learning and implementation. There is also the need to take into account the external context within which the complex system of interrelated tools, roles, responsibilities and goals of the biosphere reserve and tourism community

operates. Heeding Hjalager (2010) call for new tourism research to make use of theoretical frameworks and methodologies from other industries and disciplines, this study uses cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) as a theoretical foundation and methodological framework.

### **2.6.1 Introduction of a CHAT framework to explore sustainable tourism certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve**

CHAT and activity systems analysis are particularly useful for research that involves studying complex learning environments, in natural settings, where multiple individuals are involved in shared activities within a multi-organisational context (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). As this research is concerned with understanding the complex learning environment of tourism business operators in relation to certification and sustainable business practices in the biosphere reserve context, CHAT is seen not only as a meaningful theoretical foundation but also a useful methodological and analysis framework.

To the best of this researcher's knowledge, CHAT has not yet been applied in the field of sustainable tourism research. It has however been successfully applied across many fields of research to understand and describe interactions between individuals and the environment in various natural settings. There have been studies conducted using CHAT in the fields of: education (Barab, Barnett, Yamagata-Lynch, Squire, & Keating, 2002; Engeström, 1996; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999); drama (Davis, 2015; McAllister, Searl, & Davis, 2013); technology and information systems (Bonneau, 2013; Hasan & Pfaff, 2012; Kuutti, 1996; Mwanza, 2001, 2002; Zurita & Nussbaum, 2007); organisational change (Allen, Brown, Karanasios, & Norman, 2013; Blackler, 1993; Engeström, 2004; Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007) and strategic practices (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Jarzabkowski, 2003); health care (Engeström, 1993, 2001); and agriculture (Hill, Botha, & Capper, 2002; Seppänen, 2002).

It is proposed that activity theory and activity systems analysis contributes a practical model for informing analysis of certification as a sustainable tourism development tool in the biosphere reserve setting. This is because CHAT

considers work and practice in combination with context and consciousness. CHAT is considered a powerful and clarifying descriptive tool focused on understanding human activity and work practices as it incorporates notions of intentionality, history, mediation, collaboration and development (Nardi, 1996) and is a particularly useful framework for qualitative study (Hashim & Jones, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). It seeks to explore how we develop understandings from the real world in which we live and work, how we draw meaning from that understanding, create learning from those meanings and are motivated to respond to those learnings (Capper & Williams, 2004; W. M. Roth & Lee, 2007). It is the goal of this research to fill the gap in knowledge relating to 'how' tourism operators perceive, interpret and enact tourism certification as a learning process for sustainable development. As a result, CHAT is an appropriate framework to inform this understanding and exploration.

Additionally, CHAT is not only about understanding but also about transforming practice. It can also aid in transforming participant attitudes, values and behaviour, and shaping the development of organisational practices. As CHAT is considered both a learning theory and a theory of practice (Hill et al., 2002), it is useful for understanding behaviour change and learning processes within collective and interacting human activity systems. It is noted, however, that this study primarily uses CHAT as an analytical tool while acknowledging possible future action and research to transform practice. It is for this reason that the use of CHAT as a methodological framework is considered appropriate and useful.

## **2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided a review of literature associated with the study area. This review has revealed that despite nearly thirty years of focus the concept of sustainable tourism is far from being actualised in everyday operations of tourism businesses. Sustainable tourism certification is regarded as a useful tool to help businesses implement business practices and processes to improve sustainability. There are both benefits and challenges associated with the operationalisation of certification. Reported benefits of certification often provide motivational drive for tourism operators

to seek certification. However, understanding of the actual delivered outcomes experienced by certified operators is limited. Challenges faced by tourism operators affect their motivation and ability to achieve certification. Knowledge about the challenges faced and the impact this has on motivation to achieve certification is limited. There is little insight into the external institutional challenges and the extent to which these impact upon tourism operators' achievement of certification.

Biosphere reserves are areas charged with a responsibility to focus on the human element in biodiversity conservation. Their focus is on finding balance between economic and social development and conservation of biodiversity in the natural environment. There is a close link between the natural and cultural significance of biosphere reserves and sustainable tourism. Most forms of tourism are inherently reliant upon the natural and cultural environment of the destination. It is therefore important that the tourism industry operating in a biosphere reserve is CSR driven and sustainable. The two concepts of sustainable tourism and biosphere reserves go hand-in-glove. However, there is a gap in the knowledge that links the concepts and explores real world operationalisation of sustainable development tools, such as certification.

The past research calls for further study into the 'how' of the sustainability goal. Namely, how do operators in a biosphere reserve setting currently perceive and value sustainable management tools such as certification? How are they currently interacting and communicating in relation to this goal? How can they be motivated and supported to take action towards the goal? Research seeking to explore practice in context requires a sound research design and methodology. The methodology and research design of this study are set out in the next chapter along with the data gathering and analysis techniques employed.





## Chapter 3: Methodology

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the research methodology and research design developed and implemented to address the research questions identified in Chapter 1. The chapter establishes the rationale for employing a social constructivist or sociocultural research paradigm. This is followed by an explanation of the qualitative research strategy and justification for the choice of case study as the method of enquiry. Following on, the data collection instruments are elaborated upon, including the survey questionnaire deployed and interviews conducted. The rationale for and use of an activity systems analysis method drawn from CHAT are further discussed. Finally, the ethical considerations of the research are detailed.

### 3.2 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST RESEARCH PARADIGM

This section describes the research paradigm adopted for the investigation of certification of tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The research paradigm adopted by the researcher identifies the basic set of beliefs that guide their actions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This helps clarify their beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (how we come to know) and methodology (the way of knowing) for conducting research.

This research project is situated within the interpretative social sciences paradigm, also known as social constructivism (Lu & Nepal, 2009). As a research approach, tourism case studies are generally inspired by social constructionism (Dredge & Hales, 2012) due to the nature of tourism being a complex phenomenon based on interrelations and interactions (Goodson & Phillimore). CHAT is a specific branch of sociocultural theory (Cole, 1998; Holzman, 2006; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) and is used as the guiding theoretical approach in this research as discussed previously in section 2.6.1.

Exploring sustainable tourism certification from the business operator's perspective requires an inductive approach and ontological view that recognises multiple realities and that truth and evidence are grounded in the real world. This study takes the view that knowledge and understandings of a particular situation, such as sustainable tourism certification, are socially constructed and dependent upon the way in which participants interact with each other and are influenced by the external context (Schwandt, 2005).

Ontological situating provides a philosophical perspective for understanding 'our truths and our reality' (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 7). The social constructivist paradigm is based in the idea that life experiences shape knowledge development. Individuals are constantly refining their knowledge of the world by interacting with the environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This research assumes a relativist ontology whereby the researcher acknowledges that multiple realities exist that are influenced by the tourism operators' experiences, perception and motivations of sustainable tourism certification (Macpherson, Brooker, & Ainsworth, 2000). The research draws upon various business operators' constructed knowledge, perceptions and beliefs surrounding certification.

Social constructivism further acknowledges the existence of multiple realities, that is, the nature of reality is relative, acknowledging that the participants interpret reality based on their beliefs. In this research the tourism business operators' beliefs, knowledge and perspectives have been developed through immersion and involvement in the tourism industry context and through personal experiences and understandings of sustainability and certification. This counts as relevant knowledge within this context.

Goodson & Phillimore (2004) have argued that to fully understand the tourism phenomenon, person-focused research that takes into account the individual's subjective experiences and perceptions, and the roles they play in various aspects of tourism, has received scant attention and should receive more focus. This research project has to some extent explored the subjective formation of beliefs and perspectives in relation to certification.

Additionally, it is recognised that the researcher's background not only shapes their interpretation, it also influences the way they position

themselves within the research project. Additionally, the choice of methodology reflects the beliefs and worldviews of the researcher (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). The researcher's professional experience in the tourism industry has facilitated an informed understanding of the processes involved in operating a tourism business and gaining certification. This has helped to ensure meaningful understanding of the research context, subjects and data.

### **3.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY**

This section explains the choice of a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research methods are particularly useful in investigations of how individuals interpret experience, how they structure the social world and their social interactions (Creswell, 2007). Features of qualitative research include a focus on capturing and understanding ordinary or daily events occurring in natural settings from the perspective of research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research makes use of a flexible and evolving research design that may be influenced by the research participants, the information they provide, or other elements in the research context. Social phenomena are captured holistically (Creswell, 2007) through the gathering of rich, detailed information on relatively few cases (Veal, 2011). The flexibility of qualitative research enables the researcher to respond to the unique circumstances of the particular research case and to capture dynamic social processes and interactions as they emerge. It also allows for the discovery of unexpected data, which lead to new and previously unknown understandings.

A qualitative research strategy and social constructivist paradigm are complementary because qualitative research assumes that the world is not an objective thing, but rather a function of personal interaction and perception (Merriam, 1998). This research builds upon the need to understand the participants' subjectivities and viewpoints of certification. Additionally, this research has placed an emphasis on the localised context in relation to sustainable tourism certification, with the qualitative research outcomes essentially "expressed in linguistic forms, where the themes arising from the participants' perceptions of practices and environment are conveyed" (Macpherson 2000, p. 50). Qualitative research has furthermore been

described as appropriate for detailed exploration of “how things work in particular contexts” (Mason, 2002, p. 1). This approach was seen as most effective for revealing the tourism operators’ knowledge, experiences and motivations surrounding certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

Table 3.1 highlights the justification for the choice of qualitative research approach and demonstrates how this approach links to the research.

Table 3.1 Qualitative research approach linkages with this research

<b>Qualitative research:</b>	<b>In this research:</b>
Enables study of phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of the meanings people bring to those settings.	Certification explored within the authentic context of the tourism businesses’ operational settings.
Involves the use and collection of a range of empirical materials – personal experience, interview, introspection, observational and visual texts – that describe and provide meaning to the participants’ lives.	A variety of data-gathering instruments were employed – survey, semi-structured interviews and collection of documentary and observational evidence, such as relevant literature websites, brochures and promotional materials of both the tourism businesses and the certification programs.
Requires a naturalistic, interpretive approach to the world	The naturalist setting is provided through the tourism businesses operating within a specific biosphere reserve.
Draws on a range of interconnected, interpretive practices, hoping to generate data that provides a full and complete understanding of the research focus.	The data collected through the range of interconnected instruments and analysed through the lens of CHAT provides a comprehensive and holistic understanding of how tourism businesses perceive and operationalise certification within Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

Adapted from (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, pp. 3-4)

### 3.4 THE CASE STUDY AS A RESEARCH METHOD

This section describes the use of case studies as a research method. The section proceeds by describing the rationale for using a case study as the

method of choice for investigating the activity system of certification of tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. It is followed by a description of the key components of the case study method employed in this research.

### **3.4.1 Rationale for the use of a case study**

Case studies are well suited to the holistic inductive paradigms of tourism research and as such are widely used in the tourism field (Beeton, 2005). The approach is well suited to this research project, as a case study method is a holistic inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its natural setting (Macpherson et al., 2000; Yin, 2009). In case study research, the aim is to learn about the selected case, its activity and its functioning (Stake, 2005). Furthermore, the use of activity systems analysis is compatible with case studies as it involves the study of self-sustained systems that cannot be removed from the context (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

Case study research aims to develop a rich understanding of the case and its complexity. Theory and explanations are built from insights gained during data collection (Crosthwaite, MacLeod, & Malcolm, 1997). Macpherson and colleagues (2000) believe that qualitative research should extend beyond interpretation and analysis to action. This research project extends interpretation and analysis to proposing action towards sustainable practices within the tourism industry.

Case studies are regarded as useful for a number of reasons: they can illustrate the complexities of a situation because they recognise contributing interacting factors; they can explain why innovation did or did not work; and they show the influence of personalities and politics on an issue. Also, case studies may be applicable to other situations and can illuminate a general issue through examination of a specific instance (Hoaglin et al., 1982 in Beeton, 2005, p. 38). These factors are of importance when exploring and developing an understanding of the implementation of sustainable tourism certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

Finally, Yin (2009) described case studies as empirical enquiries that accommodate the investigation of 'real-life' phenomena that are 'entangled'

in a broader context. Often the boundaries between the case and its context are blurred. Consequently, adopting a case study approach is appropriate when the researcher needs to define a topic broadly in order to uncover the contextual factors influencing the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, in this exploratory research, understanding the external contributing factors that shape a business operator's decisions surrounding certification is significant.

### **3.4.2 Components of the case study method**

A case study is regarded as an all-encompassing method (Macpherson et al., 2000) that covers the logic of the research design, data collection techniques and specific approaches to data analysis. It is also both a process of inquiry and the product of that inquiry (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2009) has identified six critical elements of case study research design:

1. Presenting clear specifications of the research questions that frame the study;
2. Deciding on the appropriate numbers of cases to explore within the study;
3. Clearly defining the units of analysis, including sub-units if warranted;
4. Clearly specifying the criteria for choosing the units of analysis;
5. Choosing an appropriate and effective data collection and analysis strategy; and
6. Developing appropriate tests to ensure the validity and reliability of the approach taken in conducting the case study.

Table 3.2 presents an overview of the case study components as prescribed by Yin (2009). It demonstrates the components of the case study research design and links them to this research.

Case studies draw upon multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). The use of multiple sources of evidence facilitates greater exploration of a case and its complexities while affording a greater understanding of the perspectives of the individuals or groups involved. The use of qualitative methods for case studies helps to explain the processes or broader circumstances at play, rather than just reporting on the outcomes of a given situation.

The most important advantage of gathering multiple sources of evidence is that it allows for the process of triangulation, where “converging lines of inquiry can be developed” (Yin, 2009, p. 115). Therefore, the case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is formed through corroboratory mode from several sources of information. It is the convergence of the evidence from multiple sources that enhances reliability and minimises any potential problems of construct validity. To ensure that the research was reliable and valid, this case study used multiple sources of evidence and the process of triangulation, constructing a case study database and maintaining a detailed chain of evidence to enhance validity.

Table 3.2 Case study research design

Case study component	Research design
Establish research questions	The research questions correspond to an investigation of sustainable tourism certification within NBR as detailed in Chapter 1.
Decide on the appropriate number of cases to explore	The case studied is the tourism industry operating within the geographical boundaries of NBR. The units of analysis form the case study.
Selection of units of analysis	The units of analysis are the tourism enterprises operating within NBR. This includes certified and non-certified tourism businesses, certification providers and tourism organisations.
Clearly specify the criteria for selection of units of analysis	The units of analysis were selected using purposive sampling based on the information gathered in the survey phase. Essentially, there was a mix of certified and non-certified business operators that matched the typical business profile of tourism businesses operating in NBR. Additionally, the certification providers and destination management organisations were identified through the literature review and analysis phase.

Select an appropriate and effective data collection and analysis strategy	<p>Data collection was drawn from a range of sources: online survey, semi-structured interviews, and collection of documentary evidence and artefacts, such as websites, brochures and promotional materials of both the tourism businesses' certification program providers and relevant tourism organisations.</p> <p>The interview data was entered into NVivo software and thematic content analysis conducted. Activity theory analysis was used to explain and make sense of the data to provide a detailed explanation of the certification activity within the case study.</p>
Develop appropriate tests to ensure the validity and reliability of the approach taken in conducting the case study.	The three principles of data collection as identified by Yin (2009) were utilised, including multiple sources of data to allow for triangulation, the use of a case study database in Nvivo and the maintenance of a chain of evidence to increase the reliability of the information.

Case studies have been criticised for reflecting the bias of the researcher (Beeton, 2005). However, bias is not restricted to this research method (Yin, 2009). Triangulation can overcome some of the criticisms of researcher bias by combining a range of evidence materials (Jennings, 2010). Additionally, research mentors from outside the tourism field, such as supervisors, assisted in checking interview questions and with coding and auditing the evidence trail. Conversely, Stake (2005) views bias as a positive component and emphasises that the case study is personal, situational and intricate. The personal experience of gathering data combined with the previous experiences of the researcher can provide knowledge that may not otherwise have been accessible.

### 3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

A range of data collection instruments and methods were employed to ensure the reliability of the data and construct validity (Yin, 2009). Document analysis, survey and semi-structured interviews were all utilised as methods of data collection. This section explains the instruments used in this research, why they were used, their design, and administration of the data gathered. Following on, Section 3.6 details how the data was analysed using thematic coding and an activity systems analysis process drawn from CHAT.



### **3.5.1 Document analysis**

Document analysis of publicly available literature such as plans, policies, strategies, marketing material, and websites, was used to examine and detail the sustainable tourism certification programs that are currently available to tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The analysis also included investigation of other certification programs that are available nationally and internationally. The certification processes of each identified program was documented and the core aspects of each program analysed and compared through the development of a comparison matrix (see Appendix B).

Document analysis was also used to gather data relating to sustainable tourism certification development and promotion within Noosa Biosphere Reserve. Industry reports, strategies, websites and destination promotional material all provided documentary evidence that was used as part of this research.

### **3.5.2 Survey**

An online survey instrument was developed to gather information about the size and nature of the tourism businesses, their approach to sustainability within the business, and knowledge of and involvement with sustainable certification programs. As there was no existing instrument available to capture the required data, an instrument needed to be developed. The survey design was cross-sectional, aimed at gathering a portrait of current practices and knowledge, and capturing opinions of both certified and non-certified tourism businesses within Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

An online survey was considered the most suitable means of survey administration for a number of reasons. Firstly, online surveys provide a low-cost method to survey large numbers over a relatively short period of time (Dolnicar, Laesser, & Matus, 2009). Face-to-face and mail-out surveys were considered too expensive and also less timely than the option of an online survey. Additionally, online surveys have been identified as having lower dropout rates and producing less incomplete data than mail surveys. Secondly, the local tourism organisation, Tourism Noosa, supported the research and agreed to distribute the survey electronically to all members.

This allowed the researcher a direct mechanism to reach the desired sample population easily and efficiently. Online surveys are commonly used in the tourism and business environments (Dolnicar et al., 2009). Since tourism industry professionals use the internet daily, a reliable sample might be more reliably captured through an online survey. The choice of online format provided a level of familiarity and comfort for respondents. Finally, online surveys allow participants to complete the survey at a time and place convenient for them.

From the researcher's perspective, online surveys are advantageous as they allow for customisable layout and design, real-time viewing of results, both individually and in aggregate, and cross-tab and filter applications for analysis. The online survey tool selected as the graphical user interface for survey administration was SurveyMonkey. A number of online survey tools were explored, including SurveyMonkey, SurveyGizmo, Zoomerang, Qualtrics and QuestionPro. Each of these provided differing benefits and constraints. SurveyMonkey is commercial software that provides a professional and customisable solution for online surveying. It is simple to use, fully customisable, allows for skip logic and response randomisation. The survey results can be exported in Excel and PDF formats, which suits import into Nvivo analysis software. Simple graphs and tables for presentation can also be developed from within the package. The researcher's supervision team also possessed experience in designing, developing and administering surveys through SurveyMonkey.

The next section of this chapter details the design, development and administration of the online survey. An overview of the three stages is presented in Figure 3.1.

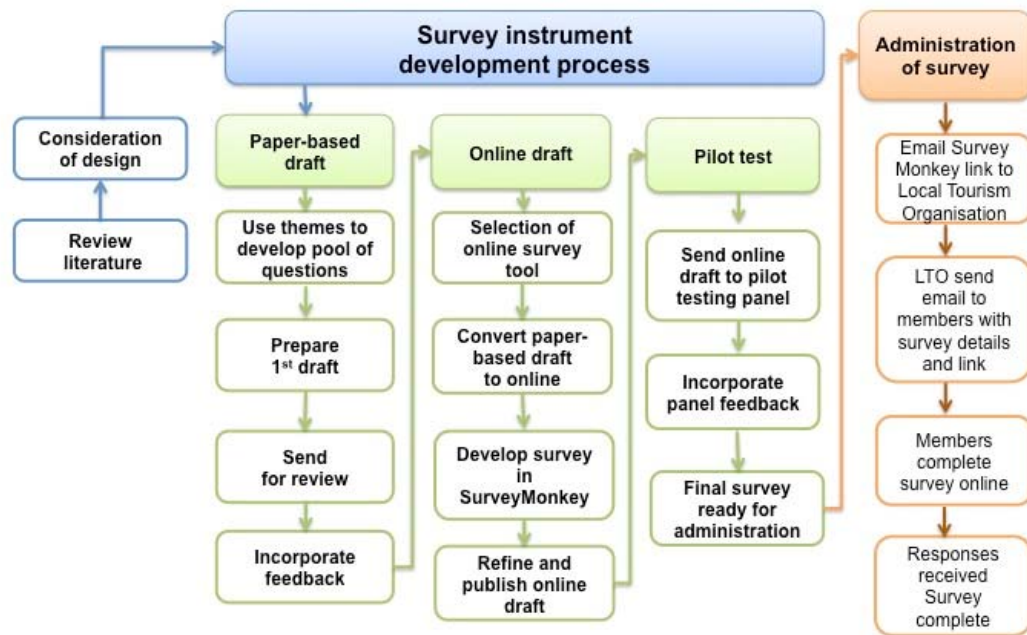


Figure 3.1 Survey design, development and administration process

### ***Stage 1 - Design considerations***

A number of design considerations were addressed when developing the online survey. These aspects were: the literature review, the survey structure, the question design, and the graphical user interface.

The literature review presented in chapter two identified current knowledge relevant to this study. It also served to help identify whether an instrument for data collection for this research already existed. The information and knowledge garnered from the literature review was used to inform the survey questions. This process enabled the researcher to develop and group the questions in a logical framework.

When designing the survey the overall structure and layout is important from beginning to end. It is suggested that dividing the survey into sections gives the participants a sense of progress and logical sequence of questioning (Fink, 2009). The survey therefore was divided into sections based on the logical flow of questioning. Dillman (2011) has demonstrated that this

approach enables the respondent to keep focus and maintain logical ordering, easing the cognitive burden.

To maintain flow and ensure survey completion skip logic was used within the formatting of the instrument. This ensured that participants were only presented with questions relevant to them based on their earlier responses. For example, if respondents answered that they were not currently certified, they were taken to the set of questions designed for non-certified businesses.

The number and type of questions in the survey instrument were issues the researcher needed to address. Both closed and open-ended questions were used to gather a range of data. Closed questions were used for their relative ease of administration, analysis and interpretation, while open-ended questions allowed participants the opportunity to make comments in their own words and express their opinions.

Concerning the use of closed questions, a combination of Likert scale and multiple choice questions were used. Likert scale questions are widely adopted in the social sciences to measure constructions such as attitudes, perceptions and opinions (Carifio & Perla, 2007). Likert scale intervals between the possible responses ranged from 'not important' to 'essential' with a 'not applicable' option provided as well. Multiple choice questions allowed respondents to choose each statement that applied or was relevant to them. Single choice questions were used to gather factual information such as business type, structure and size. The use of a range of questioning styles allowed for diversity of information, maintained the users' interest and provided rich insights into current practices, beliefs and knowledge surrounding sustainable tourism certification within Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

### ***Stage 2 – Development process***

The survey development process was conducted in three stages. Firstly, a paper-based survey was designed, and then the online survey was developed from this initial paper based survey. The third stage was pilot testing of the online survey to ensure flow, correct question positioning and functionality of the online survey.

The initial instrument was developed as a paper-based survey to enable easy editing of all aspects of the developmental process, including ordering of questions, navigation, directions, length, items and scales; and to determine where open-ended questions should be used. The first draft for the survey required a number of iterations to correct use of language and jargon, fine-tune the scales used and order questions. A second draft of the paper survey concentrated on the question layout, ease of understanding and functionality of the survey. Amendments were made in consultation with the researcher's supervisors. The draft survey was now ready for conversion to an online format.

The next stage of the process was to construct the online survey in the SurveyMonkey interface. As stated earlier, SurveyMonkey is a relatively simple interface to use, with clear instructions on how to load and build surveys using the in-built tools within the software. Dillman (2011) asserts that there are two types of question structures in online surveys, namely open-ended questions and questions that provide answer choices in an ordered fashion. As both open-ended and closed question types were used in the survey, loading and fine-tuning the way the questions were displayed and functioned was a critical process.

An additional challenge in the development stage was the integration of branching or skip logic within the survey design. Once the survey had been loaded into SurveyMonkey the next part of the development process was pilot testing.

The purpose of pilot testing was to check the validity of the instrument in terms of content and the construction of the questions. In the testing stage, feedback was sought from an expert panel to determine whether any of the questions contained terminology that was ambiguous or not easily understood. An expert panel was selected to pilot test the survey. This panel included tourism industry representatives who operated both certified and non-certified businesses, a government representative considered an expert in certification, a representative from the Noosa Biosphere Management and an academic proficient in survey design and administration.

Generally, there were few issues raised concerning the content and structure of the survey. The researcher expected the survey to take approximately twenty minutes to complete, and this was seen as a potential drawback that may have resulted in reduced response. However, during the pilot testing phase it was determined that the survey took on average ten minutes to complete. It was also suggested that a progress bar be included on each page of the survey to indicate the respondent's progress through the survey.

The resulting final online survey contained a total of 32 questions. However, each respondent was only presented with 24 questions, due to the skip logic nature of the survey design (see Appendix D). The survey was presented as ten pages that followed the themes of:

- Background information
- Sustainability within the tourism business
- Certification awareness and interaction
- Certification benefits and barriers
- Noosa Biosphere Reserve

These themes aligned with the research questions and aims identified in Chapter 1. The survey was now ready to be distributed to the industry.

### ***Stage 3 – Administration of the instrument***

The final stage of the online survey process was the administration of the survey instrument. Prior to the survey being distributed, a request had been sent to the local tourism authority, Tourism Noosa, asking for their assistance in distributing the survey to their membership. Their response indicated their willingness to be involved in the research and to distribute the survey via a members' newflash email. An email invitation to participate in the survey was sent to the 500 members of Tourism Noosa in September 2013 (see Appendix E). The email contained a link to the survey URL, details about the research and a link to the Research Participants Information Sheet (see Appendix F). The survey was open for a period of 27 days. A reminder email was sent mid-way through and a total of 100 responses were received.

The results of the survey were then processed and used to identify those businesses that currently held or had held certification. This served to inform

the selection of business operators for the interview phase of the data collection process. The design and development of the interviews is discussed in the next section.

### **3.5.3 Interviews**

Interviews are used by researchers to capture the everyday world in which participants live (King & Horrocks, 2010). Semi-structured interviews were selected as the most appropriate tool to gather the rich empirical evidence required for this case study research. This section discusses the use of semi-structured interviews as a form of data collection. It then proceeds to describe the processes followed to develop the interview questions. Finally, this section details how the interviews were administered and managed.

The use of structured and semi-structured interviews is the dominant interview technique used in qualitative tourism research (Jennings, 2010). The semi-structured nature of the technique allows rapport to be established and active participation to occur. For this reason, it is an effective method for gathering information on complex issues. The open nature of interviews allow for information based on respondents attitudes, opinions and values to be uncovered. Due to the informal, relaxed, social interaction between the researcher and participant, replication is not possible. As with the survey phase, the interviews were designed to produce a snapshot of current practices, implementation and views surrounding certification.

In qualitative research, researchers seek to recruit participants who represent a variety of positions in relation to the research topic (King & Horrocks, 2010). To achieve this diversity of viewpoints and experiences it was decided to conduct three sets of interviews. One set was conducted with business operators who have achieved certification, another with business operators whose businesses are not certified and a third with certification program providers and the local tourism destination management organisation. This research design was aimed at ensuring that the range of stakeholders involved in the activity of certification was included in the research.

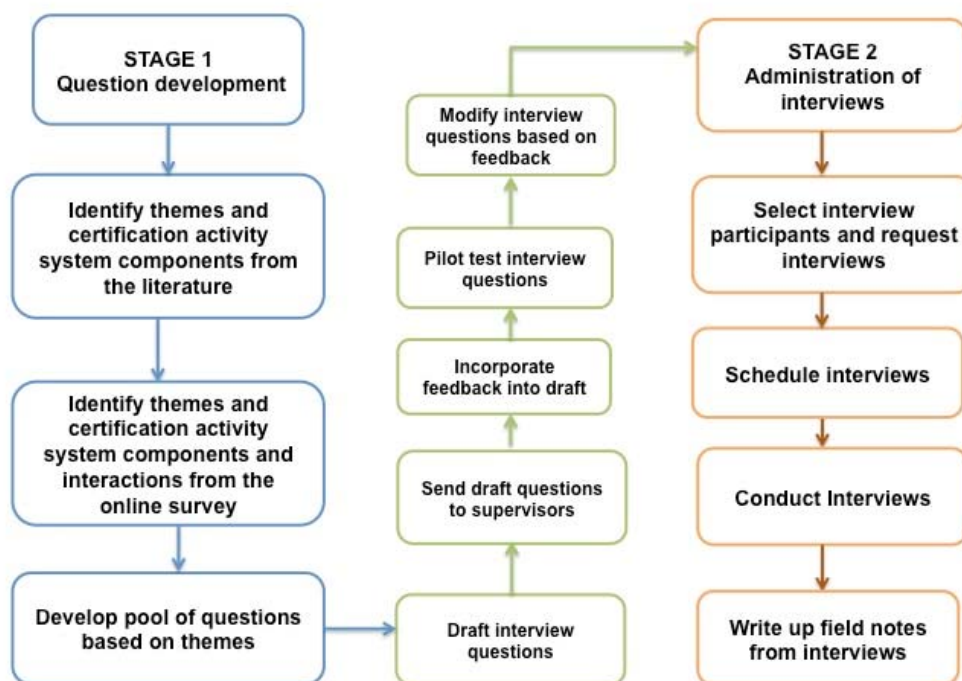


Figure 3.2 Development and administration of interviews

The development and administration of the interview phase of this research occurred in two stages. The first stage consisted of the development, refinement and pilot testing of the questions. The second stage included participant selection, scheduling of interviews and the administration of the interviews. Figure 3.2 shows the steps in each of the two stages. The following section will discuss these stages in more detail.

### **Stage 1 – Question development**

Data and information gathered during the survey phase was used to inform interview question development. The semi-structured interview approach (Macpherson et al., 2000; Yin, 2009) allowed discussion and questioning to focus around themes identified from the literature review and initial analysis of the online survey. These themes were linked with emerging components of the certification activity system, and interactions that were identified from the initial analysis of the survey results. The key themes identified for interview



questioning and their linkages to the activity system framework and research questions are presented below in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Key themes used for interview question development

Theme	Activity system components	Research question
Motivation	Internal beliefs / Value drivers / External drivers / Rules / Norms / Interactions / Relationships / Historicity / Context	RQ1
Expectation	Internal Beliefs / External drivers / Rules / Norms / Interactions / Relationships / Historicity / Context	RQ1 & RQ2
Implementation	Tools / Support / Interaction / Relationships / Learnings / Tensions / Challenges	RQ1 & RQ2
Evaluation	Object / Outcome / Learnings / Dynamics	RQ1 & RQ2
Value	Object / Outcome / Context / Dynamics	RQ2
Future	Object / Roles / Dynamics / Outcome / Context	RQ2

An initial pool of questions was developed based on the set of themes presented in Table 3.3. The initial draft question sets were sent to the researcher's supervisors for feedback and discussion. All questions were assessed for their relevance to the study and justification to the research objectives. This served to narrow the questioning focus and simplify the question structure. Leading or ambiguous questions were also reviewed and reworded. The initial twenty questions for each interview set were narrowed to ten questions.

Draft two of the interview question sets were then pilot tested. Pilot testing with both certified and non-certified tourism businesses occurred. The pilot-testing phase ensured that the question sequence flowed logically and that the questions were effective in gathering the desired information. It also allowed the researcher to gain an indication of the length of the interview process, which from the pilot tests was around 40 minutes. During the pilot-testing phase it was identified that it would be helpful to have a question relating to the value of biosphere reserve status to tourism businesses. This question was added to the interview set. Interview question sheets were then developed for each interview set, which included the interview questions and informal probes to be used by the interviewer to prompt discussion (see

Appendix G). An introduction interview sheet was also developed to provide the participant with a background to the research and interview process (see Appendix H). The interviews were now ready to be conducted.

### ***Stage 2 – Administration of the interviews***

The administration stage of the interview process concerned selecting the interview participants, scheduling the interviews, conducting the interviews and writing up field notes. Participant selection was critically important in this research in order to gain a representational cross-section of the sample population.

Analysis of the sample population gleaned from the survey data allowed the researcher to develop a portrait of the tourism businesses operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. This portrait of the typical tourism business was used to identify businesses that would provide an appropriate representation of the tourism industry operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. A list of suitable certified and non-certified businesses was constructed from those businesses that completed the online survey and agreed to be contacted for a follow-up interview.

The criterion most commonly proposed for sampling in qualitative studies is diversity. To achieve this diversity of viewpoint and experiences in relation to certification, the researcher chose participants based upon a predetermined set of criteria for each of the three interview groups (Creswell, 2007). As previously mentioned, three sets of interviews were conducted.

Set 1 interviews consisted of certified tourism business operators. The criteria for selection was:

- Identification as operating a tourism business within NBR;
- The business currently holds or has achieved certification under one of the identified sustainable certification programs; and
- The business is representative of the type, size and operational structure of the tourism industry operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve as identified by the survey data.

Set 2 interviews consisted of a selection of tourism businesses that have not sought to be certified by one of the identified programs. Again, purposive criteria sampling was used based upon the survey results, with the criteria being:

- Identification as operating a tourism business within NBR;
- The tourism operator has implemented sustainable business practices but is not certified; and
- The business is representative of the type, size and operational structure of the tourism industry operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve as identified by the survey data.

The third set of interviews, Set 3, consisted of key organisations involved in the delivery of certification programs and local tourism management organisations responsible for destination management and marketing. This set of interviews was designed to gain a deeper understanding of how organisations charged with the responsibility of delivering certification programs understood and viewed the motivations, drivers and barriers to tourism businesses seeking certification. They also served to provide insight into the future of certification delivery in Noosa Biosphere Reserve from a program-delivery and destination-management perspective.

An initial ten tourism businesses were contacted via email and phone to request an interview. After follow-up phone calls nine businesses agreed to interviews, which were conducted in person at locations convenient to the participants.

The interviews were recorded using a LiveScribe smart pen. This tool allowed the researcher to take notes and record the interviews simultaneously. The notes were then downloaded via the LiveScribe software. This allowed for accurate recording of the discussion and ensured that valuable material such as the researcher's thoughts and notations were able to be included in the data set. To ensure construct validity all interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure an accurate evidence trail (Creswell, 2007).

Once all interviews had been conducted, recordings transcribed and reflective memos and field notes written and uploaded, the data analysis phase could begin. Section 3.6 below discusses the data analysis methods employed.

### **3.6 ANALYSIS METHODS**

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data. It involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said, along with what the researcher has seen and read (Merriam, 2014). In other words, it is the process of making meaning from the data.

To begin the intensive phase of data analysis all the information about the case was brought together to form the case study database (Yin, 2009). This included interview transcripts and recordings, survey results, field notes, reports, relevant literature relating to certification and sustainable tourism in Noosa Biosphere Reserve and the researcher's own documents and reflective memos. This relevant material was loaded into the NVivo qualitative analysis computer software package. This allowed the data to be organised so that the researcher could easily locate specific data, then code and interrogate the data.

To maintain confidentiality, respondents were coded EC1-3, NC1-3 and SH1-3, (see Appendix I - Interview participant coding sheets). The coding structure was developed to enable identification of certified (EC), non-certified (NC) and stakeholders (SH) with each interviewee given a number 1, 2 or 3 in their relevant category. This allowed for comparison of the responses so that detailed descriptions of the activity system from both certified and non-certified business perspectives could be documented. Additionally, where survey responses are used as illustrative examples in the results presented in Chapter 4, they were coded using the survey respondent's number, allocated by the online survey tool. Survey respondents are numbered S1 through to S100.

The coding process allowed for intense engagement with the data through code identification and coding activities. Thematic coding was the first step in the data analysis stage of the research. The next stage of analysis involved

axial coding and then selective coding. These processes are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

### **3.6.1 Thematic coding**

The practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to the research questions (Merriam, 2014). The researcher used coding within a thematic framework approach to make sense of the gathered data. Coding is a complex process that involves moving backwards and forwards between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between description and interpretation, and involves inductive and deductive reasoning. The coding process involved engagement with the data to identify patterns relevant to the research questions. Boyatzis (1998, p. 31) explains that a “good thematic code is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon”.

Multiple rounds of coding were undertaken using the stages of open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Figure 3.3 describes the coding stages of the thematic analysis process used in this research.

The first stage of coding undertaken was open or descriptive coding. Emphasis in this stage was on trying to describe what is of interest, rather than trying to interpret its meaning. This process assisted the researcher to obtain a critical overview of the data. It involved reading through the interview transcripts and survey responses while highlighting and commenting on relevant material. At this stage the researcher identified key ideas that reflected the participants’ views, experiences and perceptions as they related to the research questions. From this process, initial descriptive codes were developed that were refined as each transcript was coded. These codes were general and did not try to interpret meaning from the data.

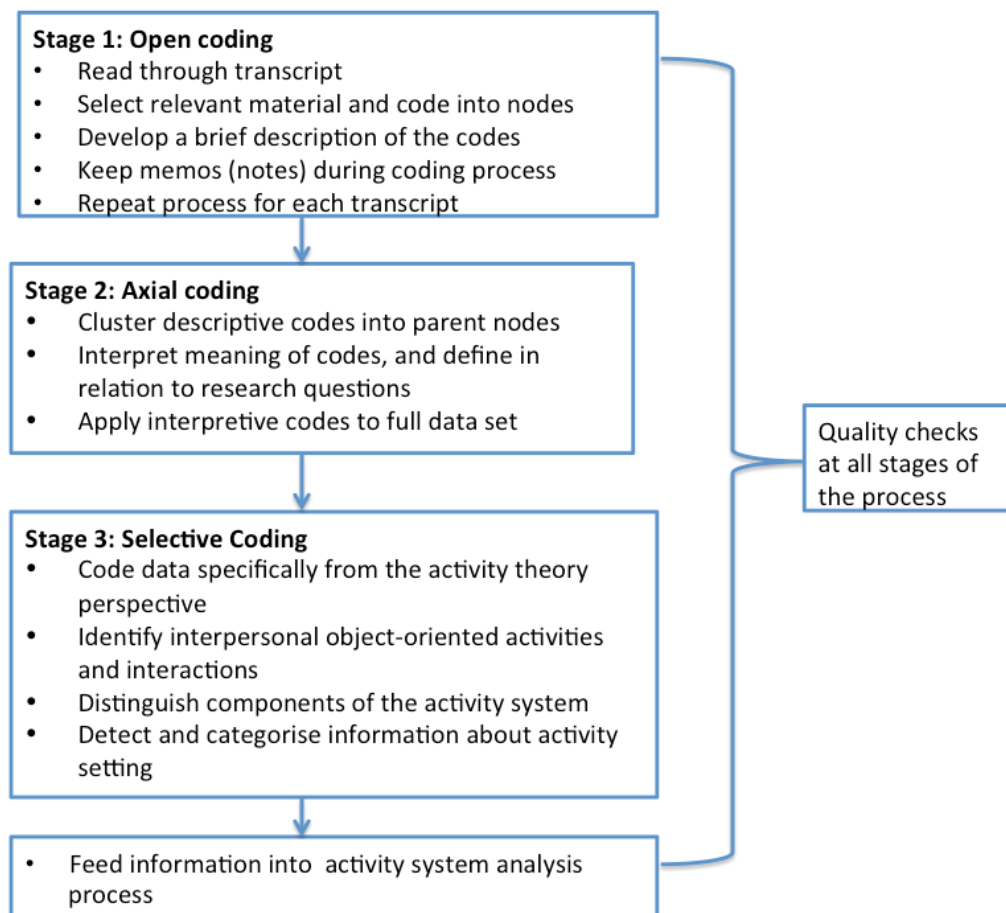


Figure 3.3 Thematic coding process

The next step was axial coding. Here the researcher goes beyond the initially identified codes to highlight constructs that assist in understanding the participant's views, experiences and perceptions (King & Horrocks, 2010). During this stage, the researcher is exploring closer associations, interactions, consequences and causes; identifying deeper links between viewpoints (Merriam, 2014). This phase of coding is interpretive where the focus is to reflect on meanings. It concentrates more on the descriptive codes and identifies content rather than the full data set. These descriptive codes emerge into the key themes from the data analysis. Themes are described as recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts that characterise particular perceptions and/or experiences that the researcher sees as relevant to the research questions (Neuman, 2010).

The final phase of the coding process was selective coding, whereby the researcher coded data specifically from the activity theory theoretical

perspective (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In this coding phase, the researcher applied selective coding by taking note of what elements of the coded data represented information about the activity system and interactions between participants within the system. Particular note was taken of the interpersonal object-oriented actions, how the coded data represented the components within the activity systems model, and what elements of the coded data represented information about the activity setting.

The coding process detailed above was not conducted in a straightforward, continuous process where one step followed the next, but rather the researcher cycled backward and forward between the data and the coding system. There were ongoing modifications, merging and separating of codes as the prevailing key themes began to emerge and take shape. This constant cycling, checking and rechecking ensures that the participants' lived perspectives are accurately reflected and translated into the resulting research findings. As the coding process proceeded through the stages a coding systemisation table was developed to record and organise the data. Table 3.4 details the descriptive coding nodes, definitions for each node and the activity systems analysis coding.

Table 3.4 Coding systemisation table

Coding node	Definition	Activity system coding
<b>Theme 1: Certification motivators and drivers</b>		
Internal values	Participants' value-driven approach to business operations influences decision to certify	Subject / Object / Historicity / Norms
Business decision	Decision to certify viewed as good for business	Rules / Norms / Object / Outcome / Community
Image enhancement / marketing benefit	Decision to certify influenced by potential for image enhancement	Interactions / Relationships / Norms / Object / Outcome
<b>Theme 2: Internal business constraints</b>		
Information quality and accessibility	Decision to certify is constrained by lack of information	Object / Subject / Relationships / Tools / Community / Roles
Perceived lack of benefit	Operators perceive little or no benefit	Object / Communication / Learning
Resources constraints	Resource-based constraints such as time, cost, staff, knowledge	Object / Tools / Rules / Norms / Roles

Coding node	Definition	Activity system coding
<b>Theme 3: External business challenges</b>		
Policy and political	Issues related to policy and political matters	Roles / Norms / Community
Range of programs	Variety and differentiation of certification programs	Object / Tools / Norms / Roles
Consumer demand	Operators perceive a lack of consumer interest / validation	Object / Community / Norms
Competing priorities	Other aspects of business operations are considered higher priority	Object / Norms / Communication / Historicity
<b>Theme 4: Stakeholder interactions</b>		
Pre-certification	Desired and actual operator interactions prior to certification	Tools / Community / Dynamics / Learnings
During certification process	Support and tools offered to operators during certification process	Object / Tools / Roles Communication / Learning / Tools
Post-certification	Communication and interactions after certification has been achieved	Object / Outcome / Interactions / Community / Tools
<b>Theme 5: Certification outcomes</b>		
Cost savings	Operators describe cost savings as an outcome of certification	Object / Outcome / Learnings
Environmental impacts	Certification provides improved environmental impacts	Object / Outcome / Learning / Tools
Business operation improvement	Operators noted an improvement to business practices, policies and performance	Outcome / Dynamics / Roles / Interaction / Learning
Learning	Learning was a valuable element of the certification process	Outcome / Interactions / Tools
Validation	Certification was a validation of best-practice business operations	Object / Outcome / Learning / Tools
<b>Theme 6: Value of the biosphere reserve concept</b>		
Understanding of the biosphere reserve concept	Participants' understanding and perception of the biosphere reserve concept	Subject / Outcome / Roles / Community / Historicity
Value of the biosphere reserve concept	Operators perceptions of the value to their business of Noosa's biosphere reserve status	Object / Outcome / Communication / Historicity
<b>Theme 7: Future of certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve</b>		
Type of certification program	Locally developed or globally recognised or combinations	Object / Outcome / Community / Subject/ Interactions
Stimulating increased certification in NBR	Stimulus required to facilitate an increase certification in NBR	Object / Outcome / Roles / Communication / Interactions / Tools



### 3.6.2 CHAT-based activity system analysis

The coding stage of the data analysis process provided the researcher with an intimate understanding of the data. The next stage of analysis was to use an activity systems analysis based on a CHAT derived framework to interpret and explore the certification activity.

CHAT is not a methodology per se, but is a theoretical framework for analysing human practices in a given context, which cannot be analysed outside the context in which it occurs. The use of an activity systems analysis framework facilitates the holistic interpretation of data, through the detailed process of studying the components of the activity system both individually and contextually.

CHAT has been described as having three principal stages or generations of development (Engeström, 1996). The first generation is based upon the work of cognitive psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his cultural-historical psychology studies and theories of cognition and learning. A second generation of activity theory pays homage to the work of Vygotsky, though it is generally Vygotsky's student Alexei Leont'ev who is identified as one of the key architects of contemporary activity theory (Nardi, 1996). The third generation draws upon the work of Vygotsky and Leont'ev. Yrjo Engeström developed a model of human action contained within an activity system. The social context of the activity system within which the actions take place includes *rules* (that regulate actions and interactions), *community* (the people associated with the activity) and *division of labour* (who does what). This third generation of activity theory as described by Engeström (2001) includes the development of conceptual tools to understand dialogue, multiple perspectives and networks of interacting activity systems.

The focus of contemporary activity theory is on how we as humans develop understandings of the real world, and how we draw meaning from those understandings and create learnings from those meanings. It allows investigations of motivations. It is well suited to case study research as it focuses on the interaction of human activity and consciousness within its relevant environmental context (in this case the tourism industry within Noosa

Biosphere Reserve). Additionally, CHAT offers a holistic and contextual method of discovery that can be used to support qualitative and interpretative research (Hashim & Jones, 2007).

In this research setting the CHAT analysis framework involved exploring the tourism operators' motivations, the business operational changes as a result of certification, and how tourism business operators perceive their joint activity and goals in light of the overall sustainability agenda. These relationships and interactions are also mediated by other factors (such as rules), which have both cultural and historical dimensions (Engeström, 2000). Since the cultural and historical values and perceptions of certification held by the tourism operator also mediate learning about certification, there was a need to incorporate this factor into the study.

Yamagata-Lynch suggests (2010, p. 5) that activity systems analysis provides a "valid framework to use as a guide while building reliable interpretations of data". She reports that activity systems analysis provides "opportunities for researchers to (a) work with a manageable unit of analysis, (b) find systemic implications, (c) understand systemic contradictions and tensions, and (d) communicate findings from the analysis". The use of an activity theory analysis framework facilitates insight into the contradictions and tensions within the system with the goal of identifying opportunities for intervention and innovation in the future.

It is important to specify that this research was not conducted as part of an interventionist approach such as Change Laboratories advanced by Engeström (1987) and colleagues. Therefore, the objective of this analysis is to identify and interpret tensions observed based on the systemic conflicts in the activity system. In order to do this, the researcher used thematic analysis to identify the different tensions and conflicts that have shaped the activity over time and to understand how the subjects themselves experience these tensions.

In this analysis a seven-step activity system analysis process was used to develop rich descriptions of the participants' lived experiences and to ensure triangulation of the data. These steps were developed based upon the prior work of Mwanza (2002), Zurita & Nussbaum (2007) and Jonassen & Rohrer-

Murphy (1999) that used CHAT-based analysis frameworks. Also, the work of Williams & Hummelbrunner (2010), and their suggested seven propositions for conducting a CHAT based inquiry was also used as a guide.

The seven steps and corresponding questions used to conduct the analysis are set out in Table 3.5. These analysis steps were used to explicate the components that frame the activity system of certification of tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve and to identify where the contradictions and tensions were occurring in the system.

Following on from the structural analysis of the system (Steps 1-6), a final seventh step was included, known as the Developmental Proposition (Capper & Williams, 2004). In this step, the identified contradictions are acknowledged as potential springboards for transformation and development. This developmental proposition can be seen as a key element of activity theory (Engeström, 2001). It is where the cycle of expansive learning ignites, where 'new' knowledge and innovation emerges (Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2010).

Data triangulation was achieved by exploring the findings of each data source through the comparative lens of other data sources. Survey results were compared with interviews transcripts in a systematic and planned manner. For example, the survey instrument and its results were analysed through the lens of the interview results to validate the key results and findings. In a similar way, the vignettes were triangulated with the survey and interview results to support the key findings and provide a more detailed and richer description of the emerging themes. Field notes were also used as a component of the triangulation process to compare the overall data relating to the certifiers and non-certifiers. The CHAT methodological framework includes an internal process of two types of triangulation, thematic analysis emerging from the coding and then analysis from the seven-step process that forms the CHAT analysis system. So applying the triangulation methods and approaches the researcher is able use CHAT to ensure construct validity, study rigor and deep interpretations of meaning. Additionally, the use of operator vignettes as a method of inquiry/interpretation added to the "integrated crystallisation" (Jennings, 2010, pg. 152) within the study. That is

the use of meaning making processes via multiple interpretations and representations provided a deepened more complex, understanding and interpretation of the topic.

### 3.7 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

In case study research the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher is paramount. Guba & Lincoln (1981, p. 387) express concern over case study evaluation and the “unusual problem of ethics”. They attest that a case study writer could illustrate anything they wished by selecting from among the available data. It is for this reason that in the current study a case study database and audit trail of the coding process has been kept to ensure validity of the findings, and fidelity to the participant experience.

It is acknowledged that the researcher’s position in qualitative research is subjective and this can introduce the problem of bias (Merriam, 2014). The researcher has a particular belief and value system that accompanies her into the field. Therefore, this research is not value free. However, the role of the researcher has been outlined and the ethnographic presence of the researcher explained (King & Horrocks, 2010): the researcher was an active participant in the interviews and the researcher has a professional and personal attachment to the study area.

Table 3.5 Steps used to inform analysis of the certification activity system

Steps	Goal	Purpose	Questions
<b>Step I</b>	Clarify the purpose of the activity system	Understand the relevant context in which the activities occur	What is the activity setting? What is the object/goal of the activities?
<b>Step II</b>	Analyse the activity system	Define the components, including subjects, objects, community rules and division of labour	Who are the subjects? What are their roles? What do we know about them? What is the subject’s current understanding of the object? Who else is in the community? Who does what? What is the division of labour? What are the explicit and implied rules of the activity system?
<b>Step III</b>	Analyse the activity structure	Define the activity by decomposing it into types of components and operations	How is certification currently implemented? What individual operations are required by the subject to move through the certification process? How are the certification processes structured to guide the operator through the process? How are the tasks required as part of the program organised?

<b>Step IV</b>	Analyse the tools	Focus on those that provide communication between subject, community and object	What are the physical and mental tools and mediators? What communication interactions occur within the system? What tools did they find (un)helpful to the process? What new/additional tools would be beneficial? Would these tools be applicable across different contexts?
<b>Step V</b>	Analyse the internal and external dynamics of the system	Discover how subject-driven contextual bounds and the external, community-driven contextual bounds influence the interactions of components within the activity system.	What are the beliefs and assumptions held by the tourism operators in relation to certification? How do these internal beliefs and motivations influence the activity? How do they refer to their experiences in relation to certification? What constrains or limits implementation of certification?
<b>Step VI</b>	Analyse the dynamics	Identify the essential dynamics that exist among the components. Uncover any contradictions or tensions in the system.	What are the interrelationships that exist within the components of the system? How have the relationships between the components been established historically? How formally established are those relationships? How have those interrelationships changed over time?
<b>Step VII</b>	Developmental proposition	Identify how contradictions can be used as a potential springboard for new knowledge and innovation.	

In relation to the use of interviews, Jennings (2010) suggests that the success of interviews relies on establishing rapport with participants. This researcher, through her extensive involvement in the industry, had an already established rapport with the participants. However, this position within the industry may have caused some interview participants to not give truthful answers, but rather answer with what they thought they were supposed to say. For this reason, the interviewing style was critical and the participants were encouraged to give their opinion and assured that there was no right or wrong answer and that their insights and opinions were valued regardless. The constructivist approach taken in this case study acknowledges that there are no simple answers and that truth evolves based on community narrative, and subjective to time and historical conditions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

### **3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical approval for this study was granted through the CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number H13/08-142, see Appendix J).

Participants of the online survey were sent an invitation to participate via an email from Tourism Noosa. This email contained a participant information sheet that included a project overview, information about the research process, confidentiality notes, a consent form and details about where to obtain further information (see Appendix F). Participants in the interviews were provided with a research participants information sheet when the interview was confirmed and they were asked to sign a consent form at the time of interview. The consent forms notified participants that their participation was voluntary, and that they had the right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any time. It also acknowledged that the responses they provided would be confidential and that their business would not be identified in the research or used in any subsequent publications (see Appendix K).

### **3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has detailed the research methodology developed for exploring sustainable tourism certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The key components of the research methodology include a social constructivist research paradigm and a case study informed research design. The key components of the research design were discussed including the use of document analysis, survey and interviews as a means of gathering data. The thematic coding and CHAT-informed analysis framework was used to identify contradictions and opportunities for innovation and development. The limitations of the research design and ethical considerations have also been discussed. The ensuing Chapters, 4, 5 and 6 present the results, findings, implications and conclusions drawn from the case study research.

# Chapter 4: Results

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the research. It integrates the survey and interview data sets to produce an overall picture of sustainable tourism certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. Firstly, an overview of the research participant profile is presented. The results of the thematic analysis are presented in Section 4.3, which discusses the seven key themes that emerged from the survey and interview data. The thematic findings were then used as guideposts for the activity systems analysis, which is presented in Chapter 5.

## 4.2 PARTICIPANT PROFILE

As discussed in Chapter 3, data was collected via an online survey and face-to-face interviews. One hundred valid online survey responses were collected and nine face-to-face interviews conducted. These were analysed and are presented according to seven key themes.

The participant profile of the survey respondents reflects the domination of small and micro businesses comprising the tourism industry in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. More than half (60%) of the tourism firms employ less than five people, with a further 30% having less than twenty employees. The overwhelming majority of businesses (88%) describe themselves as owner-operated. The respondent profile, shown in Table 4.1, details key characteristics of tourism businesses operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve that responded to the survey.

The survey respondent profiles provide a portrait of the typical tourism business operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve, where the owner is involved in the daily management of the business, and is also the principal decision maker regarding sustainable business practices. These businesses are micro or small businesses (meaning they have less than five employees)

and generally provide either accommodation or tourism experience services, such as tours, hire, transport.

Table 4.1 Summary of survey respondents' key business characteristics

<b>Tourism Sector</b>	<b>%</b>
Accommodation	30%
Tour/tourism experience/transport	22%
Health & wellbeing	11%
Direct & indirect services	11%
Events, arts & education	11%
Food services including restaurants/bar/café/tavern/takeaway	9%
Retail	6%
<b>Is the business owner-operated?</b>	
Yes	88%
No	12%
<b>Type of business entity</b>	
Company	62%
Sole trader	18%
Partnership	11%
Other	9%
<b>Number of employees</b>	
Less than 5 (micro business)	60%
5 – 20	31%
20 – 200	8%
Other	1%
<b>Principal decision maker regarding sustainable business practices</b>	
Business owner	65%
Combination of owners/manager & employees	18%
Business manager	8%
Range of employees across the business	5%
Other	4%
<b>Documented sustainability policy</b>	
No	65%
Yes	23%
Partly	12%
<b>Business certification (general)</b>	
No	78%
Yes	22%
<b>Sustainable tourism certification (Earth Check, ECOCertified or EcoBiz)</b>	
No	94%
Yes	6%



Figure 4.1 depicts a typical tourism business operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.



Figure 4.1 Features of a typical tourism business operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

These features of the tourism businesses surveyed are in keeping with the composition of the Queensland tourism industry, where 90% of tourism businesses employ less than 20 people (Tourism & Events Queensland, 2014). It is also consistent with the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (2011) definition of a small business as, "one that employs fewer than 20 people. The business will typically be independently owned and operated. The owner-managers who run the business will also tend to be the principal decision makers". The participant profile presented in this study is representative of the larger Queensland tourism industry.

The survey sample included both certified (22%) and non-certified businesses (78%). The ratio of certified to non-certified businesses included in the sample is higher than the industry average, which is estimated to be less than 1% of tourism businesses (Dodds & Joppe, 2005).

The certified respondents were then asked to specify which certification they held. Figure 4.2 shows the different types of certifications held by tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.



Figure 4.2 Certification programs used by tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

Thirty-five percent of survey respondents hold AAA star-rating, and a further 23% have other quality standard certifications from programs such as the Australian Tourism Accreditation Program (ATAP) and T-Qual. These certification programs relate to service quality standards and business management. They do not incorporate environmental and social factors into the certifications, so are not considered true sustainable tourism certification programs. The remainder of the certification programs used by tourism operators include environmental, social and quality standards and therefore (in this research) are considered sustainable certification programs. These include EarthCheck, ECO Certified, ecoBiz and Gumnut award certification programs. Forty-two percent of certified businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve hold certifications with these bodies, only 7% of the total survey respondents.

The second stage of data collection was face-to-face interviews. Nine interviews were conducted with owner operators or senior managers from tourism businesses and certification stakeholders operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. Three interviews were conducted with certified business

operators who had achieved a form of sustainable tourism certification, three with non-certified businesses and three with industry stakeholders, including certification providers and the local tourism organisation.

### **4.3 THEME ANALYSIS**

As detailed in Chapter 3, a thematic coding approach was used to interrogate and make sense of the data from both the survey and interviews in relation to the research questions. Open, axial and selective coding was employed as described in Chapter 3. This coding process allowed the researcher to: develop a rich understanding of the activity system of certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve; understand how components within the system interact and are related; and also where there are tensions and contradictions within the system.

From the data, seven key themes emerged that encompass the research objectives of the study and inform understanding of the activity system. These themes are: 1) certification motivators and drivers; 2) internal business constraints; 3) external business challenges; 4) stakeholder interactions; 5) certification outcomes; 6) value of the biosphere reserve concept; and 7) certification as a mechanism to improve sustainability of tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

The next section of this chapter discusses the results of the research in relation to these seven key themes, drawing predominately from the survey findings with elaborations provided from the interview data.

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: Certification motivators and drivers**

Drivers and motivators refer to the factors that stimulate uptake of certification by tourism business operators. This theme was identified using the survey questions (Q15 & Q24) relating to benefits of certification and subsequent in-depth probing during the face-to-face interviews. Certified and non-certified survey respondents were asked to nominate aspects that they considered as potential or perceived benefits of certification. The subsequent interviews included questioning around original motivations to certify,

expectations of the process for certified interviewees and factors that may prompt non-certified businesses to seek certification.

Figure 4.3 shows the percentage of survey respondents (certified and non-certified) that considered these aspects as potential or perceived benefits of certification.

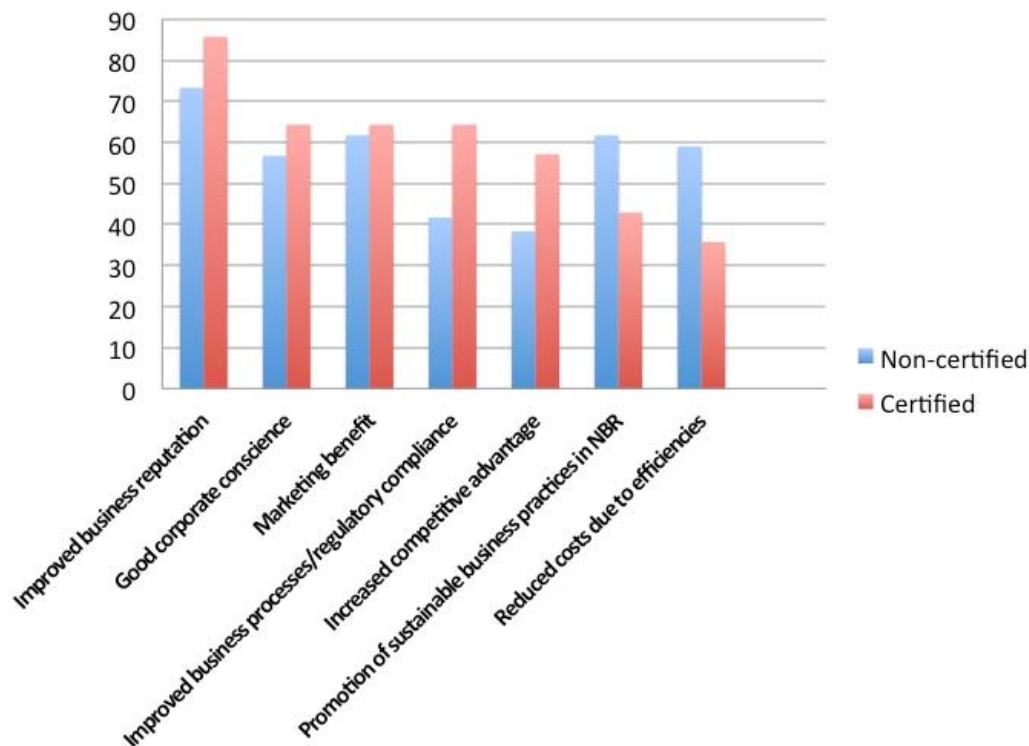


Figure 4.3 Expected and perceived benefits of certification as ranked by survey respondents

The results show that there are a number of key driving forces that prompt businesses to apply for, pursue and achieve certification. Essentially, these drivers can be separated into those that are internal, personally held values and those that are externally related that focus on the business proposition of certification.

### ***External, business-oriented drivers***

Respondents' external drivers to seek certification centre on the view that certification is a business decision rather than a value-based decision. The decision to certify or seek certification is motivated by image, profit and compliance. These drivers are referred to as external drivers as discussed in

the literature review. Externally driven motivators play an important role in understanding why businesses do or don't choose certification. Certain similarities exist with respect to particular aspects of motives and benefits. Motivation to certify is closely related to expected benefits of certification (Zaramdini, 2007). Operators are motivated by the benefits they expect to gain from certification.

'Improved business reputation' is the highest-ranking expected benefit of certification, 85% of certified and 73% of non-certified survey respondents ranking this as the most important benefit of certification. This shows that operators view certification as an image-enhancing tool. They are motivated to achieve certification as it is seen to validate their legitimacy in the marketplace, enabling them to attract new business and certain types of consumers. For example one non-certified operator stated:

So I'd be doing it more for the business perception, it would be the other business owners going, hmm isn't that good they've got certified. (NC1)

While a certified operator said:

What you are hoping is that by achieving certification, the marketplace becomes educated in the respect that they start identifying who has made the effort and taken the time to gain certification, hoping that they notice you as being a more responsible operator, more ethical operator, more principled operator. (EC1)

Closely related to improved business reputation is the expected marketing benefit certification can provide. Certified operators ranked marketing benefit equal second with good corporate conscience and improved business compliance. Non-certified operators also ranked marketing benefit as the second most important perceived benefit along with reduced costs and promotion of sustainable business practices. A certified operator expressed this by saying:

That's the hope. That it gives you some marketplace advantage.  
(EC2)

Tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve are also motivated to seek certification as a way to ensure they are operating in the most sustainable manner possible. Certification was perceived as a reviewing tool to help improve business processes by identifying where improvements could be made. Certification was considered to be a valuable validation process to endorse business operations as complying with industry standards. In the survey, 42% of non-certified and 64% of certified respondents chose improved business practices and regulatory compliance as a benefit of certification. This was highlighted by comments such as:

We were motivated to do it to ensure that we are sustainable, reducing our impact on the environment and reducing our costs.  
(S24)

To make our business operations as sustainable and environmentally friendly as possible, it's quality control. (S77)

Linked with improving business practices is the perceived benefit of reduced costs due to improved energy and waste efficiencies. This potential benefit is considered more important by non-certified operators than to those that are certified. The survey results show that 59% of non-certified respondents considered reduced costs as a potential benefit, while only 35% of certified operators noted this as a perceived benefit. This may be due to the fact that certified operators are already benefiting from reduced costs and as such no longer consider it a potential benefit.

For some operators their incentive to certify was related to achieving longer operating permits and access to protected areas. This driver falls into the category of regulatory compliance, highlighted by comments such as:

It allows access to longer permits. If you've got advanced eco-certification, instead of having a three year permit, you can get a ten year permit. (EC1)

### ***Internal values as motivational driver***

Internally driven motivators relate to business operators' historically acquired knowledge and beliefs about sustainability, and how their business should operate. These beliefs influence their motivation to pursue and achieve

certification. This is referred to in this research as 'corporate conscience'. The survey results reveal that certified operators ranked having a 'good corporate conscience' as the second highest benefit to attaining certification. Improved business reputation ranked highest and will be discussed further on. This shows that those businesses that have achieved certification place a high value on 'doing the right thing' by the environment and society. This is demonstrated by comments such as:

It's a statement of our values and management practices. (S67)

I think it's just good to let people know that we're doing our part for the business and for the environment and the local community as well. (EC2)

By way of comparison, non-certified survey respondents ranked 'good corporate conscience' lower than other expected benefits of certification. They ranked it fifth highest behind benefits such as reduced costs, marketing benefit and improved business reputation, which are external drivers.

In summary, the results of the survey and interviews show that in Noosa Biosphere Reserve the main catalyst for businesses to seek certification is to improve business reputation. Other business-related drivers were perceived benefits such as marketing advantage, reduction in costs and improved business reputation. There is also a value-based motivation associated with 'corporate conscience' that stimulates operators towards certification. On the flip side of this are the constraints and challenges faced by operators that limit or hinder their implementation of certification. Internal constraints experienced by the businesses operators and external challenges created by the contextual operating environment are identified as significant factors limiting the uptake of certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The following two themes relate to these barriers.

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Internal business constraints**

This theme centres on the internal business-oriented barriers that operators view as hindering their ability or willingness to seek certification. Internal business constraints refer to those barriers relating directly to the business in that to some extent the business operator has control over these and can

influence them. The survey contained questions (Q16 & Q25) requesting respondents to select those aspects they considered barriers to certification. The interviews expanded upon the information gathered from the survey by delving deeper to explore barriers and constraints faced by the business operator.

Figure 4.4 shows the percentage of certified and non-certified operators that nominated each factor as a perceived barrier.

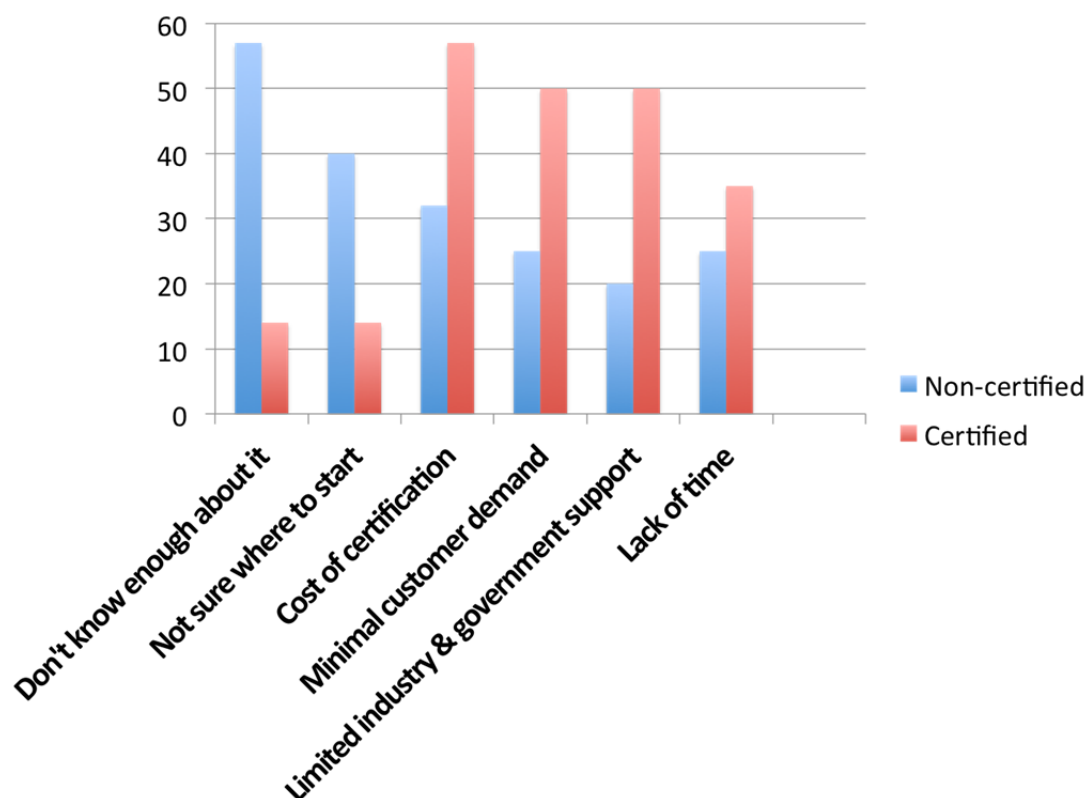


Figure 4.4 Barriers to certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

### ***Lack of knowledge***

The survey results reveal that the most reported barrier to non-certified respondents becoming certified is lack of knowledge and awareness about certification. Seventy-five percent of non-certified respondents claimed they were not aware of any certification program available to their business. Furthermore, when the survey question asked respondents to nominate the barriers to them choosing to become certified, 57% stated they 'don't know



enough about it' and 40% were 'not sure where to start'. When reflecting upon non-certified operators' lack of knowledge being the main barrier to certification, this sentiment also emerged during the interviews with comments such as:

We just probably don't understand it enough to make an informed decision whether we should be or shouldn't be. (NC1)

I think a lot of people have heard of it but not a lot of people know much about it. (NC2)

Encouragingly, the survey and interviews both highlight that with improved information and knowledge about certification, operators may be encouraged to explore certification for their business. Suggested resources that could assist businesses towards certification was information such as:

A checklist of steps, summary document of what different programs involve. (S100)

Explanation of the programs available, some sort of matrix may be helpful. (S73)

### ***Limited business resources***

For non-certified respondents, other significant internal constraints were related to their business resources such as the cost of certification (31%), and lack of time (25%). This is reflected in comments such as:

I think that's probably the biggest barrier. It's not the initial fee, that's fine, but it's the ongoing – if you don't renew you have to start again. (NC1)

Cost and time versus benefit is unlikely to result in a positive decision. (S7)

In comparison, certified respondents in the survey also identified cost (57%) as the main barrier to businesses becoming certified, followed by minimal customer demand (50%) and limited industry and government support (50%). In addition to the internally focused constraints that business operators describe there are also external challenges that hinder the uptake of certification. These are detailed in Theme 3.

### 4.3.3 Theme 3: External business challenges

External business challenges are related to contextual circumstances of the business operating environment within Noosa Biosphere Reserve and how this impacts upon the uptake of certification as a sustainable business management tool.

#### ***Limited industry and government support***

Results of the survey indicate that certified operators (50%) and non-certified operators (20%) find the limited industry and government support for certification to be a constraint. The interviews reveal that certification providers and industry organisations also find this a challenge. This lack of support manifests as a frustration for those operators who have committed to certification. In the interviews, operators expressed this by saying:

There's not enough recognition, there's not enough incentive for people to go and get certified because your local LTAs (local tourism authorities) are ignoring you, your local RTOs (regional tourism organisations) are really ignoring you, and government departments that you're dealing with, particularly in protected areas, still don't insist it is a minimum requirement. (EC1)

It's not compulsory, no one said, you know no one's given us a bit of a nudge to do it. (NC1)

As noted in the literature review in Chapter 2, the support and commitment to certification of tourism businesses is inconsistent across levels of government in Australia. This increases the difficulties faced by stakeholders and operators when implementing certification. For instance one stakeholder described the recent decision by the federal government to drop the T-QUAL program by saying:

T-QUAL was a program that everyone got behind and now it's-----not proceeding or, as I understand it, it's been handed back to the industry, but the industry don't have money to proceed. (SH3)

These sentiments were echoed by another stakeholder's comments:

You see sometimes it's just like, 'Oh God', we're just going backwards, now we're going to have to start again. (SH2)

The lack of support from industry and government coupled with the ongoing changing priorities of government is having an impact on the view of certification as a reliable and valuable business development tool.

### ***Minimal customer demand***

There is also a perception held by both certified and non-certified operators that there is minimal customer demand for certification and they express this as a barrier to certification. Fifty percent of certified survey respondents selected minimal customer demand as a barrier, and 25% of non-certified operators also indicated it was a barrier. A certified interview respondent expressed this in the following statement:

At this point in time I don't think . . . that would really induce people to come here. I mean you know I've got . . . accreditation, come and have a beer at my bar. I don't know whether they're going to do that.  
(EC3)

Similarly, a non-certified operator also expressed that they do not view certification as a means of delivering more customers by saying:

I'm really not convinced it would lead to more traffic – to our door.  
(NC1)

An interesting point to note is that although operators perceive limited demand from consumers, they did indicate that marketing benefit was an important advantage of certification. This indicates that they view certification as a way to enhance their image as a responsible operator within the context of the local community and industry, but are doubtful of its power to attract more customers.

### ***Range of certification programs***

The range of certification programs available is seen as an additional constraint to businesses choosing to become certified. As noted in the literature review, there are a number of different programs under which operators can choose to become certified. Each of these programs has varying criteria, reporting methods and procedures, audit systems, costs and consumer awareness. This adds to the confusion that operators face in

deciding which program suits their type of business and will deliver the greatest benefit. This is reflected in comments such as:

There [are] so many programs, there are some advantages and disadvantages to a number of them. (SH3)

They've got such a broad spectrum of members, the eco-certified program...really does just suit tour operators.(EC1)

The externally constructed constraints discussed above highlight that, while business operators have some control over barriers they face in implementing certification, they operate in the context of the business environment of Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The external factors such as lack of industry and government support, minimal customer demand and the range of certification programs influences this operating environment, which in turn affects operators' certification activities.

#### **4.3.4 Theme 4: Stakeholder interactions**

Understanding the interactions and communications between stakeholders in the tourism industry prior, during and after the certification process is reported to be vital to understanding the interdependencies and connections of components within the activity system.

##### ***Pre-certification interaction***

The results of the survey demonstrate the significance of industry associations and business networks in encouraging and sharing information about certification. Of the non-certified survey respondents who were aware of certification programs, 78% stated that interactions with an industry association or group, such as Tourism Noosa, Sunshine Coast Destinations, Noosa Biosphere or Noosa Chamber of Commerce brought about this awareness. These networks were also important to certified operators, who responded that 50% had also heard about certification through industry associations. One certified operator emphasised this by describing his interactions with the certification provider through an industry association:

I've been exposed to certification prior to this as part of, being part of a local cluster group... It was just to give everyone a bit of exposure

to it and what's involved. Yeah, so I had an idea of what I was up for.  
(EC2)

Increased interaction between non-certified and certified operators also has the potential to grow knowledge and prompt an increase in certification. Non-certified operators expressed a willingness to learn more about certification from someone in their industry. They described this by saying:

I would be very interested in meeting with other like-minded businesses, in networking for people that are more eco-friendly.  
(NC3)

Maybe . . . other people in the industry that are already certified can give us, you know, some firsthand experience of how it's worked for them and how it works. (NC2)

These comments demonstrate that industry associations and peer networks are a highly valuable component of the certification activity structure prior to the operators embarking on the certification process. Other means of finding out about certification are seminars, conferences and the local media.

### ***Interactions during certification***

Just as interactions prior to certification are important for operators, so are interactions during the certification process. Feedback from certified operators in relation to interactions during the process was mixed and varied depending upon the chosen certification program. For example, certified interviewees stated:

There was basically a framework that you paid for and you were given an application and you went through it...it was all up to our own resources. (EC1)

There was plenty of support from within the company itself, because obviously they're the people that are trying to drive it. The certifier gave us heaps of support. (EC2)

### ***Post-certification interaction***

The interactions and communication that occur post-certification are another important component of the activity system. After achieving certification, operators felt that more interactions and communication between the

certifiers, industry and visitors would be beneficial to recognise and promote the achievement of certification. During an interview one certified operator stated:

I think the problem with your local LTAs and RTOs, and even to a point, you know, the state tourism body, they certainly haven't picked up on the fact that people have made the effort to become certified and are best practice. They certainly don't profile those businesses in the light that I would expect them to do as a financial member. (EC1)

Post-certification interaction between the certified business and the visitor is also of importance. Certified operators view this as a vital interaction that must be ongoing and consistent. Certified operators describe their efforts as:

So we would try to ensure that every night at our welcome meeting we reiterated the eco-business to all of these new people daily. The trouble is that if you don't keep driving it all of us start to forget. (EC3)

It's just education, it's people realising what the outcomes are and what the knock-on effect is from their actions. (EC2)

Operators also viewed a strong partnership approach as necessary for the successful implementation, promotion and recognition of certification across Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The survey results reveal that 63% of respondents consider Noosa Council, Noosa Biosphere management and Tourism Noosa as equally responsible for the education, implementation, recognition and management of certification programs across Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

#### **4.3.5 Theme 5: Certification outcomes**

Outcomes are the demonstrated results of certification. Information relating to outcomes was predominately sourced from the interview data. The environment provided by the interview format allowed operators to elaborate and describe the outcomes in their own words. All interviewed certified operators and stakeholders reflected upon the positive outcomes of certification. The coding process identified five outcomes that the certification process provides to businesses and operators. These are:

- Cost savings;
- Improved environmental impact;
- Improved business practices, policies and performance;
- Learning and sharing new knowledge; and
- Validation of best practices.

The first demonstrated outcome of certification is where operators describe monetary savings as a result of becoming certified. All certified operators described the initial cost as an outlay. However, they then went on to explain that over time they began to make savings as they were more aware of their utility and resource use. One operator describes this by saying:

I thought it would be less expensive than it was, but that was all right because as time went by we clearly received savings on various utilities. (EC3)

Improved environmental impact is another outcome of the certification process that was noted by certified operators. The awareness of impacts and the requirement to minimise these environmental impacts is a demonstrated part of the certification process. All certified operators discussed this as a tangible outcome of certification. Comments that reflect this are:

We were cutting down the carbon miles...it was coming from locals, it was coming off our farm. (EC1)

Providing a stable habitat for wildlife. (EC2)

We actually have all that water tested quarterly to make sure that we're maintaining proper parameters, because that water goes back out into the basin. (EC2)

We had to replace pretty much all of our toilet systems, our showerheads and many other pieces of equipment around the property to bring them into line with best practice. (EC3)

A third outcome of the certification process that was identified by all operators was an improvement in business practices, policies and business performance. A common factor noted by respondents was that the certification process was a valuable business review tool. As one certified operator describes:

It's like putting together a business plan, essentially. You're reviewing everything you do, your philosophies, your techniques, your operational theories, your theories, so everything is critical. It's a real good look in the mirror for an operator on how they're conducting business and how they could actually better conduct their business. (EC1)

Policy development and whole of business support was a business improvement also discussed:

We've got a policy, a sustainability policy.... so that's been made available to all guests . . . That was developed as part of the initial benchmarking. So the first thing was to have a policy in place that was supported from the top of the business, so we had that to be able to push through the different initiatives. (EC2)

Learning and dissemination of new knowledge was another positive outcome of the certification process noted by all operators interviewed. The types of learning differed, however, each certified operator felt it was a significant outcome for them and their business. One certified operator describes learning by understanding as:

It's good for operators...to have a look at their own business and be able to understand what it is that they're delivering and how that impacts the environment and how they can benefit local communities. (EC2)

Learning was also identified as cultivating awareness and respect for resources. One operator described this as:

I think the thing I most learnt was a respect for the resources that sometimes we take for granted. (EC3)

Staff development and learning were also noted as a business improvement delivered by the certification process, described as:

Other areas were job description changes so that every staff member was advised about what we were doing in relation to, say, saving electricity, saving of water, saving of gas, recycling of products et cetera. (EC3)



It made the staff more aware of why you do certain things and it gave them an understanding of the business practices. (EC2)

This learning and knowledge sharing is a valuable outcome of the certification process.

### ***Validation of best practice***

The final outcome of the certification process identified through the interviews is the validation of best practice initiatives implemented by the businesses. Operators noted that not only was the process a useful business review tool that highlighted where improvements could be made, it also served as a rewarding validation process, where they scrutinised those aspects of the business where they were demonstrating industry leading practices. Certified operators describe this the following way:

One of the things it highlights...is that all of the things we were doing were, you know, industry leading best practice anyway. (EC1)

So, some of it was a validation of what we were already doing. (EC2)

### **4.3.6 Theme 6: Value of the biosphere reserve concept**

This theme relates to Noosa's biosphere reserve status and how operators perceive and value this status in relation to their tourism business. The literature review identified biosphere reserve status having potential to act as a catalyst for innovative thinking and for modelling new ways of embracing the sustainable development challenge. In this research, it is important to understand how the operators interpret and value the biosphere reserve concept, as this impacts upon their actions towards sustainability.

The research reveals that in the main, tourism operators lack understanding and knowledge about the biosphere reserve concept and how this relates to their tourism business. For instance, when questioned about what Noosa's biosphere reserve status means to them in an interview, one non-certified operator stated:

I guess to be honest I don't really understand. I mean I know the word, I've seen the term, you see it around and bandied around, but I don't really understand what it means. (NC2)

The majority of the survey and interview respondents echoed these sentiments with comments such as:

People know about the biosphere reserve however few understand it.

(S8)

Any mention of biosphere normally attracts silence due to lack of knowledge. (S18)

We don't know enough about it. (NC3)

Some certified operators have taken the time to learn about and understand the concept and what it means to their business. However, they felt that visitors and perhaps other locals did not comprehend the concept. This is reflected in comments such as:

I think maybe the biosphere status has had a very minor effect on the attitude of Noosa people but I doubt whether it's tangible yet. I don't think it's been promoted in a way that has that tangible aspect of, yes, it applies to me as an individual throughout the area. People know of this – this thing – it's more like a cloud but they can't touch it, they can't feel it and they don't perceive how it impacts directly...It's too intangible. (EC3)

The big challenge of the biosphere as a concept is the general public kind of don't get it. (SH1)

Understanding the biosphere concept is different to valuing the biosphere reserve status and knowing how to leverage on that value. The majority of operators did not understand the concept. However, they did see value in Noosa having biosphere reserve status. For instance, some non-certified operators stated that not understanding the term does not mean they do not see value in it:

Even if you don't know much about it as a tourist, it just sounds good.

It sounds like a world heritage area, it sounds like it's – there's a limited number of them, so it sounds exclusive and unique, so I think that alone makes it worth having. (NC1)

It's one of those things that sounds like a good thing but I don't know that many people that I mix with understand exactly what that means. (NC2)

While operators expressed value in Noosa being a biosphere reserve, they do not perceive this status to have impacted upon their business or influenced their business operations. This is reflected by certified operators commenting:

I don't think that it influences them to come to us in any way. (EC3)

I don't think it has any weight on how the resort is run. (EC2)

These results indicate that while tourism operators value Noosa's biosphere reserve status, many have not connected with the concept in a tangible manner that has impacted on their sustainability or business operations. Certification is one mechanism that can improve sustainability and provide tangible outcomes that align with the goals of the biosphere reserve concept.

#### **4.3.7 Theme 7: Future of certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve**

The results have shown that the majority of operators surveyed (62%), support the encouragement of tourism certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. A further 38% were not sure, as they believed they did not have enough knowledge about certification. This demonstrates that from the operators' perspective, there is strong support for certification as a sustainability improvement tool. However, they see there is a requirement for industry and government leadership along with support and incentives to motivate them to take up certification. This is demonstrated by comments such as:

Operators may need to be incentivised to complete a certification program but they need the information first i.e. the programs that are suitable for their business. (S67)

Information workshops to business and proposed applications to the businesses to get them started. (S88)

A series of workshops designed to inform and up-skill operators on becoming more sustainable within the context of working within the biosphere. (S73)

While operators agree that a cooperative management organisation approach is needed to strengthen and grow certification across the region, there is some disagreement about the type of certification program that operators believe is best suited for Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The survey responses reveal that a number of tourism businesses (22%) believe that a program that gives recognition to businesses who have achieved certification under one of the programs currently available, is the most appropriate means of recognising and promoting certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. They believe that utilisation of the internationally recognised programs will also have wider marketing appeal. A certified operator who has been certified for a number of years also agrees that a program recognising the internationally available certification programs would be the most beneficial. He described this by stating:

Ideally, it would be one that has international recognition, domestic recognition and local recognition. (EC1)

However, he then goes on to qualify that while the use of internationally recognised programs has merit, this is only true if these programs are recognised and promoted locally also. He does this by stating:

I truly think that...program probably has more recognition around the world than it does in the state of Queensland and particularly in the local Noosa Shire. So there's something really wrong there...The state government needs to turn around and encourage the local governments to recognise that the program is one of the internationally, world leading, certified programs available to people operating businesses in the natural environment. (EC1)

Even though there are benefits for utilising the range of existing programs, 40% of survey respondents were in favour of a locally developed and operated Noosa Biosphere certification program. For instance certified operators stated;

I think that it would be better to have initial – a focus on a local or Noosa style accreditation that would seem more directly relevant. An international accreditation, again perhaps, may not appear to be instantly relevant to locals, whereas something that's home grown

would probably appear to be a far more appropriate badge of honour to wear. (EC3)

Ultimately a local Noosa Biosphere certification would be great, as it would be customised to meet the needs of the local community and biosphere reserve but should also factor the higher level requirements and initiatives of some of the national and globally recognised programs. (S45)

I suppose the idea of having a local one would be good, because it's obviously based on what's required as, it's all, like sustainability's based on community, so the idea of something that's based purely on what the community's needs are. (NC2)

However, operators did note the challenges of developing and implementing a locally based certification program:

If it's small and locally managed then that's someone having to manage the program, which doesn't sound that efficient. (NC1)

Well, if you've got your own program, that's fine. It's just no one else will know. One advantage of certification-----is that if it's bigger, people like your customers, know what it is. (EC2)

Also, noted by operators, was the potential of the already developed training package 'Welcome to Noosa'. It was suggested that this program could also encompass sustainability as part of its training set. While some respondents believed this proposal has merit, the 'Welcome to Noosa' program was primarily developed as a customer service training tool. The foundations of the program are not based on businesses meeting set criteria and there is not an independent auditing and monitoring aspect to the program.

#### **4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The results presented in this chapter were drawn from the online survey of one hundred tourism businesses operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve and nine in-depth interviews conducted with tourism businesses, certification providers and the local tourism organisation. The results focus on seven key themes that serve to provide in-depth insight into the drivers, barriers, interactions, outcomes and relationships relating to the operationalisation of

sustainable tourism certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. These results highlight that operators' motivations and drive towards certification are influenced by factors internal and external to the tourism business. The results also point to a variance between the perceived benefits of certification and the outcomes delivered. The results also point to an unrealised potential of Noosa's biosphere reserve status to assist in developing and promoting a more sustainable tourism industry. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings of the research using activity systems analysis as a framework.

# Chapter 5: Findings

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The results presented in the previous chapter highlight the key themes emerging from the research data. This chapter discusses the findings of the research developed using CHAT as a framework for analysis. The use of the seven-step CHAT analysis framework process detailed in Chapter 3 facilitated rich insight into the interactions between components of the certification activity system. It also provided a useful mechanism to expose the points of tension and identify where contradictions were most prominently occurring.

Section 5.2 provides an overall description of the activity system of tourism certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve and details the interrelated components of subject, object, tools, community, roles and rules. Vignette examples from the case study are provided in Section 5.3, to give insight into the experiences and perceptions of certification from the certified and non-certified operators' perspectives. Contradictions within the system are identified in Section 5.4 and explained with the use of the activity system triangle. Finally, Section 5.5 identifies opportunities for the enhancement of motivational drivers to encourage operator action towards sustainable certification.

## 5.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY SYSTEM AND INTERRELATED COMPONENTS

The use of an activity theory analysis framework is helpful for providing insight into an activity system and identifying contradictions and tensions. The identification of contradictions may provide opportunities for developing strategies and models for innovation and organisational learning. Using the thematic coding process as detailed in Chapter 3, the elements of the activity system were identified in the data. Using activity analysis as an analytical tool, the researcher examined the relationship between subject (tourism operator) and the goal or object (certification) and how this is mediated by the

main components involved in certification activity. These are namely: (a) tools (physical, mental and human), (b) rules (formal and informal), (c) community (peers, locals, visitors and management organisations), and (d) a division of labour (roles of stakeholders). Engeström's (1987) activity triangle (Figure 5.1) is used to illustrate components of the activity and the interacting nature of these components. In practice these components operate in a dynamic, inter-related way. However, for the purposes of this analysis the next section of this chapter will identify these components in relation to the study context.

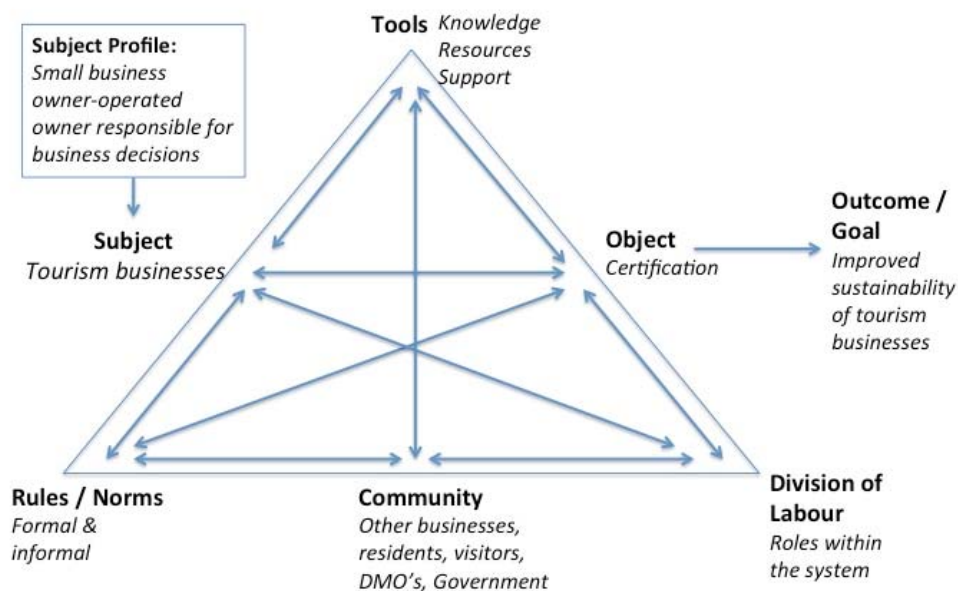


Figure 5.1 Interacting components of the tourism certification activity system in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

### 5.2.1 Subject and object of the certification activity system

The subjects within the system are both certified and non-certified tourism businesses operating within Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The key characteristics of the majority of subjects within the activity system are that they are micro or small businesses employing less than twenty people, where the business owner also operates the business and is primarily responsible for the business decisions relating to certification and sustainability. The aspirational object of the system is certification of tourism businesses, while it



is noted that this is not necessarily an object for many of the subjects. It is acknowledged that specific objects for subjects in this activity may be more directly related to running a successful business, and within that certification may be one aspect. The motivation and decision to seek or not seek certification is inherently shaped by the operators' culturally and historically acquired values, beliefs and knowledge about sustainability in business and their corporate responsibility to act sustainably.

The results of the research show that those businesses that are certified place a higher value on 'good corporate conscience' and demonstrating CSR practices than those that are not certified. This signifies that ethical motivation (Ayuso, 2007), such as believing it is the 'right thing to do' produces a stronger propensity to adopt sustainable business practices. This finding is consistent with the studies of El Dief & Font (2010) and Bohdanowicz (2005) who argue that those firms motivated by altruistic values show a greater tendency to adopt responsible practices than those motivated by business drivers such as legitimacy and competitiveness.

Strategic drivers that relate to business image such as 'improved reputation' and 'marketing benefit' are also considered important driving factors that influence a business operator's motivation to seek certification. This finding is consistent with other studies that found operators view certification as a means to achieve business legitimacy and as a way to raise their profile with industry stakeholders, including destination management organisations, government, business partners and visitors (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b; D'Souza, 2004; Harris, 2007). Therefore, within the context of Noosa Biosphere Reserve the operators' achievement of the object of certification is influenced by both ethical (intrinsic) and strategic (often extrinsic) motivations that act as drivers for certification.

### **5.2.2 Tools within the activity system**

Tools are those mediating means that assist businesses operators towards achieving their object. In this activity system, tools relate to the resources and support available to assist with certification, such as information based materials regarding the available certification programs and the processes

involved, and the financial and human resources required to achieve certification.

The results show that operator perceptions of the tools available in the activity system influence their action or inaction towards certification. For example, most non-certified operators felt they lacked the required tools to achieve certification on their own. This was often related to their reported limited knowledge about certification and the associated benefits, available programs to suit their business, and information about how and where to access further support (Carlsen et al., 2006; Chan, 2011; Jarvis et al., 2010; Revell & Rutherford, 2003). Many of the non-certified operators expressed lack of knowledge and limited resources such as time and money as barriers to their seeking certification.

Conversely, certified operators presented a different opinion of tools related to their achievement of certification. They did not note limiting factors, but rather enabling tools. They noted their own human resources (themselves and their intimate knowledge of their business) and their staff were important tools in the certification process. They also noted that support from the certifying agencies was a key tool that assisted them in their certification achievement. It is interesting to note that the certified operators did not express a lack of knowledge or information as a potential barrier for them to choose certification. This indicates that the information is probably available if operators are motivated to find and utilise it. The uncertified operators are perhaps not sufficiently motivated to achieve the goal of certification and to access the information and support available. Therefore, in the activity system, the use of tools to mediate object-oriented action is dependent upon the operator's motivation to achieve the goal. If the operator is motivated to achieve certification they will seek out and use the available tools. Conversely, those operators who are not overly motivated towards the goal view the tools as inadequate, which creates barriers to them taking goal-oriented action. In other words, their perception of the tools is influenced by their motivation toward the goal.

### **5.2.3 Community within the activity system**

The tourism businesses do not operate in isolation; they are involved in a number of communities. These include: a) employees and business partners; b) other businesses; c) local residents; d) visitors; e) business and community associations; and f) governmental jurisdictions (local, state, federal). The communities have varied influences upon the tourism businesses and their implementation of certification.

The employees, business partners and supply chains influence decisions and actions taken relating to certification. For example, where the business owner may not support certification, their employees, business partners or suppliers may provide additional information and support to influence the business owner towards becoming certified. Additionally, other businesses with whom tourism operators network provide influence by way of their opinions and experiences of certification. They also have the potential to provide support, advice and encouragement as businesses move thorough the certification process.

Local residents and visitors are also important members of the certification activity system in the way they make purchasing decisions and patronise certified or non-certified businesses. Currently, an opinion held by many certified and non-certified business operators is that certification is not valued by the visitor, local residents or management organisations.

Associations and networks are vitally important within the activity system, as the survey results and interviews reveal, as they provide a learning function within the system. Communication and information about certification most often reaches the business operator through networks such as local tourism and business associations and seminars and conferences. Local media also play a role in informing and educating operators about certification by highlighting those businesses that have achieved certification in their news stories. Communication, membership of and interaction between the communities of stakeholders within the system play a significant role in influencing the tourism operator's goal-oriented activity.

#### **5.2.4 Roles and division of labour within the activity system**

The division of labour refers to who does what in the context of the activity system, in other words what roles are filled by whom. The tourism operator and/or their employees are responsible for the actual completion and fulfilment of certification program requirements. They also have influence on the motivation to take up certification based on their historically acquired values, knowledge, skills and experience. The providers of the certification program also play a role, in that they currently develop, deliver and administer the framework for the certification process. The local tourism destination management organisation (in this case Tourism Noosa) fulfils an information and support role through strategies such as providing information regarding the certification programs available and the certification process. They can also play a marketing role in promoting certified operators to visitors and helping raise the profile of Noosa as a sustainable tourism destination. Additionally, the Noosa Biosphere management organisation (in this case, originally Noosa Biosphere Limited, now Noosa Biosphere Reserve Foundation) may have a similar role to play in the promotion and recognition of certified operators both locally and through the global network of biosphere reserves.

The local council (Noosa Council) and state government (Queensland Government) currently play a predominantly regulatory role in the activity system. They regulate permits to tourism enterprises that operate in protected and high use areas. The visitor plays an important role in the system through their purchasing behaviour. If, increasingly, tourists are choosing to patronise those businesses that are branded as sustainable and certified, this may encourage more businesses toward achieving certification. Finally, the media also plays a role through the communication of information about available certification programs and the promotion of certified businesses.

There is complexity in the division of labour within the system due to the number and variety of stakeholders, including the businesses operators and their staff, other industry members, locals, visitors and external institutions.

The roles within the system provide influence and impact upon factors that drive the operators' motivation and ability to achieve certification.

#### **5.2.5 Formal and informal rules of the activity system**

Rules are any formal or informal regulations that can affect how the certification activity takes place. Formal regulations are those imposed by governments or regulatory bodies. In this activity system, certification is a voluntary initiative. There is no regulatory requirement for businesses to complete certification. As noted in Appendix C, a previous policy of the Queensland Government was to make certification a compulsory requirement to gain protected area permits for tourism operations in the State of Queensland (Queensland Government, 2013). However, with a recent change in government it is unclear if this proposed commitment will be implemented.

Currently, the local government authority, Noosa Council, does not have a mandatory requirement for tourism businesses that operate from public land to be certified, making certification a voluntary process for the majority of tourism businesses operating within Noosa Biosphere Reserve. Additionally, the local destination management organisation, Tourism Noosa, does not explicitly advocate or promote the achievement of certification to their members, neither is it a requirement for membership. However, Tourism Noosa has identified the need to “tie industry training into government accreditation programs and to link certification programs with the local service quality program” (Tourism Noosa, 2012, pp. 13-15). Without rules that require certification, many operators feel that uptake and implementation of certification will remain low (Blackman et al., 2012).

As research suggests, formal and informal rule mechanisms need to be legitimate and recognised by the operators (Dietz et al., 2003). Currently, the lack of formal rules and the implied notion that certification holds low value and is not a required component of operating a business in Noosa Biosphere Reserve serves to moderate operators' motivation to achieve certification and impacts upon goal-oriented action.

### **5.3 PRESENTATION OF ACTIVITY SYSTEM VIGNETTES**

The analysis showed that there are many different subject/business experiences, historically acquired beliefs and interactions in relation to certification. Patterns were also evident in the nature of activity and alignment of factors where certification had been achieved with different patterns evident for those not certified. The recurring nature of patterns in the data highlighted two predominant experiences within the wider contextual setting of the tourism industry activity in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. These can be located in vignettes based on the experiences of certified operators and non-certified operators.

Two vignettes are presented to illustrate the differences in the activity system experiences of one non-certified and one certified business. These particular vignettes are included as they provide realistic accounts of the broader patterns and themes recurring in the activity systems. Vignettes are used in social research to allow action in context to be explored, and to clarify people's judgements. They are useful as they allow the reader an insight into the topic area defined by the participant in their own terms (Barter & Renold, 1999). The vignettes below are intended to provide the reader with a snapshot of the activity system through the lens of two operators.

#### **5.3.1 Vignette 1: Certified tourism business**

Dan<sup>3</sup> is a certified tourism operator. His business provides accommodation and food and beverage services. Dan has owned and operated his business for the past 18 years. He is a hands-on manager who works in the business daily. He has extensive knowledge of the tourism industry and is involved in many industry associations. Dan's business was certified approximately ten years ago.

Dan's motivation to explore certification for his business was influenced by personal contact with a representative from a certification organisation. He was motivated to become certified by the benefits it could provide to his business. Firstly, he felt it made good business sense through minimisation of resource use, which also made good environmental sense. He also recalls

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<sup>3</sup> The pseudonym of "Dan" has been selected by the researcher for this vignette

a value-driven motivation as he viewed the process as providing, *“an ethos that all of our international guests...could really engage with.”* He says, *“it seemed like an all-round package of benefits for everybody.”* Dan did not pay an application or ongoing fee to the certification agency for his certification, working through the EcoBiz program that was supported by the Queensland Government at the time.

Dan’s original expectation of the process was, *“that it would be easier and less expensive than it was.”* He first thought the process would focus on minimising use. However, as he implemented he found he had to replace most of the plumbing and waste water systems to *“bring them in line with best practice”*. The cost to do this was much higher than anticipated. Dan did receive a grant from the state government at the time to assist with the costs. However, the grant only covered approximately 18% of the costs. Even though this initial cost was much higher than anticipated, Dan found that over the long term he reduced his costs and saved on various utilities.

Dan feels that a critical factor to his achieving certification was the support and assistance from the certification provider throughout the process. He recalled, *“[they were] instrumental in following everything through.”* He feels that, *“it is vitally important to have that key person that you can go back to and rely on”*. He was also supported by his staff, who were fully involved in the process, and vital to the ongoing education of guests about the eco-initiatives. Although initially the process resulted in more work for management at the time, it did make the staff *“more aware of why you do certain things and gave them an understanding of the business practices”*. Dan feels that without that critical person from the certification body to drive the process it is too easy to put off: *“You’re so busy running your own business that it’s generally hard to find time to be the driver”*.

A positive outcome of the certification process that Dan describes is the changes made to staff job descriptions. He ensured that every member of staff was advised about the certification process and the measures taken to reduce use of water, electricity, gas and to recycle and reuse. He also described procedural changes made to the business process, whereby at the nightly welcome meetings all guests were informed of the eco-strategies they

had implemented. He views the certification process as, *“not just a one-off. It was every day of our lives going through the message”*. Dan is proud of his efforts and stated that, *“We managed to bring everybody, staff and guests into the feeling of there is mutual benefit and reward by trying to do these things”*.

Dan describes learning as a valuable outcome of the certification process. He states that what he learnt most was, *“a respect for the resources that we sometimes take for granted”*. It was the direct connection with resource use and resource cost that highlighted to Dan how he could make savings and convey a valuable message to his guests about reducing resource use. He said that it, *“really showed me a respect for the whole process, that I thought was very valuable”*.

When referring to outcomes of the certification process, he said much of it was a *“reinforcement that what we were already doing was the right thing to do”*. However, he did say, *“I think we have become a little sloppy in recent times”*. This is due to the fact that the certification program does not have a follow up process or revalidation procedure. He describes this by saying, *“If anything I’m critical of the ... program in that we were nurtured along, got the certificate, got the pat on the back and then see you later”*.

Dan views certification as a valuable business development tool to improve sustainability, but worries that operator apathy and the lack of incentive to become certified are hindrances to more businesses becoming certified. He supports making certification a regulatory requirement, but is unsure of how regulation would be implemented. He feels that an economic inducement could be necessary to prompt some businesses to act. He says that *“regrettably the financial inducement is very often more powerful than the altruistic inducement”*. He suggests a reduction in local council rates as a beneficial inducement for business operators.

Dan states that he has not yet experienced any marketing benefit from being certified. He feels that at this stage it is, *“not publically accepted as a promotional tool that would really induce people to come here”*. Dan did note a level of expectation from some of his guests that businesses naturally recycle and implement eco-initiatives. He stated, *“many Europeans... expect*



*a venue to be doing the things that we are doing...to them it is normal'. He feels that for certification to be valued locally "the majority of businesses need to undertake the process and this needs to be promoted by Tourism Noosa".*

Dan does not consider that Noosa's biosphere reserve status has added value to his business. He thinks that the concept and its meaning is not yet promoted in a way that is tangible and applicable to the people of Noosa. He states that he does not *"think it influences them to come to us in any way"*. He feels that it is too intangible and that it needs *"solid planks to help people understand it"*.

Dan's vignette illustrates a coalescence of factors that afforded enough stimulus for him to engage in and value the certification process. The 'ethos' of certification aligned with his values and beliefs, providing internal motivation. He was also further encouraged by the perceived benefits of improved business practices by way of reduced resource use and environmental impact. Even though the certification process was challenging, his initial motivation was supported by the tools available to him, particularly the contact and guidance provided by the certification agency that provided further motivation during the certification process. This was enhanced by the inducement of financial benefit from utility savings that provided a form of incentivised motivation. Therefore, the combination of drivers that Dan experienced provided enough motivation for him to value certification as a worthwhile investment of his resources.

### **5.3.2 Vignette 2: Non-certified tourism business**

Kate<sup>4</sup> is a non-certified tour operator who has recently purchased a pre-existing business that has been in operation for over ten years. The business can be categorised as a typical small owner-operated tourism business. It has two full time employees, who are also the owners, with up to four part-time staff members. Kate and her husband work hands-on in the daily operation and management of the business. They are relatively new to the

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<sup>4</sup> The pseudonym of "Kate" has been selected by the researcher for this vignette

tourism industry having owned this business for 18 months. Kate's experience in the tourism industry is limited with this business being her first tourism enterprise.

Kate claims to know *'very little'* about certification. She has conducted a small degree of her own online research into the types and levels of certification applicable to her business. She is interested in finding out more about certification and feels that she would need to research it herself, saying, *"otherwise I would feel like someone was trying to sell me something"*.

Kate views herself as being an environmentally aware citizen who operates her business in an environmentally responsible manner. As such, she is unsure if the outcome of certification would result in her making many changes to the way she operates her business. Kate feels that it would be more of a *"validation of what we are already doing"*. Kate's motivation to attain certification stems from the potential for image enhancement and recognition by the community in which her business operates. She says her motivation would be driven by *"business to business perception...I think it would lift our profile with other businesses that are certified"*. Kate also acknowledges a value-driven motive in that she believes that certification is something she *"should do"*. She does not consider certification would result in more bookings, she does not think visitors would choose her product due to her becoming certified.

When considering what limits her movement towards achieving the object of certification she refers to the internal constraints of time and cost. Saying it is *"on the list"*, but *"with our business we just don't have the time, we have enough other stuff going on"*. When referring to the cost of certification, it is not the initial upfront cost to become certified, but the ongoing annual membership fee that she views as a constraint. She says, *"I think that is probably the biggest barrier, it's not the initial fee, that's fine, it's the ongoing – if you don't renew you have to start again"*.

Another constraint articulated by Kate is associated with the rules (or lack thereof) of the external business environment in which her business operates. Currently, to operate tours in the protected areas they visit there is no regulatory requirement to be certified. She justifies this by saying, *"it's not*

*compulsory, no one has said...you know...no one's given us a bit of nudge to do it". As such, it is not a priority for her at the moment. She fears that if certification becomes a regulatory requirement she may lose some control over her ability to make decisions as to whether a trip goes ahead based on weather or track conditions at the time. She clarifies this by saying, "I'm thinking that in a regulatory environment – that might take away our decision to make a fair call". However, she feels that they already contribute and "do their bit" towards maintenance and protection of the environment in which they operate. She also feels restricted by the rules of the system by saying, "we are limited by what we can do directly, as the areas are managed by National Parks".*

Kate perceives a positive outcome of going through the certification process would be learning *"new ways to doing things"* or discovering new ideas that she may not have thought of for managing her business impacts. She sums up her views of certification by saying:

Look I probably would do it....I think it's one of those things that we should do and even if it is just for the business-to-business acknowledgment that we're doing the right thing, then we should do it. I'd be surprised if we have to make too many big changes to the way we operate.

In relation to Noosa's biosphere reserve status, Kate thinks there is value in Noosa being a biosphere reserve, even if not many people understand the concept. She believes it can add status to Noosa as a destination. Kate perceives certification as having potential, but only if there is a critical mass of businesses certified, so that it becomes *"like you are almost on the outer if you don't have it"*. She views recognition of international certification as an efficient and more recognisable framework for Noosa Biosphere Reserve. She says, *"I think a global one would be better, if there's any chance of tourists identifying the type of certification then I would imagine that would be better"*.

Kate's account is typical of the non-certified operators' activities whereby she describes a coalescence of factors that can both motivate or moderate non-certified tourism operators action towards certification of their businesses.

The moderating factors that currently hinder action towards certification are related to tools available to motivate and support the operator through the process. Her narrative also depicts the contradictory nature of rules associated with certification, namely that it is something that ‘should’ be done and that has the potential to enhance business and the destination, but currently it is not required and there are not enough incentives to stimulate action. From the non-certified operators’ perspective the effort and costs associated with gaining certification outweigh the value and benefits delivered.

#### **5.4 CONTRADICTIONS OCCURING IN THE ACTIVITY SYSTEM**

According to Engeström (1990), contradictions refer to various struggles that exist or arise between or within different components of the activity system. Systemic contradictions between old and new forms of activity and/or between components within the activity system can create *tensions* within the system. Contradictions can affect the subject’s ability to attain the object (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Understanding the existence of contradictions and their relationship to components of the activity system represents an opportunity to initiate development towards innovation and transformation (Avis, 2007; Engeström, 1987; Nardi, 1996). Engeström (2001, p. 137) suggests that “contradictions are key sources of change and development”.

In this case, the researcher has not undertaken an exhaustive survey of all the contradictions in this activity system, but rather the analysis has focused on targeting those that hold the most significance for the subjects and that are reflected in the actions and articulations of the subjects. In this study, the researcher used the mediational triangle to explore and explain the predominant contradictions within the activity system of sustainable tourism certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve and also potential developmental factors.

There is currently a cluster of contradictions that are working to demotivate operators and limit the uptake of certification. These contradictions are:

1. The primary systematic contradiction relating to the value proposition of certification;

2. Contradiction arising between the available tools and use of those tools by the subject;
3. Contradiction in the nature of formal and informal rules in the system;  
and
4. Contradiction regarding leadership roles within the system.

These contradictions are shown in the activity triangle in Figure 5.2 and are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

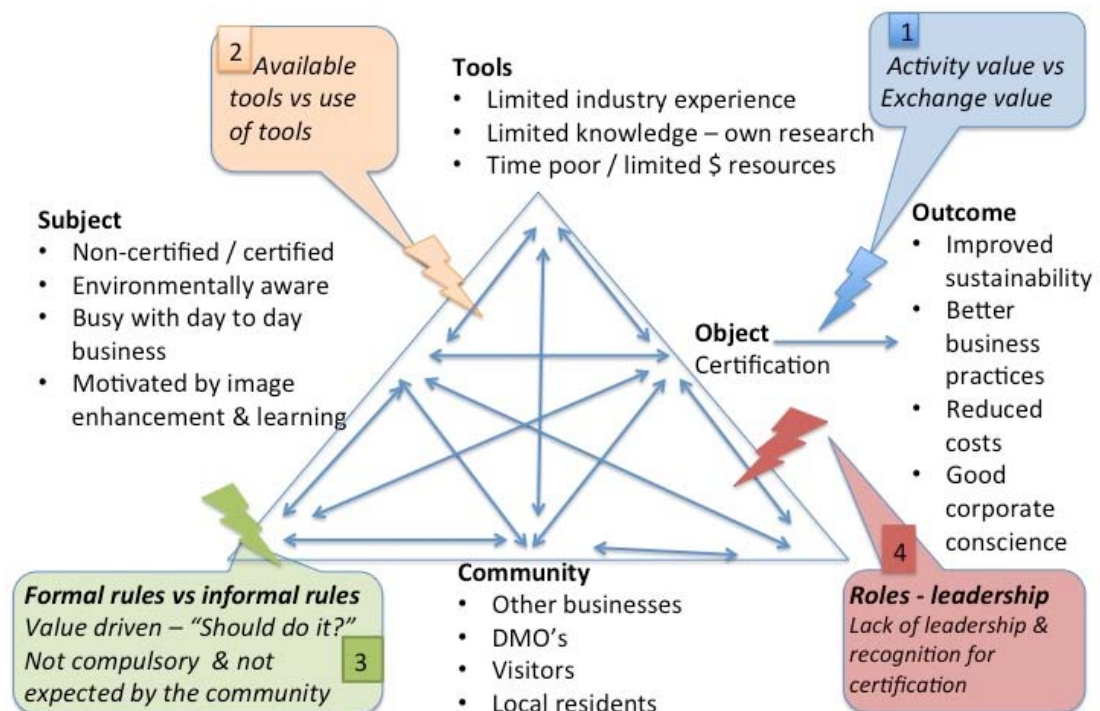


Figure 5.2 Contradictions in the activity system of certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

#### 5.4.1 Primary contradiction – Value proposition

The analysis revealed contradictions in a number of the components of the certification activity system, which shed light on the underlying primary contradiction within the system. The primary contradiction is one that Engeström and others claim pervades all elements of activity systems in a capitalist society. It is the contradiction between use value and exchange value of commodities (Engeström & Sannino, 2011). This primary contradiction is of particular relevance in this activity system of certification

and is depicted as number 1 in Figure 5.2 above. In all capitalist based exchanges proponents generally expect an equivalent or greater value exchange proposition in exchange for their use, or their labour and efforts. In this case, for the object to be viewed as worth achieving or a worthwhile investment of resources, many subjects believe there needs to be an equal or greater return on investment. The data analysis revealed that for many tourism operators the value proposition within this system is out of balance. Currently, most tourism operators in the Noosa Biosphere Reserve do not view certification as delivering enough of a value in exchange for the time, effort and resources required to achieve certification (Blackman et al., 2012). The exchange value is seen as being higher than the use value. This primary contradiction related to the value of certification can be attributed to the imbalance between expected benefits and actual delivered outcomes of certification as depicted in Figure 5.3.

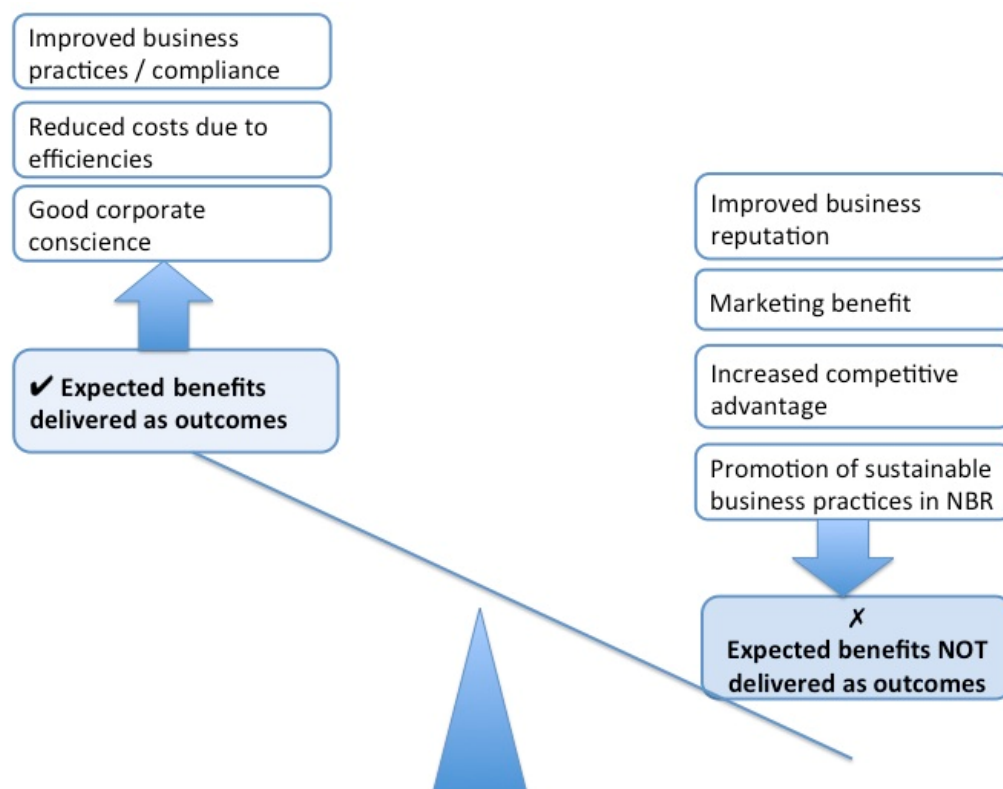


Figure 5.3 Expected benefits vs delivered outcomes of certification

In this case study, for some certified operators a number of the expected benefits of certification were translated into actual benefits and demonstrated outcomes. These included reduced operating costs and improved business processes. The intangible ‘feel good’ outcome of being a responsible corporate citizen and demonstrating CSR was also delivered by certification. Expected benefits that were seen as not being delivered were those related to image enhancement. Tourism operators had expressed the view that ‘improved business reputation’ was the most important perceived benefit of certification but this benefit is not being achieved. Other image enhancement aids such as marketing benefit, increased competitive advantage and the promotion of sustainable business practices were also noted as perceived benefits (Jarvis et al., 2010). However, when these were compared to the actual outcomes of certification as noted by certified operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve, these expected benefits were not seen as being delivered. These findings are also consistent with those of Jarvis et al. (2010) who found a “mismatch between the marketing benefits of certification as ‘sold’ to the tourism businesses and the reality of the market”, agreeing with Rowe and Higham (2007) who also suggest sustainable tourism certification does not provide marketing benefit. This disparity between the expected and delivered outcomes of the certification acts to demotivate tourism operators and currently hampers the uptake of certification (Esparon et al., 2013). This primary contradiction in the system is evidenced also through a number of other contradictions that occur within and between the interrelated components of the activity system, such as the tools, rules and roles within the system.

#### **5.4.2 Contradiction arising between tools and subject**

For the tourism operator there may be varying degrees of foundational motivation towards doing the right thing and being a good sustainable practitioner. However, the physical and psychological tools available and utilised, mediate the tourism operators’ motivation and augment or moderate their ability to undertake activity to achieve certification. Currently, a tension is evident for the non-certified operator and their apparent mediating tools. Non-certified operators identify that their action towards certification is

constrained by their limited knowledge about certification and the process involved. It is also hindered by their perceived lack of resources such as time and money. This contradiction is depicted as number 2 in Figure 5.3.

At this point it is worth noting that certified operators did not express lack of knowledge and information about certification as a moderating factor towards their becoming certified. They all found the information they required to commence the certification process. However, they did indicate that it was communication from industry networks and associations that provided the stimulus for them to seek further information and investigate certification for their businesses. Therefore, perhaps it is not a lack of information about certification that is the barrier, as it is clear that there is information available, but more a lack of motivation for non-certified operators to seek out the information they require. This lack of motivation to achieve certification is partly driven by the formal and informal rules of the system. This points to another contradiction in the system relating to the dilemma faced by the operator created by the rules of the system.

#### **5.4.3 Contradiction created by formal and informal rules**

One of the contradictions that clearly emerged from the data was the dilemma faced by the operator created by their internal beliefs and morals, and the rules and norms in the activity system. Many operators are ethically motivated towards the object of certification through their socially shared belief that it is 'something they should do'. However, as individuals they are demotivated because the rules stipulate that it is not a regulatory requirement and currently not expected by the community of the activity system. Kate's account exposes this dilemmatic thinking. She says, "*I think it's one of those things that we should do*". However, her motivation towards the goal is restricted by the (lack of) rules within the system. This is demonstrated by her stating, "*it's not compulsory, no one has said...you know...no one's given us a bit of nudge to do it*". She qualifies that she would be encouraged towards the object if it was more widely recognised and taken up by operators. This opinion was also reflected in comments such as, "*Businesses will only start considering applying for relevant certifications if it becomes a requirement by various levels of government*" (S45). This discussion begins to signpost an



opportunity to influence motivation through formal or implied rules regarding certification as a requirement to operate in certain areas.

This contradiction is depicted as number 3 in Figure 5.3. It illustrates that a foundational motivation towards the goal can be tempered by the lack of rules which may act as supported and incentivised motivators in the system.

#### **5.4.4 Contradiction regarding leadership roles within the system.**

There is, finally, a contradiction in the division of labour related to the promotion and recognition of certification as a method to improve the sustainability of businesses and the destination. This is manifest as a contradiction regarding the roles within the system. These roles relate particularly to the role of the destination management organisations and government.

The local tourism DMO views its role primarily as a marketing agent, but also contributing to industry development and hence gathering and disseminating information about certification to operators. They state that certification is beneficial to the destination as a whole *“because it shows that there are quality operators who are keen to improve themselves, I think it not only helps the operator, it helps the visitor experience and helps the destination”* (SH3). Operators view the DMOs as the most appropriate source for promoting knowledge and information about certification. However, they expressed the view that there was a lack of knowledge and information about certification and suggested that the tourism destination organisation could play an important role in this regard.

Additionally, certified operators consider that the destination management organisations have a leadership role to play in the promotion and recognition of businesses that have achieved certification. However, the research results show that they do not believe this is currently occurring. This is creating a tension in the system because those operators who have made the effort to become certified feel they are not gaining the recognition and marketing benefit of certification.

There is also a contradiction between the role of government and the object of certification. Governments do not view themselves as having a regulatory

or managerial role in certification. Federally, they have withdrawn support for an accreditation recognition program called T-Qual. On a state level, the future role of government is unclear. The previously stated goal of certification being a regulatory requirement for tourism businesses operating in protected areas may not transpire in the near future. Locally, Noosa Council has put the role of developing, managing, promoting and recognising certification in the hands of the local destination management organisation, and biosphere reserve recognition with a new Biosphere Reserve Foundation. Certification is not a regulatory requirement to gain a permit from Noosa Council to operate from council managed public land, or for obtaining a protected area permit from the Queensland Government to operate in national parks.

These examples could demonstrate a lack of leadership in this area across the industry, resulting in a dampening on drivers towards certification. The research has revealed that tourism operators would be stimulated towards certification if it was recognised and promoted by all stakeholders in the system, including the destination management organisation, government and the Noosa Biosphere Reserve Management organisation. This contradiction in the system relating to the roles of management organisations and government acts to reinforce the implied rule that certification is not valued in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

It is appropriate, with the tensions and contradictions having been identified, to now turn to where the opportunities for innovation and expansive learning are evident. By identifying these tensions and contradictions, and studying them individually and holistically we are able to articulate the systematic contradictions relating to the value of certification, and in turn identify the shifts that are possible for innovation and change in the system.

## **5.5 PROPOSED FRAMEWORK OF MOTIVATIONAL DRIVERS TO ENCOURAGE GOAL-ORIENTED ACTION**

The activity system analysis revealed a link between motivation and the achievement of the object, or goal, of certification. In this research, the term 'foundational motivation' is proposed to describe the intrinsic motivation of operators, with this being driven by internal values, beliefs and knowledge

about sustainability. There is a continuum of foundational motivation along which all operators can be identified. At one end are those that have a high level of initial motivation, meaning their internal values and beliefs surrounding sustainability and corporate responsibility are high. They believe that certification is the ‘right thing to do’ and should be embedded and integrated into business. At the other end of the continuum are those operators who have low foundational motivation, whereby they have little regard for sustainability and lack ambition to demonstrate corporate responsibility through certification. Further to the operators’ foundational motivation are additional contributing extrinsic motivators that act to stimulate and drive activity towards achieving the goal of certification (Nevid, 2013). Figure 5.4 shows a proposed framework to illustrate the continuum of motivation. It also depicts the contributing motivational drivers that act as supports, incentives and compliance requirements that can animate goal-oriented action towards certification.

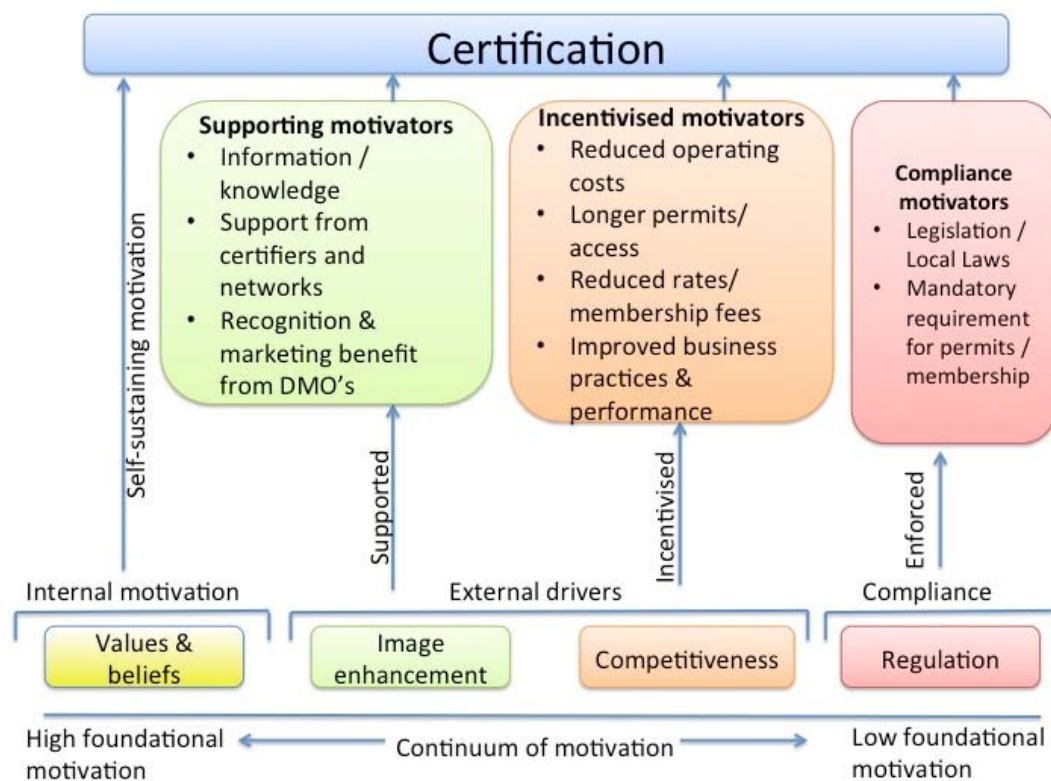


Figure 5.4 Framework of motivational drivers of certification

The data analysis revealed that operators' foundational motivation to achieve certification may be boosted by other types of motivational drivers related to support and recognition of certification, incentives and enforcement. This builds upon findings from Chapter 4 regarding the perceived benefits and moderating constraints operators face in the certification activity system, which combine to either stimulate or constrain operators' motivation to achieve the goal. Some operators at the far left side of the continuum will have high foundational motivation that provides enough of a stimulus to achieve certification without any further support or incentives necessary. Conversely, operators at the far right end of the continuum, who have low foundational motivation, may only be stimulated to achieve certification if it is a regulatory requirement. Most operators will fall somewhere toward the middle of the continuum. Some will be motivated by drivers such as image enhancement for their business, additional education, support, encouragement and recognition of certification and its attainment. These drivers along with their foundational motivation may persuade them to value certification enough to initiate, persist with and achieve it (Nevid, 2013).

Some operators may require further motivational drive in the form of business incentives, such as reduced operating costs, access to longer permits, reduced rates or membership fees. Drivers may also be improved business practices and performance. In this research, these types of incentives are termed 'incentivised motivators' and act to provide a tangible value to the achievement of certification. The lower the foundational motivation of the operator, the more supported and incentivised motivation they may require. Operators may require a combination of all three types of motivators to provide enough impetus to seek and achieve certification. Dan, for example, had some foundational motivation but was also motivated by way of assistance from the certifying body and knowledge from his networks. Additionally, he had incentivised motivation because he reduced his operating costs and improved his business practices. Conversely, Kate has quite a high level of foundational motivation but she currently does not feel supported or incentivised enough to take action towards the goal.

The research therefore reveals that tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve support certification. However, the motivational drivers to achieve it are not compelling enough to inspire action by the majority. This provides an insight into the opportunity available to increase and improve the motivational drivers for businesses to achieve certification, an area that is further discussed in the final section of this chapter.

## **5.6 FACILITATORS OF CHANGE – OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION**

The contradiction between expected benefits of certification and delivered benefits, as shown in Figure 5.3, highlights an opportunity for intervention through the development of facilitators of change. The benefits of certification that are being delivered as demonstrated through this research and other studies (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b; Haaland & Aas, 2010; Russillo et al., 2007) are an improvement to environmental, social and economic business performance, reduced costs due to efficiencies and an improvement in 'corporate citizenship' for the tourism operator.

The desired benefits that are currently seen as not being delivered relate to image enhancement factors, such as marketing benefit, improved business reputation, increased competitive advantage and the promotion of sustainable business practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. Tourism operators view these potential benefits as important elements that would create increased value for the certification of their business. This research has identified that these aspects may be converted into actual benefits through the development of a range of supporting, incentivised and compliance motivators as depicted in Figure 5.4.

### **5.6.1 Development of supporting motivators**

The tension between subject and tools noted in Kate's non-certified activity system reveals an opportunity for supported motivation whereby new tools or supports could be created that might motivate the operators towards certification. Non-certified operators revealed that tools which could assist are those that promote knowledge acquisition and information sharing. Operators expressed a desire to learn more about the types of certification programs suitable for their business type, the process involved, and the costs

associated with different programs. They expressed a desire for this information to be presented to them in a way that was useful and easy to understand, making use of networks and associations that the operators feel comfortable with.

Suggestions gleaned from the research were for:

- A matrix information sheet of the differing certification programs and their suitability for different business types;
- Workshops and knowledge sharing sessions between non-certified and certified operators; and
- One-on-one support from the certification body during the certification process.

Other image enhancing motivators that could support operators and improve the value of certification are through the creation of marketing benefit and recognition such as:

- Featuring sustainably certified tourism products on the destination management organisation's website;
- Promotional material showcasing certified product at trade and consumer shows; and
- Profiling operators who have achieved certification in the local community through media and the Noosa Biosphere Reserve Management body. The Travel Green Wisconsin program (Travel Wisconsin, 2015) is a successful example of a similar tourism destination management organisation recognising and marketing certified businesses.

### **5.6.2 Expand incentivised motivators**

There is also an opportunity to expand the incentivised motivators that may improve the tangible benefits of certification. Some incentivised motivators such as reduced operating costs and improved business practices and performance are already being delivered. However, these tangible benefits of certification are not so evident to non-certified operators. Additionally, as respondents such as Dan and other researchers (Graci & Dodds, 2015) have

noted, certification incentives help to build industry buy in. Suggestions for the expansion of incentivised motivators include to:

- Improve communication to non-certified operators about the improvement to business performance that results from going through the certification process;
- Offer financial incentives such as reduced council rates and lower membership fees to destination management organisations for certified operators;
- Give preferential consideration to certified operators for permits to conduct business on public land; and
- Grant longer permits for certified operators to operate in protected areas.

These incentivised motivators are successfully offered in other areas of Australia such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and NSW National Parks. In the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, operators who have achieved certification are granted access to longer permits (15 years) and given priority marketing via the Great Barrier Reef showcase at various events such as the Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE). Additionally, certified businesses are the only tourism businesses to be listed on the GBRMPA website (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, 2011). This type of approach indicates that although businesses can operate in the Great Barrier Reef without certification (there is no formal restrictive rule), the implied rule is that certification is advantageous, supported and recognised. This has led to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park area having the *“highest level of certified operators in Australia and 80% of all visitors to the park go[ing] on tours with certified operators” (SH1)*.

### **5.6.3 Introduce compliance motivators**

The final types of motivators are those that take the ‘stick’ approach through making certification a compulsory requirement of business in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. Rather than seeking to change the implied rules of the system through incentives that increase participation, this approach creates

formal rules in the system that become a norm of the operating environment. This may include initiatives such as:

- Policy and legislation that makes sustainable tourism certification a mandatory requirement to obtain local and state government operating permits. This is similar to the requirement for businesses to hold public liability insurance; and
- Making sustainable certification a requirement to be granted membership or partnership status with the destination management organisations and the Noosa Biosphere Reserve Management organisation.

For these facilitators of change to be successful and add value to certification there needs to be support from all stakeholders (government, industry, associations, businesses and the community). A clear commitment to adopting certification as a means to improve sustainability across the tourism industry in Noosa Biosphere Reserve would be required and a multi-stakeholder approach adopted.

## **5.7 LEARNING OUTCOME OF CERTIFICATION**

The certification process facilitates learning and sharing of knowledge about sustainability between all stakeholders. It helps the business to improve CSR business practices through learning about sustainability. This is highlighted both in the literature (Bien, 2007; Graci & Dodds, 2015) and reinforced by this research as one of the greatest benefits of certification. Certification not only helps business operators to identify where and how they can introduce sustainability measures across their business, it also helps to communicate these initiatives to industry stakeholders, including staff, other businesses, locals and visitors.

The associated knowledge flow begins when an operator is motivated by their internal values and prompted by other support or incentive drivers to take action and seek information about certification. As they learn about certification and sustainable tourism practices, they begin to think about what changes they could implement in their business to improve sustainable performance. As noted in the literature, just learning about certification can



teach businesses about better or exemplary practices, even if they eventually do not seek certification (Bien, 2007). This element was identified in Kate's vignette when she states that learning "*new ways of doing things*" or discovering new ideas would be a benefit of certification.

Those businesses that do go through the certification process learn by putting into practice a range of improved and more efficient processes and procedures. Business operators learn how to improve their business performance by examining their practices to identify where they can reduce costs, improve efficiencies, minimise negative impacts and streamline operations. As noted in Dan's vignette, the certification process facilitated a change to staff position descriptions that resulted in them having a fuller understanding of the reasons behind the newly implemented sustainability measures. This then resulted in information being passed on to guests during nightly information sessions. This provision of information about sustainable business practices to guests and visitors then provided them with an enhanced understanding and appreciation for the business's CSR measures. This also serves to portray the tourism businesses within the destination as being serious about sustainability, demonstrating by action and promoting it to visitors. Visitors are then better informed to make responsible decisions based on sustainability when making their next tourism purchase.

This positive effect of the learning process of certification is clearly one of the greatest outcomes. It was noted as a benefit by all certified businesses in this study. There is potential to capitalise upon this learning outcome to stimulate increased action towards certification. Fostering knowledge generation and shared learning through existing networks and industry clusters can enhance sustainable business practices. These exchanges can be facilitated by the learning laboratory approach of biosphere reserves.

## **5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter the certification activity system has been described and deconstructed and its individual components analysed. These components and their influence on the operators' goal-oriented action in the system have been explained. The presentation of vignettes has provided the reader with

an insight into the lived experiences of the certified and non-certified tourism operators. The development of the vignettes and the close interaction with the full data set afforded by the thematic coding process allowed the researcher to develop a detailed description of the activity system and how the components interact within the system. Close examination of the data also facilitated the identification of a cluster of contradictions occurring within the system. The primary contradiction in the system is the perceived low use value in relation to the exchange value of certification. This primary contradiction is influenced by related contradictions in the tools, rules and roles of the system.

The analysis of these contradictions enabled the identification of drivers of motivation and a range of supporting, incentivised and compliance motivators that could assist to stimulate and support goal-oriented action by operators.

The findings of the research demonstrate that although the perceived value of certification as a sustainable management mechanism in Noosa Biosphere is currently low, there are opportunities to enhance and grow the use of certification. The current research has offered a proposed framework of motivational drivers to facilitate this process. The movement towards more certification requires a collaborative approach by all stakeholders to provide and improve the motivational drivers of certification. This will in turn then increase the use value of certification for all stakeholders of the system.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

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Tourism has rapidly become the world's largest and fastest-growing industry. It is predicted to continue growing at a rate of 4% per year globally (UNWTO, 2014a). A significant sector of the tourism industry is inextricably reliant upon the natural environment and cultural heritage of destinations. Increasingly, the impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities have been recognised. It is now firmly established that the industry is required to take responsibility and act to ensure sustainability into the future. This is the challenge. In such a diverse and rapidly changing industry, how can sustainability be ensured? Certification of tourism businesses is one mechanism that is heralded as a way to engage individual tourism businesses to develop and implement CSR practices. Certification can ensure triple bottom line reporting and help tourism businesses demonstrate sustainable actions.

This research has sought to explore the implementation of sustainable tourism certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve from the tourism operators' perspective. It has also sought to explore how the biosphere reserve concept links with certification to promote sustainability in tourism businesses. This chapter begins with a summary of the key findings of the research. Then implications arising from the key findings are presented. Finally, areas for further research are identified prior to the concluding remarks.

### 6.1 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS IN RELATION TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The goals of this study were twofold. The first aim was to explore the tourism industry's perception, engagement and interaction with sustainable tourism certification in the context of Noosa Biosphere Reserve. This aim was achieved through utilisation of a qualitative research approach to explore the perspectives, experiences and motivations of business operators in relation to sustainability certification. A CHAT analysis framework was employed to identify and investigate contradictions inhibiting implementation of certification as a sustainable tourism management mechanism. This area of

the study addresses the first research question: *How is certification currently operationalised by tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve?*

The research has identified there is general support for certification as a sustainable tourism development mechanism in Noosa Biosphere Reserve from operators and stakeholders. However, there are a number of factors that currently inhibit the uptake and implementation of certification by tourism operators.

The research revealed that:

- *Knowledge is key* - knowledge and awareness about sustainable tourism certification is low among tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. Tourism operators claim they do not possess adequate knowledge and information about which certification programs are suitable for their businesses, the process involved in attaining and the outcomes achieved from certification;
- *Operational benefits were delivered* - Certified operators found the positive benefits of certification to be: improved business practices and reduced operating costs due to resource savings and efficiencies. They found the certification process to be educational as it increased their knowledge and awareness about sustainability in business and equipped them with policies and processes to improve performance. Certification also provided operators with validation of their CSR performance and provided them with a 'good corporate conscience';
- *Marketing benefits were not delivered* - The perceived benefits of certification that are related to business image, such as improved business reputation, marketing benefit, increased competitiveness and promotion of sustainable business practices across Noosa Biosphere Reserve, are currently not being experienced by certified operators. These factors are often stated as key motivational drivers for operators to pursue certification, but in reality these benefits are not being delivered as tangible outcomes of certification;
- *Certification is not the 'norm'* - The current operating environment in Noosa Biosphere Reserve and the voluntary nature of certification in

tourism is not conducive to increasing certification levels of tourism businesses. Certification is not seen as a 'normal' part of business in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. There is a lack of demand for certified product from visitors, the government does not require it, and the local destination management organisations are also not currently promoting or recognising certified businesses. These factors combine to create the implied rule that certification is of little value to operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve; and

- *There is a lack of perceived value* - Non-certified operators are not motivationally stimulated to achieve certification because they perceive a lack of value in certification. They consider that the resource costs to obtain and maintain certification outweigh the benefits they would gain.

The second aim of the research was to identify the interactions and linkages between the biosphere reserve concept and certification to foster and promote the sustainability of businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. These interactions and linkages were explored through thematic analysis and the use of the CHAT analysis framework to describe how components within the system interact and engage. This part of the research addresses the second research question: *How do the biosphere reserve concept and certification link to promote the sustainability of tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve?*

The research revealed that:

- Most tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve are not actively engaged with the biosphere reserve concept. While they view the concept as having value to the destination from a marketing perspective, their awareness and knowledge about the underpinning sustainability goals of the biosphere reserve concept is low. They currently do not link their business operations with the goals and aspirations of the biosphere reserve concept;
- It is clear that education and engagement with tourism operators is essential to help operators make informed decisions about certification

and the implementation of sustainable practices across business. Education is also necessary to help operators fully understand and embrace the biosphere reserve concept as it relates to business and sustainable development;

- Operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve identified that a partnership approach is necessary to improve certification levels across the industry. They view the local destination management organisation as having an important leadership role to play in sharing information and providing support for certification. They also view government as having a role to play by providing incentives for certification and regulation for tourism activities on public land;
- There is currently no systematic coordination between stakeholders in regard to certification. While tourism operators view industry networks as important avenues for information gathering, sharing and support for certification, these networks are currently underutilised; and
- The majority of operators (62%) support the encouragement of certification of tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. However, there is disagreement as to whether a locally developed and operated program is preferred to the range of internationally recognised and externally operated programs.

## **6.2 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

This study contributes to the current body of knowledge on sustainable tourism certification and its implementation by tourism operators. It is noted that the use of a CHAT-based framework is new to the field of tourism studies. As such, the use of this particular system-based analysis approach allowed for new insight into the complex dynamics of the certification system. It facilitated the uncovering of contradictions, which act as barriers to change and highlighted the identification of opportunities for innovation to induce change in the system.

The key insights provided by the research are threefold. Firstly, the discrepancy between the expected benefits and actual outcomes has been highlighted. Second, the requirement for active stakeholder participation

inclusive of a shared vision for a sustainable future has been revealed. Third, it is clear that critical decisions need to be made regarding the type of sustainable tourism certification desired for Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

The first insight gained from the research is the disparity between the perceived benefits of certification and the actual delivered outcomes. Carlsen et al. (2006) identified a need to conduct localised case studies that investigate the benefits of tourism certification so that the benefits of certification can be used to assist the credibility of certification and increase industry involvement. Much of the current research and literature, as described in Chapter 2 and detailed in Table 2.2, points to competitive advantage and image enhancement as being major benefits of certification. The results of this study have also shown that the majority of non-certified operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve believe they will gain improved reputation and marketing benefit from certification. While the findings of the study agree that there are benefits to be gained from certification, the research has empirically shown and concurs with the findings of Graci and Dodds (2015) and Font and Buckley (2001) that there is no tangible proof of image enhancement or marketing benefit eventuating from certification.

A second insight from the research findings is the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach with leadership from destination management organisations and government. It is clear that for tourism certification to be a successful mechanism to induce sustainability at a destination level there needs to be meaningful adoption of the concept by the tourism industry (Deng-Westphal & Beeton, 2011). A point of critical mass needs to be reached (Font, 2007; Graci & Dodds, 2015). This research agrees with findings from Sampaio et al. (2012b) that successful uptake of certification is assisted by shared vision and engagement with tourism operators where learning opportunities and advice are facilitated for the adoption of new practices. The development of a shared vision for sustainable tourism in Noosa Biosphere Reserve has been instigated through the development of the Noosa Sustainable Destination Action Plan, 2013-2016, which included input from industry operators. However, the research findings have revealed that while the strategy exists, more could be done, particularly in relation to

promoting the sustainable actions and certification of businesses. Findings show that for certification to be successful and implemented: operators need to value and adopt certification as a valuable business management tool; destination management organisations and government need to support, recognise and promote certification; and the local community and visitors need to demand that businesses demonstrate their commitment to sustainable practices through certification. This will only be enhanced in the context of a shared vision for the future of certification as both a sustainability tool and promotional channel that engages and communicates with all stakeholders.

Thirdly, a key criteria for enacting a shared vision that stakeholders will value is consideration of the type of sustainable certification program/s the industry and destination stakeholders believe is/are most beneficial and suited to the goals for the Noosa Biosphere Reserve. Currently, there are no formal – or informal – strategies regarding local promotion or recognition of sustainable certification for tourism businesses. The research reveals that there is disagreement about the type of certification program that would be most beneficial to Noosa's tourism industry.

Currently, there are three different options available for the type of sustainable tourism certification used and recognised by management organisations in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. One option is for a locally planned, developed, implemented and managed program to be promoted. Another is to select one program and insist all business are certified under this one program. The third option is for local destination management organisations to co-operatively agree upon a select range of programs, and recognise businesses that are certified under any one of the programs. Essentially, they become the accreditation agency by endorsing those programs that meet the destinations' goals for sustainability in business.

The first option of a locally planned, developed and operated program brings with it benefits and disadvantages. Locally designed programs are said to be more appealing to small tourism businesses, as they tend to be less complex, more flexible and lower in cost (Font, 2007). There are also benefits to be gained by involving the businesses to whom the certification will apply



in the setting of standards and criteria. Some researchers attribute the low uptake of certification to the fact that certification is not market led, meaning the standards and criteria that are set are not adequately informed by understanding gained from those businesses to whom the certification applies (Bowman, 2011; Font, 2007). This argument points to the benefit of developing a locally based certification program where the standards are developed in close consultation with the industry. There are, however, some disadvantages to locally developed and implemented programs, namely the cost and resources required to develop, implement and manage the program. Additionally, there is the risk that visitors will not understand or identify the logo or label used to promote the certification.

The other option for certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve is to select one program and insist that all businesses are certified under this one program. However, this proposal also has limitations. One is that currently in Australia there is no one single program that covers all types of tourism businesses. In other countries, such as Spain and Costa Rica, national governments have supported a single program focussing all their resources and efforts on having tourism businesses certified under this program. This was the original idea for the Australian developed ECO Certification program. However, this program was specifically developed for businesses that operate in nature. So it is not a relevant program for many accommodation, food and beverage, and health and wellness businesses operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

There are distinct advantages to utilising the range of currently available programs. Firstly, two of the most common programs, Earth Check and Ecotourism Australia's ECO Certification programs are internationally acknowledged and have achieved recognition from the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, which links them into international awareness and marketing initiatives. Secondly, as programs develop or change over time they can be added or subtracted from the suite of programs selected to be recognised in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. For instance, currently, Sustainable Travel's International STEP certification is not available in Australia. However, this availability may change and a program such as this may have value in being added to the suite. Conversely, a state based program such as

EcoBiz may not continue and may be replaced with an alternate program. The third advantage of utilising the range of existing programs is that a program that suits the wide range of tourism businesses operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve does not have to be developed, implemented, monitored and marketed on an ongoing basis. This is a significant saving of resources for the destination management organisations that would be responsible for the development and implementation of a locally based Noosa program.

### **6.3 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION AND POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE**

The insight produced through the uncovering of tensions between the stated goals of the destination and on-the-ground implementation of sustainable actions presents as an opportunity for further research. Such research could use a change laboratory approach (Engeström, Virkkunen, Helle, Pihlaja, & Poikela, 1996) to initiate a cycle of expansive learning where stakeholders work together to identify new ways of engaging and collaborating.

Linking in with the above suggestion is the underutilised potential of the learning laboratory concept of biosphere reserves. This concept could assist in supporting and developing sustainability action. There is potential to engage a collaborative learning approach to enhancing the sustainability of tourism businesses through the concept of a learning tourism destination as advocated by Schianetz, Kavanagh, and Lockington (2007). The current research has gone some way to advancing knowledge in this area through use of a system approach, such as the CHAT analysis framework employed. The use of this framework helped to facilitate an understanding of how the certification system functions, how possibilities can be enhanced, what changes are required for adaption and how collective awareness can be promoted.

The research revealed that providing information and sharing knowledge across the tourism destination of Noosa Biosphere Reserve is a challenge. Nonetheless, it also revealed that tourism operators are open to learning more and would value communication and interaction through their established industry networks. Additionally, the research has proven that certification provides a useful sustainability learning process that helps to

educate and equip operators with the knowledge and tools required to take action and improve the sustainability of their businesses.

### **6.3.1 Proposed framework of motivational drivers**

The research has shone a light on the importance of motivational drivers in business operators' decision to seek certification. Similarly to Tzschentke et al. (2008), it found that personal values and intrinsic motivations contribute to action rather than prompt it. Even though personal values provide a powerful motivational force, there is a need for further motivational triggers to stimulate and achieve increased operator action towards certification. The use of CHAT analysis framework in this study allowed for exploration of the dimensions of motivational drivers for certification.

This research has proposed a framework, which can operate as a foundation for understanding the development of supported, incentivised and compliance motivational drivers. The findings suggest that the use of these motivational drivers will provide additional stimulus and influence for tourism operators to adopt certification by negating the impact of perceived barriers and providing increased tangible benefits to business.

The development and expansion of motivational drivers has the potential to assist in addressing the current gap between perceived and delivered benefits of certification, particularly in the area of benefits related to improved business image, such as marketing benefit, promotion of sustainable practices and increased competitive advantage. Specifically, these motivational drivers are those external to the individual business and rely upon leadership, commitment and support from destination management organisations, government and certifying bodies working in partnership to recognise and reward certified businesses. Development of supporting motivational drivers such as improved information and knowledge sharing about certification processes along with support for businesses going through the process, relies upon improved communication and knowledge exchange between all stakeholders. Additionally, the introduction and enhancement of incentivised and compliance driven motivational drivers will require a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach across the destination as discussed

above. Potentially, this may require a move away from voluntary measures towards a more focused, accountable and reportable framework to move certification forward. For this to occur, industry must see government and management agencies – including tourism and biosphere reserve management – supporting and recognising certified businesses. The destination will need to work collaboratively to decide the type of certification program/s to promote, and establish a roadmap for the support and recognition of certification at an operator and destination level.

#### **6.4 LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This research was explorative in nature and has attempted to understand tourism operators' perceptions about sustainable certification based on their actions and experiences. The sample size of one hundred survey responses and nine in-depth interviews presented a strong representational cross section of the tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. However, as noted in Chapter 3, the case study nature of this study and the small focus area limits the findings to explanatory, but not generalisable, findings, which may apply across the broader tourism industry. The novel approach of using a CHAT based activity systems analysis resulted in the uncovering of previously unexamined areas of tension in the system. At times, the researcher felt restricted by the research framework being exploratory and not action based. Future research could build upon the groundwork provided by this study by implementing action based research that uses an interventionist approach to enhance learning and stimulate change in a similar way to Engeström's 'change laboratory' projects (Engeström, 2004; Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Engeström et al., 1996).

Several areas of further research have been identified as a result of undertaking this project. It would be useful to further explore and conceptualise visitors' awareness and opinions regarding sustainable tourism certification. Further research would help to inform understanding about the extent to which knowledge and awareness of certification impacts upon their individual tourism product purchasing decisions and their perception of the destination. While outside of the scope of this research, such knowledge

would be beneficial to further inform the debate surrounding the marketing and image enhancement benefits of certification.

Further research could also be conducted through replicating this project across other biosphere reserves, both nationally and internationally. This would allow for comparison across developmentally and geographically different tourism destinations. It would also help in the facilitation of knowledge sharing and learning across the world network of biosphere reserves.

## **6.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The literature suggests that sustainable tourism certification has the potential to not only improve tourism businesses' sustainability and CSR performance, but also to provide image enhancement and marketing benefit. This exploratory research has shown that, in Noosa Biosphere Reserve, the outcomes of sustainable tourism certification are: improved business practices, cost savings and improved CSR reporting. However, it has also demonstrated that the promoted benefits of image enhancement, marketing benefit and improved reputation are undelivered. The lack of benefit in these areas is tied to the need for a multistakeholder approach, and one where leadership is demonstrated to promote a common vision that recognises and promotes certification as both a sustainable development tool for operators and a valuable sustainability reporting mechanism for the destination.

A key contribution of this study has been the identification of a framework of motivation drivers, and specifically the clusters of supported, incentivised and compliance based drivers of motivation. These drivers serve to act as a stimulus for tourism operators to take action towards certification. They also contribute to balancing the perceived benefits with delivered outcomes, by providing recognition and marketing benefit to certified operators.

The challenge for the tourism industry operating in Noosa Biosphere Reserve is not the direction it should take but rather the means to get there. The local community, industry and management organisations have set the direction and goal to improve sustainability through the designation of biosphere reserve status and the development of the Noosa Sustainable Destination

Action Plan. It has been proven that certification of tourism businesses can provide a mechanism to achieve sustainability improvements but support, recognition, collaboration, commitment and leadership is required to stimulate action and focus activity in the direction of the goal.

In the words of United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon:

Building a sustainable future will need open dialogue among all branches of national, regional and local government. And it will need the engagement of all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society ... we believe that when people strive towards a common goal, transformational change is possible. (UN, 2013)

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# Appendices

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## **APPENDIX A – SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS AVAILABLE IN NOOSA BIOSPHERE RESERVE**

This study focuses on sustainability certification programs that are available to tourism businesses operating in the Noosa Biosphere. Some of these programs are GSTC-‘recognised’ and some are not. Additionally, some programs focus only on environmental criteria, while others take in the broader sustainability standards that include social, cultural and economic issues of benefit to the local community. Some are process-based while others are performance-based.

### **Eco Biz**

<http://www.cciqecobiz.com.au>



The ecoBiz program is operated by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ). In the past, the program was developed and managed by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. It was implemented in Noosa through the Sunshine Coast Regional Council and Noosa Council.

ecoBiz is a free eco-efficiency program providing self-assessment tools, training and information developed to guide Queensland business to improve efficiencies and resource use for financial and environmental benefits. The program recognises businesses as ‘partners’ that demonstrate environmental improvements of at least a 10% reduction in at least one area of greenhouse gas emissions, energy, water or waste. Achieving ‘partner’ status is equivalent to receiving certification

To maintain partnership status ecoBiz partners must continue to submit action plans and re-assessments on an ongoing basis. However, due to changing state and local government priorities, such as the outsourcing of the program to CCIQ and Noosa Council reducing staff and funding for the program, follow up and re-assessment has been limited and disjointed.

### **ECOCertification programs offered by Ecotourism Australia**

<http://www.ecotourism.org.au/our-certification-programs/>

Ecotourism Australia offers a range of certification programs for nature-based and ecotourism operators in Australia. The Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP), introduced in 1996, was the first national ecotourism certification program in the world (Thwaites, 2007). NEAP is now known as The Eco Certification Program and is Ecotourism Australia's flagship program. This certification is for tours, cruises, attractions and accommodation that are nature-based and provide ecotourism products. The tourism products and services provided are certified individually, certification is not for the business entity.

The levels of certification offered under The Eco Certification Program are:

**Nature Tourism:** Tourism in a natural area that leaves minimal impact on the environment.



**Ecotourism:** Tourism in a natural area that offers interesting ways to learn about the environment with an operator that uses resources wisely, contributes to the conservation of the environment and helps local communities.



**Advanced Ecotourism:** Provides certification to Australia's leading and most innovative ecotourism products, providing an opportunity to learn about the environment with an operator who is committed to achieving best practice when using resources wisely, contributing to the conservation of the environment and helping local communities.



### **Climate Action Certification**

This is designed for all sectors of the tourism industry including hotels, attractions, tours, transport, restaurants, travel agents, tourism commissions and industry bodies.



The Climate Action Certification program is dedicated to reducing carbon emissions and assuring travellers that certified products are backed by a commitment to sustainable practices related to addressing climate change.

While the Climate Action certification program is completely stand-alone, Sustainable Tourism Australia (a wholly owned company of Ecotourism Australia) has actively sought to complement existing environmental certification schemes where overlaps may occur. The Climate Action Certification Program has sought to recognise and give credit for relevant portions of these alternate schemes. A third-party auditing process has been established to ensure the credibility of the program.

### **EarthCheck offered by EC3Global**

<http://www.earthcheck.org>

EarthCheck is the certification program owned and implemented by EC3Global. The program was developed through 10 years of scientific research at the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) housed at Griffith University. The STCRC began in 1997 and was established by the Australian Government to enhance the environmental, economic and social sustainability the tourism industry. Directed by the principles of Agenda 21 from the Rio Earth Summit, extensive investment went into technological innovation and industry research to develop the scientific benchmarking and reporting tools that now underpin the Earth Check program and previously the Green Globe brand.

Until the end 2009 these benchmarking and reporting tools were made available to the tourism industry as a certification program sold under the brand name "Green Globe". In February 2010, EC3 Global upgraded its global network of members to the EarthCheck Program. This included members who were previously certified using the Green Globe brand.

EarthCheck offers a number of certification programs for a range of 39 sectors of the tourism industry. Earth Check offers certification programs for tourism businesses.

### **EarthCheck Evaluate**

Earth Check Evaluate is an entry-level program that recognises organisations that engage in sustainable practices. It uses GSTC recognised criteria to report on management performance covering a wide range of areas including



environment, risk and quality management. It evaluates an operator's economic, social and environmental impact.

Participating businesses are awarded an Earth Rating to recognise their achievement level and are also provided with guidance on how to reduce resource consumption and operating costs. Additional recommendations are outlined for training and engagement with staff, suppliers, visitors and the local community. To ensure transparency a set number of properties are verified annually by an Earth Check assessor.

### **EarthCheck Certified**

Earth Check Certified is a globally available online program that provides a detailed framework of sustainable business practices. EarthCheck recognises 39 sectors in the travel and tourism industry and helps operators to monitor, measure and manage their environmental, social and economic impacts. It is designed to assist tourism businesses to measure their current performance and compare it to global baseline and best practice performance standards. The program is applicable to all sectors and firm sizes within the tourism Industry



EarthCheck Certified is a performance-based platform that is supported by a range of benchmarking indicators, which include:

- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Energy efficiency, conservation and management
- Management of freshwater and stormwater resources
- Ecosystem conservation and management
- Management of social and cultural issues
- Land use planning and management
- Air quality and noise control
- Wastewater management
- Solid waste management
- Environmentally harmful substances

Auditing occurs annually or bi-annually based on risk.



## **Eco-Friendly STAR Certification Offered by AAA Tourism**



Eco-Friendly STAR Certification is an adjunct endorsement to a current AAA Tourism STAR rating for an accommodation property. Eco-Friendly STAR gives special recognition for a property's commitment to reducing the environmental impacts of its business.

To be awarded an Eco-Friendly STAR the accommodation property must achieve adequate points against a set of environmental criteria that include:

- Energy efficiency
- Waste minimisation and management
- Water minimisation
- Guest education

The standards used in this program were developed by AAA Tourism in partnership with EC3Global and the Green Globe program (Now EarthCheck).



## APPENDIX B - SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CERTIFICATION PROGRAM MATRIX

Program details		ecoBiz	Ecotourism Australia Ecocertification	EarthCheck	AAA Tourism Eco-Friendly Star	Climate Action Australia Certification Program
Availability	Global/domestic Program	Queensland Only	Australia Only	Global 70+ countries Australian Based	Australia & New Zealand	Australia Only
	Industry sectors program is available to:	Small to Medium size Queensland Businesses – Any sector	4 sectors Nature based - – clients must spend at least half their time experiencing nature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tours</li> <li>• Cruises</li> <li>• Attractions</li> <li>• Accommodation</li> </ul>	All tourism sectors and destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accommodation</li> <li>• Hotels</li> <li>• Apartments</li> <li>• Resorts</li> <li>• Motels</li> <li>• Self-catering</li> <li>• Guesthouses</li> <li>• Backpackers</li> <li>• Houseboats</li> <li>• Caravan parks</li> </ul>	All tourism industry sectors Including: accommodation, attractions, tours, transport, restaurants, travel agents, tourism commissions and industry bodies.
	Criteria publically available prior to application	Yes Worksheet available online prior to application	Yes - Detailed outline of required criteria is available online	For a \$175 fee	Yes Online - easily accessible from website	Yes - detailed outline of required criteria is available online
	Data entry is on-line	No – worksheets are online for download	Yes	Yes	No Checklist is downloaded from web and return-mailed	Yes
2	<b>Sustainable business management</b>	No	Product specific	Yes	No	No

	<b>systems and processes:</b> Compliance with legislation, design & construction of buildings, education & interpretation		certification – Not whole of business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature Tourism</li> <li>• Ecotourism</li> <li>• Advanced Ecotourism</li> </ul>			
	<b>Social &amp; economic benefits to local community:</b> initiatives for community development, local employment, fair trade, equitable, local suppliers	No	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecotourism</li> <li>• Advanced Ecotourism</li> </ul>	Yes	No	No
	<b>Cultural heritage benefits:</b> Contribution to the protection of local, historical, cultural, spiritual properties and areas	No	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecotourism</li> <li>• Advanced Ecotourism</li> </ul>	Yes	No	No
	<b>Environmental Impacts:</b> eg., measurement of energy, waste, water, CO <sub>2</sub> emissions, wildlife protection and support for biodiversity	Yes	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature Tourism</li> <li>• Ecotourism</li> <li>• Advanced Ecotourism</li> </ul>	Yes	Yes	Yes
Emissions	Is carbon footprint measured?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Climate Action Business - No Climate Action Innovator & Climate Action Leader- Yes
	Levels of carbon the program measures	Scope 1 & 2	N/A	Scope 1 & 2	N/A	Scope 1 & 2

Compliance	Minimum standards/indicators/measures exist by which participants are assessed	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Online self-assessment is an initial part of the certification process	No	Yes – Online self-assessment through set criteria	Yes	No	Yes
	Operators' compliance is verified?	Yes	Through referees and post certification, on-site audit	Yes – Certified level	Yes	Yes
Auditing	Is 3 <sup>rd</sup> party auditing part of the certification process?	An ecoBiz project officer works with businesses throughout the process	Occurs post certification, approximately within the first 12 months but can be up to 3 years	No – Assessed Yes – Certified	Yes	Occurs post certification, usually within the first 12 months
Bench-marking	Does benchmarking against similar sectors occur as part of the process?	No	No	Yes and reported back to operators	No	No
Review	Is the program GSTC recognised? Does the criteria align with global standards?	No	GSTC Recognised	GSTC-recognised & consistent with National Greenhouse Energy Reporting Scheme	No	No – GSTC Yes - Consistent with National Greenhouse Energy Reporting Scheme

## **APPENDIX C – CHANGING PRIORITIES AND POLICIES OF FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN AUSTRALIA**

The changing focus and commitment of governments in relation to certification in the tourism industry is impacting upon adoption and implementation rates in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The changing priorities and focus of government can be attributed in part to the changing governing parties, federally, state and locally. For instance, in December 2009 the Australian Labor Party was in federal government. At this time they launched *The National Long-Term Tourism Strategy*, followed by *Tourism 2020* in 2011. This strategy was designed to address barriers to industry growth and build a foundation to support industry to maximise economic potential (Australian Government, 2011). One of the six pillars of this strategy was to build industry resilience, productivity and quality. A key action listed to achieve this objective was to encourage operators to take up T-QUAL certification. T-QUAL was launched in December 2011 and the government committed \$5.5 million over four years to support the implementation of the framework (Australian Government, 2012). On June 30, 2014 the now Liberal Australian Government ceased the T-QUAL framework. Initially, the government stated that it intended to transfer T-QUAL to the industry to continue the framework, however a subsequent tender process found no industry-based organisation demonstrated an ongoing business model for T-QUAL. As such the program was cancelled (Australian Government, 2014). The result of the federal government dropping this program highlights the unstable environment of certification under government control. Each new government brings changed priorities. Operators and consumers are required to maintain currency.

Additionally, both state and local government changes in recent years have resulted in changes in priority in relation to certification. For the last three years Queensland has been governed by the National Liberal Party and during this time the government released the Queensland Ecotourism Plan. In a similar vein to the federal plan, it placed an emphasis on certification of tourism businesses to improve service standards and sustainability. In particular, this plan was set to introduce certification as a compulsory

requirement for commercial activity permit holders operating in protected areas by June 30, 2015. However, on 30 January 2015, Queensland held a state election and the Labor Party is now in government. This means that at the present time the future of the Ecotourism Plan is unclear.

Additionally, the Queensland Government established the EcoBiz program in 2005. This program is an environmentally focused program aimed at assisting businesses to improve sustainability by providing self-assessment tools, training, information and support. This program was provided free to all businesses in Queensland and was managed and operated by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. In 2013, the Queensland Government handed over the operation, implementation and management of the program to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland and the University of Southern Queensland.

Also, on the local level, changes in local government structures and the Noosa Biosphere management structure have all impacted upon the political drive and desire to promote certification as a means to improve the sustainability of locally operated tourism businesses. For instance in March 2013, Noosa Biosphere Ltd commissioned research to investigate the potential of certification to act as an industry development and marketing and promotional tool for tourism operators in Noosa Biosphere Reserve (Withyman, 2013). At this time, the organisation had introduced a Biosphere Partnership program and was working on plans to develop a biosphere certification plan for tourism businesses and local products. However, a change to the local government area and subsequent change in leadership resulted in the management structure of Noosa Biosphere being altered. All plans and strategies developed have ceased and a new structure is being planned.

The above changes in government and political direction all compound to make it difficult for tourism operators to navigate the ever changing political agenda in relation to certification.

## **APPENDIX D - ONLINE SURVEY**

### **Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve**

#### **ABOUT THIS SURVEY**

##### **WELCOME**

This survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.  
By completing the survey you can choose to enter the draw to WIN an Apple iPad valued at \$500.

Your answers to the following survey will form part of a research project about sustainable business practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The project is being undertaken by CQUniversity post-graduate student, Cathie Withyman as part of her Master of Business Degree.

The project is being conducted in partnership with Tourism Noosa and Noosa Biosphere Ltd. Your input is encouraged and valued.

You are encouraged to answer as honestly and openly as possible, so that the information gathered is the most accurate indication of business operators thoughts and perceptions. Your identity and business identity will remain confidential and will not form any part of the research data. You can choose to remain anonymous if desired.

By moving to the next page of the survey you are giving your consent to participate in the survey. Closing date for survey responses is 30 September 2013.

Thank your for taking the time to complete the following survey.

Page 1



## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

### Background Information

This section is designed to provide a basic insight into the type, size and location of your business.

**\* 1.** What type of business do you operate? Choose all that apply.

- ☐ Libraries / museum / arts
- ☐ Accommodation
- ☐ Tour operator / travel agency
- ☐ Transport – Taxi / air / water /
- ☐ Retail
- ☐ Café / Restaurant / Takeaway food
- ☐ Health/fitness/wellbeing
- ☐ Transport – Motor vehicle hire
- ☐ Club / Pub / Tavern / Bar
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**2.** Does your business / or part of your business, operate within Noosa Biosphere Reserve?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Partly
- ☐ Not Sure

If partly please indicate what % operates within NBR

**\* 3.** How many employees does your business employ on an ongoing basis

- ☐ Less than 5 employees
- ☐ 5 – 20 employees
- ☐ 20 – 200 employees
- ☐ 200 + employees
- ☐ Other (please specify)

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

\* 4. What type of entity is the business?

- ☐ Sole trader
- ☐ Partnership
- ☐ Company
- ☐ Co-operative
- ☐ Government Body
- ☐ Educational institution
- ☐ Club / Society / Association
- ☐ Other (please elaborate)

\* 5. Would you describe the business as owner operated?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

### Sustainability within your business

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has defined sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes into account the full, current and future economic, social and environmental impacts. It addresses the needs of visitors, the industry, environment and host communities" (UNWTO 2012, p.1).

Examples of sustainable business practices in the tourism industry may include initiatives such as: recycling & waste minimisation strategies, support for conservation of the local environment and culture, community involvement and contribution, environmental management plans and impact reduction strategies, energy reduction strategies, visitor education methods and sound business management systems and processes.

6. Please list 3 sustainable activities or initiatives that you undertake within your business:

1.	
2.	
3.	

★ 7. Please rate how important the following factors are to the sustainability of your business.

	Not important	Somewhat important	Very Important	Essential	N/A
Managing business reputation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improving employee job satisfaction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community involvement and contribution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mitigating risk related to climate change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being innovative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sound business management strategies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reducing environmental impact of business operations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conservation of the local environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Retaining current customers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improving employee retention	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improving regulatory compliance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Introducing new products	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conservation of the local culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reaching new customers and markets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

\* 8. Who is the principal decision maker/s regarding sustainable business practices for the business?

- ☐ The business owner/s
- ☐ The business manager
- ☐ A range of employees across the business
- ☐ A combination of owners / managers / employees
- ☐ Other (please specify)

\* 9. Does your business have a documented sustainability policy?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Partly
- ☐ No

Other (please specify)

\* 10. When thinking about sustainable tourism within Noosa Biosphere Reserve. How important do you consider the following aspects?

	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important	Essential	N/A
The visitor is satisfied with their tourism experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The tourism business gives back to the local community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The visitor's expectations of their tourism experience were met	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The tourism experience takes place in nature	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The tourism business contributes to the conservation of the area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The visitor experience has a cultural component	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The visitor learns about Noosa's natural environment, biodiversity & heritage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The visitor learns about Noosa Biosphere Reserve	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The experience has minimal impact on the environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

### Certification of tourism businesses

Certification or accreditation of tourism businesses is considered by some to be a useful tool to promote and encourage sustainability within the tourism industry. Certification is defined as 'the formal process under which an independent body audits and gives written assurance that a facility, product, process, service or management system meets specific standards'. It awards a logo or seal to those that meet or exceed baseline criteria or standards.

We would like to gain an understanding of your views regarding sustainable tourism certification/accreditation as it relates to your business.

**\* 11.** Is your business currently certified / or has in the past been certified?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Page 6

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

### Certification Awareness

\* 12. Are you aware of any tourism certification programs available to your business?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Page 7

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

### Certification continued

\* 13. Which certification programs are you aware of? Choose all that apply

- ☐ Earth Check - Assessed / Certified
- ☐ Gumnut Awards
- ☐ TQUAL
- ☐ EcoCertified – Nature Tourism / Ecotourism / Advanced Ecotourism
- ☐ National Accommodation, Recreation & Tourism Accreditation (NARTA)
- ☐ Certified Event Company (COC)
- ☐ Gold Licence Caterer
- ☐ Savour Green Table (Restaurant & Catering Australia)
- ☐ Climate Action Certification
- ☐ Australian Tourism Accreditation Program – ATAP
- ☐ EcoBiz
- ☐ China Ready and Accredited (CRA)
- ☐ ROC Certified
- ☐ AAA Tourism Green STAR
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (please specify)

\* 14. How did you hear about these certification programs? Choose all that apply.

- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Industry Association / Group (Tourism Noosa, SCDL, Tourism QLD, Noosa Biosphere, Chamber of Commerce)
- ☐ Google / internet / search engine
- ☐ Seminar / Conference
- ☐ Other businesses
- ☐ Local media
- ☐ Other (please specify)

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

### Certification Benefits & Barriers

★ 15. When thinking about certification, what do you consider as potential BENEFITS?  
Choose all that apply.

- ☐ Reduced risk
- ☐ Promotion of sustainable business practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve
- ☐ Helps local community
- ☐ Increased employee productivity
- ☐ Increased competitive advantage
- ☐ Improved ability to attract and retain staff
- ☐ Increased media exposure
- ☐ Reduced costs due to materials or waste efficiencies
- ☐ Marketing benefit
- ☐ Improved business reputation
- ☐ Better innovation of product/service offering
- ☐ Improved business processes/regulatory compliance
- ☐ Good corporate conscious
- ☐ Increased margins or market share
- ☐ Reduced costs due to energy efficiency
- ☐ There have not been any benefits
- ☐ Please tell us any other benefits



## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

\* 16. What are the current BARRIERS to your business seeking certification? Choose all that apply

- ☐ Cost to change business practices
- ☐ Inadequate industry support
- ☐ Not sure where to start
- ☐ It is not relevant to my business
- ☐ Too complicated
- ☐ Not enough time
- ☐ Don't know enough about it
- ☐ Decision rests elsewhere
- ☐ Cost of certification
- ☐ Limited government support
- ☐ Minimal customer demand
- ☐ Don't see any benefit
- ☐ Other -Please tell us about any additional barriers:

17. Please tell us what resources or support would assist you to move towards certification of your business?

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

### Certified Tourism Businesses

Please tell us a little more about the process and your experiences of certifying your business. Remember the survey is completely confidential. The more accurately and honestly you answer the questions to more useful this research project will be to improve and add value to certification.

★ 18. What year was your business first certified?

★ 19. Which certification program is / has your business been certified under? Choose all that apply

- ☐ Earth Check - Assessed
- ☐ Earth Check - Certified
- ☐ EcoCertified - Nature Tourism
- ☐ Eco Certified - Ecotourism
- ☐ Eco Certified - Advanced Ecotourism
- ☐ EcoBiz
- ☐ Climate Action Certification
- ☐ ROC Certified
- ☐ Savour Green Table (Restaurant & Catering Australia)
- ☐ AAA Star Rating
- ☐ AAA Tourism Green STAR
- ☐ Australian Tourism Accreditation Program - ATAP
- ☐ National Accommodation, Recreation & Tourism Accreditation (NARTA)
- ☐ Certified Event Company (CEC)
- ☐ China Ready and Accredited (CRA)
- ☐ Gold Licence Caterer
- ☐ Gumnut Awards
- ☐ Other (please specify)

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

\* 20. Have you kept your certification current? i.e. have you paid the annual fees to remain certified?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If No - please state why you did not renew your certification:

\* 21. How did you hear about the certification programs? Choose all that apply.

☐ Other businesses

☐ Seminar / Conference

☐ Google / internet / search engine

☐ Industry Association / Group (Tourism Noosa, SCDL, Tourism QLD, Noosa Biosphere, Chamber of Commerce)

☐ Social media

☐ Local media

☐ Other (please specify)

\* 22. Please tell us briefly what first MOTIVATED you to seek certification for your business.

\* 23. Have you changed your business practices as a result of going through the certification process?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Partly

Please explain your selection

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

\* 24. What do you consider as the BENEFITS of certification? Choose all that apply.

- ☐ Promotion of sustainable business practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve
- ☐ Increased media exposure
- ☐ Improved ability to attract and retain staff
- ☐ Increased margins or market share
- ☐ Increased competitive advantage
- ☐ Reduced costs due to energy efficiency
- ☐ Good corporate conscious
- ☐ Reduced costs due to materials or waste efficiencies
- ☐ Marketing benefit
- ☐ Improved business processes/regulatory compliance
- ☐ Better innovation of product/service offering
- ☐ Increased employee productivity
- ☐ Reduced risk
- ☐ Improved business reputation
- ☐ Helps local community
- ☐ There have not been any benefits

Please tell us any other benefits

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

\* 25. What do you consider are the current BARRIERS to businesses choosing to become certified? Choose all that apply

- ☐ It is not relevant to my business
- ☐ Cost to change business practices
- ☐ Not enough time
- ☐ Cost of certification
- ☐ Inadequate industry support
- ☐ Too complicated
- ☐ Limited government support
- ☐ Not sure where to start
- ☐ Minimal customer demand
- ☐ Decision rests elsewhere
- ☐ Don't know enough about it
- ☐ Don't see any benefit

☐ Other -Please tell us about any additional barriers:

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

### Final Section - Noosa Biosphere Reserve

Noosa Biosphere Reserve (NBR) was recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2007 and encompasses 150,000 hectares of land and sea. Covering the area of the (soon to be re-established) Noosa Shire.

Biosphere Reserves have three basic functions, these being conservation, sustainable development and logistical support which includes research, education and training. They are established to provide the context in which communities can explore and demonstrate approaches to conservation and sustainable development on a regional basis.

26. As Biosphere Reserves are considered a testing ground for sustainable development, what resources or support do you consider would be useful to move businesses towards more sustainable practices?

\* 27. Do you think certification of tourism businesses should be encouraged in Noosa Biosphere Reserve?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure
- ☐ Please comment

\* 28. Who should be responsible for developing and promoting certification of the tourism industry in Noosa Biosphere Reserve? Choose all that apply.

- ☐ Noosa Biosphere Ltd
- ☐ Tourism Australia
- ☐ Local Noosa Council
- ☐ State Government
- ☐ Independent Certification bodies
- ☐ Local tourism authority - Tourism Noosa
- ☐ Business owners/operators
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (please specify)

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

\* 29. To promote sustainable tourism within Noosa Biosphere Reserve which option do you consider would most beneficial?

- ☐ A local Noosa Biosphere certification program. Developed and operated locally by local authorities
- ☐ A program that gives recognition to operators certified under one of the current range of certification programs available
- ☐ Use of one globally recognised certification program by all operators
- ☐ No certification program or recognition program is required
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other - Please elaborate

30. In closing, please share any other ideas or thoughts you have regarding certification of tourism businesses in Noosa Biosphere Reserve?

## Sustainable Tourism Business Practices in Noosa Biosphere Reserve

Thank you for completing this survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you wish to be entered into the draw to WIN an Apple iPad valued at \$500 please fill in your contact details below.

By completing this section you are indicating your willingness to be contacted by the researcher to participate in a possible interview as part of this research project. If you do not wish to submit your contact details, click NEXT to finish the survey.

You may also elect to receive a plain english summary of the research findings. To receive this summary you must provide your contact details.

### 31. Contact Details

Name:	<input type="text"/>
Company:	<input type="text"/>
Email Address:	<input type="text"/>
Phone Number:	<input type="text"/>

32. Please select YES if you would like to receive a plain english summary of the research findings upon project completion.

☐ Yes



## APPENDIX E - EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear Tourism Noosa member,

You are invited to participate in a research project being undertaken about sustainable tourism certification within Noosa Biosphere Reserve. CQUniversity post-graduate student, Cathie Withyman is undertaking this project as part of her Master of Business Degree.

Tourism Noosa and Noosa Biosphere Ltd encourage your participation in this valuable research project.

The survey is expected to take no more than 10 minutes to complete and you can choose to remain anonymous if desired. Attached is a participant's information sheet that provides more detail about the project and how it works. To participate in the survey please click the link below:

**LINK TO SURVEY – CLICK HERE** Or go to:  
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/sustainabletourism>

The survey is designed to gather information about the size of your business, decisions makers within the business, your knowledge of and involvement with sustainable tourism certification programs and your approach to sustainability within your business. Closing date for survey responses is 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

If you would like further information on Sustainable Tourism Certification programs that may be available to your business please email [accreditation@qtic.com.au](mailto:accreditation@qtic.com.au)

If you have any questions regarding the survey or the research project, please contact Cathie via email [c.withyman@cqu.edu.au](mailto:c.withyman@cqu.edu.au). Alternatively you can contact the research supervisors for the project, Professor Mike Horsley and Dr Susan Davis on [REDACTED].

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project.

Tourism Noosa

CQU HERC clearance Number: H13/08-142



## **APPENDIX F - RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET**



### **RESEARCH PARTICIPANT'S INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **RESEARCH TOPIC TITLE**

"Sustainable tourism certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve"

#### **Project Overview**

This information and consent package relates to research being undertaken about 'Sustainable tourism business practices and certification within Biosphere Reserves'. Specifically, a case study of Noosa Biosphere Reserve. The principal researcher involved, Cathie Withyman, is undertaking this research as part of her Masters of Business degree. Cathie is supervised by a team of experienced research academics from CQUniversity.

This project has the support of Tourism Noosa and Noosa Biosphere Ltd. Both organisations see value in this research project and encourage your participation.

The research project aims to gain an insight into sustainable businesses practices and the process of sustainable certification from the tourism business operator's perspective. It will seek to understand the motivations, experiences and perceptions of certification and the process involved in becoming certified. It aims to identify the factors and interactions that prompt business operators to choose or not choose certification as a tool to improve sustainability.

Examples of sustainable business practices in the tourism industry may include initiatives such as: recycling & waste minimisation strategies, support for conservation of the local environment and culture, community involvement and contribution, environmental management plans and impact reduction strategies, energy reduction strategies, visitor education methods and sound business management systems and processes.

It is anticipated that this research will assist governments and destination management organisations to identify how certification might be used as a tool to develop a sustainable tourism industry within Biosphere Reserves. Locally, the outcome of the research will allow for a more informed approach to the use of certification as a sustainability tool for tourism businesses within Noosa Biosphere Reserve.

If you would like further information on Sustainable Tourism Certification programs that may be available to your business contact QTIC's accreditation manager on [REDACTED] or email: [accreditation@qtic.com.au](mailto:accreditation@qtic.com.au)

#### **How does it work?**

Research components of the project include an online survey, interviews and focus group. Participation in the project is voluntary and you can withdraw your participation at any time.

#### **SURVEY**

The initial phase of the research is an online survey of all Tourism Noosa members. The survey is expected to take no more than 10 minutes to complete and you can choose to remain anonymous if desired. The survey is designed to gather information about the size of your business, decisions makers within the business, your knowledge of and involvement with sustainable tourism certification programs and your approach to sustainability within your business.

Data from the survey will then be used to select a number of sustainably certified and non-certified businesses that will then be invited to participate in a 45minute interview.

Completion of the online survey will be taken as your consent to participate in the survey. Completion of the online survey can be anonymous, or you can include your contact details. Your identity will remain confidential. If you choose to provide your name, business name and contact details, these will only be used to contact you to request an interview if your business is selected. Your identity will be protected and will not form any part of the research data.

The survey can be accessed at: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/sustainabletourism>

### **INTERVIEW**

Nominating that you are willing to participate in an interview does not necessarily mean you will be requested to do so. Interview participants will be selected across a range of industry sectors and will be both certified and non-certified businesses. The interviews will be approximately 45minutes in length and will be held at a time and place convenient to the participant.

If you agree to participate in the interviews and are selected to participate in an interview your identity will remain completely confidential, your name and your business name will not form part of the research data. It will be used for contact purposes only.

You will be required to provide your consent in writing to participate in the interview phase of the research. This means that you will be asked to sign a 'consent' form. While signing this form means that you have agreed to be interviewed, you can withdraw from the project at any time. If there are questions that you do not wish to answer you have the right to refrain from answering those questions.

If you are selected to participate in an interview the researcher will contact you by phone or email to request an interview and to arrange a convenient time and place for the interview to be conducted. The consent to participate form will be sent to you at this time for completion prior to the interview.

### **Confidentiality**

The information collected in the survey and interviews for this project is subject to the University's Code of Conduct (<http://www.cqu.edu.au/research/governance-and-policies>).

All data relating to the research project will be retained for a period of five years and will be stored in a secure location in compliance with CQUniversity's policies relating to ethical research.

All comments and responses provided through the survey and interview stages will be treated confidentially and will not be shared with any other persons or organisations. It is anticipated that interviews and focus groups will be digitally recorded, transcribed and coded as part of the data analysis. Recordings will be kept securely for the duration of the project and for up to five years afterwards.

Your name and business / organisation identity will remain confidential. Individual or business identities will not be identifiable in the research results, final thesis and associated research articles and papers.

The information provided in the survey and interviews will be used as part of the research for a Masters of Business degree and the results may also be published in research articles and conference papers as findings from the research but your identity will be protected.

#### Consent to Participate

Your completion and submission of this survey is accepted as an indication of your consent to participate in the survey stage of this project. If you include your contact details you may be contacted and invited to participate in an interview. Prior to the interview you will be provided with and requested to sign a consent form to participate in the interview stage of the research.

#### Information & Questions

Please contact the researcher/s named below if you have any questions or if you require further information about the project.

#### Research Contacts

##### Principal Researcher

Cathie Withyman,  
Building A,  
CQUniversity  
90 Goodchap Street,  
Noosaville, 4566  
Email: [c.withyman@cqu.edu.au](mailto:c.withyman@cqu.edu.au)  
Phone: [REDACTED]

##### Research Supervisors

Professor Mike Horsley,  
CQUniversity - Ph (07) [REDACTED]  
Dr Sue Davis,  
CQUniversity - Ph (07) [REDACTED]  
Dr Scott Richardson,  
External Supervisor - [REDACTED]

#### Concerns / complaints regarding the conduct of the project

CQUniversity is committed to researcher integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the Ethics and Compliance Officer. (07 4923 2603, Email: [ethics@cqu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@cqu.edu.au) ; Mailing address; Building 361, CQUniversity, Rockhampton QLD 4702) The Researcher Ethics Officer is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.  
CQU HERC clearance Number; H13/08-142

## APPENDIX G - INTERVIEW QUESTION SHEETS

Interview Questions - Eco-Certified		
	Main Question	Informal Probe
1	<b>Why</b> did you decide to become certified?	<i>What motivated / prompted you at the time? Where did your motivation come from? Personal values, business benefit, regulation</i>
2	What were your <b>original expectations</b> and <b>perceived outcomes</b> of certification?	<i>What did you think the outcome would be? What were the perceived benefits?</i>
3	What were the critical <b>steps</b> of the certification process and who were the critical <b>people</b> in the process?	<i>Who did you interact with? What relationships were important? How was the program organised?</i>
4	What were the <b>challenges</b> and <b>supports</b> through the process?	<i>What were the hard parts of the process? Where did you require support? What support did you use? What could have helped you through the process?</i>
5	What did you <b>learn</b> from the process?	<i>What has been valuable? What have changes have you made to your business? What improvements?</i>
6	What have been the <b>benefits</b> to your business?	<i>If no benefits, what could be changed to create benefit? What is the impact of the benefits?</i>
7	What have been the <b>costs</b> to your business?	<i>What is the impact of the costs?</i>
<b>BIOSPHERE RESERVE</b>		
8	BIOSPHERE – Do you see Noosa's Biosphere Reserve status having value to your business?	<i>In what way? What does it mean to you?</i>
9	How do you see certification of tourism businesses evolving in NBR?	<i>What changes / improvements could be made? What types of interactions are necessary / beneficial?</i>
10	If you could choose, what type of certification program do you believe would be most beneficial to the tourism industry in NBR?	<i>For example, globally recognised, or locally based What would the most important factors be in this ideal eco-certification program?</i>
11	Do you have any other comments or issues relating to certification that you would like include in our discussion?	

Interview Questions - Non-Certified		
#	Main Question	Informal Probe
1	Please tell me what you <b>know</b> about sustainable tourism certification?	<i>How did you learn about certification? What do you perceive the outcomes of certification may be to at tourism business?</i>
2	Did you undertake conscious steps in your <b>decision</b> to not be certified?	<i>What was your decision process? What barriers / constraints are there?</i>
3	What <b>supports</b> would you require to become certified?	<i>What are the challenges you face? Where did you require support? What would help you through the process?</i>
4	What would <b>influence</b> your decision to become certified in the future?  Who are the critical <b>people</b> that could help?	<i>What changes to the system are necessary for you to become eco-certified? Internally within your business and externally?</i>
5	What do you consider the <b>benefits</b> to your business could be?	<i>If no benefits, what could be changed to create benefit? What is the impact of the costs and benefits?</i>
6	What do you consider the <b>costs</b> to your business could be?	<i>Are they financial, time, staff?</i>
7	Are you going to apply for certification in the future?	<i>Why / why not?</i>
<b>BIOSPHERE RESERVE</b>		
8	BIOSPHERE – Do you see Noosa's Biosphere Reserve status having value to your business?	<i>In what way? What does it mean to you?</i>
9	How do you see certification of tourism businesses evolving in NBR?	<i>How could certification be made relevant to your business? What types of interactions are necessary?</i>
10	If you could choose, what type of certification program do you believe would be most beneficial to the tourism industry in NBR?	<i>For example, globally recognised, or locally based? What would the most important factors be in this ideal certification program?</i>
11	Do you have any other comments or issues relating to certification that you would like include in our discussion?	

Interview Questions – LTO & Certifiers		
	Main Question	Informal Probe
1	Why do you <b>think</b> tourism businesses decide to become certified?	<i>What motivates / prompts businesses? Where does this motivation come from?</i>
2	What <b>outcomes</b> do you think tourism operators expect certification to deliver?	<i>What do they think the outcome will be? What were the <b>perceived</b> benefits?</i>
3	What are the critical <b>steps</b> of the certification process?  Who are the critical <b>people</b> involved in the process?	<i>Who and how does interaction occur?</i>  <i>What relationships are important?</i>
4	What do you see are the <b>challenges</b> faced by tourism businesses when going through the certification process?  What <b>supports</b> are required by tourism businesses when going through the process?	<i>What are the hard parts of the process? Where do most businesses require support?</i>
5	What do you think operators <b>learn</b> from the process?	<i>What is valuable? What changes do they make to business practices?</i>
6	What do you see as the <b>benefits</b> of certification to the individual business? What are the <b>impacts</b> of these benefits? What are the <b>benefits to the destination</b> ?	<i>What is the impact of the benefits?</i>
7	What do you see as the <b>costs</b> of certification to the individual business?	<i>What is the impact of the costs?</i>
<b>BIOSPHERE RESERVE</b>		
8	BIOSPHERE – Do you see Noosa's Biosphere Reserve status as having value to individual tourism businesses?	<i>In what way? How could this be enhanced?</i>
9	How do you see certification of tourism businesses <b>evolving in Australia</b> <b>And in NBR?</b>	<i>What changes / improvements could be made? What types of interactions are necessary / beneficial?</i>
10	If you could choose, what type of certification program do you believe would be most beneficial to the tourism industry in NBR?	<i>For example, globally recognised, or locally based What would the most important factors be in this ideal certification program?</i>
11	Do you have any other comments or issues relating to certification	

## APPENDIX H - INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION SHEET



### INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview phase of this research.

**Background:**

This research is about sustainable business practices and certification of tourism businesses. Both sustainably certified and non-certified businesses are being interviewed to give a cross-section of viewpoints and experiences.

As an eco-certified business I am interested in finding out more about your experiences, perception and interactions in relation to eco-certification of your tourism business.

Your opinions and thoughts are very valuable to this research. Please answer the questions as openly and honestly as possible.

**Interview Detail:**

Interview Date:

Interviewee:

Name of Business	
Type of Tourism Business	
Number of Employees	
Principal Decision Maker	<input type="checkbox"/> Owner <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Combination of owners & managers <input type="checkbox"/> Range of employees across the business
Owner / operated	Yes / No
Length of time operating business:	
Has your business been eco-certified in the past?	



## **APPENDIX I - INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT MATRIX**

Respondent Code	Type of Business	Business Size	Operational Structure
EC1	Tours	Micro <5 employees	Owner operated
EC2	Accommodation Food / Functions Health / Wellbeing	Medium 20-200 employees	Management Company
EC3	Accommodation	Small 5-20 employees	Owner operated
NC1	Tours	Micro <5 employees	Owner operated
NC2	Accommodation Food / Functions	Small 5-20 employees	Owner operated
NC3	Health / Wellbeing	Micro <5 employees	Owner operated
SH1	Certification provider	N/A	N/A
SH2	Certification provider	N/A	N/A
SH3	Local tourism organisation	N/A	N/A

## **APPENDIX J - ETHICS APPROVAL**



Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee  
Ph: 07 4923 2603  
Fax: 07 4923 2600  
Email: [ethics@cqu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@cqu.edu.au)

Prof Mike Horsley  
Ms Cathie Withyman  
School of Business and Law

5 September 2013

Dear Prof Horsley and Ms Withyman

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE ETHICAL APPROVAL PROJECT: H13/08-142 A CASE STUDY OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CERTIFICATION WITHIN A BIOSPHERE RESERVE**

The Human Research Ethics Committee is an approved institutional ethics committee constituted in accord with guidelines formulated by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and governed by policies and procedures consistent with principles as contained in publications such as the joint Universities Australia and NHMRC *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*. This is available at [http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/\\_files/r39.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/_files/r39.pdf).

On 5 September 2013, the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee considered your application under the Low Risk Review Process. This letter confirms that your project has been granted approval under this process, pending ratification by the full committee at its September 2013 meeting.

The period of ethics approval will be from 5 September 2013 to 30 August 2014. The approval number is H13/08-142; please quote this number in all dealings with the Committee. HREC wishes you well with the undertaking of the project and looks forward to receiving the final report.

The standard conditions of approval for this research project are that:

- (a) you conduct the research project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments required to be made to the proposal by the Human Research Ethics Committee;
- (b) you advise the Human Research Ethics Committee (email [ethics@cqu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@cqu.edu.au)) immediately if any complaints are made, or expressions of concern are raised, or any other issue in relation to the project which may warrant review of ethics approval of the project. *(A written report detailing the adverse occurrence or unforeseen event must be submitted to the Committee Chair within one working day after the event.)*
- (c) you make submission to the Human Research Ethics Committee for approval of any proposed variations or modifications to the approved project before making any such changes;

- (d) you provide the Human Research Ethics Committee with a written “Annual Report” on each anniversary date of approval (for projects of greater than 12 months) and “Final Report” by no later than one (1) month after the approval expiry date; *(A copy of the reporting pro formas may be obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee Secretary, Sue Evans please contact at the telephone or email given on the first page.)*
- (e) you accept that the Human Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to conduct scheduled or random inspections to confirm that the project is being conducted in accordance to its approval. Inspections may include asking questions of the research team, inspecting all consent documents and records and being guided through any physical experiments associated with the project
- (f) if the research project is discontinued, you advise the Committee in writing within five (5) working days of the discontinuation;
- (g) A copy of the Statement of Findings is provided to the Human Research Ethics Committee when it is forwarded to participants.

Please note that failure to comply with the conditions of approval and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* may result in withdrawal of approval for the project.

You are required to advise the Secretary in writing within five (5) working days if this project does not proceed for any reason. In the event that you require an extension of ethics approval for this project, please make written application in advance of the end-date of this approval. The research cannot continue beyond the end date of approval unless the Committee has granted an extension of ethics approval. Extensions of approval cannot be granted retrospectively. Should you need an extension but not apply for this before the end-date of the approval then a full new application for approval must be submitted to the Secretary for the Committee to consider.

The Human Research Ethics Committee wishes to support researchers in achieving positive research outcomes. If you have issues where the Human Research Ethics Committee may be of assistance or have any queries in relation to this approval please do not hesitate to contact the Secretary, Sue Evans or myself.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Phillip Ebrall  
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

Cc: Dr Sue Davis, Dr Scott Richardson (Supervisors) Project file

**Approved**

## APPENDIX K - PARTICIPANTS CONSENT FORM



### PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT FORM

#### "Sustainable Tourism Certification in Noosa Biosphere Reserve"

Ethics clearance number: **H13/08-142**

Researcher: Cathie Withyman - [c.withyman@cqu.edu.au](mailto:c.withyman@cqu.edu.au)

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information sheet about this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that any survey and interview information collected will be stored so that they are not accessible by any other persons than the researcher/s.
- Understand that your name and business details will not be used in publications unless you indicate you wish your real name to be used;
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the researcher;
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty;
- Understand that you can contact the researcher if you have any questions about the project, or the CQUniversity Ethics & Compliance Officer on 61 (0) 74923 2603 or email [ethics@cqu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@cqu.edu.au) if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and
- Agree to participate in the project.

#### Participant consent

Name	
Signature	
Date	
Email	

I wish to receive a plain English summary of the research findings