

Tour Operator and Activity Provider Licensing Longer term licences

Fact Sheet
May 2021

What is the purpose of a licence?

The tour operator licensing system provides a consistent legislative framework for licensing commercial tourism and commercial recreation activity on public land and waters in Victoria.

Licensing provides land managers and government with assurances that tour operators and activity providers are:

- implementing risk management measures associated with a tour or activity
- meeting relevant safety standards
- complying with environment protection conditions.

Longer term tour operator licences

Public land managers in Victoria can grant a tour operator licence for up to a ten year period.

The decision whether to grant a tour operator licence and the duration and conditions of a licence, are decisions for the relevant public land manager under the guidance of the policy statement 'Licensing System for Tour Operators and Activity Providers on Public Land in Victoria'.

Public land managers must consider whether the applicant is accredited under a recognised industry accreditation program that encourages improved environmental, cultural and business management standards or if an applicant has a good compliance history under previous licence conditions.

Licensing system 2018 policy update

The 2018 policy reforms recognise that a good business compliance history is evidence of achieving environmental, cultural protection and safety standards set out in a licence and that this is worthy of the security of a longer licence. They also recognise the value of endorsed industry accreditation as a way of encouraging higher operational standards by increasing the maximum length of licence for accredited operators.

Licence terms available from June 2018

Land managers may offer licences for the following terms:

- a standard licence for a one year period
- a licence for up to three years for operators with three years of full compliance (who have provided their insurance details, trip returns and paid invoices on time, and have a record of meeting all their compliance obligations under the licence)
- a licence for up to five years subject to relevant endorsed tourism accreditation
- a premium licence for up to ten years subject to relevant endorsed tourism accreditation.

The programs currently recognised as supportive of an application for a longer term licence are in Table 1.

Table 1: Recognised tourism accreditation providers and programs

| Up to 5 year licence term | Up to 10 year maximum licence term |
|--|--|
| Ecotourism Australia EcoCertification - Nature Tourism | Ecotourism Australia EcoCertification – Advanced Ecotourism |
| Victorian Tourism Industry Council Quality Tourism Accreditation Level 2 – Sustainable Tourism (formerly, Australian Tourism Accreditation Program) | Ecotourism Australia EcoCertification -Advanced Ecotourism |
| Ecotourism Australia Respecting Our Culture | EarthCheck EarthCheck Benchmarking and Certification (formerly GreenGlobe Company Standard) |

Tour Operator and Activity Provider Licensing

Longer term licences

When considering applications, particularly for longer term licences (i.e. any licence longer than one year), public land managers should ensure that:

- applications are considered fairly and equitably
- applications to carry out the same activities and/or operate at the same locations are treated consistently
- applicants are provided with transparency in decision-making.

Please note that obtaining accreditation under one of the recognised programs is the preferred basis for considering applications for a longer term tour operator licence, as it enables public land managers to recognise and reward an evolving suite of industry-developed and regularly reviewed operating standards.

Recognition of alternate certification programs, equivalent operating standards

Where an alternate industry accreditation program appears to deliver operating standards equivalent to those required by the recognised programs, public land managers, applicants or accreditation providers may contact the Department of Environment Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) for consideration of the program as a recognised program.

Will a longer licence term for tour operators result in changes to public access?

No. Public land is set aside by law for the benefit of the public. A licence grants a non-exclusive right to use land, so members of the public can continue to access and enjoy the land.

Before applying for a tour operator licence

Before making an application for a tour operator licence, prospective licence-holders should contact the relevant public land manager and confirm the availability, terms and conditions of licences for the specific activity/site and their compliance history.

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