

Exploring environmental management among New Zealand tourism firms

Summary of findings April 2007

Introduction

The New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2010 described the importance of the relationship between New Zealand tourism and the natural environment, which posits that one of the goals of the tourism industry is to ‘recognise the value of the natural environment and actively protect, support and promote its sustainability’ (NZTSG 2001 p.16). Tourism operators have a significant role to play, as they are able to minimise the impacts of their business upon the natural environment and also contribute to conservation. In August/September 2001, a total of 61 activity and accommodation operators in the Nelson/Tasman region were interviewed with a view to ascertaining information about their adoption of environmental practices. This research found that:

- Tourism operators were engaging in a broad range of practices that reduce their impacts upon the natural environment and that contribute to conservation;
- Operators felt that a limited range of practices are most effective at improving their environmental performance;
- Individual environmental practices are being adopted for specific reasons;
- Energy and waste-related practices were considered more appropriate among accommodation operators due to their greater resource use;
- Accommodation and activity operators are contributing to conservation in different ways, due to the different opportunities presented by their type of businesses;
- While most tourism operators discuss the environment with their guests, active environmental interpretation is limited to a group of activity operators, most of whom are Department of Conservation (DOC) concessionaires;
- Formal environmental practices are being adopted among a group of environmental ‘converts’ and have not resulted in the adoption of additional practices among these operators.

Most effective practices:	Main practices that operators want to adopt:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Waste;○ Energy;○ Conservation practices;○ Interpretation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Waste (recycling);○ Energy (solar);○ Conservation practices.

The Nelson/Tasman Region

This research was conducted among tourism operators in the Nelson/Tasman Region which was chosen for the following reasons:

- The region has a diverse range of tourism types, including urban and natural-area tourism; domestic and international visitors; and tourism ‘traffic’ ranging from the popular Abel Tasman National Park to peripheral areas such as Golden Bay and Murchison;
- At a macro-level, the Nelson/Tasman Region is between more established destinations such as of Auckland, Rotorua or Queenstown (for example) and peripheral tourism regions.
- With four National Parks and pristine beaches, lakes and rivers, the natural environment is an important element of the tourism product in the region.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Impact minimising practices

Operators are reducing their impact upon the natural environment through a diverse range of practices. Practices that are being adopted by more than half of the operators interviewed are shown in Figure 1.

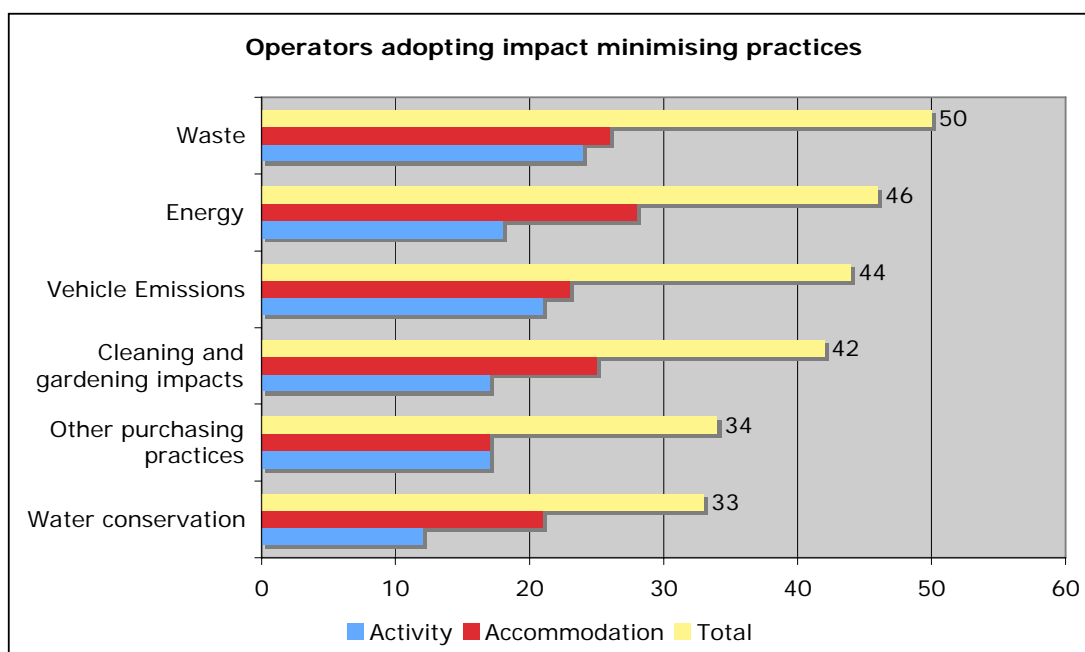


Figure 1: Commonly adopted impact minimising practices (n=61)

Of these practices, energy and waste-related practices were described as the most effective at improving operators’ environmental performance, and the key aspects of operators’ adoption of these practices are summarised below.

Waste-related practices

- **Waste-related practices were dominated by recycling practices**, but also included composting and minimising waste produced;
- They were mostly adopted due to a range of **environmental ethics**. Other influences included facilities becoming available and economic savings resulting from avoiding the costs associated with waste disposal;
- Operators **wanted to adopt recycling** or extend their current recycling practices, but were prevented from doing so by the **lack of recycling facilities**. This was most prevalent among accommodation operators, who appeared to produce more waste.

Energy-related practices

- Consisted of a **suite of practices**, the most popular of which was the use of 'eco-bulbs', but which also included the use of energy efficient appliances, shutting down appliances either manually or through the use of timers, energy efficient construction, and the use of solar power;
- Virtually all operators had adopted energy reduction practices **in order to save money** on the bills associated with energy use;
- A substantial number of **operators wanted to adopt solar energy use**, but were unable or unwilling to, largely because of the initial **capital costs** involved.

Impact minimising practices among different business types

Impact minimising practices were different among activity and accommodation operators. The main differences were:

- Certain impact-reducing practices were not as applicable to activity firms who operate predominantly 'off-site'. For example, kayak-guiding businesses are not large consumers of electricity and therefore were limited in their ability to reduce energy use;
- Related to this, accommodation operators were much more likely to want to adopt or extend their adoption of energy and waste-related practices;
- Reduction of the impacts of activity operators' vehicles was more significant than accommodation operators who mostly described their vehicle use as similar to regular domestic use.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Contributions to conservation

Tourism operators are making widespread contributions to conservation, outlined in Figure 2. The most popular of these were in-kind contributions, which include environmental groups or individuals to natural areas for research purposes or education purposes, providing information on the local environment, and contributing through monitoring or other contributions to research.

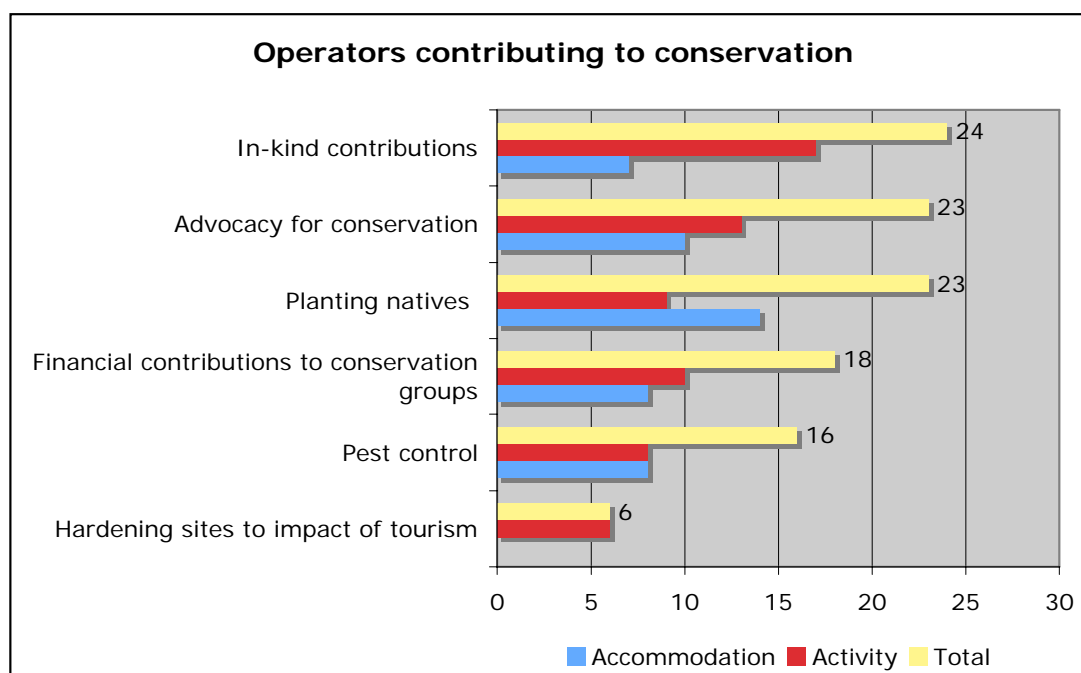


Figure 2: Operators contributing to conservation practices (n=61)

Key features of operators' contributions to conservation include:

- Conservation practices were largely motivated by a desire to improve or protect the environmental attributes of the area that the operators were located in, to **ensure the continued viability of their tourism product**;
- Some operators were motivated by a **wider environmental ethic**, citing their 'environmental legacy' to the next generation, for example;
- Activity operators were better positioned to make in-kind contributions to conservation, while accommodation operators, on the other hand, were more likely to contribute through planting native flora, although many operators conceded that their planting practices were mostly cosmetic;
- The **limited time** available to tourism operators was the main barrier to the further adoption of conservation practices.

Environmental Education and Interpretation

Educating tourists on appropriate environmental behaviour is one means of reducing their impact upon the natural environment. Describing or interpreting the natural environment to tourists is seen as having potentially lasting environmental benefits by engendering an appreciation of the natural environment among visitors. The adoption of these practices is described in Figure 3.

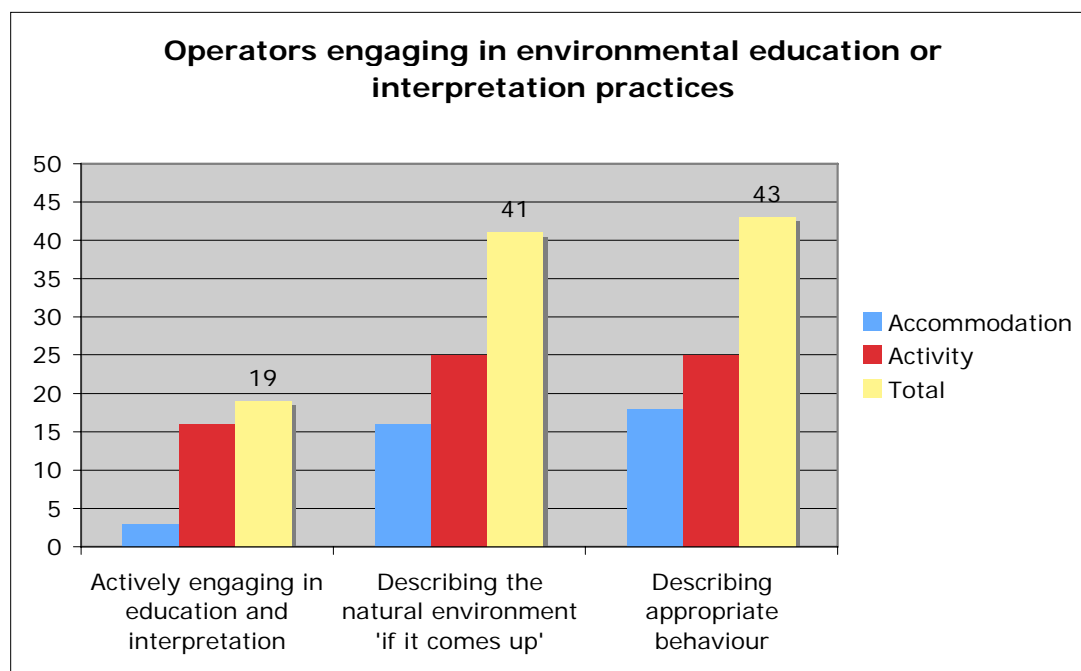


Figure 3: Operators engaging in environmental education or interpretation practices (n=61)

There was a clear split between operators who were actively interpreting the environment and those who are informally and passively discussing the environment with their guests/clients.

- Most of the **operators who were actively interpreting the environment are concessionaires** with the Department of Conservation;
- Many of these operators also nominated interpretation practices as an **essential part of their product** and among their most effective environmental practices;

"We talk about a lot of things - of course the environment comes up but we don't go out of our way to talk about it" - Passive operator.

"We are the guardians of this area...we have a responsibility to share the meaning of the land and the environment" - Active operator.

- Operators who were actively interpreting the environment were **mostly motivated by environmental ethics** – to share the attributes of their area with

their visitors. A smaller number of operators are interpreting the environment primarily to **add value to their product**.

Formal and strategic environmental practices

Formal and strategic practices often begin with the formulation of a formal, written environmental strategy and can also include environmental accreditation. These practices are often advocated as a means of extending the adoption of environmental practices among tourism businesses. In the Nelson/Tasman Region seven operators were accredited with or were members of one of two schemes:

- Green Globe 21;
- The Environmentally Sustainable Tourism Project, administered by Latitude Nelson in cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment.

The key features of the adoption of formal practices among this group were:

- Operators described that involvement in either Green Globe or the Environmentally Sustainable Tourism Project generally **has not resulted in their adoption of new environmental practices**. Operators adopting these formal practices described themselves as environmentally pro-active prior to adoption;
- Motives for the adoption of formal practices included a desire among operators to take a **leadership role** within the industry; achieving **operational efficiencies** through assistance with resource audits; and gaining recognition for existing performance.
- Operators were also adopting **a range of other formal practices**, most of which were prompted by DOC concession or Resource Management Act (RMA) consent processes.

Operators were generally sceptical of the benefits of formal practices, which is demonstrated by the fact that only one operator felt that these practices were among their most environmentally effective, and that no operators wanted to adopt formal practices. Operators felt that formal practices:

- Were **not relevant** to their business type;
- Were a **'waste of time'**;
- Were unfamiliar – operators simply **did not know what formal practices were** or how they would improve their environmental performance.

'I would rather be doing something about the environment than talking about it and not doing it' – Tourism operator on formal practices.

Finally, some operators described an opportunity to increase the role of Qualmark accreditation, to further encourage the adoption of environmental practices. The following comments were made:

- Qualmark is already being adopted among many operators and it also confers marketing benefits to the operator. This was described by operators as being more accessible, acceptable and affordable to operators than Green Globe 21;
- However, operators also pointed out that some current Qualmark accreditation criteria discourage environmental practices, such as the need to have dimmer switches for lighting, which precludes the use of eco-bulbs.

Contact with external groups

The provision of information and encouragement by external groups is an important means of encouraging the adoption of environmental practices among tourism operators. Figure 4 shows the groups who were most likely to be in contact with tourism firms *regarding their environmental performance*.

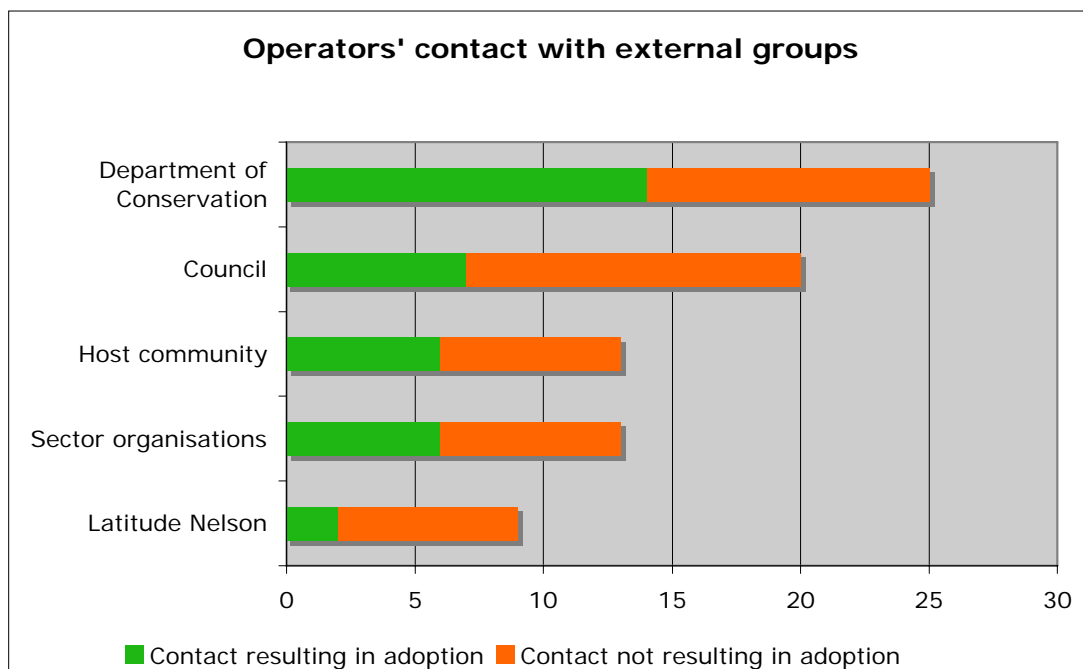


Figure 4: Contact and adoption of environmental practices resulting from contact between operators and external groups (n=61).

- The majority of contact resulted from the administration of regulatory tools (especially regarding DOC concessions and RMA consents);
- Contact from sector organisations was mostly focused on the prevention of the invasive water-borne algae ‘dydimo’ and came from the New Zealand Professional Fishing Guides Association and Fish and Game, which operators described as very pro-active and useful;
- As accommodation operators were less likely to require a DOC concession or RMA consent, and were less likely to be directly affected by dydimo, they were less likely to have any form of external contact. Indeed, **accommodation firms were operating in an information vacuum** regarding environmental management.

Recommendations

Waste and energy practices...

Based on the findings of this research, recycling and solar-use could be encouraged by targeting the influences and barriers to the adoption of each. Such targeted activities could include:

- Assisting with the capital costs of installing solar-power, which would encourage the adoption of solar-use among (especially accommodation) operators. A case can be made for extending the \$15.5 million that has recently been allocated by the Government to encourage solar-use (through interest free loans) (Fitzsimons 2006) among private households to include tourism firms and in particular accommodation operators.
- Making extra provisions for recycling among tourism firms, which would almost certainly encourage further adoption of these practices. However, it is clear that this would need to be addressed within the wider context of local authority funding, and the issues facing the tourism sector are in this sense similar to those of most house-holders.

Education and interpretation...

The apparent effectiveness of interpretation described by tourism operators who are actively engaging in these practices presents an opportunity to extend these practices based on two findings emerging from this research:

- Many operators across sectors have personal contact with visitors;
- The environmental benefits of interpretation practices are only recognised among those who are actively engaging in these practices.

Based on these findings, it may be possible to encourage more active interpretation practices beyond activity operators (and in particular DOC concessionaires). This could be achieved by raising operators' awareness of the potential benefits of these practices, focusing the operators' environmental ethics or on the 'value-added' benefits that were reported among operators who are currently actively interpreting the environment to their clients.

Formal practices...

As formal practices are mostly being engaged in by 'environmental converts', perhaps measures of the success of organisations that encourage the adoption of formal practices could begin to include the extent that this contact is reaching the 'unconverted' – firms who are not presently adopting many environmental practices.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

SOURCES

Fitzimons, J. Spokesperson on Energy Efficiency. 'Switch on the Sunshine'. Media Release.

<http://www.eeca.govt.nz/news/media-releases/switch-on-the-sunshine.html>.

New Zealand Tourism Strategy Group (NZTSG) (2001). New Zealand tourism strategy 2010.

Retrieved May, 6, 2006, from www.tourism.govt.nz/strategy.

This research was undertaken as part of a Master's of Tourism Management (MTM) thesis at Victoria Management School, Victoria University of Wellington.

For further information contact:

Tim Grubb

trjgrubb@hotmail.com

c. 021 2305804