

Proposed Braided River Partnerships Project and the role accreditation

1.0 Background / Rationale

1.1 Sustainable Development (SD) is defined as something that improves the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of the planet's supporting ecosystems. The United Nations details the 17 goals of sustainable development. In terms of an accounting framework, SD is measured through three broad pillars: economic, environmental, and social. This is referred to as triple bottom line accounting. In New Zealand under the Treaty of Waitangi, culture is a fourth bottom line, so sustainability here refers to quadruple bottom line accounting. Kaitiakitanga, guardianship and conservation of the environment, places environmental outcomes as a first order priority. So cultural and environmental bottom lines generally are consistent with one another as both recognises a healthy environment underpins social well-being and economic activities.

1.2 Environmental Management Systems (EMS) are used to assess and implement sustainability. In the agricultural sector for example, nutrient and agri-chemical management are components of an EMS in farm management plans.

SDs and EMSs vary across sectors. Arguably, the environment (natural capital) should be the first order priority as it provides essential life-supporting ecosystem services¹ without which there can be no society and no economy. Economics is the first order priority for most businesses and industries, as it's the metric by which they measure their ability to be sustainable. Thus, the term 'sustainability' can be misleading as some businesses does not always capture the four pillars of sustainability. For example, irrigation in Canterbury is often cited as essential to sustain economic development, creating jobs and supporting rural towns² (society). The cost of degraded water is externalised (transferred to the environment and society) with concurrent degradation, loss of taonga species, the mauri of waterways, mahinga kai, clean drinking water, and recreational amenity values. In effect, despite the RMA, the core of sustainability accounting—the environment and culture, kaitiakitanga—is often absent from the equation. By definition this is not sustainable development.

1.3 Braided rivers: The Canterbury Water Management Strategy is an attempt to bring balance back into this equation. As some businesses that use waterways are inherently environmentally damaging, a variety of mechanisms can be used to offset their impacts, such as contributing to the cost of environmental programmes and biodiversity offsetting. For example, some business operations such as irrigation and gravel extraction can enhance braided river bird habitats through a slight change in operations, often with little or no short-term economic costs and with long term economic benefits such as evidence to support the renewal of resource consents. Tourism businesses that benefit from the '100% Pure NZ' image could introduce a value-added environmental component to their operations by promoting the unique ecology and birdlife of braided rivers. Further value can be added by demonstrating their actions to protect, enhance, and restore braided river bird habitats. The environment in which these businesses operate then becomes an essential business asset protected through risk avoidance and risk management activities.

Globally, there is an increasing demand for sustainable and environmentally friendly products. Businesses that can meet this demand have a competitive market edge. Hence, gaining accreditation for environmental stewardship is simply good business. A Braided Rivers Partnership Project would help enable some businesses to achieve this.

2.0 Accreditation options

2.1 Tourism sector: New Zealand Tourism uses Qualmark <http://www.tourismnewzealand.com/tools-for-your-business/qualmark/>. This includes ‘Enviro Awards’:

*“Responsible tourism is about respecting, protecting and benefiting local communities, cultures and the environment... Visitors look for environmental accreditation... The sustainability component known as **Qualmark Green** will help you assess your current environmental performance and put in place initiatives to improve.”* (<http://www.tourismnewzealand.com/tools-for-your-business/responsible-tourism>).

Preferential promotion is given to Qualmark accredited operators on www.newzealand.com.

Their actions and activities to meet sustainability standards can be audited through Sustainability Reporting (see 2.3).

2.2 Farming sector: Involvement in the BRPP will help them tick some biodiversity requirements in farm management plans (see <http://ecan.govt.nz/our-responsibilities/regional-plans/lwrp/Pages/plan-decisions-version.aspx>)

Several but not all organisations give accreditation to suppliers for sustainability. Silver Fern Farms, for example, do not have sustainability reporting in their annual reports, whereas Fonterra do: <https://www.fonterra.com/nz/en/Sustainability+Platform/Group+Environmental+Policy>.

2.3 Sustainability Reporting: There are several—

- The Sustainable Business Council (New Zealand) <http://www.sbc.org.nz/our-work/ecosystem-health> works in collaboration with DOC and Landcare Research to develop and audit sustainability reporting
- The Global Reporting Initiative Sustainability Reporting Guidelines (GRI G4, last update 05 August 2015) <https://www.globalreporting.org> is an international standard for sustainability reporting
- The United Nations Global sustainable Tourism Council <https://www.gstcouncil.org/en>.

In New Zealand, sustainability reporting requires audited quadruple bottom line accounting by a certified auditor. The United Nations Global Sustainable Tourism Council for destinations has clear benchmarks including the following (<https://www.gstcouncil.org/en/gstc-criteria/criteria-for-destinations.html>).

- *SECTION C: Maximize benefits to communities, visitors, and culture; minimize negative impacts* [cultural and social bottom lines]
- *SECTION D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts* [environmental bottom line]

The further you drill down into these standards, the more site- and operational-specific they become. Just to give you an idea, the following on page 3 is expanded from SECTION D.

D1 Environmental risks The destination has identified environmental risks and has a system in place to address them.	IN-D1.a. Sustainability assessment of the destination within the last five years, identifying environmental risks IN-D1.b. System in place to address identified risks
D2 Protection of sensitive environments The destination has a system to monitor the environmental impact of tourism, conserve habitats, species, and ecosystems, and prevent the introduction of invasive species.	IN-D2.a. Maintained and updated inventory of sensitive and threatened wildlife and habitats IN-D2.b. Management system to monitor impacts and to protect ecosystems, sensitive environments, and species IN-D2.c. System prevents the introduction of invasive species
D3 Wildlife protection The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and standards for the harvest or capture, display, and sale of wildlife (including plants and animals).	IN-D3.a. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) IN-D3.b. Regulations and standards for controlling harvesting or capture, display, sale, of plants and animals
D4 Greenhouse gas emissions The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to measure, monitor, minimize, publicly report, and mitigate their greenhouse gas emissions from all aspects of their operation (including emissions from service providers).	IN-D4.a. Program to assist enterprises to measure, monitor, minimize, and publicly report greenhouse gas emissions IN-D4.b. System to assist enterprises to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions

3.0 Braided River Partnerships Project and Tourism

“Tourism businesses who can tell their environmental story can help to increase awareness so that we not only have responsible tourism operators but we also have responsible tourists.”

– Qualmark Enviro Awards

Tourism New Zealand/Qualmark Enviro Awards are based on those of the United Nations Global Sustainable Tourism Council (2.3 above). They were developed in consultation with NZ tourism operators and are recognised and highly respected globally, particularly in the way they were developed through stakeholder engagement processes. Currently, there are 900 Qualmark members with accredited Enviro Awards.

A key part of the Braided River Partnerships Project will be to work with Tourism NZ/Qualmark and the DOC TAG group to identify and develop existing and potential tourism operations and develop standards and practices that maximize the benefit to braided river birds that can be used to form part of Qualmark’s Enviro Awards criteria.



3.1 Qualmark Enviro Award criteria in relation to braided river birds: The following is an extract from the Qualmark Enviro Awards standards:

“Qualmark’s Enviro Awards reflect your efforts and those of your business as a responsible tourism operator. The achievement of a Qualmark Enviro Award indicates that actions, initiatives and management of resource and social impacts are being managed by the business – over and above minimum expectations.

“Businesses that meet the highest levels of environmental and social criteria are acknowledged with a Qualmark Enviro Award, with achievement levels of Gold, Silver and Bronze.

“RECEIVING A QUALMARK ENVIRO AWARD

“Enviro Award evaluations are conducted at the same time as the Qualmark Grading or Endorsement evaluations. The business is reviewed against a set of Enviro Award criteria, with the Qualmark Tourism Business Advisor giving the appropriate credit where evidence of achievement is demonstrated.

“This evidence is crucial to your success in achieving an award. Without it your Advisor will be unable to award the appropriate credit for the criteria. It is expected that an operator that is fully engaged and deserving of an Enviro Award will be able to easily demonstrate achievement to the criteria, show clear evidence of their actions and initiatives and be fully aware of their business’ environmental impacts.

“Qualmark Tourism Business Advisors are required to ensure that all Enviro awardees have met or exceeded all of these requirements plus others in the Enviro Award section before awarding an Enviro Bronze or Enviro Silver.”

Qualmark criteria that have relevance to braided rivers

- Evidence of significant contribution towards community and/or conservation activity relevant to business size
 - Contribution to a community or conservation activity is more than “writing a cheque”.
 - It involves active participation, with a contribution of time and effort.
 - The operator should have an understanding of how these efforts improved the local community/environment.
 - The level of significance will be relevant to the size and type of operator.
- Evidence that an Environmental & Social Responsibility Tourism Statement is engagement publicly displayed to encourage customer engagement
 - Statement is to be publicly displayed and invite/allow the customer to engage and be involved if desired

For the Gold Award:

- Evidence that the business is taking a proactive role and is an exemplary advocate of responsible tourism
 - The business needs to demonstrate clear actions, initiatives and strategies that foster a forward thinking attitude towards their environmental stance; and have an appreciation of continual improvement to stay at the forefront of opportunities.
 - Exemplary advocates of Responsible Tourism will demonstrate clear leadership within the community and be a stalwart in ensuring the best solutions in sustaining the environment and environmental causes.

Operators have so clear directives to meet Enviro Awards. The minimum entry requirements are (bold are directly relevant to braided river birds):

- Any past environmental/community problems have been effectively overcome
- All necessary statutory licenses, permits and/or consents have been obtained and are current. This includes concessions and/or consents for operating on land other than owned or leased.
- **Where applicable, an operator's land use complies with all regional, district and conservation management plans in place for the area.** This is particularly relevant where the area is a national park, reserve and/or marine reserve.
- In regions which offer recycling (whether kerbside or transfer stations at dumps), facilities are in place for staff and customers/guests to collect and separate waste for recycling
- Evidence that a checklist or similar tool has been used to review the environmental impact of the business
- **Any environmental claims made in promotional materials (including website communications) can be substantiated**
- Evidence of 3 key initiatives in place that reduce waste, energy or water consumption
- Where applicable, effective air, water, noise and/or light pollution management is in place

4.0 Recommendations

- BRaid accreditation would not be a subset of any current agri-industry or other awards including Qualmark Enviro Awards.
- Some key guidelines in these awards systems can be used to set out BRaid's criteria for recognition
- Section D of the United Nations Global Sustainable Tourism Council benchmarks can be used to inform our assessment criteria with the goal firmly in mind: to protect, enhance, and restore braided river bird habitats.
- 'Best practices' in protecting, restoring, and monitoring will come into play on a case-by-case basis and be guided by the Department of Conservation Technical Advisory Group (DOC TAG)
- The logos on the next page are suggestions based on the level of participation.

