



Tralee Bay Wetlands Ecotourism Policy

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Ecotourism can be defined as responsible travel that offers visitors an opportunity to experience and learn about the natural environment, history, and culture of a region. Our aim at Tralee Bay Wetlands is to introduce visitors to the beautiful cultural and natural heritage of the Tralee Bay area and to raise awareness of environmental and conservation issues in general. The key point is the issue of “responsible” travel, and we are committed to actively promoting the conservation of our environment, through our own environmental practices, through our interactions within our community, and through our education and interpretation activities. Our commitment to the principles of ecotourism can be categorised under the following headings.

1. Environmentally Sustainable Practices

Appropriate minimal impact codes identified and adopted

All walking routes throughout the grounds of the centre are protected by gravel/asphalt paths and visitors are not encouraged to walk across the more vulnerable areas of the facility (particularly the wetland). A timber walkway has been constructed to allow visitors and particularly educational groups access to the wetland itself, while still protecting the fragile terrain.

In order to minimise disturbance to the wildlife, the tour boats are propelled by electric engines which are virtually silent, as well as emission-free. Bird hides have been built at either end of the wetland to allow visitors to observe the bird life without impacting on it.

Dogs are not allowed in the wetland area to prevent distress to the bird life. In the front/park area, they must be kept on a leash at all times. Dog litter bags are provided to minimise the impact of fouling.

Environmental Sustainable Management

At Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre, we recognise that we impact the environment, not only directly through our own activities but also indirectly through the activities of our suppliers, both of goods and services, and our customers. We are committed firstly to understanding these impacts and then to working to improve our practice on a continual basis. The details of our environmental impacts and the steps we have undertaken to reduce them are contained in our **Environmental Policy** and **Environmental Action Plan**.

Use of onsite renewable technologies

A large array of solar panels (60 tubes) is used to provide hot water for the building. Additionally, this water is used to heat the building through a NILAN heat exchanger, which also removes the heat from air exiting the building and uses it to heat the incoming air.

While a backup gas boiler is present, it is not used except during periods of very high usage. This results in a very low fossil fuel input to heat the building.

Use of non-motorised transport

On all of our brochures (general public, national school and secondary school) there are clear instructions as to how to reach the centre through the use of public transport. The centre is within a short walk (15 mins) of Tralee's bus and train station, and the train and bus also connects to Kerry airport in Farranfore less than 20km away.

The only motorised transport used in the delivery of the product here at Tralee Bay Wetlands is the boat tour, which uses a very small 80lb electric motor to drive the boat. All other aspects of the experience here are on foot.

Use of a cycle network

There is a walk/cycle way running between Ballyseedy Wood and Blennerville which continues on to Fenit, right past the centre in Ballyard. Plans are currently in place to provide a proper link to allow the cycleway to cross our grounds; at present there is a 100 yard section of Ballyard Road (a small secondary road) between us and the cycleway.

Use of environmentally friendly fuels/technology in transportation

The engines that power the tour boats are small 80lb electric motors, run from a pair of 12V deep-cycle batteries on board the boats. Charging points are fixed on the dock. Additionally, there is an ESB charge point for electric vehicles in the car park of the visitor's centre.

Staff awareness of environmental impacts

As part of training and induction, new staff are exposed to the same educational material that we use for our school programmes. These include classes on biodiversity, climate change and water and energy conservation. Additionally, a great number of the staff and volunteers that work at the centre have a background in environmental science or a related discipline, and have necessarily learnt a great deal about these subjects as part of their college courses.

Promotion of Eco-labels for tourist accommodation

At present, the only eco accommodation provider that we are currently striving to work with at the centre is the Tower View Hostel, which is currently seeking Ecotourism Ireland certification. The Centre Manager has requested from all local hoteliers confirmation or a copy of their environmental policies and practices for future cooperative marketing initiatives or promotions.

Waste/Water/Energy minimisation plan adopted

Tralee Bay Wetlands recognises that all of our activities generate waste and use energy, and we are committed to reducing our waste production and energy consumption. We have a contract with a local recycling company, and use recycled materials as much as possible. The design of the building incorporates renewable energy and efficient heat recovery/insulation systems to reduce our energy consumption. Details of all the measures we undertake to minimise our waste/water and energy consumption can be found in our **Environmental Policy**.

Green purchasing policy adopted

We are committed to purchasing environmentally products wherever possible, from our cleaning supplies and chemicals, through our stationery and office supplies and the food used in the restaurant. Details of our activities can be found in our **Green Purchasing Policy**.

Communication of commitment to ecotourism principles

A copy of this document, our **Ecotourism** Policy, which details how Tralee Bay Wetlands upholds the principles of ecotourism will be available on our website, with a paper copy available at reception should it be requested. Additionally, our annual audit of our waste, water and energy consumption, along with our carbon footprint and offsets will be sent out electronically to all members of our mailing list, and also made available on our website every year.

Use of eco-labelled accommodation

We do not provide accommodation ourselves; however, pending accreditation we will be working with the Tower View Hostel in providing a packaged product. The hostel is currently seeking Ecotourism Ireland certification. We have requested details of environmental accreditation from all of the local hostels and hotels that we work with in providing offers etc, and will be using these to inform our marketing decisions next year.

Ethically traded goods

The restaurant in the centre uses fair-trade coffee and tea. Additionally, wherever possible the products used in centre are from sustainable and ethical sources (Rainforest Alliance, Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification).

2. Natural Area Focus

A great part of our visitor experience here is on our constructed wetland. The 9 hectare site has been carefully landscaped to provide a microcosm of the different wetland habitats in the Tralee Bay Special Area of Conservation. To the additional site (estuarine saltmarsh) has been added several duck-ponds, braided river channels, a freshwater marsh area with associated flooded meadow-ponds and wading-bird scrapes, all designed to both enhance the

biodiversity of the site, and also to allow access by visitors to the flora and fauna of what is normally an inaccessible ecotype.

Additionally, a great part of the experience here in the centre is our link with the greater Tralee Bay area. Our exhibition area is focused on the conservation importance and biodiversity of one of the most beautiful natural areas in the country, much of which is visible from the viewing tower at the heart of the wetland.

Working with landowners

The entirety of the experience here at the Wetland Centre is on our own land; there are no other landowners involved in the project. The facility is a Tralee Town Council project, and has been developed with the consent of the local community. The site of the project is the old landfill site for Tralee, capped since 1992. The centre is therefore a reclamation project, restoring damaged habitat to a more natural state, and does not impede on any other historical, archaeological or cultural sites in the area.

“Leave no Trace”

Walkways and pathways have been constructed through all parts of the visitor experience and sufficient litter and recycling bins have been placed in order to minimise visitor impact to the site. All visitors and school groups are advised as to the relevant parts of the Leave No Trace conduct by their guides, and reading material outlining the principles of “Leave No Trace” is available in the centre and on the website.

The majority of the bird life in the wetland area is wild; some duck and geese species have been brought in as part of the visitor experience however, and are allowed free range through the wetland in the same fashion as the wild birds. Feeders are provided around the wetland area for wild and specially bred birds alike.

No historical or natural artifacts are promoted or sold in the centre.

Ensuring visitor’s time spent in nature

The majority of the experience at the centre is the guided boat tour of the wetland area. The remainder of the visitor’s time is divided between the viewing tower which looks out over the beautiful Tralee Bay Special Area of Conservation, and the exhibition centre, which interprets the biodiversity and natural heritage of the bay area.

Ensuring visitor’s personal experience of nature

The visitor is given the chance to directly experience the wetland habitat which is so representative of the Tralee Bay SAC both through the boat tour through the wetland channels, and also through the paths and walkway that go around and through it.

Ensuring no more than 15 visitors per guide

The guided tour is limited both by the size of the exhibition centre and by the tour boats – there is a necessary maximum of 12-15 persons in one group in the exhibition centre, and a maximum of 8 adults per guide on the boat tour.

Product makes careful use of a protected area in its operation

The centre is built on land that has not been designated with any protected status. It is however, directly adjacent to the Tralee Bay SAC, and a large amount of the interpretive material deals with its importance.

A part of the visitor experience is observing the bird life typical to wetland habitats. There are many waterfowl, waders and passerine birds resident in the wetland area. Binoculars are provided for visitor use, and there are a number of bird hides situated on the adjacent to the wetland area to facilitate this activity.

3. Interpretation and Education

The main aim here at the Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre is to promote and raise awareness of the fantastic reservoir of biodiversity almost within touching distance of the site. Here on our wetland we have created a microcosm of many of the different wetland habitats in Tralee Bay, from small braided river channels lined with willow to flooded meadows, reedbeds and saltmarsh habitats. These different habitats will host and protect a great diversity of mammal, bird and insect and life, and is already home to great numbers of breeding Smooth Newt, an important and protected native amphibian species. The visitor interpretation is critical to the experience here, and takes various forms, which are outlined below. The objective of the interpretive experience is to inform the visitor about Tralee Bay, what makes it special and why we should conserve it, as well as highlighting some of the particular species that are found both here at the centre, and in the Bay in general. Full details of all of the onsite interpretation can be found in our **Interpretive Plan**.

Appropriate interpretive plans in place

The interpretation here at the centre consists of the following: 1) Audio-visual exhibition 2) Guided Tour 3) Interpretive signs 4) Visitor keys and informational material. Full details of these can be found in our **Interpretive Plan**.

One item of personal interpretation incorporated

The main part of the visitor experience at the centre is a guided tour of the wetlands delivered by one of our trained guides. Additionally, there are occasional lecture talks by experts on topics ranging from specific species (Hen Harrier, Brent Geese, Whooper Swan, and Barn Owl) to more general conservation and environmental topics.

One item of non-personal interpretation incorporated

In addition to the guided tour, the experience also incorporates an interpretive audio-visual exhibition, and interpretive boards on the wetlands and in the bird hides.

Targeting of interpretation towards special interest groups

All of the interactive information pods and the introductory video in the exhibition centre are also available in French and German. Additionally, plans are underway to provide audio hand-held guides, which will make available the information in the guided tour to non-English speakers.

Much of the interpretive material in the exhibition centre and on the information pods is geared towards children. Additionally, there is a bird drawing and tracing area for children provided.

Provision of newsletter for past and future visitors

We collect contact information from all of our visitors, to whom we send out ezines and information about upcoming events. We are working towards a more regular wildlife blog and newsletter, that will be implemented once the website has been overhauled.

Ensuring staff are appropriately trained

In addition to training and guidance on customer service, tour guiding and ecology/wildlife information, staff training at the centre now includes training on ecotourism and its guiding principles. Staff are required to read our ecotourism and environmental policies as part of the induction process. Additionally, many of the staff at the centre take an active role in much of the conservation work that is carried out by the centre (Coastwatch Ireland, Irish Wildlife Trust)

Business is involved with 'Payback Scheme'

IWT magazines and publications are available for sale in the centre. 100% of proceeds are returned to the IWT. Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre take no percentage or commission on sales of these items.

4. Contributing to Conservation

Membership of nature conservation organisations

In addition to our own efforts to promote the conservation of biodiversity through our classes and interpretative material, we are members of a number of other conservation networks. The centre acts as the regional co-ordinator for **Coastwatch Ireland**, a volunteer-driven NGO that is concerned with monitoring the environmental impacts on and the current state of the country's coastline. The survey takes place in September each year, and in our first year

as co-ordinators we put together a team of 15 individuals and students from the area and surveyed 10km of coastline in the Bay.

We are members of **Birdwatch Ireland**, the charity supporting the conservation of birds and biodiversity in Ireland, through habitat conservation, research, promotion and advocacy.

We have recently taken over the chair of the Kerry branch of the **Irish Wildlife Trust**, the charity committed to raising awareness of Ireland's rich natural heritage and protecting it for future generations. We are currently in the process of setting up an urban/semi urban otter survey in the inner bay, similar to that run successfully by the IWT in Cork.

Active involvement in local environmental project

The centre co-ordinated the Coastwatch Ireland effort for Kerry in September 2012 (see above). Plans are currently being developed to co-ordinate an otter survey in association with the Irish Wildlife Trust and the Fenit Development Committee, similar to that run in Cork over the last few years, in order to track the region's urban/semi-urban otter population and establish the conservation status of the Lee catchment with regard to an important protected species.

Public information event

The centre hosts a number of talks, guided walks and training events themed around biodiversity and conservation, and open to the general public. We ran a talk series on the week of May 25th 2012 for National Biodiversity Day, and plan to do so again in May 2013. Some of the topics covered thus far have been:

- Barn Owl conservation in Kerry
- Hen Harrier conservation in Ireland
- Kerry's Natural Heritage
- Brent Goose research in Kerry and Iceland/Canada
- Whooper Swan research in Kerry and Iceland
- Wetlands and Water Conservation
- Newt Survey training workshop
- Wildlife Watching in Tourism training workshop

We also ran a number of guided walks on urban biodiversity and wetlands for Heritage Week in August 2012.

Information available on local flora and fauna

The guided tour of the wetland is largely composed of information about the flora and fauna found here. In addition to the information given by the guide, there are identification keys available to visitors at reception, a large amount of information on the interactive pods and

wall displays in the exhibition centre and several information boards around the grounds, all pertaining to wildlife.

Litter clean-up day organised

A litter clean-up day was recently organised on the river Lee behind us to clear the high-tide mark of the considerable detritus that builds up. This will become a monthly event going forward. The event was covered in the Kerry's Eye.

Information on local nature reserves

The centre adjoins the Tralee Bay SAC, and a large amount of information is provided to visitors through the interpretive material about this, the Stacks Mountains SAC, the Slieve Mish cSAC and the Derrymore and Tralee Bay Nature Reserves as part of the experience here.

Native tree planting

Over a hundred trees were planted during the development of the park area in March 2012. They were a mix of many species, some of were non-natives (principally Lime and Horse-Chestnut, but over half of them were natives (Oak, Willow, Silver Birch and Alder). As part of the grounds work in March 2013, over 200 Hawthorns were planted in a section of the wetland area.

Establishment of wildlife area

Over half of the grounds here at the wetland centre (around 5 hectares) have been left undisturbed (after the initial landscaping and development), in order to encourage the natural development of the wetland area that is the mainstay of our product. In addition to this area, large sections of the grounds around the lake in the park area have been left in their original condition (patches of rushy marsh and wetland).

Installation of bird and bat boxes

Nest boxes for migrating swift will be installed on the viewing tower before next summer (they didn't get finished in time this year!). The boxes incorporate a summer roost space for Pippistrelle bats, and additional boxes will be put up during the summer for other roosting bats.

5. Benefiting Local Communities

As much as is possible involve local businesses and suppliers for all of our needs at the centre. Our IT, printing and office suppliers are all within 1 mile of the building. The majority of the food brought into the kitchen is sourced in Tralee and from local butchers/grocers. The building itself was built by contractors from Castleisland, 15km away,

and electrical contractors are also based there. All of the part-time and restaurant staff is from Tralee town, as are the grounds and maintenance staff.

A large part of the facility here is an open park area around the lake, which is open 24 hours. As such, it has attracted a great number of people from the local community which use it for running and walking, a place to meet, and also a good spot for a picnic at lunch time (in fine weather!)

Supporting local employment

All of the staff that works in the centre lives within 100km of the site, with the vast majority living in Tralee town itself, within 5km of the centre. This applies to management staff, tour guides, lake assistants, kitchen staff and grounds maintenance workers.

Working with the local community

We provide space here at the centre for a number of community events and meetings, ranging from book launches to angling training, and have hosted the start of several local athletics events, most recently the 3-day cycle event, the Kingdom Alliance Sportive.

Employing local guides

All of the guides that provide personal interpretation to visitors are resident within 10km of the site.

Provision of access to work experience

We provided two 6 week work placements in 2012 for students from IT Tralee studying Adventure Tourism and Management, a course which touches on all aspects of tourism and ecotourism. Another work placement from the same course commenced here in March 2013.

Encouraging purchase of local arts and crafts

Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre plans to have a souvenir and gift area developed in time for the peak 2013 season. The centre is working closely with Deirdre Johnston of Original Kerry, in sourcing some unique, bespoke local crafts and jewellery for stock.

Encouraging purchase of local food

A great deal of the food that is used in the restaurant comes from local producers. All of the meat products come from Country Pork in Killarney, which sources all its meat from animals in Kerry. Seasonal fruit and vegetables come from Fruity Fresh, a producer based in Listowel, which grows much of its produce. Fish products are bought from Daly's Seafood in Caherciveen, which lands its fish from the Iveragh and Dingle peninsulas. Desserts and cupcakes are made by Classy Cupcakes, a small one-person business based in Tralee.

Encouraging purchase of organic food

The Lakeside Café and Bistro currently serve organic seabass as one of their lunch daily specials. The LakesideCafe manger and head chef is in discussions and planning with the centre ecologist to develop a vegetable patch on site, which will be used for the café. A suitable area has been identified.

Membership of a tourism business network

Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre is a member of Tralee Chamber Alliance and will be a member of Go Kerry this season.

6. Visitor Satisfaction

A high level of visitor satisfaction is essential to the success of Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre, and its ecological experiences. Management and the greater team will continue to ensure that all experiences will meet or exceed visitor expectations.

To ensure this centre management has included measures under the following headings aimed at closely monitoring visitor satisfaction so that quality can be continuously maintained and improved in all areas.

Continuous monitoring of visitor satisfaction and reporting to Ecotourism Ireland

Tralee Bay Wetlands centre is visited annually by Failte Irelands ‘Mystery Shopper’ and a detailed report is sent to the centre manager.

To ensure excellent customer service and excellent front of house, phone skills, and guiding skills training is provided annually to both new and existing staff members at all levels. This training is provided by an external mentor and is part funded by Failte Ireland.

Customer Satisfaction is closely measured by means of a general customer questionnaire, a group and schools questionnaire, guest comments book, on line questionnaire (mid June). All guests are also encouraged by guides and staff members to rate their experience on Trip Advisor and this will be supported by additional onsite signage in 2013 season. (www.adamson.ie)

Corrective Action is taken by management if required or where appropriate. All emails are responded to within 24hours and any complaints or issues are immediately brought to the attention of the centre manager.

The customer questionnaire is designed for the 2013 season and will be available at two locations within the centre and on line from mid June. The responses are currently checked daily by centre administrator and reported to centre manager. To ensure adequate (high) customer sample response rate, a prize will be used as to entice customers to fill out same. This same questionnaire will also be available on line (mid June) to fill out following a visit to the centre. Group Organisers are given questionnaire(s) on day of trip or are posted same with a stamped addressed envelope following visit.

To keep customers up to date or to show we value their input and option, corrective solutions will be communicated to customer(s) directly by personal reply and on end of questionnaire. i.e. due to customer feedback in 2012 we are going to install a children's area for 2013.

All questionnaires clearly ask customers how Tralee Bay Wetlands products and service could be further developed to increase satisfaction levels further. This striving for constant improvement is implicit in the quality concept of Total Quality Management [TQM], which Tralee Bay Wetlands are implementing. Feedback of visitor satisfaction results **will be reported to Eco – Tourism Ireland annually in their requested format.**

Complying with relevant legislation

The management team are responsible and will ensure the visitor centre; experience and additional activities conform to all relevant and necessary legislation.

These include;

- Signed Health & Safety Plan For Centre & Activity Lake (see appendix)
- Environmental Protection (see appendix)
- All staff are Garda vetted (currently on going)
- HACCP measures are adhered to and recorded by Lakeside Café & Bistro.
- Insurance (see copy in appendix)
- Special Needs Access. (Disability Cert in appendix)
- Employment Policy. (See Appendix)

All staff have been trained in health and safety requirements for the running of Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre and Eco Experience from the visitor centre to maintenance. In house induction training is revised continuously with check lists and procedures documents available for each department. The Centre Ecologist is concerned with monitoring the environmental protection conducted on site. All HACCP measures are followed and recorded by the Lakeside Café and Bistro under the management and supervision of David Baitson. Tralee Bay Wetlands Ltd. is covered by Combined Liability Insurance with Finucane (Insurance) LTD. The Combined Liability Insurance covers Employee Liability Insurance and Public Liability Insurance. Lakeside Café and Bistro have separate insurance. Special needs access is available throughout the Visitor Centre, grounds and viewing tower and comply with national regulations. The centre offers wheelchair friendly entrances and exits, and offers disabled restroom facilities. The tower is served by a tarmac path and by both a stairwell and elevator. Entrance door to tower has a ramp suitable for wheelchair users. The Guided Boat Tours can also accommodate wheelchair users as they are equipped with a special ramp (see appendix for map with disabled areas and facilities highlighted and photos of boats). Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre is an equal opportunities employer. Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre is equitable in hiring women and local minorities, including in management

positions. The Centre Manager, Administrator, as well as many of the seasonal volunteers are female.

Review of the product by industry professionals

Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre is a new visitor and eco-tourism product which was co funded by both Fáilte Ireland (the National Tourism Authority) and Tralee Town Council (local authority). Tralee Bay Wetlands is reviewed quarterly by both bodies.

In May 2012 there were two FAM Trips to Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre. One FAM Trip (June 2012) was organised by **Tralee Chamber Alliance**, whom TBW is a member of. Feedback was taken verbally on the day and by means of questionnaire. *Questionnaires on file.*

The second FAM trip was organised by Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre Manager and all members of local accommodation, and other activity providers were cordially invited to visit the centre and facilities over a two day period. Visitors completed questionnaires at visit and again are on file.

Fáilte Ireland has in 2012 sent travel journalists to the centre.

Sharing of visitor satisfaction insights

The sharing of visitor satisfaction was presented to both Fáilte Ireland local representatives and Board of Directors in November 2012. Areas for improvement were discussed and agreed at this meeting with an action plan and budget devised. (Action Plan available on request)

7. Responsible Marketing and Communication

Responsible Marketing and Communication

Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre operations are marketed as responsibly as possible, and will strive to do so going forward. All marketing material is designed (with website under review) so that the portrayal of the ecotourism experience on offer is an accurate picture of what the visitor can expect.

Tralee Bay Wetlands where possible use paperless web based marketing, and where brochures and other printed material have to be used, these are produced in as environmentally friendly manner as possible and is cost effective.

Measures are on-going to promote the development of links between other ecotourism operators and organisations thus hopefully stimulating the further development and growth of ecotourism internationally

Exclusive use of web-based marketing

Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre will reduce paper where possible and make a more conscious move to further web based activity. At present the website www.traleebaywetlands.org is under upgrade and development and this ethos has been discussed with design team. (Foran Enterprises Killarney). The centres Facebook and Twitter accounts are both quite active and we have over 1200 Facebook followers and friends. Our digital databases are continuously growing from our on site visitors, data collected on the pods, guest book, comments sheets and special events, trade shows and talks. Mailchimp E-zines have been used for School Tour Information, Newsletters to Customers and members of the Trade, and to promote our Summer Camps. With the help of Fáilte Ireland a digital marketing plan has been put in place for Tralee Bay Wetlands.

8. Cultural Respect and Awareness

Information provided on local heritage

As part of the personal and non-personal interpretation, visitors are provided with information on several local heritage sites, principally: Scotia's Grave (a burial site less than 5km from the centre) and the Iron-Age promontory fort on Caherconree in the Slieve Mish range. Both are mentioned in several Celtic myths and stories, and visitors are provided with this information. Other sites mentioned as part of the tour and non-personal interpretation that are important for local history are Blennerville Windmill and Fenit Harbour.

Provide local access

The Tralee Bay Wetlands centre does not impede access by local residents to any cultural, historical, archaeological or spiritually important site of any kind.