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How the Quality Tourism Framework supports the EU's Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive (EmpCo)

With the EU'S Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive (EmpCo) coming into effect in September 2026, businesses will be required to substantiate environmental claims through recognised certification schemes. This is intended to prevent greenwashing and strengthen consumer trust across international markets and distribution platforms.

What the Directive requires

Under the Directive, a "certification scheme" is defined as *"a third-party verification scheme that certifies that a product, process or business complies with certain requirements... and allows for the use of a corresponding sustainability label"* (EU Directive 2024/825).

To qualify, a scheme must meet the following criteria:

- Be *"open and transparent, fair and non-discriminatory terms to all traders willing and able to comply"* (Article definition (i))
- Have requirements *"developed...in consultation with relevant experts and stakeholders"* (Article definition (ii))
- Include procedures for non-compliance, including *"withdrawal or suspension of the use of the sustainability label"* (Article definition (iii))
- Ensure monitoring is *"subject to an objective procedure and... carried out by a third party whose competence and independence... are based on recognised standards"* (Article definition (iv))

How the QTF aligns

The Quality Tourism Framework (QTF) meets the Directive's definition of a certification scheme and aligns with these criteria:

- **Third-party verification scheme certifying compliance with defined requirements**

The QTF certifies tourism businesses against established quality and sustainability criteria and enables the use of recognised program credentials (badges). This supports the use of verified sustainability claims in line with the Directive.

- **Open, transparent and non-discriminatory access**

The QTF is open to all tourism businesses willing and able to comply with its requirements, aligning with the requirement for *"transparent, fair and non-discriminatory"* access.

- **Requirements developed with experts and stakeholders**
QTF Program standards are developed and maintained by the scheme owner, the Australian Tourism Industry Council (ATIC), in consultation with industry and relevant experts, consistent with Article definition (ii).
- **Procedures for non-compliance**
The QTF sets out clear processes for addressing non-compliance, including the suspension or withdrawal of certification, aligning with Article definition (iii).
- **Objective monitoring by an independent third party**
Monitoring of compliance is carried out through an objective assessment process. ATIC operates as the scheme owner, while State and Territory Tourism Industry Councils, as separate legal entities, undertake assessments. This ensures independence from both the scheme owner and participating businesses, consistent with Article definition (iv).

Why this matters

For Australian tourism businesses, the QTF provides a clear and credible pathway to support substantiated sustainability claims in line with incoming EU requirements.

For industry bodies, the QTF aligns with the EU definition of a certification scheme and demonstrates consistency with the Directive's criteria.

For global platforms, the QTF provides confidence that sustainability claims are underpinned by a recognised certification scheme, supported by independent verification, transparent governance and clear compliance processes.