



EUROPARC
Atlantic Isles

Conservation Without Frontiers

European Charter Partnership Programme for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

Guidelines for implementing Part II of the Charter (working with tourism business partners) within the Atlantic Isles Section

1 Introduction

The text of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas has been agreed and finalised – it can be found at www.europarc.org/european-charter.org. The guidelines describing the process for accreditation, and details concerning which documents need to be sent to the EUROPARC Federation, and when, can also be found at that site. In addition, EUROPARC Atlantic Isles are available at all times to help with advice and support.

One of the guiding principles of the Charter is to allow a flexible approach to delivery, allowing for the very wide range of organisations and governance structures across Europe's protected areas. These Guidelines have been written with the different governance structures across the Atlantic Isles in mind.

This guidance was prepared by EUROPARC Atlantic Isles with the EAI Sustainable Tourism Network, and incorporates advice from the EUROPARC Federation Charter Network.

These guidelines are aimed at participating Protected Areas, individual businesses and Forums. It lays out the basic requirements needed to gain Part II status within the Atlantic Isles, but the intention is for those participating to use them as a starting point for developing their own specific guidelines and documentation together. Participants are encouraged to join the EAI Sustainable Tourism Network in order to share experience and develop best practice.

These guidelines describe the roles of three entities; the Protected Area, the tourism businesses, and the Sustainable Tourism Forums that they establish together.

2 Definition of tourism business

For the purposes of this initiative, a potential tourism partner is **a local tourism business or local tourist service provider that is based in, or develops its their activities in, the Charter area**. The Charter area includes the Protected Area itself, and its area of immediate economic and social influence.

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3 The Protected Area

3.1 Status

Before a company can benefit from the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism its Protected Natural Area must fulfil the following requirements:

- it should be accredited with the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism;
- it should have notified its intention to develop Part II of the Charter, and have begun the process of establishing specific requirements, documents and mechanisms for businesses to get involved.

3.2 Training and support

Individual Protected Areas will formulate and facilitate a schedule of training to be offered to businesses. Third parties may be employed to deliver this training. Before finalisation the training schedule will be agreed by the Sustainable Tourism Forum (see section 4 below). At a minimum the schedule shall contain:

- background information on the Protected Area that can be passed on to customers;
- verification that the company fulfils all criteria and requirements of EUROPARC and the specific Protected Area in which it operates;
- guidelines concerning sustainable business practices, in line with local facilities, priorities and policies, as per paragraph 5.3 below;
- assistance with developing the Agreed Action Plan for the three years following accreditation.

3.3 Further responsibilities

The Protected Area shall undertake to:

- explore marketing opportunities with destination marketing organisations
- process the application
- provide a certificate for display. The document shall certify that the tourism company supports both the Protected Area and the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. Craft certificates to be approved by EUROPARC Atlantic Isles' Sustainable Tourism Charter Network.

4 The Sustainable Tourism Forum

4.1 The Protected Area will have set up a Sustainable Tourism Forum, or equivalent, and will maintain it. Accredited businesses shall be encouraged to become involved with this Forum. In many instances a suitable Forum may already exist; it is not expedient to create another layer of organisation unnecessarily.

4.2 Role

The Forum allows businesses and the Protected Area to form an equal partnership. Ideas for improvement, expansion etc can, and should, emerge from both partners. The Forum should **own, manage and monitor** the implementation of Part II of the Charter at the Protected Area level. There should be clear representation of the Forum within the broader Charter management.

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5 The Business Partners

5.1 Eco-accreditation

In a region where an existing eco-labelling scheme operates, the business shall have achieved a form of eco-accreditation recognised by the Protected Area Authority, normally one recognised by the national tourism body (e.g. Green Tourism Business Scheme or Green Dragon), or alternatively one set up and run by the PA Authority.

Where neither a suitable scheme nor the resources to put one in place exist, the business partners should demonstrate a positive attitude to environmental management, backed by action. This will be verified as part of the Agreed Action Plan (see below).

The business shall have achieved a **grading** recognised by the national tourism body if one is available for that business type. If none is available, the assessment shall be at the discretion of the PA Authority.

5.2 Agreed Action Plan

This sets out the business's actions that it voluntarily undertakes to fulfil in the three years after joining the scheme and becoming an accredited partner. The Agreed Action Plan will at a minimum, address points 5.3 to 5.10 below.

The Agreed Action Plan should:

- Identify someone to take responsibility for the work
- aim towards collaboration with the Protected Area and other businesses;
- aim to improve the company's sustainability, over and above what it would ordinarily do to meet existing legislation, by gathering and using baseline data on, at the least, energy water and waste;
- include time-limited targets and monitoring indicators, where appropriate (i.e., contain an improvement plan);
- explain the process for renewing the business's engagement with the Charter process

5.3 Focus areas for the Agreed Action Plan

Whether through an existing scheme or via Protected Area-specific guidelines, businesses shall take actions, wherever feasible, under the following headings:

- Waste disposal and contamination
- Travel
- Energy
- Management and marketing
- Social involvement and communication
- Water
- Purchasing
- Waste management and reduction
- Heritage
- Innovation

Businesses, individual Protected Areas and Sustainable Tourism Forums are all encouraged to expand on this list, and to consider issues that have specific relevance locally.

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5.4 Engagement with Forum

The business agrees to engage with the Protected Area's Sustainable Tourism Forum (or equivalent) either directly or as a member of an association represented on the Forum.

5.5 Sustainable Tourism Strategy

The business shall formally agree to the aims and objectives of the current sustainable tourism strategy, policy or other official statements of the Protected Area.

5.6 Codes of conduct

The business will agree to abide by any codes of conduct established by the Protected Area authority in consultation with the Sustainable Tourism Forum, particularly those relating to the use of the Protected Area. It also agrees to inform their customers about these codes where appropriate.

5.7 Information & interpretation

- The business agrees to display Protected Area information/interpretive material as appropriate.
- This shall include information concerning the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.

5.8 Protected Area training

The business shall:

- avail itself of the training and support offered by the Protected Area in 3.2 above
- inform itself and its staff of the special qualities of the Protected Area, and agrees to interpret these to customers as appropriate (see 5.9 below).

5.9 Visitor information

- The potential to use the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism logo, and/or a specific logo for the relevant protected area scheme, shall be agreed as part of the business's individual Agreed Action Plan. The business is encouraged to display the logo(s) wherever possible, including on stationery and websites.
- The potential to display the certificate in a prominent place, including on websites, shall be agreed as part of the individual Agreed Action Plan.
- The potential to provide information to customers about the Protected Area, and about sustainable tourism within that Area, either in verbal or written form, shall be agreed as part of the business's individual Agreed Action Plan.

5.10 Facilitating customer feedback

Opportunities for the business to offer its customers a suitable means by which they can comment upon the sustainability work of the business in relation to the Protected Area shall be considered as part of the business's individual Agreed Action Plan. This could involve a suggestion box, or a customer satisfaction questionnaire, or a suitable area on the business's website.

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