

ProGuides AGM in the Bay of Islands

Sustainability commitment needs teeth

Auckland, May 2019 - The tourism industry in New Zealand is at an all-time high with 3,9 million international guest visits and an expected increase to 5.1 million by 2025. With the rise of visitor numbers, questions how to grow the sector in a sustainable way has become more important than ever. It was one of the major discussion points at the annual meeting of ProGuides NZ, the association of professional tour guides in New Zealand.

Tourism minister Kelvin Davis, who was guest speaker at the association's AGM, is adamant, that the tourism sector should remain on the growth trajectory. "We have to bring tourism into the regions and develop a better destination management", he said at the meeting, which was attended by over 40 tour and driver guides. Steering the system in the right direction and building meaningful partnerships, is a focus of the government's tourism strategy.

An international visitor levy of NZ\$ 35, which will be implemented by the end of the year, will be one way to gather additional resources for managing the region. ProGuides has long lobbied for a levy like that, specially to fund the work of the department of conservation and the majority of the members are pleased that a charge like that will finally be implemented. Davis confirmed that 50% of the income of the levy will go to tourism and 50% to conservation.

"But it's a number game", argues Wilhelm Lehmborg, chairperson of ProGuides NZ, and accuses the government of ticking boxes without doing anything. "We need solutions and ideas. The sustainability commitment needs teeth", he continues. "If you talk quality, then do quality and don't just add up numbers. There is no point lamenting a decrease in numbers in the back packers market. Just make sure the more affluent market stays longer with more time to discover the regions. You minimize the environmental impact of flying by staying longer!"

ProGuides NZ would welcome better strategies to offer training opportunities for newcomers. "We are happy to support initiatives to attract young people to the industry, but cannot write training programs or do the financing," says Lehmborg as the association is a professional established partner and a not-for-profit organisation within the New Zealand tourist industry.

Wilhelm Lehmborg is happy to lay out the association's opinions and concerns in front of the media. Contact details below.

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