

Proactive crisis management tools: Ecolabel and Green Globe 21 experiences from New Zealand

By Christian Schott

This is an article was first published by Cognizant Communication Corporation in
Tourism Review International, 10(1/2), pp. 81-90, on 01/09/2006, available online
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3727/154427206779307303>

PROACTIVE CRISES MANAGEMENT TOOLS: ECOLABEL AND GREEN GLOBE 21 EXPERIENCES FROM NEW ZEALAND

CHRISTIAN SCHOTT

Victoria Management School, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Abstract: This article addresses the theme of crisis management in tourism by adopting a proactive rather than a reactive perspective. As such, it examines ecolabels as one of the proactive mitigation mechanisms with the capacity to contribute to the creation of a more sustainable future. Specifically, ecolabels are examined in the context of New Zealand with the aim of providing a better understanding of consumer attitudes and levels of awareness. The findings are generated by a questionnaire survey of international and domestic visitors to Wellington and reveal awareness levels of ecolabels to be small and ecolabel knowledge to be inherently confused. An in-depth examination of the most widely represented ecolabel, Green Globe 21, produced similarly sobering results. However, in the context of previous studies these findings can be regarded as encouraging because the level of awareness reported by international visitors appears to have increased over the last 2 years. Exploring the notion of “greenwash” as a potential inhibitor to greater ecolabel uptake, the majority of respondents report no distrust, thus suggesting that consumer skepticism of ecolabels may be overestimated.

Key words: Ecolabels; Environmental certification; Green Globe 21; Consumer awareness; New Zealand

Introduction

The year 2004 saw scores of unusually violent weather extremes batter the globe, which resulted in the direct and indirect loss of tens of thousands of lives. In the eyes of many, particularly those countries and communities that were worst affected by these events, the world is facing a “creeping” crisis, one that is not conventionally discussed in the con-

text of crisis management in tourism as it is not seemingly as acute as the effect of cyclones or devastating floods. But rather, this crisis is related to the slow but persistent degradation of the natural environment and the impacts that this process has on the global ecosystem and climate in particular. After decades of intense debate on the issue of changing weather patterns, the scientific community has now largely reached consensus with regard to two issues: firstly,

the unusual and often dramatic weather patterns referred to above are related to climate change; and secondly, human activity impacts on the world climate. Hence, one can deduce that human activity has at least some bearing on this “creeping” crisis.

To date, human responses to these increasingly violent weather phenomena have been dominated by reactive damage control strategies, while the causes of these crises have largely been left unaddressed. It appears ever clearer that merely attempting to tackle and contain the “symptoms” will achieve neither environmental nor economic sustainability. Consequently, there is a great need for crisis management strategies to incorporate proactive mitigation mechanisms targeted at the cause of the symptoms. This realization prompted several international initiatives and negotiations in the 1980s and 1990s, of which the most prominent are Agenda 21 and the Kyoto Protocol. While the principles of Agenda 21 have been put into practice, to greatly varying degrees, since the immediate aftermath of the Earth Summit in 1992, the initiative specifically targeted at climate change, the much-heralded Kyoto Protocol, only came into effect on 16 February 2005—7 years after it was first negotiated.

While this event was welcomed by many countries it also engenders significant implications for the economies of the countries that ratified the Kyoto Protocol. In order to meet their obligations under the Protocol, or to benefit from it, countries will have to manage the emissions of all economic sectors, which will in many cases place pressure on the tourism industry to review its practices. Thus, the tourism industry will have to identify and enlist new mechanisms that will assist in the proactive management of this situation and address the sector’s environmental performance more effectively than in the past.

A case in point is New Zealand, where tourism has long been recognized as an important economic force; this is aptly illustrated by the sector’s contribution of 9.6% to the country’s GDP in 2003 (Tourism Research Council New Zealand [TRCNZ], 2005a). The resource at the heart of much of this economic success is the tourist perception of New Zealand’s natural environment as “clean, green, and pristine.” This innate characteristic of New Zealand tourism, coupled with the earlier discussed ramifications of the Kyoto Protocol and an enhanced un-

derstanding of environmental processes, render mechanisms designed for improved environmental performance highly topical and relevant to the tourism industry in New Zealand. While it is not suggested that the New Zealand tourism industry is presently facing an environmental crisis per se, it would be narrow-minded to contend that New Zealand will not be affected by climate change. There is little doubt that New Zealand contributes to climate change and will in turn also be affected by it because climate change is ultimately a global challenge rather than a localized one.

One of the most debated and studied proactive mitigation mechanisms in tourism is the concept of ecolabels (Barnett & Cheyne, 2003; Buckley, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Fairweather, Maslin, & Simmons, 2005; Font, 2002; Honey & Stewart, 2002; Kahlenborn & Dominé, 2001; Lübbert, 2001; Sasidharan & Font, 2001; Sasidharan, Sirakaya, & Kerstetter 2002), which is tipped to be a potentially valuable tool in the creation of a more sustainable tourism industry. Therefore, this article will explore consumer awareness of and attitudes towards ecolabels as one mitigation tool available to the tourism industry. Specifically, the study is concerned with exploring the opportunities and challenges facing ecolabels in the New Zealand tourism industry, rather than attempting to test the suitability of ecolabels as the most appropriate crisis mitigation mechanism for the outlined scenario. After positioning this research within the broader literature on ecolabels and tourism-based environmental certification schemes, the article will relate the findings, where appropriate, to other research to provide an insight into the level of consumer support that this relatively novel approach, in a New Zealand context, has gained over time.

Ecolabels

First of all, the concepts underlying the term “ecolabel” require clarification. In terms of their most basic characteristics ecolabels can be described as, “Trademarks or logos which have been developed to indicate the environmental credentials of a company, product or service to its clients” (Middleton & Hawkins, 1998, p. 240). Elaborating on their features and commonalities, and consequently further validating the relevance of ecolabels

in the context of crisis mitigation, the likely benefits of their implementation include:

- Curbing tourism's negative environmental impacts by encouraging tourism enterprises to attain high environmental standards.
- Exerting pressure on the tourism industry to improve environmental performance by adopting effective and tangible environmental management techniques.
- Assisting the tourism industry in developing standards for environmentally sensitive tourism services and products.
- Acting as strategic tools for officially approving and promoting the design, production, marketing, and use of environmentally benign services, and products having a reduced environmental impact (Sasidharan, et al., 2002).

However, in addition to the above-discussed benefits relating to both the environmental impacts of tourism and the sustainability of the tourism industry as a whole, ecolabels are also characterized by awarding a selective logo, seal, or brand that is recognizable by tourism consumers (Honey, 2003).

This consumer-directed dimension of ecolabels will engender different implications to the benefits listed above; these should include:

- Promotes the environmental achievements of companies via marketing campaigns both within and off premises.
- Furnishes tourists with "better" information on the environmental impacts of tourism enterprises.
- Prompts tourists to act in favor of environmentally sensitive tourism enterprises through their purchasing decisions.
- Enables tourists to make informed choices while selecting tourism enterprises for their vacations (Sasidharan et al. 2002).

These points all relate either to marketing, the concept of competitive advantage, or the environmental education of tourism product consumers. While environmental protection and education are arguably more altruistically motivated than a business's drive to increase its competitive advantage, the success of achieving either aim hinges on

the acceptance and level of ecolabel awareness displayed by tourism consumers. Previous studies have noted that tourism ecolabels have flourished (Fairweather et al., 2005) and that the level of industry interest and uptake of ecolabels such as Green Globe 21 (GG21) has been encouraging (Buckley, 2001b; Schott, 2004); however, it is also widely recognized that knowledge of the demand perspective on these environmental certification schemes is limited (Lübbert, 2001).

To date, the ecolabel concept has not received a great deal of empirical research attention, but rather generic discussions of the range of ecolabels and their respective characteristics have dominated (i.e., Buckley, 2001a, 2001b; Font, 2001, 2002; Hamele, 2002; Honey, 2003; Honey & Stewart, 2002; Sasidharan & Font, 2001; Sasidharan et al., 2002). Equally, this observation applies to the case of Green Globe 21 (i.e., Buckley, 2001b, 2002; Epler Wood & Halpenny, 2001; Font, 2002; Higham & Carr, 2003), which is of particular interest to this discussion, as it is the only truly global tourism ecolabel (Font, 2002; Koeman, Worboys, de Lacy, Scott, & Lipman, 2002); in 2005 it had nearly 500 members in 54 countries (personal communication with Koch, 2005). Kahlenborn and Dominé (2001) comment in this context that only international ecolabels are able to make a significant difference to the environment while also sustaining themselves, which is an opinion supported by Font (2002): "there are too many ecolabels, with different meanings, criteria, geographical scope, confusing messages, limited expertise...and the nature of most of these labels restricts their ability to grow beyond the narrow target groups for which they were created" (p. 203). Hence, GG21 warrants comprehensive attention in this context as it is widely considered to be the only ecolabel with the realistic prospect of long-term global survival.

Thus, this article seeks to mitigate the neglect of the demand perspective on ecolabels by examining the level of consumer trust in these schemes, and by exploring the pivotally important issue of ecolabel awareness. In addition to this broad study of ecolabels, GG21 will be scrutinized in some depth by equally studying consumer trust and awareness, and by also investigating knowledge and source of information about the ecolabel scheme. Apart from the earlier presented rationale for conducting this

study in New Zealand, the evolution of GG21 in this country provides an additional incentive, “[it] is the most aggressive ecolabel in New Zealand at the moment, and this is one location where Green Globe has a good chance to make an impact” (Font 2002, p. 199).

Consumer perspectives of ecolabels and GG21, however, have not been ignored altogether as this area of research has recently received some attention. The most notable pieces of work in this context are by Lübbert (2001), who explored German tourists’ level of awareness and attitudes towards tourism ecolabels, Barnett and Cheyne’s (2003) study of ecolabel and GG21 awareness, and Fairweather et al.’s (2005) research into ecolabel awareness and environmental values. While Lübbert’s work is of limited interest in this context because of its geographical location, the two latter studies were conducted in New Zealand and therefore provide useful parameters for this article. Both of these studies will be reviewed in brief.

Fairweather et al. (2005) conducted a survey of 295 visitors to Christchurch in 2002, studying the relationship between visitor response to ecolabels and visitors’ environmental values. The research was motivated by the realization that “there seems to be genuine concern from visitors about the environment in which they travel but at the same time there appears to be lack of response to ecolabels” (Fairweather et al., 2005, p. 86). Analyzing ecolabel awareness, the authors found that 20% of respondents had been to a place either in New Zealand, or in transit, that had an ecolabel. As a further 13% reported having heard of a tourism ecolabel the authors summarized that in total one third of the sample had some experience of ecolabels. Fairweather et al. also note that the majority of visitors have a positive attitude towards ecolabels and that further ecolabel development and use should be supported in New Zealand.

The 2003 self-completion survey of 1340 visitors by Barnett and Cheyne (2003), which was commissioned by the Tourism Industry Association New Zealand, equally explores attitudes and awareness of ecolabels while also devoting specific attention to GG21. Although Barnett and Cheyne’s survey used the term tourism-based environmental certification schemes, the concept is comparable to the more commonly used term ecolabel. Their findings

were surprising and not consistent with Fairweather et al. (2005) in that after respondents were provided with a definition merely 8% reported knowledge of any environmental certification schemes. Moreover, less than 10% of those reporting knowledge of certification schemes provided a specific answer and remarkably none of these answers represented ecolabels. Of the sample, 4% also indicated that they had visited a New Zealand tourism operator that was a member of an environmental certification scheme, while 79% were unsure. Other findings highlight the previously observed anomaly (Fairweather et al., 2005) of 43% stating that they were willing to purchase ecolabeled tourism products, while merely the above-mentioned 4% had done so. With regard to GG21, Barnett and Cheyne generated equally surprising results as after being provided with an illustration of the label and a description of the scheme merely 3% of the sample indicated knowledge of GG21. The most commonly reported sources of information for finding out about GG21 were “School/University,” followed by “TV/Media” and “Newspapers/Magazines.” Roughly two thirds of the sample stated that they would choose a GG21 business over a similar one without the label.

In the context of these previous studies, this article aims to examine consumer perspectives of ecolabels and to provide a valuable longitudinal insight into the pivotal issue of awareness, as both Barnett and Cheyne’s (2003) and Fairweather et al.’s (2005) studies were conducted roughly 2 years prior to the research presented in this article. The notion that longitudinal research is important in this context finds support with Fairweather et al. (2005), who note, “tourism ecolabels are beginning to manifest in New Zealand, but at this stage they are only in the earliest stages of development” (p. 83). This is well illustrated by GG21, which was only introduced to New Zealand in 2000.

Methodology

The data were generated by means of an administered intercept survey of domestic and international visitors to Wellington. The survey enlisted a systematic first-across-line approach to draw the sample and was carried out between January 20 and February 9, 2005. In order to maximize the representativeness of the sample, the survey was conducted at

four popular Wellington visitor sites between 9 am and 7 pm on both weekdays and weekends. A total of 295 surveys were conducted; however, 10 questionnaires were incomplete and subsequently excluded. Thus, 285 useable questionnaires were available for analysis, which represents a response rate of 60.6%. In addition to the questions inquiring about attitudes and awareness of ecolabels and GG21, the questionnaire also included sections on respondents' sociodemographics and trip characteristics. Questions were presented in open-ended, closed, and Likert scale format. While methodologically not entirely consistent with Barnett and Cheyne (2003) and Fairweather et al. (2005), the questionnaire was informed by these New Zealand studies to allow for an updated insight into consumer attitudes and awareness of ecolabels. The generated data were subsequently analyzed in SPSS. The most noticeable limitation of this methodology was the reluctance by members of group tours to participate in the survey, which led to an underrepresentation of those who purchase package tours to New Zealand; merely 7% of the sample reported that their visit to Wellington was part of a package. Additionally, language issues were identified as obstacles in that some visitors to Wellington declined to take part in the survey because the questionnaire was only available in English.

Findings

This section will initially outline visitor characteristics before examining ecolabel awareness, and consumer awareness and knowledge of GG21; the issue of "greenwash" and consumer trust in ecolabels will be addressed last. Table 1 displays the respondents' place of residence for the three studies that will be frequently referred to in this analysis. Some variance between the three samples is noticeable, with the greatest variance observed for the percentage of visitors from New Zealand. In fact, the low proportion of domestic visitors in Fairweather et al.'s (2005) sample led the authors to focus their analysis on international visitors in recognizing, "while 60% of all visitors to Christchurch are domestic our sample contained only 9%" (p. 87). Apart from this noteworthy difference in the proportion of domestic visitors and a degree of general variance apparent throughout Table 1, similar distribution patterns are

Table 1

Usual Place of Residence in Comparative Format by Study

Country of Residence	This Study (<i>N</i> = 285)	Barnett and Cheyne (2003, <i>N</i> = 1340)	Fairweather et al. (2005, <i>N</i> = 295) ^a
New Zealand	17%	31%	9%
Australia	13%	7%	18%
North America	8%	11%	14%
UK	27%	29%	23%
Other Europe	27%	16%	21%
Asia	4%	3%	11%
Other countries	4%	2%	4%

^aThese are rough percentages because domestic tourists were not included in Fairweather et al.'s analysis, yet the study mentioned that domestic visitors accounted for 9% on which basis the above distribution was calculated.

nevertheless evident. It is also worth noting that some of the observed variance is inherent to the locational implications of the survey sites, and due to the fact that Barnett and Cheyne's (2003) survey was self-complete while the other two were assisted.

Table 2 illustrates the sample's distribution in terms of main purpose of visit. This question was phrased to be relevant to the respondent's trip around New Zealand, rather than their reason for visiting Wellington. "Holiday/leisure" is the most commonly reported purpose of trip (64%), followed by visiting friends and relatives (22%). It is worth noting in this context that the study was conducted during the New Zealand high season, which typically sees a higher proportion of leisure travel and a lesser proportion of business travel compared to the rest of the year. Relating this to official tourism statistics, the International Visitor Survey generated the following data

Table 2

Main Purpose for Trip Around New Zealand

Trip Purpose	% of Respondents (<i>N</i> = 285)
Holiday/leisure	63.5
VFR	22.1
Education	4.6
Other	3.5
Conference/convention	2.8
Business	2.1
Sporting or cultural event	1.4
Total	100.0

in 2004: Holiday/leisure 51%, VFR 28%, Business 12%, and Other 9% (TRCNZ, 2005b). Bearing in mind that the sample of 285 includes domestic tourists, it can be concluded that broad consistencies between the two data sets prevail.

Ecolabel Awareness

Respondents were provided with a definition of the term "ecolabel" following a section on trip characteristics and prior to questions about ecolabels and GG21. The definition was adapted from Fairweather et al. (2005) and was read out as well as provided on a flashcard for the respondents to read themselves: "An Ecolabel gives assurance that the tourist accommodation or operation: enhances the environment, or minimises environmental impacts." A question inquiring about familiarity with ecolabels followed, which proved to be more problematic than anticipated, though. The most common answer was that respondents were familiar with ecolabels. However, when asked to name the label(s), the majority of the sample provided responses relating to general consumer goods, in particular food packaging and household goods. While some respondents stated that they could not recall the exact name, in the majority of all cases the following labels were mentioned: "Der Grüne Punkt" (The Green Dot) and "Der Blaue Engel" (The Blue Angel). These labels identify environmental commitment to consumers of predominantly "everyday household products," and in the case of "Der Grüne Punkt" consumer product packaging. While a great deal of products bearing these labels, which enjoy a high level of exposure in Europe, are regularly used by tourism businesses, they do not represent the same concept as tourism ecolabels because these consumer labels are neither designed for, nor used by, tourism accommodation or operators. Other observations, which serve to further accentuate the persistent lack of consumer awareness and understanding of ecolabels in the tourism industry, relate to respondents providing New Zealand's Department of Conservation (DOC) and Australia's Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) as names of ecolabels.

Due to the fact that none of the above-discussed answers represent tourism ecolabels, these cases were excluded from analysis and only those listing

actual ecolabels or, where respondents were confident that the label they could not precisely recall was used for tourism accommodation or operators, were included. Nine percent of respondents were familiar with a tourism ecolabel, which is consistent with the 8% revealed by Barnett and Cheyne's survey in 2003. Fairweather et al. (2005), on other hand, found that 33% have had some experience of ecolabels; yet, it is unfortunately not clear to what extent the accuracy of the responses was verified. The request to specify the label(s) that respondents were familiar with generated the following answers: "Eco-certified," in academic literature commonly referred to as "NEAP," and "Green Leaf," were both mentioned by three respondents. In total only 12 respondents could name a specific ecolabel, which translates to 5% of the total sample. While this is a surprisingly small figure, none of the 1340 respondents in Barnett and Cheyne's (2003) sample were able to name a tourism ecolabel, which suggests that 5% presents an encouraging result.

Other interesting findings in this context are that on average 1 in 10 visitors from every major market was familiar with ecolabels, though not domestic respondents (Table 3). This is very surprising considering the amount of exposure that particularly GG21 has enjoyed in New Zealand, and sobering with respect to the high level of expectation in terms of ecolabels making a meaningful impact in this country. At the same time this finding may in part explain why Fairweather et al. (2005) discovered a high level of ecolabel awareness, as they had excluded domestic visitors from the analysis. Of the 25 respondents (9%) that reported familiarity with ecolabels, 10 stated

Table 3
Ecolabel Familiarity by Place of Residence

Region	Ecolabel Familiarity		N
	Yes (%)	No (%)	
New Zealand	0	100	49
Australia	11	89	37
North America	9	91	23
UK	9	91	78
Europe	10	90	77
Asia	9	91	11
Other	30	70	10
Total	9	91	285

that they had purchased an ecolabelled product, 12 said that they had not, and the remaining 3 were unsure. In terms of the ecolabel's influence on the respondent's purchasing decision, some influence was detected as the average score was 3.00 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents "not at all" and 5 represents "very strongly." Thus, the level of ecolabel awareness is very modest and less than half of those that are familiar with an ecolabel have purchased a labeled tourism product.

GG21 Awareness

Unexpectedly, none of the 285 respondents mentioned GG21 when asked about knowledge of ecolabels, which was also evident in Barnett and Cheyne's study. This is of particular interest because after being prompted 8% of the sample paradoxically indicated knowledge of GG21. Specifically, 4% responded affirmatively when asked whether they were familiar with GG21 and a further 4% indicated that they recognized the label after being shown a flashcard. This evidence compounds the notion that consumers' comprehension of tourism ecolabels remains to be confused and limited, despite the provision of a definition. Apart from this inconsistency, the findings are encouraging seeing that Barnett and Cheyne's (2003) study found that merely 3% of the sample had heard of GG21, after providing both a description and an illustration of the label. The indication that the level of GG21 awareness has increased in the last 2 years is further supported by the fact that of those respondents that could recall when they first learned about GG21, two thirds stated that this was less than 13 months ago, and the median was 4 months. The most common sources of finding out about the scheme, as generated by an open-ended question, were "seen on tourism accommodation or operation" (33%), followed by "media" (19%) and "Internet" (14%). Half of those that were aware of GG21 learned about it in New Zealand, the other half in their home country.

Influence and Level of Knowledge of GG21

However, awareness of GG21 only translated into the purchase of a GG21 ecolabeled product in 24% of cases; 38% were not sure whether they had purchased GG21 tourist accommodation or activities/attractions. Of the GG21 ecolabeled tourism

products mentioned, the majority were accommodation, and the influence of the GG21 label on the decision to purchase the ecolabeled accommodation produced a mean of 1.63 and a median of 1.00 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents "not at all" and 5 represents "very strongly." This signifies a very low level of influence, which can be partly explained by the equally low level of GG21 label knowledge. In response to a question asking respondents to specify their level of GG21 label knowledge on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents "minimal knowledge" and 5 "in-depth knowledge," the mean response was 1.62 and the median 1.00, which translates into three quarters of those that have any knowledge of GG21 admitting that this knowledge is minimal ("1"). Indeed, the extent of minimal knowledge appears to be correlated to a general absence of effective marketing material and a lack of education provided by GG21 labeled businesses, as apparent in Table 4. Unfortunately, only five respondents are represented in Table 4, but interestingly all five reported their level of GG21 knowledge as minimal.

To summarize, only 1 in 11 respondents appear to be aware of ecolabels in general and GG21 specifically, yet the data also reveal that the level of awareness appears to have increased in both cases over the last 2 years (2003–2005). Another significant finding is the apparent confusion relating to ecolabels, which was also noted by Fairweather et al. (2005), and the lack of knowledge about the characteristics and meaning of the ecolabel scheme GG21. Undoubtedly, this lack of knowledge of ecolabel scheme characteristics will play an important role with regard to consumers' responses to the market penetration attempts by ecolabels.

Table 4
Level of Satisfaction With Features of GG21 Accommodation

Aspect of GG21 Accommodation	Mean
Overall quality of experience	3.60
Amount of information on GG21	1.80
Level of environmental education	2.80
Value for money	4.20

Note: Mean generated from 5-point semantic differential scale: 1 = Very Dissatisfied, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Very satisfied.

Consumer Trust in Ecolabels

A potential factor in this context is the notion of “greenwash” (Font, 2002), or consumer concern about the integrity of ecolabels (Fairweather et al., 2005). Because the proposition that skepticism about the integrity of ecolabels can deter tourists from a) actively seeking further information regarding such schemes, and b) from purchasing ecolabelled products, is a valid one, it appears critical to investigate tourists’ levels of trust in these schemes. The questionnaire addressed this issue by differentiating, as previously, between ecolabels as a general concept and GG21 specifically. Table 5 displays the responses for ecolabels generated by asking the entire sample to comment on their level of trust in ecolabels based on their experience or alternatively their perception of these labels after the previous provision of a definition. In the case of GG21, only those aware of the ecolabel were asked to reply to the corresponding question (Table 5). Analyzing the data, the most striking finding is that the respondents reported a very low level of distrust towards the general concept of ecolabels in tourism. When distinguishing between those that reported previous ecolabel awareness and those that did not, marginal differences were evident as the former provided a trust rating with a mean response of 3.80 (SD = 0.816), while those that were not previously aware displayed a mean of 3.40 (SD = 0.837).

With regard to the GG21 label, none of the respondents expressed any outright distrust and the mean response for those previously aware of GG21 was 3.35 (SD = 0.606). It has to be acknowledged that the 5-point Likert scale utilized for this question may favor responses indicating trust, as “3” rep-

resents “some trust.” However, when taking this observation into account, the data nevertheless provide a strong indication that issues of distrust in the context of ecolabels and the notion of fear of “greenwash” may well be overestimated, as the mean scores represent a strong overall feeling of trust.

Comparing mean scores calculated for different sociodemographic groups and trip characteristics did not reveal any significant trend, which suggests that the degree of trust in ecolabels and GG21 applies across different visitor characteristics and population groups.

Discussion and Conclusions

In the context of managing crises in tourism, this article examined ecolabels as one mechanism that can potentially make valuable contributions to the proactive, rather than a reactive, mitigation of environmental crisis situations. Specifically, it aimed at providing a greater understanding of consumer attitudes of ecolabels, and sought to contribute further knowledge to the discussion surrounding the relationship between tourist consumers and tourism ecolabels by exploring label knowledge and the notion of trust. The first realization in this context was the high degree of confusion and ignorance observed in relation to respondents being asked to name tourism ecolabels they were familiar with; this was both sobering and perplexing when taking into account that the respondents had been provided with a definition of the term. This finding appears to be somewhat symptomatic of the entire ecolabel concept that continues to be little understood by consumers. This could in part be due to ecolabels suffering overkill as a result of the tremendous wealth of labels used in different sectors of the world economies and indeed different geographical regions. This notion is supported by Fairweather et al. (2005) and in part by other findings produced in this article, such as the modest level of knowledge of the GG21 scheme characteristics.

Levels of ecolabel and GG21 awareness were discovered to be relatively small (9% and 8%, respectively), and conversion rates of label awareness into purchases of labeled tourism products were found to be moderate. In effect, of those that purchased GG21-labeled accommodation the majority admitted that the label had not influenced their purchas-

Table 5
Trust in the Integrity of Tourism Ecolabels

Level of Trust	Ecolabels (%) (N = 285)	Green Globe 21 (%) (N = 22)
1 = No trust at all	3	0
2	4	0
3 = Some trust	44	55
4	30	18
5 = Full trust	9	5

Note: Remaining percentage of respondents felt they could not comment.

ing decision, but rather that they had only realized during their stay that the business was ecolabeled. This is of grave concern and a clear indication that the label needs to be more visible to tourists in the businesses' marketing material as well as at the tourism product.

However, when considering the findings presented in this article in the context of previous studies, it is important to note that both the awareness levels of ecolabels on the whole and GG21 appear to have increased. This notion is supported by the fact that three quarters of those that indicated GG21 awareness had learned about the ecolabel less than 13 months ago. These results are encouraging for the future of GG21 in New Zealand, as one must bear in mind that the scheme was only introduced to the country in 2000 and is still increasing its membership. Additionally, the project's research assistants noted that approximately 40% of respondents showed interest in learning more about GG21 while participating in the survey. One of the most surprising findings, however, was related to the "greenwash" debate in that tourists appear to have less distrust in the integrity of ecolabels than at times speculated; in fact, the data indicated that consumers appear to have a relatively positive attitude towards ecolabels overall.

The evidence produced in this article indicates that the key to greater ecolabel awareness and subsequent informed purchase of ecolabeled products, such as GG21, is marketing and consumer education. However, this responsibility does not only lie with the certification bodies, but also with the ecolabeled tourism operators. Table 4 illustrated, admittedly for a very small number of respondents, that the level of GG21 education/information obtained in the participant businesses was perceived by the respondents to be insufficient, leaving them to depart and acknowledge that their level of knowledge of the scheme continued to be minimal at the time of the survey. An important component of consumer education at the business level is arguably the "reach" of a company's website, where the display of the label could increase consumer awareness considerably and act as a stimulus for raising consumer curiosity. However, as informal research conducted by Green Globe 21 in 2004 revealed, merely 45% of GG21 businesses beyond the "Affiliated" stage display the label on their website. Combining the ef-

fect of lacking ecolabel education with merely moderate label display by member businesses raises concern because consumers are not readily able to relate a responsible, quality tourism experience to an ecolabel that the business may have been awarded; however, this would undoubtedly be one of the most effective ways of promoting ecolabels.

This article then echoes Fairweather et al.'s (2005) statement that it may take some time before an effective system of ecolabeling with international standards is well known among visitors, even though many already approve of the ecolabel concept. However, the article wishes to suggest that particular marketing attention be given to domestic visitors, due to their lack of ecolabel awareness, and because domestic tourists may very well play host to overseas VFR visitors in the future. If product education and marketing of ecolabels, and GG21 in particular, are increased, these schemes could make a valuable contribution to proactive crisis mitigation management in tourism. There is little doubt that every one of the more than 100 global ecolabels has flaws and that ecolabels are not the all-encompassing answer to the world's complex ailments. However, any scientifically guided and informed measures aimed at environmental protection, which are the foundation for many criteria of established ecolabels, are arguably more beneficial to a sustainable future than inactivity or good intentions that are uninformed and unguided.

Biographical Note

Dr. Christian Schott is a lecturer in the Victoria Management School at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. In addition to sustainability and ecolabeling, his research interests include various aspects of youth travel and tourism distribution channels.

References

- Barnett, S., & Cheyne, J. (2003). *Visitor perceptions of tourism environmental certification and Green Globe 21: A report prepared for Tourism Industry Association New Zealand*. Palmerston North: Massey University.
- Buckley, R. C. (2001a). Major issues in tourism ecolabelling. In X. Font & R. C. Buckley (Eds.), *Tourism ecolabelling: Certification and promotion of sustainable management* (pp. 19–26). Wallingford: CABI Publishing.
- Buckley, R. C. (2001b). Turnover and trends in tourism ecolabels. In X. Font & R. C. Buckley (Eds.), *Tourism ecolabelling: Certification and promotion of sustainable*

- management* (pp. 189–212). Wallingford: CABI Publishing.
- Buckley, R. C. (2002). Tourism ecolabels. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(1), 183–208.
- Epler Wood, M., & Halpenny, E. A. (2001). Ecotourism certification and evaluation: Progress and prospects. In X. Font & R. C. Buckley (Eds.), *Tourism ecolabelling: Certification and promotion of sustainable management* (pp. 121–139). Wallingford: CABI Publishing.
- Fairweather, J. R., Maslin, C., & Simmons, D. G. (2005). Environmental values and response to ecolabels among international visitors to New Zealand. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 13(1), 82–98.
- Font, X. (2001). Regulating the green message: The players in ecolabelling. In X. Font & R. C. Buckley (Eds.), *Tourism ecolabelling: Certification and promotion of sustainable management* (pp. 1–17). Wallingford: CABI Publishing.
- Font, X. (2002). Environmental certification in tourism and hospitality: Progress, process and prospects. *Tourism Management*, 23(3), 197–205.
- Green Globe 21. (2004). *Informal research of Internet label use*. Turner: Author.
- Hamele, H. (2002). Ecolabels for tourism in Europe: Moving the market toward more sustainable practices. In M. Honey (Ed.), *Ecotourism & certification: Setting standards in practice* (pp. 187–210). Washington: Island Press.
- Higham, J., & Carr, A. (2003). The scope and scale of ecotourism in New Zealand: A review and consideration of current policy initiatives. In D. A. Fennell & R. K. Dowling (Eds.), *Ecotourism policy and planning* (pp. 235–254). Wallingford: CABI Publishing.
- Honey, M. (2003). Protecting Eden: Setting green standards for the tourism industry. *Environment*, 45(6), 8–21.
- Honey, M., & Stewart, E. (2002). The evolution of “green” standards for tourism. In M. Honey (Ed.), *Ecotourism & certification: Setting standards in practice* (pp. 33–71). Washington: Island Press.
- Kahlenborn, W., & Dominé, A. (2001). The future belongs to international ecolabelling schemes. In X. Font & R. C. Buckley (Eds.), *Tourism ecolabelling: Certification and promotion of sustainable management* (pp. 247–258). Wallingford: CABI Publishing.
- Koeman, A., Worboys, G., de Lacy, T., Scott, A., & Lipman, G. (2002). Green Globe: A global environmental certification program for travel and tourism. In M. Honey (Ed.), *Ecotourism & certification: Setting standards in practice* (pp. 299–324). Washington: Island Press.
- Lübbert, C. (2001). Tourism ecolabels market research in Germany. In X. Font & R. C. Buckley (Eds.), *Tourism ecolabelling: Certification and promotion of sustainable management* (pp. 71–85). Wallingford: CABI Publishing.
- Middleton, V. T. C., & Hawkins, R. (1998). *Sustainable tourism: A marketing perspective*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Sasidharan, V., & Font, X. (2001). Pitfalls of ecolabelling. In X. Font & R. C. Buckley (Eds.), *Tourism ecolabelling: Certification and promotion of sustainable management* (pp. 105–119). Wallingford: CABI Publishing.
- Sasidharan, V., Sirakaya, E., & Kerstetter, D. (2002). Developing countries and tourism ecolabels. *Tourism Management*, 23(2), 161–174.
- Schott, C. (2004). Environmental attitudes of tourism activity providers in New Zealand. In *Proceedings of the BEST Think Tank IV Conference ‘Sustainability and Mass Destinations: Challenges and Possibilities’*. Esbjerg: University of Southern Denmark.
- Tourism Research Council New Zealand. (2005a, February). *Tourism Leading Indicator Monitor Series 2005/1*. Wellington: Author.
- Tourism Research Council New Zealand. (2005b, May). *Total arrivals by purpose of visit current year end*. Retrieved May 22, 2005, from <http://www.trcnz.govt.nz/Surveys/>