

BULLER SKI LIFTS P/L
CASE STUDY



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Buller Ski Lifts: vital stats in brief

- Owned by the Grollo Group.
- Ski area occupies a 300 hectares of the Victorian Alps.
- 24 ski lifts.
- 6 cafes and restaurants.
- 6 retails outlets.
- Visitor accommodation for 350 in the form of units, chalets, hostels and hotels.
- Between 80 and 700 staff, depending on the season.
- Staff accommodation for up to 400.
- 150 snow-making guns.
- 45 skidoos and 16 snow grooming machines.

CERTIFICATIONS WITH NCS INTERNATIONAL:

ISO 14001 Environmental
Management System



BACKGROUND

As awareness of the ever-widening implications of climate change increases, no one is more affected than those whose livelihood is dependent on our fragile natural environment. One organisation in precisely that position is Buller Ski Lifts P/L, owner and operator of the lift company and hospitality venues on Mt Buller, the well-known Victorian snow resort. The environmental measures the company has put in place are more than just paying attention to climate change. They involve taking a leadership role with the implementation of a comprehensive and dynamic certified ISO 14001 environmental management system.

Key challenges for Mt Buller Ski Lifts

- Ensuring the long term sustainability of the business in the face of climate change.
- Reducing or eliminating the environmental impacts of operations on the fragile country on which the business relies.
- Ensuring that vast numbers of seasonal and international staff are adequately trained in the environmental management system.
- Managing risks and impacts that literally change with the weather and seasons: from snow during winter to managing tourism in the temperate summer bush environment.



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Meeting the challenge: a new line in the snow

Will Walker is Mt Buller's Health, Safety and Environmental Coordinator, and the person tasked with putting together Buller Ski Lifts' environmental management system. He believes it may be the most comprehensive system in the Australian alpine industry to date, making Buller Ski Lifts the industry leader.

As he explains, the decision to achieve ISO 14001 certification is an indication of both the strategic direction and culture of the resort's owners, the Grollo Group.

“We are all extremely concerned about preserving the alpine environment,” he says.

“Unless we take steps to address the big issues we realise that our business simply won't be sustainable. What's more, we know that we're looking at long term effects and must therefore take an equally long range view of every aspect of our operations to achieve our goals. So our system is not about quick fixes or just for show. We're extremely serious about what we are doing and we're in it for the long haul.”

In choosing to certify the Mt Buller EMS to the internationally recognised ISO 14001 standard, the company was drawing a firm 'line in the snow' and demonstrating its commitment to sustainability in both word and deed.

“The reason we chose ISO 14001 was because it entails going above and beyond the regulatory minimum, which is something we recognise as essential to achieving our aims,” explains Will Walker. “Choosing to have the system certified is the next step. It's the check we need both internally to ensure that we're on track – and it's the external proof that we're adhering to the Standard and doing what we say.”

A system that supports the strategic and corporate vision

Certainly, assessment of the EMS that Mt Buller now has in place cannot fail to impress. Using a step-by-step approach it addresses everything from energy efficiency – fuel, electricity and water – through to the choice of natural, non-petrochemical lubricants in machinery, waste management, recycling of water, advanced sewage treatment and more. Revegetation of alpine habitats and installation of environmentally protective devices such as sediment traps has become par for the course. Reuse and recycling of rental equipment – items that would otherwise go into landfill – is also now standard operating procedure.

Another feature of the resort and its EMS is its increasing use of green power and purchase of state-of-the-art machinery and infrastructure that in some cases uses up to 30% less power or fuel than its older or cheaper counterparts. As well as the larger plant such as ski lift infrastructure and snow machines, the notoriously inefficient two-stroke sleds and skidoos – the norm in the industry – are being gradually replaced with far more efficient four-stroke versions.

“Yes, this has been a very significant financial outlay,” says Will Walker. “But it is also an investment in our future and has been made for solid business reasons, in line with our long term strategy of sustainability.”





Harnessing people power: education and training

Of course, the system runs on people as well as machines and that's another area that has gone under the spotlight to ensure it holds up under the considerable pressure.

With staff numbers fluctuating between 80 and 100 during the summer months and swelling to 700-plus during winter, this is no mean feat. Add to this the fact that many staff are non-returning – they are overseas travellers or students who may work for only a season or two – and the need for effective induction, education and training in the use of the system becomes even greater.

“We conduct our training in-house over weekends prior to the season starting,” says Will Walker. “Although again it's a massive undertaking it is also hugely rewarding because most of our staff are younger and tend to be more environmentally concerned. They are hugely positive about what we are doing and their eyes are really opened to the challenges involved. It's also gratifying that the feedback we get from many who have worked with much larger outfits overseas is that we are going above and beyond what they have seen elsewhere – which is absolutely our intention.”

Certification: the who, what and why

As Will Walker explains, another critical component in the system was the choice of certification body.

“Right at the outset I contacted a number of different organisations and talked them through the vision and what we wanted from the system,” he says.

“In the end we opted for NCS International because there was a definite partnership approach there. It wasn't just a matter of a tick and a cross in the old-fashioned auditing style. There was a real level of engagement and interest in what we were doing and great constructive feedback.”

Further, Will says there was a level of understanding and expertise in-house that he felt was essential to their highly specialised requirements.

“Working in the snow and at these temperatures throws up special challenges and issues and I felt NCS International was across them,” he says. “One of the people who came in to audit actually had experience auditing in Antarctica and from the start he had the kind of relevant knowledge and insights that really add value. One of the difficulties in our business is finding people with such expertise.

“Sure, the auditors had to ask the hard questions and put us through our paces but they also had a very good understanding of the demands and I think together we were able to get the very best from the system and the process. And of course, the very nature of the ISO 14001 system is that this process is inbuilt and ongoing – we continue to improve and make advances and that's what our vision is all about.”

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Key messages from Mt.Buller



- Ensure that all of those involved in the system have full ownership of it and become the 'experts' in their own field. They are the ones with the experience in their department and they need to tap into that to get and sustain the best results.
- Having firm central control with clear lines of communication throughout the organisation is also important to ensure appropriate coordination, resourcing and support of the system.
- Don't stint on training, refreshers and induction because the system really does rely on people.
- Keep the system relevant. Don't talk ISO talk – speak the language of your business in terms people understand and can relate to. If they understand the what and why, the how will make sense, too.

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