



TOURISM AND RECREATION REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TRRAC) 32nd Meeting – 8 and 9 September 2010 – Townsville SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The thirty-second meeting of the TRRAC was held in Townsville on 8 and 9 September 2010.

The Chairman paid respect to the Wulgurukaba and Bindal Traditional Owners and acknowledged their traditional land and sea country in the Townsville region.

A summary of the outcomes of the main items discussed is set out below.

GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AUTHORITY UPDATE

The Committee noted that the Shen Neng 1 grounding on the Douglas Shoal on 3 April 2010, had involved significant resources from the GBRMPA and other management agencies. It was the biggest grounding scar on record for the Reef; with subsequent damage to the coral, along with paint residue from the hull of the vessel.

MARINE TOURISM INDUSTRY STATUS REPORT

There continues to be concern about a downturn in the number of visitors to the Marine Park. Data from the Environmental Management Charge collected by the GBRMPA shows a decline in the total number of visitors in the past three years and, at best, a static performance over the past nine years.

The representative of the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO) again reported that business was very slow for marine tourism operators and, for most operators, a matching with last year's numbers will be a good outcome for the year. While he was unaware of any operators closing their businesses, many were still operating well below capacity, so much so that closure is still a real risk.

The Committee discussed the factors that may have contributed to the declining trend in visitation over the last 10 years, especially in the Cairns and Port Douglas areas. This decline has been in both the international and domestic market. For the international sector, factors such as the rising value of the Australian dollar, the improving attractiveness of alternate destinations, international events such as the Global Financial Crisis and health epidemics, and changed airline arrangements (including both airline seating capacity and the proportion of group travellers) have all reduced the number of people visiting the Great Barrier Reef. Domestically, the high value of the Australian dollar has encouraged many to holiday overseas. At the same time, individuals who do visit the region are not necessarily taking up the opportunity of a Reef visit, or are seeing it as a once-only experience.

The Committee is very concerned about the trends and the long-term implications for the marine tourism industry. Members noted the lack of a consolidated analysis of

visitation to the Great Barrier Reef and the factors that affect it. As a first step to better understanding the situation and potentially addressing the issue, the Committee recommended that the GBRMPA collates the available information on visitation trends and likely drivers. Recognising that tourism promotion is not an explicit responsibility of the GBRMPA, it was recommended that the outcomes of this analysis be reported to relevant agencies in both the Australian and Queensland Governments with the suggestion that a 'champion' be appointed to consolidate understanding on the issue and drive action to address it.

ADDRESSING IMPACTS OF CATCHMENT RUNOFF AND COASTAL DEVELOPMENT

The Committee received a very informative presentation on catchment runoff and coastal development. Members noted the water quality outcomes that were being pursued, and broadly endorsed the GBRMPA's focus on this important issue affecting the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem.

Members were keen to discuss coastal development in more detail at a future meeting, and looked forward to receiving ongoing briefings on the matter.

EYE ON THE REEF AND RELATED PROGRAMS

The Committee was impressed with the continuing success of the Eye on the Reef monitoring program, and with all the work that has been undertaken to integrate the various Reef monitoring programs and sightings arrangements.

Members noted the progress that has been made in developing arrangements for delivering the Tourism Staff Training Course, and endorsed the proposed approach. Initially, this will involve the introduction of a low cost, online 'Reef Essentials' course, targeted at all who work in and around the Marine Park. Phase Two would be a series of modules about 'Reef Life' delivered as a combination of online learning and three classroom sessions, targeted at contact staff and delivered at a moderate price. The final stage would be a two-day residential course on 'Reef Communication' for those responsible for the development of training and interpretation material.

Additionally, the Committee identified a potential opportunity to extend some or all of the Tourism Staff Training Course to high schools participating in the Reef Guardian Schools Program.

RECREATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK

The Committee examined and discussed at length the draft Recreation Management Strategy for the Great

Barrier Reef Marine Park. The outcome was an endorsement of the broad approach, namely to provide an overarching framework for the management of recreation, rather than specifying detailed, regulatory-based management arrangements.

The Committee supported the risk-based approach where management emphasis will be on those issues that present the highest risk to the values of the Marine Park, as well as the intention to place early priority on updating and expanding the best practices for recreational users and increasing recreational expertise on the TRRAC.

It was noted that the GBRMPA is currently seeking advice from the other Reef Advisory Committees and the Local Marine Advisory Committees, and will soon be engaging with relevant managing agencies about recreation and the Strategy. Recognising the importance of the Recreational Management Strategy, the Committee agreed to maintain its Working Group to provide out-of-session advice.

The Tourism and Recreation Section plans to provide the final Strategy to the Marine Park Authority Board in early 2011.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT POLICIES

Members were interested to receive a presentation on the proposed review of the GBRMPA's Environmental Impact Management policy. The Committee considered such a review to be very timely given the recent changes in the legislative environment and the fact that the Policy had not been reviewed since 2004.

The Committee endorsed the proposed process for undertaking the review, but considered it too early to offer substantive advice, other than to keep any regulatory requirements outcome-oriented and as simple as possible. The Committee asked that a report on the progress of the review be provided to its next meeting.

RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The Committee received a detailed presentation on the progress to date in implementing the Great Barrier Reef Tourism Climate Change Action Strategy, 2009-2012. Members were very impressed with the work undertaken, particularly the Tourism Industry and Stakeholder Climate Change Survey, the published case studies and the climate change tourism industry workshops.

Following the presentation, members formed into two groups and considered several questions in relation to development of a Great Barrier Reef Tourism Climate Incident Response Plan. These questions addressed policies and processes that might be adopted in relation to the management of a climate-related incident. The solutions suggested by the groups will be considered by the Tourism and Recreation Section prior to the initiative being further pursued at the first TRRAC meeting in 2011. Noting the high proportion of TRRAC members on the Tourism Climate Change Action Group it was agreed that this Group could provide out-of-session TRRAC input during development of the Climate Incident Response Plan.

DEVELOPMENT OF A BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY FOR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF ECOSYSTEM

The Committee was informed of the progress that has been made in developing a Biodiversity Strategy for the

Great Barrier Reef Ecosystem. Members recognised the overarching importance of biodiversity to the health and resilience of the ecosystem and, therefore, to the users that rely on that ecosystem. The fundamental importance of protecting the habitats that support individual species was also recognised, along with the need to focus management on the factors that impact on those habitats and species.

The Committee encouraged the GBRMPA to base the Strategy on the best available information, and to take the opportunity to check both the information and the Vulnerability Assessments with knowledgeable users of the Reef. Members also encouraged that the Strategy be as simple as possible.

REEF GUARDIAN PROGRAM FOR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

The Committee learnt of the steps being taken in the early stages of broadening the Reef Guardians Program. Members noted some similarities between the proposed approach in relation to fishing and farming and the approach adopted by the tourism industry and the GBRMPA.

The Committee looks forward to learning of the progress made in this Program and of exploring areas for tourism involvement. Members considered that any initiatives that can improve the quality of the waters and ecosystems of the Great Barrier Reef are to be applauded.

INFORMATION ITEMS

The Committee was informed of the resignation of the GBRMPA's Director of the Tourism and Recreation Section. Members noted the substantial contribution that she had made to the work of this Committee, and to tourism management more generally.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled to be held in March 2011.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE 2009-2012

Mr Tony Baker	Marine tourism operations and pontoons
Mr Mike Bartlett	Cruise ship industry
Mr Tony Charters	Eco-tourism and tourism in protected areas
Ms Helen Cox	Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism
Mr Peter Frawley	Independent Chairman
Ms Anne Greentree	Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management
Mr Daniel Gschwind	Business acumen and economics
Mr Bernard Heimann	Sailing and day tourism operations
Mr David Hutchen	Marine tourism history
Mr Bruce Leaver	Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
Mrs Judy Lynne	Sunfish Queensland – Recreational fishing
Mr Wayne Kirkpatrick	Tourist resorts
Mr Daniel McCarthy	Game fishing operations
Mr Col McKenzie	Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO) – Marine tourism industry, recreational diving
Mr Glen Miller	Indigenous tourism
Mr David Morgans	Tourism Queensland – Regional tourism development
Mr Adrian Pelt	Bareboat charters
Mr Alan Sweeney	Aircraft operations and tourism marketing
Supported by:	
Mr Andrew Skeat	General Manager, GBRMPA
Mr Chris Briggs	Acting Director, Tourism and Recreation, GBRMPA