



TOURISM AND RECREATION REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TRRAC) 33rd Meeting – 3 and 4 March 2011 – Townsville SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The thirty-third meeting of the TRRAC was held in Townsville on 3 and 4 March 2011.

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 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has responded to Tropical Cyclone Yasi (Category 5) and the recent severe Central Queensland flood events by providing additional funds to investigate the impacts. Members commented that accurate and timely public communication by all parties is essential during such events.

MARINE TOURISM INDUSTRY STATUS REPORT

There continues to be concern about the downturn in the number of visitors to the Marine Park.

The representative of the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO) reported that passenger numbers in January were down 10 to 15 per cent on the previous year, and that media reports alleging the Great Barrier Reef had been 'destroyed' by the recent severe events is impacting heavily on tourism figures. The current high rate of the Australian Dollar is also a contributing factor in the downturn of tourist numbers to Queensland and to the Great Barrier Reef. As a result, operators are struggling.

Members raised concern that while the downturn continues, some operators may look for ways to cut costs, and this could lead to increased non-compliance with Marine Park requirements, including payment of the Environmental Management Charge (EMC). The Committee endorsed that the rules and procedures for the collection of the EMC should be enforced.

Despite the decline in visitation, some positive developments are occurring, including better forward bookings from China, improved air services to and from Japan and China, and the promotional initiatives being undertaken by Tourism Queensland and others.

RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The Committee received a presentation on the progress to date in implementing the *Great Barrier Reef Tourism Climate Change Action Strategy, 2009-2012*.

Members endorsed the approach taken in drafting the tourism response framework for environmental incidents on the Great Barrier Reef, and recommended more emphasis be placed on communication, engagement with scientists and the linkages between this framework and other disaster or incident response plans.

ADDRESSING IMPACTS OF CATCHMENT RUNOFF AND COASTAL DEVELOPMENT

Members were updated on the actions being taken by the GBRMPA and other agencies to address the impacts of coastal development. Members noted that the GBRMPA has commenced an assessment of coastal ecosystems that support the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem, and the pressures faced by those ecosystems. This assessment should be completed by the end of 2011.

The Committee agreed with the four key elements of the GBRMPA's proposed Coastal Strategy, namely:

1. Develop an outlook for critical coastal ecosystems for the Great Barrier Reef.
2. Work with the Commonwealth Government on coastal ecosystem management issues using the strategic and major project impact assessments components of the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*.
3. Work with the Queensland Government, especially through regional natural resource planning, to effectively protect and manage critical coastal ecosystems and their functions.
4. Work with local government, through the Reef Guardian Council program, to effectively manage coastal ecosystems.

Members suggested the need for a comprehensive education and communication campaign to support the Strategy.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Committee received an update on the progress to date of the review of the GBRMPA's Environmental Impact Management policy. The first stage has been completed, and around 84 per cent of the administrative audit of Marine Parks' structures permissions has also been completed.

Members provided preliminary comments on such factors as the existing bond and insurance requirements imposing unnecessary costs on

operators, and the certification and currency of maintenance reports.

A Working Group was established to consider these and other issues prior to the next TRRAC meeting.

RECREATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK

The Committee was presented with the current draft Recreation Management Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, noting the changes made, especially the inclusion of recreational fishing, since their consideration of an earlier draft at TRRAC 32.

Members agreed this is a valuable Strategy and, once the relevant Australian and Queensland Government agencies had been given an opportunity to comment, recommended the document be submitted for approval to the Board of the Marine Park Authority.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY, 2011

The Committee received an update on the progress to date in developing a Biodiversity Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef. Members discussed the Priority Actions which focused on reducing the impacts on the biodiversity of the Great Barrier Reef resulting from climate change, continued declining water quality due to catchment runoff, loss of coastal habitats from coastal development, and fishing and illegal fishing and poaching.

The Committee endorsed the overall direction of the draft Strategy with the recommendations that wording is simplified, and the contributions made by the tourism sector in monitoring and management should be more explicitly recognised.

The Committee also advised of the need to promptly investigate any gaps between the research priority areas identified in the draft Strategy and the research program being developed as part of the National Environmental Research Program (NERP) process.

TOURISM MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK

The Committee received a presentation on the management of tourism in the Marine Park, and the proposal to develop a Tourism Management Strategy for the Marine Park.

In discussion, members suggested the Strategy emphasise: the importance of high standards; the quality and range of destinations available on the Great Barrier Reef; the enunciation of clear goals; streamlined processes; consideration of risks; and timing, given the current state of the tourism industry.

Members considered that any such Management Strategy should link to a shared vision for tourism on the Great Barrier Reef and articulate the role of the GBRMPA in achieving that vision.

Work has already commenced on developing a future vision for Great Barrier Reef tourism through the National Landscapes Program.

EYE ON THE REEF AND RELATED PROGRAMS

The Committee congratulated the Tourism and Recreation Section for its ongoing activities in developing and improving the Eye on the Reef programs. In particular, members noted that the connection with the tourism industry established through these programs continues to be extremely important during responses to incidents such as the recent extreme weather events.

HIGH STANDARD TOURISM PROGRAM

The Committee was advised of the progress that has been made in the High Standard Tourism Program, and was pleased to note the number of operators certified to the Ecotourism and Advanced Ecotourism levels of the Eco Certification Program has grown from 18 in 2004 to 50 in December 2010.

Over 60 per cent of tourism visits to the Marine Park are now undertaken on a certified high standard operation, compared to about 30 per cent when the Program was introduced.

REEF GUARDIAN PROGRAM FOR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

The Committee was updated on progress to date in the Reef Guardian Program in the already established schools and councils programs.

The Committee was also advised of the developmental work being undertaken to shape the framework for industry-based stewardship programs with farmers, graziers and fishers. Discrete 12 month pilots are about to commence to road test assessment standards being developed for these targeted industries.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled to be held in June 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 Virginia Gerlach	Marine Park recreation
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	Director, Tourism and Recreation, GBRMPA