



TOURISM AND RECREATION REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TRRAC) 35th Meeting – 26 and 27 October 2011 – Townsville SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The thirty-fifth meeting of the TRRAC was held in Townsville on 26 and 27 October 2011.

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

Set out below is a summary of the outcomes of the main items discussed, and the advice provided to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA).

2011 EXTREME WEATHER RESPONSE

The Committee was updated on the work undertaken by the GBRMPA and its partners in response to the extreme weather events of 2011, including the rapid assessment of damage, the targeted training of tourism and fishing industry staff, and the assessment of damage to islands and their infrastructure. The outcomes of the *Extreme Weather Response Program*, funded under the *Caring for our Country* initiative, will be summarised in a final report, planned for release in early 2012, and possibly in a shorter 'fact sheet' format.

The Committee acknowledged that the information in the final report will be of great value to management agencies and tourism industry representatives, in terms of their planning for future extreme weather events. However, members expressed concern that the release of the report may re-ignite media interest in the adverse impacts to the Great Barrier Reef, once again triggering negative perceptions about the destination.

CURRENT AND PROPOSED COASTAL DEVELOPMENTS AND MANAGEMENT OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

A major topic of discussion at the meeting was the burgeoning coastal developments adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef, principally driven by coal and liquid natural gas developments.

Members were alarmed and deeply concerned by the scale and geographic spread of current developments and additional proposals. In particular, members were disappointed to learn that further 'green field' ports were currently being proposed. The Committee considered the Wongai proposal on the Cape York coast, and the Port Alma proposals located closed to the already highly developed port at Gladstone, to be particularly concerning.

While recognising that Queensland is currently experiencing a resources boom, and that the export of resource commodities is a vital part of our economy, members were disappointed to learn that the assessment and decision making processes for the mines and their associated coastal developments were not closely integrated. It was also noted that the current processes of assessment and decision making do not adequately

address the cumulative impacts of all current and future proposals.

Many members also suggested it was difficult for any stakeholder to make timely and informed comment on each of these proposals. The opportunities for comment are generally not communicated well, and the extent of the development documentation and its level of detail make it difficult for any outsider to assess. The likely impacts on the Great Barrier Reef and its current uses, including for tourism, cannot be gauged without thorough examination of the cumulative effects.

The Committee was particularly concerned about the likely massive increase in shipping traffic that would result if the proposals were approved. In particular, members highlighted the increased risk of shipping incidents and accidents on the Reef; the impacts of the dredging and dumping of spoil in and adjacent to the Marine Park; and the impacts of anchoring in the Marine Park adjacent to ports.

Members noted that two of the current proposals included barging cargo from the port to ships offshore. While recognising this arrangement reduced the need for dredging, members expressed serious concern about the likelihood and impact of spillages during the barging and transfer process.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE'S JUNE 2011 DECISION FOR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF WORLD HERITAGE AREA

The previous item provided an introduction to consideration of the World Heritage Committee concerning the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Members were briefed on actions being taken by the Australian Government in response to the decision, and the intended process for developing a Strategic Assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Members were particularly alarmed at any suggestion that the Great Barrier Reef may be placed on the World Heritage 'in danger' list or, in the worst case, lose its World Heritage status. The World Heritage Area recognition of the universal importance of the Great Barrier Reef is vital to the tourism industry, and members considered that, of all the Reef's industries, it is the tourism industry that would suffer most from any loss of World Heritage status.

The Committee considered the flow-on effects that mining and industrial developments have on the growth and development of coastal communities. Members asked that urban development and its implications for the Great Barrier Reef be included in a future TRRAC agenda.

NATURALLY QUEENSLAND 2020

The Committee was briefed on the draft master plan for Queensland's parks and reserves, *Naturally Queensland 2020: The Master Plan for protected areas, forests and wildlife*. Members noted the emphasis that the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is placing on recreation and tourism in protected areas, and congratulated the agency on its willingness to work co-operatively with stakeholders.

Encouraged by the work undertaken by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in developing the master plan, the Committee advised the GBRMPA to consider such documents in its future strategic work (for example, the proposed Tourism Management Strategy).

GREAT BARRIER REEF RESEARCH

Members were provided a detailed summary of the arrangements and research program of the Tropical Ecosystem Hub of the National Environmental Research Program (NERP), in particular, the project to develop a social and economic long-term monitoring program. It was noted that the tourism industry has been engaged throughout development of the Research Program.

Members strongly supported the inclusion of a social and economic element in the research, as this is an area that has been largely neglected in the past. However, it was noted that the social and economic research is still a very small component of the overall budget for the Hub.

The Committee considered that information about social and economic dimensions of the Great Barrier Reef is vitally important to both industry and managers, including ongoing information on patterns of use and regular assessments of overall economic and social value.

TOURISM MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Committee was updated on the work being undertaken by the GBRMPA to develop a Tourism Management Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Members recognised the development of this Strategy was a significant opportunity for both the GBRMPA and the tourism industry, presenting the chance to re-examine our current management arrangements and creatively consider future tourism management in the Marine Park. A Working Group was established to provide out-of-session advice during the development of the Strategy.

Members noted the Strategy will sit within the context of various other strategic tourism documents (such as the National Long-Term Tourism Strategy and the National Landscapes initiative), and needs to complement these initiatives. Some members expressed concern about the lack of flexibility in some of the GBRMPA's current management arrangements, and urged flexibility in the provisions of the proposed Strategy.

REEF PLAN

Members were provided an update on implementation of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan, including the release of the first Report Card. While recognising it takes time to analyse and collate data and prepare and publish reports, members were disappointed the information provided was significantly out-of-date, providing information for the period up to 2009.

Members also noted the current Reef Water Quality Protection Plan is approaching its conclusion, and the

process of developing the next iteration is likely to commence shortly. Given the significant impact poor water quality has on the health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef, the tourism and recreation sectors have a strong interest in the development of the next iteration of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan, and should be engaged in its development.

MARINE TOURISM INDUSTRY STATUS REPORT

The Committee was provided the most up-to-date information about the current state of the marine tourism industry, including analysis of visitation derived from the Environmental Management Charge (EMC) data. The data shows a continuing decline in the total number of visitors to the Marine Park for 2010/11, fairly evenly spread across the management areas.

The AMPTO representative provided a presentation developed by Tourism Tropical North Queensland about the current status, drivers and benefits of tourism in Cairns and Far North Queensland. Important messages included that airline seat capacity is a fundamental determinant of tourism visitation, and that the economic and community well-being of Cairns is very dependent on the status of the local tourism industry.

HIGH STANDARD TOURISM PROGRAM

The Committee was advised the late payment of the Environmental Management Charge (EMC) continues to be an issue for the GBRMPA. In particular, one participant in the High Standard Tourism Program currently has suspended Marine Parks permits due to the late payment of EMC and/or related fees and charges.

The Committee supported strong action being taken to maintain the integrity of the High Standard Tourism Program, as it is a program designed to recognise and reward only those operators demonstrating best practice in the Marine Park.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled to be held in March 2012. Two more meetings will be held prior to the end of the term, which expires on 31 December 2012.

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 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