



## **TOURISM AND RECREATION REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TRRAC)**

### **21<sup>st</sup> Meeting**

**2 and 3 February 2006 – Mackay**

### **SUMMARY DOCUMENT**

The twenty-first meeting of the TRRAC was held aboard the Elizabeth EII, out of Mackay, on 2 and 3 February 2006. The meeting included site visits, which allowed members to visit areas of relevance to the Committee in the Whitsundays/Mackay area.

#### **ENSURING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE WHITSUNDAYS**

The Committee discussed the current and future issues relating to ensuring sustainable tourism in the Whitsundays. Members noted the high level of latency in the number of passengers carried and the general slight decline in the number of active operations and active vessels and aircraft, despite a considerable rise in visitor numbers.

The Committee considered that, unless properly managed, there is potential for environmental and amenity impacts in the Whitsundays, because of:

- The immediate potential for significant growth in the number of active tourism vessels in the Whitsundays (particularly, but not exclusively, because of the ability of vessels in the bareboat fleet to convert to active crewed charter vessels).
- The long-term potential for massive growth in the number of tourists carried (both because of the unused passenger capacity within current permits, and because of the embedded ability to increase passenger numbers by increasing vessel capacity).
- The impacts that increased competition for a limited tourism market may have on the commercial viability and, therefore, operating standards of the current tourism fleet.

The options provided to the meeting were discussed in detail in order to provide some guidance to the already established Working Group. The Committee recommended that the Working Group re-examine the issue in its broadest sense (i.e., not confined to the management of bareboats) and that the GBRMPA review composition of the Working Group in light of this broader focus.

Members noted the linkages between any management arrangements developed and the management intentions of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) in implementing the Tourism in Protected Areas (TIPA) arrangements and the Whitsunday/Mackay District Visitor Management Strategy.

With regard to the bareboat specific issues, the Committee supported the general thrust of the recommendations proposed, particularly the need for bareboat briefers and other key staff to regularly demonstrate their continuing competency.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION OF VESSEL IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS**

Members were brought up-to-date with the outcomes of the Vessel Identification Numbers (VINs) trial which showed strong benefits to those operators involved. The Committee commended the arrangement and endorsed voluntary implementation for the entire tourism fleet. Members concluded that the use of VINs should remain voluntary at this stage, predicting that uptake will be strong as industry members recognise the advantages of the arrangement. Members agreed that VINs should continue to be offered to permittees when any new permits are applied for.

#### **UPDATE ON THE STATE OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF**

Members were given a presentation on the current extent of coral bleaching in the GBR, and how this may be affecting the health and presentation of the Marine Park.

It was suggested that media interest in coral bleaching could be improved by providing “good news” stories when reefs are observed to be recovering from bleaching. This could help offset the perception that the Reef is “dead” once it is affected by bleaching.

Tourism operators were thanked for their assistance in providing information on the current conditions of the GBR in their areas of operation, and were encouraged to continue their participation in this valuable exercise.

#### **RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

Following on from the Marine Tourism Leaders Forum on Climate Change held in conjunction with TRRAC 20 (on 2 and 3 November 2005), members further considered the issue of climate change and opportunities for the industry to respond and adapt.

The Committee considered that there were three main Response Strategies: Marketing and Communications; Product Diversification and Business Planning; and Environmental and Site Adaptation. The Suggested

Specific Actions identified at the Forum (with the addition of an action relating to practical research projects to investigate environmental adaptation) were grouped under these three Response Strategies. Members considered that, in the first instance, the focus should be on the action to “support and develop research into the feasibility and effectiveness of tourism site protection and enhancement strategies (e.g., shading, artificial reefs and interpretation)”.

A Tourism Industry Action Group (comprising some members of the TRRAC) was established to co-operate with the GBRMPA in developing responses to climate change and plans for implementation.

## **ANALYSIS OF TRRAC FRAMEWORK ACHIEVEMENTS**

As this was the final meeting of the current Committee, the Committee reviewed its achievements in the four years since providing the advice on *A Cooperative Framework for the Sustainable Use and Management of Tourism and Recreation Opportunities in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park*. The Committee agreed that substantial progress had been made and that the vision and concepts of the Framework had been largely achieved over the last four years. Many members recorded their strong satisfaction with their involvement in the TRRAC and with their work with the GBRMPA in general.

## **WHITSUNDAY/MACKAY DISTRICT VISITOR MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

Members were updated on the progress and plans for finalisation of the Whitsunday/Mackay Visitor Management Strategy. A site visit to Scawfell Island provided an opportunity for members to work through the proposed management arrangements on the ground and directly provide some ideas to the QPWS officer present.

Members were pleased to note that the settings proposed for the island National Parks closely match those for the surrounding marine areas. However, members were concerned that the Strategy does not take into account the exceptions to group size limits currently provided to those marine operators who have a history of accessing a site with more than the prescribed maximum. It is considered that management of the beaches (which are the junction between Marine Park management arrangements and those for island National Parks) requires further close consideration.

## **PERMITS COMPLIANCE AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

The Committee was updated on the purpose and progress in developing the Permits Compliance and Management System (PCAMS), an integrated information system for managing compliance and permissions (including the Environmental Management Charge). Members supported the GBRMPA’s intention to write to all permittees seeking their comments on the current system and suggestions for improvement.

## **STATE MARINE PARK REGULATIONS**

Although not under the direct jurisdiction of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, it was considered beneficial for the QPWS to bring members up to date on proposals to amend the Queensland Marine Park regulations, including amendments to enable the future implementation of the Tourism in Protected Areas (TIPA) arrangements.

Industry members of the Committee were particularly concerned that the marine tourism industry had not been involved in the lead up to the process of amending the regulations. There were a number of individual elements of the proposed changes that caused concern, including:

- Capacity based pricing, its effectiveness in a highly seasonal market and its ability to manage latency in passenger capacity.
- Capacity trading, its inconsistency with the GBRMPA’s approach and, further, its potential to lead to monopoly situations.
- The treatment of intertidal areas and State Marine Park bays and estuaries. How the TIPA arrangements would affect these areas is unclear and could substantially affect tourism operations at some of the highest use sites, especially in the Whitsundays where the marine, beach and island experience are so closely connected.
- The distribution of revenue raised in a TIPA negotiation process. What controls are there on the deployment of that revenue? Is it retained for management at the actual site?

The Committee noted that the GBRMPA planned further consultation with QPWS on the proposed amendments and how it may affect management of the Marine Park, particularly the joint permitting process.

## **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting, TRRAC 22, was proposed for 1 and 2 June 2006, and will be the first meeting of the new Committee’s term of membership.

### **CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE**

Ms Bryony Barnett .....	Research, Extension, Best Practice
Mr Mike Bartlett .....	Cruise Shipping
Mr Mike Burgess .....	Business Acumen, Economic, Marketing
Mr John Doohan .....	Recreational Fishing
Mr John Evetts .....	Ranging Operations, Game Fishing
Mr Peter Frawley .....	Independent Chairperson
Mr Daniel Gschwind .....	Business Acumen, Economic, Marketing
Mr Bernard Heimann .....	Mooring, Anchoring
Mr Ralph Henderson .....	Tourism and National Parks Management
Mr David Hutchen .....	Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators
Mr Terry Kemp .....	Bareboat Charter
Mr Glen Miller .....	Indigenous Community
Mr John Millward .....	Dive, Pontoon, Aircraft
Mr David Morgans .....	Tourism Queensland
Ms Lisha Mulqueeny .....	Director, GBRMPA
Mr John Rumney .....	Conservation, Dive, Anchoring, Mooring and Ranging
To be appointed .....	Commercial Fishing
To be appointed .....	Dept of the Environment and Heritage
To be appointed .....	Dept of Industry, Tourism and Resources
To be appointed .....	Resort Operations