



TOURISM REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMUNIQUE Meeting 3, 26 and 27 November 2015

The Tourism Reef Advisory Committee (TRAC) was established in 2014 to provide advice to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) on tourism matters relating to the implementation of the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014, the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment and Program Report and the Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan. The TRAC is a competency-based committee with members providing a cross-section of stakeholder expertise and interests in areas relevant to tourism use of the Great Barrier Reef. The Committee is appointed for a three-year period. Ms Glenys Schuntner is the independent Chair.

Ms Glenys Schuntner acknowledged the Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owners and their role as custodians of the Reef; paid respect to the Wulgurukaba and Bindal Traditional Owners, their cultures and their Elders, both past and present; and acknowledged the TRAC members representing Traditional Owners groups.

As part of the regular business, TRAC ratified the Communique and advised on outstanding actions from TRAC Meeting 2. In response to a question about future 'Celebrate the Reef' events, Ms Margaret Johnson, GBRMPA General Manager, indicated there is likely to be one more event in 2016.

Below is a summary of the discussion and advice provided to GBRMPA for other agenda items considered at the third meeting which was held in Townsville on 26 and 27 November 2015.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority update

TRAC noted the report on GBRMPA.

Dr Russell Reichelt, GBRMPA Chairman, provided an update on agency matters.

- The Australian Government is attending the Climate Summit in Paris in late November 2016. Minister Hunt, Department of the Environment, is expected to highlight work within the Great Barrier Reef. Dr Reichelt will also be present. David Attenborough's new documentary on the Great Barrier Reef is due to be launched around this time.
- The Australian Government is seeking damages from the ship's owner of the Shen Neng 1, for the cost of remediation of the Douglas Shoal in April 2010. TRAC asked if any potential monies received from this case could be used in other ways than repairing the Douglas Shoal, if it was to achieve a greater net benefit to the Reef, but was advised that if the Australian Government was successful, there would be no discretion in how the money was spent.
- In relation to the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, Dr Reichelt is chairing the Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Steering Group. He explained that monitoring has to be embedded deeply within all Reef work. He said that work on the Mackay Whitsundays Reef Recovery plan is underway and added that suggestions for other potential areas of focus would be welcome.
- El Nino is causing bleaching off Hawaii. GBRMPA is keeping a close watch on conditions of the Great Barrier Reef, but as yet there have been no reports of wide spread bleaching. Dr Reichelt recognised the need for messages to media to be accurate but not unnecessarily alarming.
- Dr Reichelt discussed other GBRMPA programmes including improving the permissions system; continuing the work with Reef Guardians; High Standard tourism operators; and focusing on field management, especially recreational fishing offences. He thanked TRAC for involvement in the Great Barrier Reef marine debris clean-ups and GBRMPA's 40th birthday event 'Celebrate the Reef'.
- Current permit applications that are likely to generate public interest are the Queensland Shark Control programme and the Lindeman Island resort marina proposal. GBRMPA is also working on resolving disused underwater observatories. Members raised the recent articles in the media regarding the Queensland Government's focus on resolving island resort leases.

Great Barrier Reef tourism industry update

TRAC noted the report on the current status of the Great Barrier Reef marine tourism industry and the Environmental Management Charge visitation information for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Mr Col McKenzie, Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO), advised that industry is the most positive it has been in the last decade. For the Cairns region, this calendar year is bringing the best trading figures, which may potentially exceed the Cairns region 1997 peak visitation of nearly 1 million visitors. Smaller operators are still struggling and AMPTO's position is there should be a zero tolerance on failure to pay Environmental Management Charge (EMC) by the due date. There has been a significant



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change in product mix with more independent travellers visiting and an increase in online or direct bookings. The domestic market is up dramatically, as is Chinese visitation and the international market is increasing. Day trip and overnight visitation numbers in the Cairns region have fallen from 2.8 to 1.1 average visitation days per person over a 15-year period, which is largely due to the collapse of the dive market. The 'Great Eight' campaign may help increase multiple visits.

Mr Tony Brown, Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association, commented that visitation to the Whitsundays region has increased by 5 per cent from last year's figures. The region is experiencing a significant increase in demand in day trip visitation as opposed to multi-day trips and therefore operators are adapting their itineraries to meet this need. The local council has been very progressive with development and the support of direct flights and this is also enhancing visitation. Supply may be outstripping demand, with day trip boats expanding much faster than visitation itself.

Ms Annie Judd advised that the Whitsundays bareboat (self-sail) industry has had a good season, with a 20 per cent increase. The industry has adopted a collaborative marketing approach called "Go Bareboats". There are a reduced number of bareboats operating, and bookings are taken directly so there is lower exposure to agents for this industry. The industry wants to encourage investment in vessel upgrades.

Other matters that were raised:

- Mr Col McKenzie stated that over the last 15 years, 40,000 open water dive certifications from the Great Barrier Reef tourist centres of Port Douglas, Cairns and the Whitsundays have been lost to visitors attaining them elsewhere. This has reduced the demand for four day trips to complete open water courses.
- Further, the certified dive market has dropped to less than 200 dive certifications this year compared with 1000 dive certifications last year. This is due to visitors choosing to attain qualifications outside Australia, particularly in Thailand, believing that a one day trip provides them adequate exposure to the Great Barrier Reef. Resort dives are also becoming more popular.
- Mobile reception and WIFI availability can be a challenge for Tourism Operators. Free WIFI influences booking patterns for hotels and is popular for visitors on vessels, as it enables the visitor to promote their positive experience through social media. The challenge offshore is to have access to phone reception and WIFI without detracting from the on/under water experience.
- There are still issues with agent commissions of up to 45 per cent in Cairns and up to 50 per cent in the Whitsundays.
- Whitsunday members indicated an interest in reviving the collection of Regional Tourism Activity Monitoring data.

Members reviewed the visitation figures from the Environmental Management Charge (EMC) records presented by Ms Fiona Merida, Manager, Eye on the Reef, and noted that there was increased visitation to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in general, and to the Whitsundays Plans of Management in particular. Visitors being carried by High Standard tourism operators is steady at 64 per cent.

Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan

TRAC noted the update on the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan including the implementation strategy released in May 2015 which outlines the governance arrangements and engagement processes together with a summary of progress to date.

Ms Margaret Johnson, GBRMPA General Manager, presented on the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (the Reef 2050 Plan) and its implementation strategy. In summary, the vision is that the Great Barrier Reef continues to improve each decade and be a natural wonder for future generations. It is underpinned by 150 actions and by an integrated monitoring reporting program. Sixty-two of the actions are either completed, or underway. GBRMPA is responsible for 74 actions and 22 of these are related to tourism. TRAC asked if they could review the 22 tourism actions identified in Reef 2050. This list was distributed.

The governance arrangements approved by the Ministerial Forum were in place with two meetings and one workshop held by the Reef 2050 Reef Advisory Committee (RAC) and one meeting for both the Independent Expert Panel and Reef Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Steering Group. Over \$200 million is invested in the Great Barrier Reef and this funding is also outlined in the plan.

The reporting requirements are six-monthly and annually to the Ministerial Forum and reporting in 2016 and 2019 to the World Heritage Committee. The review of the Reef 2050 Plan (detailing whether actions are meeting the targets) is due in 2018 and the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report is due in 2019.

In response to a member's question, TRAC was advised there is Indigenous and Traditional Owner representation on the RAC and GBRMPA's Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee is informing this process. More broadly, Reef 2050 will embed cultural values into how GBRMPA does business.



New policy initiatives – Cumulative Impacts, net benefits and offsets; and an update on integrated monitoring and reporting

TRAC noted the approach and timelines for the development of policy documents on cumulative impact management, offsets and net benefits; and progress on the Reef Integrated Monitoring and Reporting. TRAC members nominated for a working group to assist with these initiatives. TRAC advised there needs to be communication pieces (e.g. documents, web content, social media) that provides an overview of the Reef 2050 Plan, its initiatives and actions and way forward to ensure the story is told in a clear narrative and which allows for smaller stories to be told within that context.

Ms Josh Gibson, Director, Reef 2050, presented on three new initiatives under the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Program Report: cumulative impact management, the offsets policy and net benefits policy. These initiatives are about maintaining and enhancing the health of the Reef.

Offsets are applied through GBRMPA regulatory assessment tools and focus on maintaining the health of the Reef through 'no net loss'. Ms Gibson explained that there needs to be an understanding of impacts, to deliver on 'no net loss'. Net benefits are to be applied to all GBRMPA tools and programs, such as the Zoning Plan and are about improving the health of the Reef. Net benefits are looked at on a regional scale.

Ms Gibson said that GBRMPA would like to work with the tourism sector to develop case studies to understand impacts and how to apply cumulative impact management and offsets. A member stated that to provide advice, you need to know the impacts and sustainability limits at particular sites.

The Reef 2050 Plan can help to address this issue, as it is underpinned by a Reef Integrated Monitoring and Reporting program. This program will provide information from the local to Great Barrier Reef wide scale. The aim is to make the data as accessible as possible and to provide web based products for stakeholders to access.

The following key points were raised in the discussions:

- Information is important for identifying gaps and priorities.
- Most of the work in establishing the program will be in the first two years to put an operational system in place. This will be used to capture data in the next two years for ongoing reporting.
- A communication strategy and action plan are required to inform the community about the Plan and actions being undertaken - so there is an understanding of the whole story and how individual issues and actions (such as responses to coral bleaching) fit within it.
- The shared story or 'narrative' will need to be continually updated to complement new data.

Ms Gibson requested input from TRAC on how to best engage with developing these policies and case studies. Suggestions from TRAC included setting up a working group, or holding a workshop session at the next TRAC meeting depending on the timing required. TRAC members Mr Col McKenzie, Mr Tony Brown, Mr Peter Gash and Ms Annie Judd nominated for this working group.

Tourism Sector Plan – Industry Action

TRAC provided advice on the Tourism Sector Plan.

Mr Col McKenzie, AMPTO, provided an update on the Tourism Sector Plan, which is being driven by the marine tourism industry, as their contribution to the Reef 2050 Plan.

The Tourism Sector Plan lists the current actions being undertaken by the tourism industry. These include controlling crown-of-thorns starfish; completing Eye on the Reef monitoring; promoting high standard tourism operations; and marketing the Great Barrier Reef. The Tourism Sector Plan also identifies actions moving forward, such as having all marine tourism operators ECO certified within 12 months of commencing operations; gaining greater government participation in trade shows; increasing starfish control funding; assisting with a Great Barrier Reef Guide programme; developing responses to coral bleaching; and working with GBRMPA on amending Plans of Management.

Members raised the following suggestions for inclusion in the document:

- The role the tourism industry plays in conservation effort, promotion of conservation values and showcasing the Reef values.
- Highlighting the employment opportunities and capacity building that the Tourism industry brings.
- A reference to intangible cultural heritage.
- Drawing a clear alignment with the Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan.
- Contributing to capacity building of the global tourism industry, for example, by sharing lessons about managing starfish outbreaks.



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- The benefit of researchers understanding the industry so there is more consistent key messaging. Mr McKenzie undertook to take these suggestions back to AMPTO and to circulate a revised version to TRAC members.

eReefs

TRAC nominated a tourism representative for the eReefs User Reference Group.

Dr Cedric Robillot, Project Director, eReefs, presented on the eReefs program. eReefs is a research project that links what is happening in the catchment, to what is happening in the ocean by developing a collection of tools that users can access to support their business, or decision making. The initial phase has focused on delivering a complex supply of scenario models, with the next phase delivering forecasting models and improvements to satellites.

As part of the general discussion, TRAC supported the idea of working with tourism operators to enable use of technologies such as cameras on vessels to monitor depth, water conditions and other key modelling parameters to inform the project. Mr Robillot advised that a modelling app would be available in the coming months and he would make this available to TRAC.

Dr Robillot explained that an eReefs User Reference Group is being set up. Its function is to advise the eReefs Project Board on strategic and technical user requirements including challenges and opportunities associated with adoption of the eReefs System. It will also provide a conduit for eReefs related communications within organisations represented on the User Reference Group and their broader network. Mr Col McKenzie nominated to be on the eReefs User Reference Group. Mr Robillot advised this nomination would be considered.

Reef health and responses

TRAC noted the information on the summer outlook predictions across the Great Barrier Reef, the update on the crown-of-thorns starfish outbreak and the contingency responses for the tourism industry to severe environmental incidents. TRAC reconfirmed the representation of the Tourism Incident Response Group and proposed a preliminary meeting be held for members to be briefed on the pre-summer workshop and agree key communication messages. TRAC advised an amendment to the *Cairns Area Plan of Management* was needed to provide for longer relocation where required under the *Marine Tourism Contingency Plan*.

Dr David Wachenfeld, Director, Reef Recovery briefed TRAC on the most recent El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) update from the Bureau of Meteorology. Temperatures in central tropical Pacific are now 2.2 °c warmer than average and are continuing to warm, increasing the risk of heat stress-related coral bleaching. Based on current modelling, this El Niño event is expected to be similar to the 1997–98 El Niño which resulted in mass bleaching, but no significant mortality. The likelihood of a mass bleaching event will largely depend on local weather conditions over the summer. GBRMPA is monitoring sea surface temperatures closely and is continuing to work with the Bureau of Meteorology and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to forecast and assess coral bleaching conditions and help target in-water surveys. A pre-summer expert workshop will be held on Monday 30 November with a key focus on coral bleaching.

A query was raised about pontoon operators' trialling ways to minimise impacts at the local scale, noting that Marine Parks permits are likely to be needed. It was noted that any media on such trials would need to be contextualised within the larger narrative of coral bleaching.

Dr Roger Beeden, Director, Tourism and Stewardship provided an update on the Crown-of-thorns starfish program. The Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO) has culled 400,000 starfish and will continue to cull crown-of-thorns starfish at high tourism sites in the outbreak area for the next three years. TRAC was asked to note that the amount of coral cover maintained is a more important indicator of Reef health, rather than the number of starfish culled. Members were reminded to continually monitor where outbreaks are likely to start as tactical responses are most effective when commenced early. TRAC discussion covered pest management techniques, chemical attractants and the most recent media on an automated robot.

TRAC was then briefed on specific contingency responses to severe environmental incidents for the tourism industry, by Ms Vicki Bonanno, Manager, Tourism and Stewardship.

- The *Marine Tourism Contingency Plan* provides for tourism operators who are impacted by a severe environmental incident such as coral bleaching or crown-of-thorns starfish outbreak to apply to move their operation to another area. There was some discussion as to the two-year time frame



provided for temporary relocation and members felt there should be an amendment to the *Cairns Area Plan of Management* to provide for longer relocation where required.

- The *Great Barrier Reef Marine Tourism Coordination Framework for Environmental Incidents* sets out a mechanism for the coordination and facilitation of responses to an environmental incident by the marine tourism industry. After some discussion, TRAC reconfirmed the representation of the Tourism Incident Response Group and recommended that a preliminary meeting be held for members to be briefed on the pre-summer workshop and agree key communication messages.

Tourism and Events Queensland Great Barrier Reef Tourism Strategy

TRAC noted the Tourism and Events Queensland’s Great Barrier Reef Tourism Strategy and endorsed the three pillars of size and use, wildlife diversity and conservation; and also endorsed the eight underpinning strategies. TRAC noted the Strategy’s alignment with GBRMPA’s Reef Discovery Course.

Mr David Morgans, Director Destination and Experience Development, Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) and TRAC member, presented on TEQ’s Great Barrier Reef Tourism Strategy. It is based on the three pillars of size and use; wildlife diversity epitomised by the ‘Great Eight’ iconic species of the Reef; and conservation for a sustainable Reef experience through best management. The aim of the Strategy is to enhance the profile of the Great Barrier Reef; increase visitation and overnight expenditure; assist industry to deliver memorable visitor experiences; and strengthen the partnership between industry, governments and communities. Members also discussed how to strengthen the approach to cultural heritage through the Strategy’s actions.

Members were briefed on how the three pillars also aligned with the content of GBRMPA’s Reef Discovery Course relating to Reef management, world heritage values and the ‘Great Eight’ and how this would be used in the development of a Reef Guide programme.

Best practice – Wildlife interactions

TRAC noted GBRMPA’s Responsible Reef Practices and advised on a number of ways to improve practices by the marine tourism industry, including GBRMPA meeting with crew on boats to talk about best practice, developing a you-tube clip on the issue and producing a flyer that promoted the use of the Environmental Management Charge monies and highlighting best practice about wildlife interactions.

Ms Fiona Merida, Manager, Tourism and Stewardship, presented on best practice wildlife interactions. Members were provided with examples of how interactions with wildlife were being portrayed on Facebook and operator websites and the type of complaints GBRMPA was receiving about inappropriate interactions with wildlife. Members agreed that touching iconic and protected species and feeding wildlife indiscriminately was not best practice. Nor did this align with the three pillars of the Great Barrier Reef Tourism Strategy. Members undertook to review their image collections.

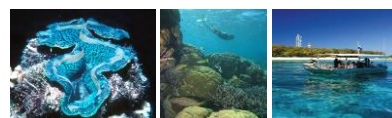
All members felt operators should be educated directly one-on-one, through videos and with a purpose built EMC flyer. All members supported more strongly worded permit conditions especially for protected species and follow up compliance action.

High Standard Tourism

TRAC noted the way certification schemes are assessed by GBRMPA. TRAC noted the outcome of the second round of ‘secret shopper’ audits and stressed the importance of having ready to use material for crew. TRAC noted the Queensland Government is committed to introducing mandatory certification for tourism operations within terrestrial and marine protected areas and advised that the TRAC strongly supported mandatory certification to be applied to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. TRAC will discuss the challenges and potential for implementation at TRAC 4.

Ms Vicki Bonanno, Manager, Tourism and Stewardship, briefed TRAC on a number of aspects of the High Standard Tourism programme. To be a high standard tourism operation, operators must currently be certified under Ecotourism Australia’s ECO Certification Program. GBRMPA is able to recognise other certification schemes, provided they meet GBRMPA assessment criteria for such schemes. The process for assessing potential certification schemes was also discussed and it was suggested that additional criteria for assessing certification schemes could be recognition by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

The second round of ‘secret shopper’ audits reconfirmed the overall high standard in delivery of Great Barrier Reef product experience by high standard tourism operations. There was some variability across



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operations, especially in relation to presentation of the Marine Park and World Heritage concepts. Members discussed that training, such as the *Reef Discovery Course*, needs to be supplemented with material from GBRMPA that includes simple ready-to-use messages.

The Queensland Government is committed to introducing mandatory certification through the *Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2015–2020* as a way to foster world-class, best practice ecotourism experiences in terrestrial and marine protected areas. As GBRMPA and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service jointly manage the Great Barrier Reef, members strongly supported a joint approach to mandatory certification. There was some discussion on this concept including how it would apply to all types of operations, what would be the exemptions and transition periods, the importance of robust auditing and what would happen to operators who fail certification? Mr Daniel Gschwind noted this concept was industry driven and that accreditation is a requirement for tourism operations nominating for the Queensland Tourism Awards.

Improving the permissions system

TRAC noted the updates on the Assessment and Decision Enhancement project and the Permission System Compliance project. It was agreed that TRAC would provide advice on improvements to the permissions system through the formal public consultation. TRAC deferred advice on the Permits Online system until development progresses. TRAC requested that tourism permits compliance issues and the Environmental Management Charge (EMC) be agenda items at TRAC 4.

TRAC was provided with an overview of the permissions system and then an update on the range of projects to improve the system.

Assessment and Decision Enhancement project – Ms Rachel Reese, Manager, Strategy Development, presented on this project advising that public consultation commenced in October 2015 with GBRMPA seeking feedback on improvements to its permission system. This consultation focuses on changes to the pre-application, scoping, assessment and decision-making stages for permitted activities in the Marine Park. Consultation will end on 18 December 2015. To date, the submissions received indicate general support on the matters under consideration.

Initial comments from members on longer term permits included the issue that it may devalue the 15-year permit held by High Standard Tourism operators and that a rolling renewal for High Standard Tourism operators may provide a better incentive as there was always a long-term permit horizon. Members felt incentives to become high standard were essential to offset the financial cost to business for obtaining certification.

Mr Col McKenzie raised AMPTO's position that:

- Rather than making certification mandatory, EMC should be doubled and then high standard tourism operations would be provided with a 50 per cent discount as an economic incentive.
- All tourism permits should have standard conditions and any exemptions should be clearly and consistently stated.
- The use of Vessel Identifier Numbers (VINs) which were intended to allow flexibility in the use of vessels should not be used to gain access to a location above that which was originally intended.

Members indicated they would provide comments on the improvements to the permission system to the TRAC Chair who will submit them through the public consultation process.

TRAC requested a briefing on the EMC regulations and application and an update on the project at the next TRAC meeting.

TRAC was also advised of three contracts currently underway to inform the management of fixed facilities (design standards, maintenance and decommissioning), financial risk management (indemnities, insurance and deeds) and risk assessment framework. TRAC was asked to consider who in the industry could best assist with interviews for managing fixed facilities and financial risk management. TRAC members will provide nominations direct to: consultation@gbmpa.gov.au.

Permits Compliance project – Ms Mel Cowlshaw, Manager, Protection Strategies and Systems, presented on this project and the permits online project.

The *Strengthening Permissions Compliance Action Plan 2015–2020* (Action Plan) was approved by GBRMPA in September 2015. An Annual Permissions Compliance Plan which focuses on education and communication, monitoring and reporting and enforcement for 2015–16 has now been approved. TRAC discussion focused on educating operators about permit requirements first, so they can review their operations and make any required changes. This would target compliance action to those who are continually non-compliant. There was some discussion about unpermitted structures in the Marine Park and the processes to address this. In discussing other compliance issues, a member suggested a



communication strategy was needed to address the perception that GBRMPA has been ‘soft’ on tourism compliance, but is now focusing on tourism compliance. TRAC requested a briefing on the range of non-compliant issues from a tourism perspective at TRAC 4.

Permits Online project – This is about developing a secure external interface to allow online tracking of payments; management of contact details; lodgement of reports and as a single login point for Permits, EMC and bookings. A member suggested that the EMC online while good, needed refreshing.

Superyachts

TRAC noted the briefing on superyachts provided by Superyacht Australia.

Mr Cameron Bray, on behalf of Superyacht Australia, presented to TRAC on superyachts and the Great Barrier Reef. Superyachts are luxury vessels of 24 metres or more in length, which are either operated recreationally by the owner, or can be offered as whole of vessel charters for up to 12 passengers. Mr Bray spoke about the value of superyachts to the Australian economy because of the diverse supply chain (marina berthing, suppliers such as florists and local produce). He raised their concerns about the current access in the Whitsundays for vessels greater than 35 metres and indicated a desire for a more fair and equitable access for superyachts in the Great Barrier Reef.

Increasing visitation to the Whitsundays

TRAC noted industry concerns over the increasing visitation in the Whitsundays and the impact this may be having on the environment, other users and the marine tourism industry. TRAC deferred advice on this issue until after the agenda item on the progress on the Whitsundays Plan of Management.

Mr Tony Brown, WCBIA and TRAC member, spoke about the local Whitsundays tourism industry's concerns on overcrowding at a number of popular sites in the Whitsundays. He also identified issues with infrastructure such as public moorings not being sufficient for demand. He said that it was felt that overcrowding was caused in part by the industry move from extended overnight market to a day trip market and most recently a ½ day trip market, which concentrates on experiences at Whitehaven and Tongue Bay/Hill Inlet. The industry felt the overcrowding was exacerbated by the range of destinations shrinking because of degradation of some of the fringing reefs, use of previously latent (unused) 365 day permits, and the impact of increasing recreational use on the Whitsundays. Overcrowding has the potential to impact on the environment and on safety.

On behalf of the industry, Tony Brown requested that GBRMPA consider - managing latent permits more aggressively; introducing a moratorium on permits; increasing no anchoring areas; and providing for more public moorings (including dedicated use moorings where operators negotiate partial use of the public mooring in exchange for assisting with installation and maintenance of those moorings).

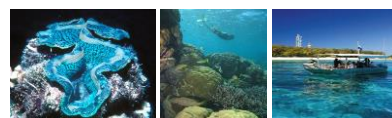
Amending the Whitsundays Plan of Management

TRAC noted amendments to the Whitsundays Plan of Management are currently being prepared; and provided strong advice that the amendment should be informed by a baseline study into the carrying capacity of key locations where overcrowding was reported. The study should include consideration of the values and the impacts on those values at those locations. In addition, TRAC requested that a moratorium on the grant of permissions for daily access through an expression of interest process be put in place and to also consider limiting 50 day booking permits to the area until a review of latency could be undertaken.

Ms Sally Harman, Planning Manager, Great Barrier Reef Operations, provided an update on the progress of the amendment to the Whitsundays Plan of Management, including details of the current amendments proposals around improved access for superyachts and motorised water sports activities and of fine tuning of regular aircraft landing areas and of settings at a small number of locations. The issue of overcrowding at some popular locations was also discussed.

Members voiced their concerns about the capacity of the Whitsundays to cater for current use and the Queensland Government's aim to double tourism by 2050. There was discussion of the options for management such as installation of public moorings (including dedicated use) and reef protection areas, site planning for high use tourism sites, diversification of itineraries and compulsory vessel monitoring systems on all tourism vessels.

Members felt strongly that more information was needed on base options for managing overcrowding. Mr Col McKenzie and Mr Tony Brown offered to collaborate on a capacity study of the key locations (5-6)



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where overcrowding was occurring, to inform the plan amendments and indicated they would approach AMPTO and WCBA respectively to fund the study. Mr Mc Kenzie advised industry members that this was a 'Pandora's box' and that the result of the study could be actual use of the locations should be reduced which could impact all current operators. Members requested GBRMPA to consider the review of latency of existing permits and a moratorium on the issue of further tourism permits for the area.

Tourism and Stewardship update

TRAC noted the briefing on Tourism and Stewardship activities and that due to time constraints, the overview of the Recreation Management Strategy will be deferred to TRAC 4.

Dr Roger Beeden, Director, Tourism and Stewardship, advised that his Section continues to progress those items of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan for which they are responsible. This includes managing the crown-of-thorns starfish control program and engaging communities through the Reef Guardians and High Standard Tourism programmes. It was noted that there has been some challenges with progressing the Reef Guardian fishers program due to staffing.

The Section coordinates all the Local Marine Advisory Committee (LMAC) meetings (12 LMACS with up to 5 meetings a year) and the LMAC Chairs meeting which was held in October 2015. Other work being progressed by the Section includes the successful marine debris clean-ups, the substantial resources for management resulting from the Eye on the Reef programme, and developing a Reef Guides course to complement the Reef Discovery Course and generally support the interpretive work of the industry.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service update

TRAC noted the achievements of the Great Barrier Reef Field Management Program for 2014–15 and the range of actions being undertaken by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) that have the potential to impact on tourism in the Great Barrier Reef.

Mr Geoff Kent, Executive Director, QPWS advised that the Field Management Program had been recognised in the State Excellence Awards and read out the commendation to TRAC members. Mr Kent then reported on a number of other initiatives including the revised *Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2015–2020* which provides a better balance of tourism and environmental outcomes for State protected areas; the progress on ecotourism facilities in National Parks, the management planning underway for the Hinchinbrook Island National Park, and the amendments to the Nature Conservation Act which returns conservation as the sole object of the Act.

Other business

TRAC considered other matters raised by members relating to Commonwealth Marine Reserves.

Ms Bianca Priest, Commonwealth Marine Reserves and TRAC member, provided an update on Commonwealth Marine Reserves programme. The Chairs of the independent review into the Commonwealth Marine Reserves provided an update in early November and were hoping to have their reports completed by the end of the month. The reports will include recommendations around zoning arrangements for the Coral Sea Marine Reserve. The next step will be to prepare a management plan which she will bring to a future TRAC.

Next meeting

The next meeting of TRAC will be scheduled for April 2016 after consultation with all members.

Tourism Reef Advisory Committee Membership

Member	Expertise/Affiliation
Ms Glenys Schuntner	INDEPENDENT CHAIR- Advocacy for regional economic development
Mr Tony Baker	Marine tourism operations, including pontoons, in the northern region of the Great Barrier Reef
Mr Tony Brown	Sailing and day tourism operations in the central region of the Great Barrier Reef
Mr Tony Charters	Ecotourism and tourism in protected areas <i>Ecotourism Australia</i>
Mr Mike Drake	International cruise shipping and marketing
Mr Peter Gash	Sustainable tourism and aircraft operations in the southern region of the Great Barrier Reef
Ms Chrissy Grant	Indigenous affairs



Mr Daniel Gschwind	Business acumen and economics <i>Queensland Tourism Industry Council</i>
Mr Gavin Herholdt	Tourism resorts
Ms Annie Judd	Bareboat operations in the Whitsundays and tourism marketing
Mr Geoff Kent	Tourism management in the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park <i>National Parks, Recreation, Sports and Racing (Queensland)</i>
Mr Daniel McCarthy	Charter fishing
Mr Col McKenzie	Marine tourism industry and diving <i>Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators</i>
Mr David Morgans	Regional tourism development <i>Tourism and Events Queensland</i>
Ms Bianca Priest	Commonwealth Marine Reserves <i>Parks Australia (Australian Government)</i>
Ms Margaret Johnson	GBRMPA General Manager, Strategic Policy and Reef Stewardship
Dr Roger Beeden	GBRMPA Director, Tourism and Stewardship

