# TOURISM REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMUNIQUE

# Meeting 6, 6 and 7 April 2017 – Cairns

*The Tourism Reef Advisory Committee (the committee) was established in 2014 to provide advice to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the agency) on tourism matters relating to 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 Committee is competency-based with members providing a cross-section of stakeholder expertise and interests in areas relevant to tourism and recreational use of the Great Barrier Reef. The Committee is appointed for a three-year period and Ms Glenys Schuntner is the independent Chair. Membership details and earlier communiques are available on the agency’s* [*website*](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/about-us/reef-advisory-committee/tourism-reef-advisory-committee)*.*

Ms Glenys Schuntner acknowledged the Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owners of the Cairns region and their Elders, both past and present.

## Update from the agency, the industry and resilience based management

The Committee noted the report on the agency and the impacts of category 4 cyclone Debbie and coral bleaching in the various regions, and recognised the importance of being transparent and working together collaboratively on these matters. In particular, the Committee supported the immediate actions of the Queensland Tourism Industry Council and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in responding to cyclone Debbie. The Committee nominated a working group to focus on messaging around these cumulative impacts and an industry position on climate change.

The Committee supported the Reef Summit proposed by the agency in May 2017 where it will consider management actions for a resilient Great Barrier Reef and requested feedback on outcomes. Further, the Committee advised the agency to explore active intervention, including reef restoration and, in light of the impacts of cyclone Debbie, consider flexibility for Whitsunday operators if they required access to alternative locations in other setting areas.

## Great Barrier Reef Foundation

The Committee noted the role and focus areas for the Great Barrier Foundation and acknowledged the opportunities for collaboration with the tourism industry to address threats to the Reef through active intervention.

## Draft Whitsundays Plan of Management amendments

The Committee was very concerned about the impacts of cyclone Debbie on the Whitsunday Planning Area and recommended it is critical for the agency to understand the status of locations and the extent of impacts before finalising the Plan of Management.

The Committee considered a range of matters including flexibility in provisions; the five aircraft permissions for scenic flights, site assessments for anchorages, private moorings, impacts of recreational access, reef walking, seabird closures and motorised water sports access.

The Committee undertook to make a formal submission out-of-session on the Whitsunday Plan of Management amendment.

## Cost recovery measures related to the permission system

The Committee will not comment on the current arrangements but noted the timeframes for members to comment independently. The Committee is keen to be involved in the 2017–18 review and urges the agency to consider ways to address delays in processing permit applications and to use this as an to opportunity encourage high standard tourism in that their permit renewals are on a less frequent basis.

## Facility inspections and financial risk management tools

Noting that insurance, indemnity, deeds, bonds and facility maintenance can place significant burden on the industry, but are necessary to ensure the protection of the Reef, the Committee advises that:

* In relation to financial risk management tools, the Committee supported AMPTO exploring an industry-owned bond pool system.
* In relation to fixed facility management, the Committee supported meetings with pontoon operators in each region to establish existing obligations from AMSA, MSQ etc. and if any additional information is needed to address the qualifications and maintenance regimes.

## Improving the permission system

The Committee advised it still strongly supported incentivising high standard tourism operations and reiterated its original advice to the agency that general tourism operations should only be able to apply for five-year permit terms and supports the extension to 20-year permit terms for high standard operations.

## Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) and Citizens of the Great Barrier Reef

Key members of the tourism industry, Douglas Shire Council, Cairns Regional Council, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre and the Local Marine Advisory Committees attended this session of the Committee meeting and were all provided a briefing on the work of Tourism Tropical North Queensland and the Citizens of the Great Barrier Reef.

## Cairns Aquarium site visit

The Committee toured the Cairns Aquarium, which is currently being built and scheduled to open in June 2017. The interpretation theme traces a raindrop from the rainforest out to the sea. The Aquarium focuses on both the dry and wet landscapes. Once the tanks are completed they will contain 15,000 specimens from 250 species.

## Tourism policy

The Committee supported the proposed scope for the review of the policy on managing tourism permissions (including allocation, latency and tenure).

The Committee advised industry associations should be targeted to ensure the greatest response by their members to the proposed survey on aspects of the policy that could be changed. It should be impressed on permit holders that this has the potential to affect their tourism permit.

## Gunggandji Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA)

The Committee positively endorsed the good work of Traditional Owners in developing and implementing TUMRAs.

The Committee advised the opportunity to pilot an Indigenous interpretation program in Cairns should be explored as it could diversify and enrich the tourism product and provide employment opportunities for Indigenous people.

## Reef 2050 Plan policies

The Committee is supportive of this strategic approach of the draft Reef 2050 cumulative impact management policy, net benefit policy and Great Barrier Reef offset guideline, noting these draft documents will be released for public comment and when finalised, inform the chain of decision making and can be applied to Commonwealth, State and local levels.

The Committee advised the Reef 2050 policies should use appropriate language for the intended audience (i.e. policies are prefaced with why the policy is relevant to the audience, is not bureaucratic and is a positive investment in time). It is important to have a structured approach to ensure more evidence is being used in the decision making, people are empowered in the process and there is timeliness in the decision making.

## Eye on the Reef

The Committee supported more involvement by the tourism industry in the Eye on the Reef program and resultant improvements to the data collected. The Committee was particularly supportive of the development of the Eye on the Reef interface highlighting case studies of operations on the Reef and it was also interested in exploring the concept of recognising ‘ecodivers’.

## Other items

The Committee was provided information papers relating to: the Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring, Modelling and Reporting Program; the Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan; the Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve and Fisheries Queensland management reform and boat ramp survey (Net Free Zone).

In other business, the Committee noted the issues being raised about boat-share operations, including safety and compliance aspects, and requested a future agenda item on this matter.