



From the Deck

From the Director's Desk

Welcome to the first edition of *From the Deck* for 2007!

Within government circles we've had a very significant change this year already. The Honourable Malcolm Turnbull MP was appointed to the position of Minister for The Environment and Water Resources in January and has already shown his commitment to improving the sustainability of Australia's natural resources by tackling shark by-catch and promoting greener homes for a cooler planet.

Also in January 2007, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park tourism operators received amazing national publicity in the QANTAS in-flight magazine with the publication of a six-page spread (valued at over \$88,000) on how Marine Park tourism operators are doing their bit to keep the Great Barrier Reef 'great'.

This sort of positive profile, facilitated by the GBRMPA, is essential to rebut ongoing negative community perceptions of tourism on the Great Barrier Reef. It's important we all send a very clear message that tourism on the Great Barrier Reef is sustainable and contributes significantly to the environment and local communities. Tourism is the largest industry on the Great Barrier Reef, contributing \$5.1 billion to the national economy.

One of our key initiatives this quarter is a survey of SCUBA diving activities on the Great Barrier Reef. In partnership with the Association of Marine Park Tour Operators and Dive QLD, the GBRMPA are scoping the scale and diversity of the dive industry to ensure appropriate management arrangements are in place and industry trends are being monitored. I'd like to encourage all operators to complete and return the survey form that was sent out in January this year. For more information please call Dean Miller from the Tourism and Recreation Group on (07) 4750 0715.

Lisha Mulqueeny
Director Tourism and Recreation

Corals in the clear?

Reports submitted by BleachWatch volunteers have been vital to our efforts to keep track of coral bleaching this summer.

Water temperatures remained below average throughout most of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) during December and January, with only slight warming seen in the north in late February. This means there has been virtually no coral deterioration this summer.

After training workshops held recently in Port Douglas, Cairns, Townsville, Airlie Beach and Rockhampton, 49 new members joined the BleachWatch team, bringing our total membership to 140. Thanks to everyone who participates and if you'd like more information on BleachWatch please call (07) 4750 0700.



our great barrier reef
let's keep it great





On TRACC

The Tourism and Recreation Reef Advisory Committee (TRRAC) reconvened for a third term and formally adopted the Tourism and Recreation Group's Vision Statement - *Ensure that tourism and recreational use in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is sustainable.*

One of the key agenda items for the first meeting of the new-look TRRAC was to identify the Committee's priorities for the coming three years. These are:

- Climate change;
- Reef health;
- Industry sustainability;
- Recreational use; and
- Indigenous partnership in tourism.

The TRRAC's first meeting, held in Port Douglas on the 22nd and 23rd of February, covered topics relating to the tourism industry's response to climate change, current trends in Reef health with particular focus on coral bleaching, amendments to the Cairns Area and Whitsundays Plans of Management, and a pilot programme for dedicated use moorings in the Whitsundays.



TRRAC meeting in Port Douglas

Amending the plans

The GBRMPA has recently welcomed comment from tourism operators and members of the public on the proposed amendments to certain Marine Park management plans. These include:

- Cairns Area Plan of Management;
- Change to the No Structures Policy (NSS) at Upolu Reef to allow glass bottom boats to be moored within the Marine National Park Zone.
- Whitsundays Plan of Management; and

- Implementation of Setting 5 Site plans.

The public consultation period has now closed, so thanks to those who provided comments. Over 100 individual meetings were held with stakeholders to better understand their views.

Submissions will now be analysed and a final plan prepared, and it's anticipated the amendment process will be completed in the second half of this year.

Response to climate change

Working with the Tourism and Recreation Group, the GBRMPA's Climate Change Response Team has focused the attention of Marine Park tourism operators on the impacts of climate change on the GBR and their businesses. Recent workshops brought together industry leaders with experts from academia, business, and government.

"The workshops that GBRMPA organised made us realise what this global issue means for us here in Queensland," said Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) director, Daniel Gshwind.

"We see that climate change has serious implications for our industry, and that there are meaningful actions we need to take to create a positive future for GBR marine tourism."

These actions are spelled out in a draft industry action strategy which has three goals:

- To reduce climate change;
- To support the Reef's resilience to climate change by reducing other stressors; and
- To adapt the industry to inevitable changes in weather and ecosystem condition.

The draft industry action strategy will soon be available for comment.

New insurance requirements

From the 1st of October 2007, the GBRMPA will require all tourism operators to carry a minimum of \$10 million in public liability insurance.

In September 2006, the Director General of the Queensland Environment Protection Agency (EPA) wrote to the GBRMPA indicating that the EPA's insurance requirement is a minimum of \$10 million and requested that the GBRMPA complement this approach. Following this request the GBRMPA undertook a benchmarking exercise against other agencies around Australia and \$10 million is the current standard for public liability insurance. Discussions with tourism operators indicate many operators already hold this level of cover.

Should an operator have genuine difficulty obtaining \$10 million insurance cover at a reasonable cost, the GBRMPA will work with them and the insurance industry to investigate options to achieve the required level of cover.

Industry prepared for COTS control

The government-funded Crown-of-thorns Starfish (COTS) Control Program, managed through the GBRMPA and implemented on-ground by the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO), has been running for five years and has eradicated over 95,000 COTS from high-use tourism reef sites.

Since 2000/01, the Federal Government has contributed \$2.4 million to the COTS Control Program, with the latest report (July - December 2006) supporting the recent findings of the Australian Institute of Marine Science study into COTS numbers that shows there is currently no evidence of a new outbreak of COTS in the far northern region.



With the current round of Federal Government funding due to finish in May 2007, the AMPTO have been conducting training for Marine Park tourism operators and their staff to ensure operators can implement control procedures at their own sites to protect against coral damage from the starfish. If you suspect an outbreak please contact the GBRMPA on (07) 4750 0700.

The GBRMPA tops in tourism?

The GBRMPA's Sustainable Tourism Partnership initiative is one of only three finalists in the Destination Award in the World Travel and Tourism Council's Tourism for Tomorrow Awards. It recognises the environmentally sustainable marine tourism that has been achieved in the GBR through a highly successful partnership between the GBRMPA and Reef tourism operators.

The GBRMPA Chairman Virginia Chadwick AO said the nomination for the award confirmed the GBRMPA's Sustainable Tourism Partnership, which involves working closely with tourism operators throughout the GBR, was among the worlds leading examples of best practice in sustainable tourism.

The Tourism for Tomorrow Awards were set up in 1989 by the Federation of Tour Operators to encourage action from all sectors of the industry to protect the environment. This year there were 130 applications from more than 40 countries in the four categories. Site verifications took place on the GBR in a number of regions, and a wide range of tourism operators and organisations were visited. One of the site verifiers also attended part of the TRRAC meeting in Port Douglas to better understand how tourism and recreation representatives play a role in the sustainable management of the Marine Park.

Awards will be finalised in May 2007, so watch this space!

EMC matters!

Permit holders are reminded on 1 April 2007, the standard EMC will increase from \$4.50 per person per day to \$5.00 per person per day. You are also legally required to meet all your EMC obligations. These are:

- Accurately advertise the EMC to your visitors;
- Collect the correct amount of EMC from individual visitors;
- Ensure the full and timely lodgement of all applicable EMC returns and payments to the GBRMPA.

The GBRMPA is getting serious with operators who do not meet these obligations. Particular emphasis will be placed on late payments in the upcoming months. To assist permit holders with EMC obligations, the GBRMPA has introduced two new facilities. These are as follows:

Introduction of BPAY for EMC payments

For those wishing to use the new BPAY facilities, your 2007 EMC Logbooks and Charging Returns contains a BPAY biller code and reference number for each of your quarterly Charging Returns.

Should you have more than one vessel or permit and wish to combine your EMC charges into a single payment – you will need to contact the GBRMPA on (07) 4750 0717 and register as a multi permit user. You will be

provided with a new customer reference number and sent a Summary Remittance Form, which is to accompany your charging returns.

BPAY is available for payments of EMC liabilities from 2007 onwards.



Your 2007 EMC Handbook (purple cover) contains further information on making EMC payments inside the front cover. Contact the EMC Unit on (07) 4750 0764 or (07) 4750 0702 for further information.

Free EMC posters

To help reduce EMC fraud, increase transparency and assist you inform your visitors about what the EMC is used for, the GBRMPA has developed two full colour EMC posters that are available free of charge from our website. We encourage you to download the PDFs, print them out, and display on your booking office wall and your vessel.

To download the file, visit www.gbrmpa.gov.au and look under Tourism and Recreation publications.

Fifteen permits have not met reasonable use

The GBRMPA's policy of reasonable use is taking effect.

On renewal of a special tourism permission, the GBRMPA reviews your use to ensure that you average 50 days per year per vessel in the Marine Park. Over the last year, fifteen permits did not meet

reasonable use and have not been reissued, and a further nine are under review.

If you have any queries about the application of this policy to your Marine Parks permit please contact Vicki Bonanno on (07) 4750 0868 or email v.bonanno@gbrmpa.gov.au.

Bulletin board

- High Standard ECO Certified operators are being promoted by the GBRMPA and Ecotourism Australia at the following major travel trade exhibitions. These are:
 - o Japan Australia Mission (JAM), the premier event showcasing Australian product and businesses to Japanese travel industry managers;
 - o IBT in Berlin, the worlds largest travel trade and consumer show
 - o Australian Tourism Exchange, largest international travel trade show in the southern hemisphere.
- PAAF Fees have increased with CPI, and the new 2007 schedule can be found via www.gbrmpa.gov.au, under Permits/General Information.
- Submissions for the Draft Operational Policy on Whale and Dolphin Conservation in the GBR Marine Park closed on 14 January 2007. Thanks to all those who provided input on this document. For more information visit http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/about_us/policies
- Submissions for the QPWS Draft Whitsunday and Mackay Island Visitor Management Strategy closed on 2 March 2007. For more information please contact David Marshall, Planning Officer QPWS (Rockhampton) on 07 4936 0567 or on david.marshall@epa.qld.gov.au.
- The Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, or DEH, has changed its

name to the Department of the Environment and Water Resources, or DEW. Their new website address is www.environment.gov.au

- After seven years studying the GBR, the Cooperative Research Centre for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (CRC Reef) has finally closed its doors. The knowledge base and partnerships created by CRC Reef are being built on by the Marine and Tropical Science Research Facility (MTSRF), part of the Commonwealth Environment Research Fund through the Australian Department of the Environment and Water Resources.
- The MTSRF funding is managed by the Reef and Rainforest Research Facility (RRRC) and officially opened its doors on 8 February 2007. For more information visit www.rrrc.org.au

Going Green

This is a call for any operators who have found great ways to make their boats or offices, or both, more environmentally sustainable. We know you're a very creative and innovative bunch, and we know you're doing all you can to make a difference. So if you have a great idea that you would like to share, please email tourrec@gbrmpa.gov.au so we can spread the green word. Just another way we can work together to keep the Great Barrier Reef 'GREAT'!

High standard operators

Peter Boundy of Cairns Dive Centre felt it was appropriate to make his business ECO Certified as he has a long-term interest in the reef and ensuring it is there for his grandchildren.

On the ECO Certification process, Peter says "Once I started, I realised it presented me with the opportunity to totally re-evaluate my business, from marketing and business plans through to operational manuals and staff position statements".

Peter sees the tying of ECO Certification to obtaining 15-year permits and gaining extra marketing advantages as a clever initiative by the GBRMPA because it gives businesses the added boost to become certified. Peter urges all operators to become ECO Certified, as such positive actions can lead to a better protected reef that will be more resilient and better able to cope with the pressures of coral bleaching, climate change and COTS.

To join the ranks of high standard operators contact the GBRMPA on (07) 4750 0775



Would you like to receive this newsletter electronically and make it easier to share this information with your staff?

Please provide your details to Nicole Robbins on (07) 4750 0775 or email tourrec@gbrmpa.gov.au

Your contributions, ideas and feedback are welcome. Contact Dean Miller in GBRMPA's Tourism and Recreation Group by phone (07) 4750 0715 or email: d.miller@gbrmpa.gov.au.