



From the Deck

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NEWSLETTER - 31

GBRMPA roundup

In August and September, over 500 school students from Reef Guardian Schools across the Great Barrier Reef catchment took part in the GBRMPA's "Sustaining Biodiversity" Future Leaders Eco Challenge. Tourist operators lent their support to a number of activities in this annual event. Twenty six students from schools across the Port Douglas area joined marine biologists from Quicksilver Cruises – Reef Biosearch to explore the intertidal zone of Four Mile Beach and discover its biodiversity, and in

the Whitsundays over 20 students travelled to Hamilton Island, courtesy of Fantasea Cruises, to participate in activities with students from Hamilton Island State School.

A full site impact assessment report of Douglas Shoal is being prepared following the grounding of the *Shen Neng 1* in April 2010. When the report is finalised we will have a better picture of the damage done to the Reef and what the recovery periods are likely to be. The ship's owners will be asked to undertake appropriate clean up

and rehabilitation to improve the natural recovery rate of the damaged reef, while ensuring action at the site is beneficial and does not introduce additional impacts to the environment.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has recently updated the Responsible Reef Practices for Tourism Operators. Make sure you are up-to-date with best practices and are sharing this with your guests by going to www.gbrmpa.gov.au/onboard (under High Standards). A hard copy is also available by contacting Vicki Bonanno on (07) 4750 0868.

Based on the September forecasts from the Bureau of Meteorology and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), it looks to be a better than expected forecast for coral bleaching in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park as we head into 2010/11. Further details are in the item on page 3.

Reef HQ Aquarium has secured \$1.7 million in funding from the Australian Government for essential capital works projects planned for 2010/11. See the separate item on page 2 for more.



CLIMATE CLIPS

Responding to Bleaching

Following an uncharacteristically warm winter sea season of temperatures up to 1°C above average (and forecast to persist through October and November) the predicted La Niña event is expected to bring vigorous monsoon and tropical storm activity, resulting in a cooling of sea surface temperatures (SST) around the time of the summer maximum (SST) when corals are most at risk of bleaching.

While a La Niña may lessen the risk of coral bleaching, this type



of weather system typically sees a higher occurrence than normal of cyclones and increased rainfall, which may stress some reefs. With this in mind, now is the time to make sure your operation is adequately prepared for the coming cyclone season. The GBRMPA will continue to assess the risk of bleaching throughout the summer season.

This year has been a horror year for coral in Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Coral bleaching in Southeast Asia is the worst recorded since the 1998 mass bleaching event, with reports of 60 to 80 per cent bleaching from Thailand and Indonesia, and up to 100 per cent bleaching in susceptible coral species. This trend looks likely to continue elsewhere, with the Caribbean on a high bleaching alert.



TAKING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

A recent survey of the Great Barrier Reef (the Reef) tourism industry found that while climate change is the prominent top-of-mind environmental threat to the Reef, (41 per cent), 43 per cent of respondents thought it was primarily the government's responsibility to reduce the tourism industry's climate change footprint. Yet 87 per cent of respondents were using the GBRMPA's programs and products to take action.

The telephone survey of 82 Reef marine tourism industry stakeholders including operators, industry associations, Regional Tourism Organisations and government stakeholders was undertaken in April / May 2010 and looked at:

- Climate change awareness and concern
- Awareness, usage and effectiveness of the GBRMPA's climate change initiatives
- Climate change actions being undertaken
- Barriers preventing taking action on climate change.

A recent Tourism Queensland survey found 10 per cent of Queensland's tourism industry had measured their carbon footprint. This compares with 50 per cent of Reef tourism operators from our survey, placing the Reef tourism industry ahead of the pack on climate change.

A summary of survey results will be available soon on the GBRMPA website.

Marine Tourism Climate Incident Response Plan

Great Barrier Reef tourism industry leaders, facilitated by the GBRMPA, are developing a Marine Tourism Climate Incident Response Plan (the Plan) to help the industry respond to and manage climate change incidents such as coral bleaching and severe cyclones.

A series of scenarios will be workshopped with tourism industry representatives and a range of organisations such as Tourism Queensland, Queensland Parks and Wildlife and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council, to help

determine the most appropriate responses.

A review of the Marine Tourism Contingency Plan will take place in 2011 to complement the Plan.

The need for a Marine Tourism Climate Incident Response Plan (the Plan) was identified in the Great Barrier Reef Tourism Climate Change Action Strategy 2009 – 2012 (available online at www.gbrmpa.gov.au/onboard/home/high_standards/climate_change_action).

Compliance matters

Between 1 July 2009 and 30 June 2010, 211 compliance actions were taken for Commonwealth offences, including 30 prosecutions and over \$290,000 fines were issued.

Offence	Far Northern	Cairns/ Cooktown	Townsville/ Whitsunday	Mackay/ Capricorn	TOTAL
Commercial Line/ Net Fishing	2	16	4	11	33
Commercial Line, Unattached Dory	9	3	10	17	39
Commercial Trawling	4	3	10	17	34
Indigenous Hunting/ Fishing (State)	2	16	8	2	28
Recreational Visitors *	0	58	97	44	199
Tourism Vessels *	3	30	38	10	81
Shipping Vessels	0	1	1	2	4
Groundings Commercial Vessels	1	0	0	2	3
Groundings Recreational Vessels	1	1	2	2	6
Groundings Tourism Vessels	0	2	6	2	10
Moorings	0	17	1	1	19
TOTAL	22	147	177	110	456

* Includes Fishing, Unpermitted Activity, Breach of Permit, Plan of Management, and State Offences

Changes to the management of permits and EMC

In early 2010 the GBRMPA began implementing a new integrated management system for permits and EMC, known as Reef Permits. Plans are underway to test the system with tourism operators before a phased rollout to all permittees.

Reef Permits will offer an easy-to-use online system to submit permit applications, report EMC, and make bookings to Plan of Management Areas and anchorages. The new system is expected to make previous manual, time-consuming tasks quicker and easier.

Reef Permits brings with it some new terminology to be aware of:

- Operations – the separate components that make up a permit. For example, you may hold a permit with operations for a pontoon, a vessel, a guided tour and beach hire. EMC data and payments must be supplied for every operation under a permit, even if you didn't operate.
- Authorised Contacts – Reef Permits allows permittees to establish authorised contacts for their various permits. An Authorised Contact may act on behalf of the permittee in a variety of authorised roles, such as administration, permit applications, bookings and EMC management.

Reef HQ Aquarium

Reef HQ Aquarium is the national education centre for the Great Barrier Reef, recognised nationally and internationally as a centre of excellence in environmental education. After 23 years of successful operation, the Aquarium's age and the inherent stresses of salt water aquariums means the infrastructure requires attention to ensure the facility's ongoing operational effectiveness.

The Australian Government has provided \$1.7 million funding for 15 capital works projects to ensure Reef HQ meets contemporary Australian Standards, is operationally efficient and meets world's best practice in aquarium life support system

infrastructure for the world's largest living coral reef aquarium.

Some of the significant projects for 2010/11 will be the complete refurbishment of the Aquarium's first floor, construction of new living exhibits, and a new conference/training centre for up to 80 people. The new living exhibits will provide visitors with a "touch free" yet highly interactive experience with marine creatures. The conference/training centre will be supported by state-of-the-art integrated computer technology.

Correctly advertising the EMC

As a Marine Park tour operator, your obligation to collect the Environmental Management Charge (EMC) includes correctly representing the amount of the EMC when advertising fare prices. It is your responsibility to ensure consistency across all media including websites, brochures, television advertising, tax invoices, receipts, etc.

It is a criminal offence under the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 to make a false or misleading representation of the EMC and compliance checks will be underway over the coming months. For more information on how to correctly advertise the EMC, see www.gbrmpa.gov.au/onboard (under EMC).

Going Green

Banning plastic bags grows green credentials

Agnes Water and Seventeen Seventy are raising the bar in the fight to attract the increasing green travel dollar with the war cry **Ban the Bag, Save our Reef**.

They hope to become Queensland's first town to go plastic bag free, with many local businesses behind the initiative and already trialling plastic bag alternatives, including reusable bags and cardboard boxes.

Discovery Coast Tourism and Commerce Inc (DCTC) secretary Georgia Hughes said the **Ban the Bag**,

Save Our Reef campaign had been talked about for years.

"With turtles, whales and birdlife being a major tourist attraction, along with our town's unique natural environments, banning plastic bags in our retail outlets and educating the community is one positive step towards preserving our natural assets for future generations to enjoy," Georgia said.

"We also see this as a strategic marketing move, positioning our town as a sustainable destination to actively attract the increasing number of "green" travellers, particularly those from Europe."

"It's as simple as asking 'Do you have your own bags?', 'Would you like to buy a reusable bag?' or even 'Would you like a box to pack your groceries?'"

L-R: Georgia Hughes (DCTC), Janelle Fielding (Agnes Water Tavern) Erin Schultz (DC Cruisers) and Katherine Mergard (1770 Environmental Tours) say "No" to plastic bags



Cruise Indigo

Our profiled High Standard Operator...

David Stielow, owner of Cruise Indigo, has spent his whole working career on the Great Barrier Reef and chose to become ECO Certified as a way to ensure his business was looking after the Reef. David is passionate about making sure there remains a vibrant Reef to show our future generations.

"Being a small business, ECO Certification took us six months all up", David says. "It made us step back and look at many of our practices including interpretation, guest experience, efficiency within our own operation and care of the environment."

Cruise Indigo offers day sailing excursions on the traditional Banjo Paterson and evening cruising on the iconic MV Denison Star around the beautiful Whitsundays.



For Cruise Indigo, ECO Certification is an ongoing self-motivated process and a linchpin for moderating and evaluating the business. While David recognises the upfront costs of certification to his business, he is a strong advocate for its benefits.

The GBRMPA's High Standard Tourism Program recognises the Eco Certification Program at the Ecotourism and Advanced Ecotourism levels. To find out more, contact us on **(07) 4750 0868**.

CONTACT US:

Your contributions, ideas and feedback are welcome. Please call us on **(07) 4750 0775** or email tourec@gbbrmpa.gov.au

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BULLETIN BOARD

- Tourism buyers at this year's **Australian Tourism Exchange** in Adelaide were very interested in ECO Certification. Some wholesale agents were looking to create packages of only certified products.
- The Queensland Department of Education and Training advise that the **Course in Maritime Bareboat Briefing Operations** has received national accreditation. Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE, Cannonvale and the Whitsunday Sailing Club have both indicated they will be offering the course.
- The GBRMPA Chairman has considered the **review of the new and spare Special Tourism Permissions** and approved that there be no action to allocate these permissions in 2010. The next review is scheduled for 2012.
- Congratulations to all the operators and crew who completed **humpback whale-specific Sightings Network forms**, recording locations and activities of whales during the whale season. Look for more details on other sightings recorded in the next Sightings Network report.