

SeaRead

Marine Park news from catchment to coral



Australian Government
Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority



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Tourism Research Partnership sets benchmark for Whale watching

For many people whales are among the most attractive and mysterious of marine animals. The unique appeal and the close approach of dwarf minke whales to vessels and swimmers in the northern waters of the Great Barrier Reef have provided opportunities both for tourism and research programs.

To ensure the sustainable management of the dwarf minke whale tourism industry in North Queensland tourism operators are working with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and researchers to help discover more about the whales.

Ms Virginia Chadwick, Chairman of the GBRMPA said it is marvellous to see that with conservation and tourism working together the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is able to provide the world's only swimming with dwarf minke whale program.

The Minke Whale Project is a joint initiative of researchers at James Cook University, the Museum of Tropical Queensland and Undersea Explorer and is made possible through contributions from the GBRMPA.

Team leader Dr Alastair Birtles, of James Cook University said the partnership between tourism, marine park managers and research has increased the benefits for all involved and most importantly the greater protection of the dwarf minke whales.

"It's an absolutely essential operation. Tourism operators benefit from our research and we benefit from them. There is still much to learn about dwarf minke whales and their interactions with swimmers. The cooperation from tourism operators has been instrumental in supporting our research and increasing our understanding of the dwarf minke on the reef," Dr Birtles said.

The close partnership has allowed for the development and implementation of best practices when encountering the whales.

"The vast majority of tourists want to do the right thing. They want to have the experience of seeing these amazing animals up close but they don't want to harm them or affect their natural behaviour. By working together we are able to learn more about the whales and the tourists get a much better experience," said Dr Peter Arnold of the Museum of Tropical Queensland.

Tourism operators distribute questionnaires to their passengers, to assist with the gathering of information on visitors' experiences and their observations of the whales' behaviour.

"Since 1996 Undersea Explorer has provided us with berths and other support so that we can conduct research out on the reef," said Dr Birtles.



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Message from the chairman

the Hon Virginia Chadwick



Happy New Year! I hope everyone had a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful and joyous new year. Welcome to the first edition of *SeaRead* for 2005.

2005 looks set to be another positive and productive year for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority as we continue to build and expand on the strong community relationships established over the past few years.

At the end of 2004, we commissioned an independent consultant to review the way we engage with communities along the Great Barrier Reef coast and to provide advice on how we can effectively build on the links established with communities and industries over the zoning process.

The review specifically focused on those people most affected by the Representative Areas Program and will soon be presented to the Minister for Environment and Heritage.

One of our main objectives in 2005 is to produce the very first water quality and ecosystem health status report for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. We are currently completing a selection process to employ a science provider to undertake the research needed to produce this first report.

In light of our desire to strengthen links with local communities, we will continue to get out of the office and into the regions throughout 2005, attending shows and events, visiting Community Access Points, supporting Reef Guardian Schools and engaging with industries and stakeholders.

I look forward to working with you and sharing our achievements and experiences with you over the year to come.

Regards

Virginia Chadwick
Chairman, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

END

continued from page 1

"All dedicated operators provide the researchers with data such as sightings of whales, passenger numbers, as well as images and video footage to help identify individual whales and assess any cumulative impacts of swim-with-whales activities," he said.

From 2003, all commercial swim-with-whale activities on the reef have been conducted under permits from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. At the same time, the Authority commenced funding for a proposed six-year research program to determine the sustainability of human interactions with dwarf minke whales for the conservation and protection of the whales.

Dr Arnold said JCU Research Officer Matt Curnock was also an integral part of the research program along with the owners and crew of the Undersea Explorer.



The pictures of the dwarf minke whales are courtesy of Matthew Curnock, JCU

END

GBRMPA staff receive Australia Day awards

Six GBRMPA staff including five women were presented with Australia Day achievement awards recently for their dedication and hard work towards helping to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

Dr Leanne Fernandes, Manager of the RAP Taskforce and Belinda Jago, Senior Planner received the Australia Day awards for their commitment to the implementation of the new Zoning Plan.

Fiona McDonald, Director of Legal Services was awarded for her hard work in developing the new regulations for the Zoning Plan and for her ongoing dedication to successfully implementing new legislation necessary to help manage and protect the Great Barrier Reef.

Dr Kirstin Dobbs, Manager of Species Conservation was awarded for her ongoing commitment and effort towards the protection of threatened species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Sharyn Kirkby, Travel Coordinator during the zoning implementation, was recognised for her patience and support towards all staff.

Michael O'Keefe, Manager of the GBRMPA's Canberra office also received the award for his exceptional liaison and continued support and dedication towards the GBRMPA's programs during 2004.



Australia Day award recipients (back from left) Dr Kirstin Dobbs, Dr Leanne Fernandes, Fiona McDonald (front) Sharyn Kirkby and Belinda Jago

END

Our Reef named one of the healthiest

The Great Barrier Reef has been named one of the healthiest coral reefs in the world.

The Status of Coral Reefs of the World: 2004 report, compiled by the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) revealed Australia is leading the rest of the world by a large margin in conservation of coral reefs.

This is largely due to the recent Australian Government initiative to protect one third of the Reef as marine sanctuaries and Australia's intention to improve the Reef's water quality through better management of the land that drains into it.

Report Editor from AIMS, Dr Clive Wilkinson said without such actions, Australia's reefs could easily go the way of those in other countries.

"More and more reefs are being smothered by sediment run-off caused by poor land use and poor coastal development; more are being polluted by towns and resorts; more are being over fished; and more reefs in Asia, the Caribbean and Africa are still being bombed and poisoned for fish," Dr Wilkinson said.

"With these pressures, a quarter of the world's remaining reefs are under imminent risk of collapse through human pressures and another quarter are under long term threat of collapse."

The report stated that reefs of most concern are in the wider Caribbean and the nearby Atlantic where catastrophic degradation has seen live coral cover on many reefs drop from 50% cover 25 years ago to 10% today. The most damaged reefs are in the Persian Gulf where 65% have been destroyed. Pressures from booming populations in South and Southeast Asia are taking their toll with 45 and 38% of reefs (respectively) considered beyond repair.

The new report is based on more than a decade of reef surveys by the AIMS long-term monitoring team along with 240 contributors from 96 countries.



END



An aerial photo of a bleached reef

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is working with Coastwatch and charter operators to help detect and monitor coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef as part of the BleachWatch (Aerial) Program.

Jo Johnson, Project Manager for the Climate Change Response Team said Coastwatch and charter operators involved in BleachWatch play a vital role in the GBRMPA's ability to monitor and assess bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef.

"The pilots have a unique view of the Great Barrier Reef and are able to detect bleaching events that may otherwise be overlooked by people on the water," Jo said.

"The pilots generally monitor reefs they may regularly fly over and report signs of bleaching to the GBRMPA. They also provide us with photographs of both bleached and unbleached reefs."

Jo said the aerial component of BleachWatch is the most effective method for obtaining an overview of where bleaching is occurring over spatial scales that are relevant to management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

"Because of the large size of the Great Barrier Reef, early detection of coral bleaching is very difficult and resource intensive, so programs such as BleachWatch are vital to help monitor the health of the Reef."

BleachWatch (Aerial) is just one component of the GBRMPA's BleachWatch Program, which plays a vital role in detecting the onset of bleaching and is an important part of the GBRMPA's coral bleaching response strategy.

Tourism operators also play a vital role in assessing coral bleaching by participating in the BleachWatch (Professional) Program. Operators submit weekly reports during the summer season on conditions at the sites they visit.

According to Jo, even recreational users, students and individuals can be involved in BleachWatch by keeping an eye out for signs of coral bleaching and reporting observations to the GBRMPA or online at www.grbmpa.gov.au.

For more information about how you can be involved in BleachWatch email bleachwatch@grbmpa.gov.au



END

What's that slick?

Residents and visitors to Queensland coastal communities can help to protect the Great Barrier Reef by keeping an eye out for oil slicks and reporting these to the appropriate authorities.

Manager of Shipping, James Aston says the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Maritime Safety Queensland, Environment Protection Authority and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority provide a coordinated response to any sightings or reports of oil spills.

"Reports of oil spills need to be confirmed as it is sometimes difficult to tell if the slick is really just coral spawn or an algal bloom" James said.

"Oil and fuel slicks are the only ones that pose a threat to the Reef, so your help in identifying oil spills is particularly important."

The pictures below will help you to identify the differences between an oil spill and an algal bloom.



Oil in water



An oil spill

Photos courtesy of Maritime Safety Queensland



The algae *Trichodesmium*

If you see an oil spill in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, contact the [EPA Hotline on 1300 130 372](tel:1300130372) urgently.

END

World Wetlands Month

Residents living in the Great Barrier Reef catchment are being urged to consider the important role wetlands play in keeping our water clean as part of World Wetlands Month throughout February.

Hugh Yorkston, Director, Water Quality and Coastal Development says World Wetlands Day on February 2 was an ideal opportunity to highlight the importance of wetland areas and to recognise those landowners and land managers who are doing great things to revegetate and rehabilitate wetlands.

"While most of us know something about wetlands, a lot of people are unaware of their immense value to our environment, our lifestyle and economy."

"Wetlands act as a buffer between land use activities and nearby waterways. In particular, they help trap fine sediment and nutrients (from fertilisers and animal wastes) before they reach waterways" Hugh said.

"Many farmers and other land managers have been working with landcare groups, industry and governments to rehabilitate wetlands in their area".

Wetlands are under pressure and are affected by a range of human activities including urban development, land clearing and filling, stock grazing, cropping, dumping of rubbish and littering.

Hugh said, by looking after and rebuilding these vital water features, farmers and community groups are helping to reverse the declining quality of water entering the Reef.

Wetlands provide water passage and storage, regulate water discharge from catchments, contribute to flood mitigation and protect the landscape from erosion.

"It is essential that we all recognise the importance of wetlands and work together to protect them."

In the Great Barrier Reef catchment, wetland areas often reflect the health of the catchment and are essential in linking the catchment with the coast.

Wetlands occur in many different sizes, forms and locations, from coral reefs, seagrass meadows, mud flats and mangroves to lakes, dams and constructed wetlands in urban areas.

Wetlands are also vital breeding and nursery grounds for fish, crab and other aquatic species and provide habitats for birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects.

Hugh said all levels of government are also focusing on maintaining and protecting wetlands in the Great Barrier Reef Catchment through initiatives like the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Wetlands Protection Program and the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan.



Aligator Waterhole, Tedlands Creek. Photo: Vern Veitch 2004

END

A Smithsonian Fellowship - 15 weeks of wonderful opportunities but also hard work!



Jon (far right) held and attended many workshops during his Fellowship, many of which were translated.

Jon Day, Director of the Conservation, Biodiversity & World Heritage Group recently returned after almost four months overseas undertaking a Queensland-Smithsonian Fellowship. Jon used his Fellowship to work with marine managers, policy makers and conservation non-government organisations in the United States and in Panama, Belize and Colombia.

"I was fortunate enough to be able to meet and speak with a wide range of people from commercial fishermen in Panama and Belize; to the National Marine Sanctuary Managers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) from across the United States; to local and international non-government organisations; and even a meeting in the Pentagon with high-ranking military personnel involved in environmental matters," Jon said.

During the 15 weeks he was away, Jon gave presentations and workshops with the aim of informing others as to how the GBRMPA manages the Great Barrier Reef as well as developing new approaches for planning and managing marine resources in other areas.

Jon was able to draw upon his 18 years experience as a planner and manager with the GBRMPA and specifically the lessons learnt from the Representative Areas Program as part of the recent rezoning of the Marine Park.

"I had dozens of meetings with government personnel and non-government organisations, but also made over 30 formal presentations including the Keynote presentation at the US Coral Reef Task Force meeting in Florida. I was also the main presenter in three major marine management workshops and a participant in a further three workshops, so it was all pretty hectic," he said.

"One aspect I found really pleasing was the high level of admiration from every country I visited for what the Australian Government has been able to achieve in the Great Barrier Reef, particularly over the last five years."

Jon said Australia's experience with marine management/planning is increasingly being sought around the world, particularly in coral reef management.

"There is strong interest from the Panama Government and several international non-government organisations following on from my visit, so it will be interesting to see what might eventuate," he said.

During his trip Jon was fortunate to be able to take advantage of a wealth of opportunities offered including spending a week with experts from the Smithsonian Tropical Research Station in the islands off the Pacific coast of Panama, a visit to Cartagena in Columbia, a week in the Florida Keys as part of an official NOAA visit, and visits to several coral cays in Belize.

END

Lifework of NOAA scientist recognised on Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority recently recognised long-time National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientist and administrator, the late Nancy Foster, with the naming of a specific reef within the Great Barrier Reef in her honour.

Ms Foster becomes only the second American with a reef designation in the Great Barrier Reef, the other being ecologist and author Rachel Carson, best known for her book "The Silent Spring".

"The Nancy Foster Reef commemorates the lifework of a conservationist whose impact on her peers and the natural environment is a shining example to future generations," said Virginia Chadwick, GBRMPA Chairman.

"The Great Barrier Reef possesses one of the most beautiful environments on the planet and it is only fitting that a reef be named for a person of Nancy's calibre and dedication to the marine environment," she said.

Nancy Foster served in a variety of positions during a 23-year career at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the USA. She was a strong supporter of the establishment of NOAA's coral program as well as the establishment of NOAA's Office of Habitat Restoration, the National Marine Mammal Tissue Bank and NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Program. Ms Foster was also the driving force in the development of the US Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Act.

Ms Foster presented the keynote address at the 1998 inaugural International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium in Australia where she spoke of the need to embrace a broad view of marine protected areas: as essential reservoirs of biodiversity, as foundations of cultural integrity and diversity and as focal points for collaboration between the diversity of stakeholders.

Joseph Geraci, Ms Foster's husband, said this recognition is a tremendous honour in Nancy's memory.

"I know she would be both thrilled and humbled to be the recipient of this designation. She was a person who was passionately concerned about the oceans and recognised the importance of coral reef ecosystems to the overall health of the planet," he said.

Jon Day, Director of Conservation, Biodiversity and World Heritage at the GBRMPA was present at a special dedication ceremony in Miami in recognition of Nancy Foster's work as a conservationist and coral reef advocate.

The Nancy Foster Reef is a mid-shelf reef located in the Mackay - Capricorn Section of the Great Barrier Reef at Latitude 2122' South, Longitude 151 22' East. It is particularly special area in that while it has been declared a 'no-take' area since 1988, it is now the highly protected core in a much bigger 'no-take' zone due to the zoning changes implemented in July 2004.

The naming of sites on the Great Barrier Reef follows a process agreed some time ago by the Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia (CGNA). The CGNA has a broad representation of agencies with interest in naming locations across the country.



Jon Day (left) with Tim Keeney, Deputy Assistant Secretary, NOAA, at the formal dedication ceremony held in Miami, Florida for the naming of Nancy Foster Reef.

END



Schools committed to guarding the Reef in 2005

The Reef Guardian Schools Program for 2005 has begun with new resources and support available to teachers and students Australia-wide to assist them in helping to make a difference in their communities and keep the Reef great.

About 140 schools have already registered for the Program and most will begin implementing their Reef Guardian activities in the first term of the year.

Most schools are located throughout Queensland, however some have also registered from as far as Victoria and the Northern Territory.

Angela Colliver, National Education Programs Manager said the Reef Guardian Schools Program enables schools to be recognised as national leaders in sustainable living.

"We receive much support from local communities, businesses and industries for the Program with many schools working in partnership with these groups to share messages in their community," Ms Colliver said.

"It is important to remember that Australia's marine and land environments are all connected so even school's located thousands of kilometres from the Great Barrier Reef can help to protect it by learning to live, work and play in a sustainable way."

The Reef Guardian Schools Program is still open to schools that wish to register for the 2005 Program. Schools can register at www.reefed.edu.au/guardians or by contacting the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on (07) 4750 0850.

END

LMACs are:

- Cape York Marine Advisory Group
- Port Douglas LMAC
- Cairns LMAC
- Mission Beach LMAC
- Hinchinbrook LMAC
- Townsville LMAC
- Whitsunday LMAC
- Mackay LMAC
- Capricorn Coast LMAC
- Gladstone LMAC
- Burnett LMAC

END



Angela Colliver and Doug Baird, Chair of the Port Douglas LMAC and Manager of Quicksilver Connections present the Reef Guardian award to Mossman State School aboard a Quicksilver vessel

Community efforts help to protect Reef

Mossman and Port Douglas communities have been working together with local Reef Guardian Schools on a number of projects to help raise awareness about the Great Barrier Reef and what people can do to help protect it for the future.

Vilma Minisini, teacher at Mossman State School, said a range of community support has been given to the school for its environmental projects including the council assisting students with water sampling, local businesses providing funds and resources for projects and parents and other members of the communities donating their skills and time.

"The whole school has participated in a range of projects to help protect the reef, many of these we couldn't have completed without the support of the community," she said.

The school, with support from Quicksilver Connections and Lotsa Printing, produced a Reef Guardian School brochure, which includes best reef practices. The brochure has been handed out to locals as well as being onboard Quicksilver Connections for the tourists visiting the area.

In addition to the brochure, Quicksilver Connections also supported and worked with the school in the production of a student video.

The video will show the students participating in the many different environmental projects undertaken at the school such as picking up litter, screen painting calico bags, and recycling waste for mulch and compost on the schools vegetable and front gardens.

The video once finalised will be played to passengers on board Quicksilver Connections as part of their interpretative program. It includes important messages about what people should do to help protect the reef whether they are their visiting the reef for the day or when they are at home or work.

Miss Minisini said the students hope that the video will educate visitors to the area about things that can have an impact on the reef, like water pollution and plastic bags.

"The students have shown dedication to their reef projects, they want to help protect the reef for their kids," she said.

END

Reef Guardians say “no” to plastic bags

Queensland schools involved in the Reef Guardian Schools Program are helping to minimise plastic bags in an effort to protect the Great Barrier Reef and other marine environments.

According to Angela Colliver, National Education Programs Manager at GBRMPA, Reef Guardian students and teachers have implemented many initiatives to help minimise the use of plastic bags in their communities.

“These initiatives have been very successful with schools playing a key role in empowering individuals and communities to say no to plastic bags to help protect our coasts and oceans,” Ms Colliver said.

To help support the schools’ plastic bag initiatives, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has supplied calico bags to 55 Reef Guardian Schools with an interest in developing and implementing projects to reduce plastics. The calico bags were purchased with funds provided by the Natural Heritage Trust.

Ms Colliver said students have designed Reef protection images and painted or screen printed these onto the calico bags, making them available to students and their parents, as well as many local businesses and their local community.

“With the success of the calico bag projects in 2004, many more schools will want to implement these activities into their Reef Guardian Programs next year. Therefore, we will once again be making calico bags available to schools thanks to a generous \$10,000 grant from the Natural Heritage Trust,” Ms Colliver said.



A student paints a calico bag at the North Keppel Environmental Education Centre

END

Regional Partnership to Keep it Great

The Burnett Mary Regional Group for Natural Resources Inc (BMRG) has joined forces with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) to help protect the Reef into the future.

GBRMPA National Education Manager, Angela Colliver, said the partnership would see the BMRG take part in the Authority’s Reef Guardian Schools program by providing \$10,000 per year to promote environmentally friendly activities and educate students about one of the nation’s most cherished icons.

“We are delighted to get the support of the Burnett Mary Regional Group. Australia’s marine and land environments are all connected so even if your school is thousands of kilometres from the Great Barrier Reef learning to live, work and play in a sustainable way will help protect and preserve many of our precious marine environments, including the Reef,” Ms Colliver said.

The Reef Guardian Schools program is an innovative program that enables schools to be recognised as national leaders in sustainable living and the environmental management of the Great Barrier Reef by focusing on current issues affecting the Reef and other marine environments.

There are currently six schools in the Burnett Mary region that have been named Reef Guardian Schools: St Mary’s College-Maryborough, Sharon State School, Woongarra State School, Yarrilee State School (Hervey Bay), Burnett Heads State School and Agnes Waters State School.

BMRG’s Executive Officer, Dr Deborah Scott, said the new partnership was an excellent way to reach out to the broader community and raise the awareness of residents about their connection to the marine environment.

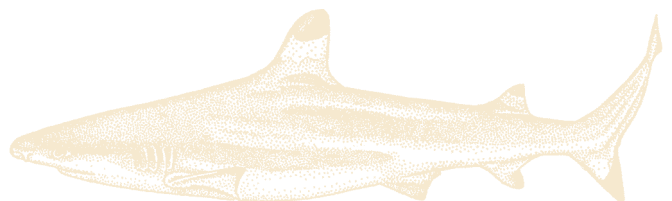
“Combining forces with the GBRMPA is a great opportunity. It will add a marine component to our Schools Program and it will help communities understand that even if you don’t live near the ocean or Great Barrier Reef the things we do on land affect the ocean,” Dr Scott said.

END

SeaWeek 2005 SOS - Save our Sharks

March 6 – 13 is SeaWeek 2005 and this year’s theme is SOS - Save Our Sharks. SeaWeek is an initiative of the Marine Education Society of Australasia (MESA). For great educational material and links to useful shark websites and other information visit www.reefed.edu.au or log on to www.mesa.edu.au/seaweek.asp

END



Experimental Reefs Set to Reopen for Fishing

Four reefs involved in the Effects of Line Fishing Experiment are scheduled to re-open to fishing on 6 March 2005.

The experiment began in 1995 to directly investigate the effects on fish stocks of different levels of fishing pressure and to investigate the effect of zoning reefs on the Great Barrier Reef as 'no take' areas.

Dr Phil Cadwallader, Director of Fisheries of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) said the reef line fishery is of major importance and a key consideration for managers and stakeholders of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Effects of Line Fishing experiment is being conducted by researchers from the Cooperative Reef Research Centre and is being funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and the GBRMPA.

The experiment includes research on a range of target and non-target fish species and other organisms during controlled changes in fishing pressure. It is also providing a wealth of biological information on these fish species.

"The information being collected is giving managers and stakeholders solid information about the reef's responses to changes in fishing activities, which is vital in effectively assessing and developing management arrangements to ensure the sustainability of the fishery," Dr Cadwallader said.

For more information on the reopening of these reefs and the ELF Experiment, visit www.gbrmpa.gov.au and www.reef.CRC.org.au.



END

Keeping the Whitsundays blue!



Beautiful Whitehaven Beach, the Whitsundays



Fantasea staff displaying the environmentally friendly blue bags

Whitsundays based tourism operator Fantasea cruises recently delivered a free re-useable shopping bag to every household on the Whitsunday Coast in an initiative aimed at protecting the marine environment.

The bags were produced in blue rather than green with the message 'Keeping the Whitsundays Blue' in an effort to focus attention to the damage plastic bags are having on the marine environment.

"We are amazed at the number of plastic shopping bags we find floating in the ocean on our daily trips," said Fantasea Cruises managing director David Hutchen.

"Most of these plastic bags have been discarded and have found their way into creeks and rivers which flow in the sea," he said.

"These bags end up wrapped around or consumed by our marine creatures – particularly turtles, dolphins and dugongs."

With the increasing use of re-useable shopping bags at supermarkets, Fantasea Cruises developed and distributed more than 4,000 bags.

The initiative has helped to raise awareness in the Whitsundays to the decline of water quality entering the reef lagoon and that what goes into drains, creeks and rivers may end up in the ocean.

In addition to the re-useable bags, Fantasea Cruises ensures its operations are environmentally sustainable. They have met the Eco –certification requirements for Advanced Eco-accreditation and a 15-year Marine Parks permit.

"We operate in a beautiful environment and we have a duty to protect it for future generations," Mr Hutchen said.

Operators who are interested in becoming Eco-certified can contact **Ecotourism Australia on 07 3229 5550** or visit www.ecotourism.org.au for more information.

Operators who have a recognised certification are eligible to apply to for a 15-year permit, for further details contact the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on 07 4750 0700 or e-mail tourec@gbmpa.gov.au.

END

Creature Feature **Whale Shark (*Rhincodon typus*)**



- The ancestry of the whale shark dates back to 245-65 million years ago.
- They are largest living fish and can grow up to 12 metres.
- Although they have approximately 3,000 tiny teeth, they do not use them while feeding.
- They are able to open their mouths to a great width (greater than 1m) to optimise feeding, while they can sieve prey items as small as 1mm through the fines mesh of the gill-rakers.
- They feed on minute organisms including krill, crab larvae and jellyfish.
- They are harmless to humans.

END

A new view at Reef HQ

Reef HQ recently launched its new "Behind-the-Scenes" tour that allows visitors to see for themselves what it takes to keep corals colourful.

The Behind-the-Scenes tour takes visitors into the realm of aquarists and marine biologists where they can witness the life support systems that keep Reef HQ exhibits at precise temperature and nutrient levels.

Guests are taken through workshops and laboratories to arrive on a platform over 3million litres of water and participate in feeding sharks and other animals in the main Coral Reef and Predator exhibits.

The new tour is an excellent opportunity for locals and visitors alike to see first hand what it takes to make Reef HQ a world-leading aquarium. The tour offers a completely different view of a Townsville icon, the world's largest living-coral aquarium.

Reef HQ offers a fantastic display of creatures and corals that make up live on the Reef. Exhibits include brightly coloured reef fish, a full array of hard and soft corals, reef sharks, rays, giant clams and our very own green sea turtle.

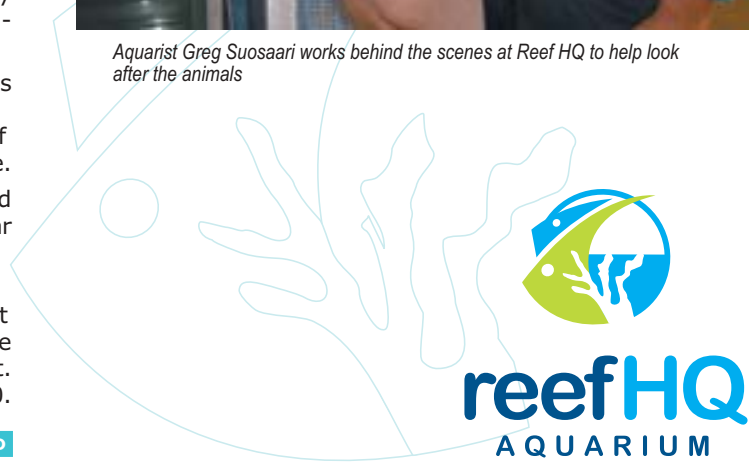
Guests are invited to join talks and tours that are provided throughout the aquarium each day including the ever popular Dive Show presented from within the Predator Exhibit at 11am and the Animal Feeding tour at 3pm.

The Behind-the-Scenes tour is available at 2pm daily at an additional fee (\$19.50) and is limited to just ten people per day. Participants should wear closed-in shoes and a hat. Further information is available from Reef HQ on 4750 0800.

END



Aquarist Greg Suosaari works behind the scenes at Reef HQ to help look after the animals



Reef HQ offers Teacher Professional Development

One of the many new reef education initiatives being implemented by the Reef HQ Education Team is the Science by the Sea Teacher Professional Development experience.

This experience allows teachers from around the Townsville region and pre-service teachers from James Cook University to venture out into the many beautiful coastal zone ecosystems found along Townsville's shoreline including rocky shores, mangroves, seagrass meadows and beachfront communities.

Fred Nucifora, Reef HQ Education Manager said this professional development opportunity aims to provide participants with an opportunity to observe and undertake some excellent hands on fieldwork activities.

"All participants are provided with an extensive resource booklet that provides a framework for teachers with the major aim being to increase confidence and provide participants with the tools to facilitate rewarding and empowering reef activities with their students," Fred said.

END



What's new on

reefED.edu.au

educate to keep it great

Recently new to Reef ED:

- Water Quality hot topics section provides loads of information about the declining water quality in the Great Barrier Reef and the activities and land uses affecting it
- Reef Guardian Schools for 2005 are listed in the Reef Guardians section
- The Living Classroom is packed with new teaching units and challenge activities for students and teachers.

Amendments to the Cairns Area Plan of Management builds on a sustainable tourism industry

The latest amendments to the Cairns Area Plan of Management came into effect on 2 December 2004.

The Cairns Area features some of the most spectacular reefs in the Marine Park as well as iconic wildlife species such as dugong, whales, dolphins and turtles. These natural attractions are the focus of a dynamic tourism industry that accounts for over 50% of the total annual tourism visitation to the Great Barrier Reef.

Plans of Management are used for intensively used or particularly vulnerable areas of the Marine Park and for the protection of vulnerable species or ecological communities. Plans of Management are more detailed than zoning plans. They protect natural and cultural resources by prescribing acceptable use at a finer scale.

The plans, which were first developed in the mid 1990's aim to ensure that use of the area is ecologically sustainable and that a broad range of use opportunities are maintained. Amendments to the Plan are required from time to time to keep up with contemporary environmental management practices and to reflect changing needs of the community.

Leanne Brown, Planner with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, said the amendments addressed a number of access issues for larger vessels and also provided for up to five new permits to be issued to tourism operations based in the area between Cape Tribulation and Cooktown.

"Public comment on the amendments was sought during 2004. Over-all the comments received were very supportive of the proposed amendments and the Authority was able to refine the proposals based on the very practical suggestions received through that consultation process" she said.

Details of the amendments are available on the Authority's website at www.gbrmpa.gov.au or by contacting the Public Information Unit on (07) 4750 0700.

END

New regulations for discharging sewage in the Marine Park

New vessel sewage regulations for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park were introduced on 1 January 2005 effectively mirroring those of the Queensland State Government.

According to James Aston, Manager of Shipping, the new regulations are now aligned with those of Maritime Safety Queensland (see www.msq.qld.gov.au) and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

"The vessel sewage regulations offer a range of sewage management options for vessel owners and operators to help maintain the environmental, health and aesthetic values of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park," James said.

"The new regulations mean that while in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park any boat carrying **more** than 15 people must discharge macerated sewage at least one nautical mile seawards from the nearest reef, island, mainland or an aquaculture facility."

"If a boat is carrying **less** than 15 people, it may pump out untreated macerated sewage in the Marine Park anywhere outside of a boat harbour or marina or more than one nautical mile from an aquaculture facility."

"A vessel may also discharge treated sewage into the Marine Park at varying distances from a sensitive area depending on the level of treatment received."

For more information about the new vessel sewage regulations, please contact the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on 4750 0700 or visit www.gbrmpa.gov.au.

END

Reporting incidents in the Marine Park

Here are some useful numbers that may come in handy when you are visiting the Great Barrier Reef. We encourage Reef users to report incidents to the appropriate agency. Incident report forms are also available at www.gbrmpa.gov.au

Agency	Incident	Phone Number
EPA Hotline	Marine animal strandings and deaths Fish kills Marine pollution Oil/sewage spills	1300 130 372
SUNTAG	Tagged fish	1800 077 001 (24hr)
Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries	Illegal fishing	1800 017 116 (24hr) Fishwatch hotline
Queensland Department of Transport	Marine incidents and accidents	07 3895 1317 (24hr)
Australian Maritime Safety Authority	Search and rescue Vessel collisions, groundings	1800 641 792 (24hr)
Queensland Department of Primary Industries (Shark Hotline)	Out-of-place shark equipment and entrapped marine animals	1800 806 891
GBRMPA	Crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks and coral bleaching	www.gbrmpa.gov.au (07)4750 0700
Maritime Safety Qld	Queensland weather forecast	1300 360 426

MARINE PARK PARTNERSHIPS



Profile of QBFP Officer Ian Fricke

Ian is a District Officer for the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries' Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol based in Townsville. Ian joined the QBFP in 1989 in Mooloolabah, since then he has worked in Brisbane, Rockhampton and Maryborough before moving to Townsville in July 2003.

Ian's position as District Officer involves managing and coordinating the delivery of the DPI&F's QBFP services, ranging from the management of resources to providing technical advice.

His position involves 50 per cent of his time in the field where he is directly responsible for all of DPI&F's QBFP operations from Molongle Creek, Upstart Bay to Crystal Creek to the North and all coastal waters (including Commonwealth waters) and all freshwater waterways west to Richmond. He oversees the QBFP Ingham office operations that extend further north to Innisfail.

Working for the DPI&F, Ian's goal is to ensure the long-term sustainability of fish stocks and to successfully lead a great bunch of fellow officers to ultimately ensure that his grand children will have the opportunity to catch that elusive wild barra or trout.

He loves his job because it provides him with an opportunity to make a real difference in relation to fisheries resource protection where it matters – on the water.

A typical inshore patrol consists of two officers rostered for an 8-hour shift and heading out into the field for the day to ensure compliance with a range of State & Commonwealth laws including fisheries legislation, Marine Park Regulations and Maritime Safety legislation.

There are offshore patrols where usually two DPI&F officers and an external agency officer (Water Police, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Customs, etc) go to sea for up to 6 days in a 13.5m O'Brien class patrol vessel.

Ian loves the Townsville region as it provides an opportunity to experience a great deal of diversity in his job.

In the photo above Ian is at the Burdekin fishing clinic for children.

END

Clean Up Australia March 2005

Every year hundreds of thousands of Australians help clean up their environment and this year you have 3 chances to make a difference.

Business Clean Up Day on Tuesday 1 March 2005 gives employees an opportunity to work as a team to make a difference in the local community.

Schools' Clean Up Day on Friday 4 March 2005 is designed to let students participate in creating a healthier environment for Australia.

Clean Up Australia Day on Sunday 6 March 2005 is an opportunity for individuals and groups to help clean up their local environment and put rubbish away for good!

For more information log on to www.cleanup.com.au

END

Please report stranded, injured, sick or dead marine animals to the EPA hotline on 1300 130 372.

Doing your bit to look after it!

When fishing in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park you can do your bit to help look after it by:

- Anchoring your boat with care
- Taking only what fish you need and abiding by possession and size limits
- Returning all undersized or unwanted fish to the water as carefully as possible
- Being aware of best practices for releasing fish (see www.info-fish.net/releasefish)
- If you intend to keep a fish, remove it from the hook or net quickly and kill it humanely
- Not throwing fishing line or other litter overboard as it can kill marine animals
- Studying zoning maps for the area you are visiting to ensure fishing is allowed
- Report any suspected illegal fishing incidents to Fishwatch Phone: 1800 017 116



Removing hook for release

Community Links



A profile of **Steve McGuire** Chairman Townsville LMAC

Steve McGuire is the Chairman of the Townsville Local Marine Advisory Committee (LMAC) and has held the position for 5 years. Steve is actively involved in recreational fishing debates and became a member of the LMAC through his desire for greater community participation in decision-making processes.

One of Steve's greatest passions is involving people in the consultation process and ensuring the community is informed. He sees the LMAs as being an important information source for the community and is constantly on the look-out for people to become involved in the Committee who can both benefit and participate in the LMAs activities.

Steve believes it is important for people from all walks of life and professions to become a part of the process so they can bring to the attention of management agencies marine issues that they as a community believe are important.

Steve has continually supported Reef Guardian Schools in the region, inviting teachers and students to the LMAs meetings and bringing the kids together with other community members who share an interest in marine issues.

Along with the Townsville LMAs, Steve is also very involved in the Rotary Club of Mundingburra and got the group involved in Seagrass Watch. He also sits on the Board of the Maritime Museum and looks after Leisure Accessible – a boating program for disabled and aged people.

Steve is also on the Townsville Chamber of Commerce Steering Committee for the proposal for an artificial dive wreck and is Coastal and Marine Convenor for the Natural Resources & Environment Forum for the Townsville – Thuringowa Coastal Plain.

Steve first became interested in marine issues when he finished school and went to work for the Navy at Garden Island in Sydney. His interest grew through the years as he worked in a variety of occupations and indulged his love of fast paced hobbies such as motor racing and flying. Having sailed for 30 years Steve and his wife have travelled to remote reefs throughout the Pacific and continue to sail every Sunday.

END

Calendar of events

28 February – 1 March 2005

Tourism and Recreation Reef
Advisory Committee meeting

1 March 2005

Business Clean Up Day

4 March 2005

School Clean Up Day

6 March 2005

Clean Up Australia Day

6 – 13 March 2005

Seaweek – SOS Save Our Sharks

9 March 2005

Mission Beach LMAs meeting

10 – 11 March 2005

Fisheries Reef Advisory Committee meeting

22 March 2005

World Water Day

12 April 2005

Port Douglas LMAs meeting

13 April 2005

Cairns LMAs Meeting

GBRMPA contacts

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If you do not wish to receive this newsletter in the future or if you would like to receive this newsletter via email instead of as a hard copy, please email searead@gbmpa.gov.au or phone the GBRMPA on 4750 0807.



Australian Government
Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority



our great barrier reef
let's keep it great



Natural
Heritage
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Helping Communities
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A Commonwealth Government Initiative