

COMMERCIAL MARINE TOURISM

Summary

Commercial marine tourism is the largest Reef-dependent commercial industry within the Region, contributing significantly to the economy.

The industry was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as lockdowns and travel restrictions impacted visitation. Visitation numbers are currently recovering to pre-pandemic levels.

Independent reviewers found management effectiveness for commercial marine tourism in the Region was *effective* to *mostly effective*.

What the Outlook Report 2024 says about commercial marine tourism

Within the Region, tourism is concentrated into about 7 per cent of the area around the Cairns and Whitsunday planning areas.

The industry faced significant hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Between early 2020 and the end of 2021, visitation to the Region was down about 42 per cent on 2019 volumes. The border closures also redistributed tourists from the Region's north (Cairns visitation decreased by 12 per cent in 2020) towards domestic destinations in south (about 4 per cent increase).

Benefits of commercial marine tourism

The Reef is recognised locally, nationally and internationally as an iconic nature-based tourism experience. Tourism delivers benefits to people, the environment and the economy.

Within Queensland, the output in the 2020–21 financial year was estimated at \$7 billion and \$29 million for domestic and international, respectively. The total tourism-filled jobs (both direct and indirect) totalled 206,200 (up 32 per cent on 2020–21 and down 17 per cent on 2018–9).

Programs such as the Reef Authority's site stewardship, Master Reef Guides, and citizen science-focused Eye on the Reef benefit Reef management through visitor and industry contributions. Since 2019, tourism operators have contributed more than 4 times the number of reef health surveys than the preceding 5 years.

Partnerships and engagement between First Nations peoples and the commercial marine tourism industry in the Region continues to strengthen through program and management initiatives sponsored by Reef managers and government.

Impacts of commercial marine tourism

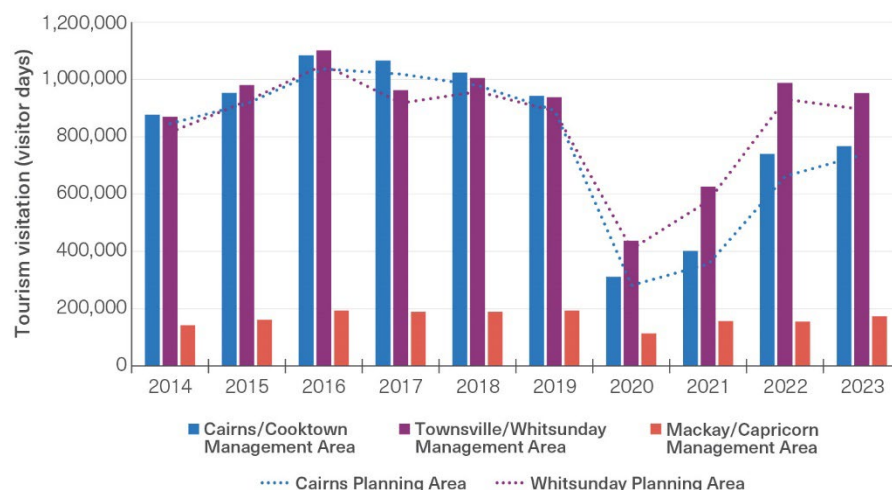
Impacts from commercial marine tourism are generally localised to a few intensively managed areas. These impacts include incompatible uses, vessel groundings, marine debris, sewage discharge and damage to reef structure.

Since 2019, improvements in compliance effort, data capture and education programs by Reef managers have helped minimise impacts.

Management of commercial marine tourism

The impact of the commercial marine tourism industry on the Region is restricted in extent, low in severity and there are well-resourced planning and management systems in place to support sustainable tourism outcomes. The release of the *Tourism Management Action Strategy* in 2021 was an important milestone.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Australian Government support was provided to the industry through the waiving of some fees and charges. Australian Government funding was provided under the Tourism Reef Protection Initiative to complete site stewardship plans. The number of operators involved in the Reef Authority's High Standard Tourism Operator program increased by 13 per cent since 2019 carrying approximately 63 per cent of tourists visiting the Reef.



Number of tourism visitor days, 2014 to 2023. Source: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2024