

TOURISM REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMUNIQUE

Meeting No. 22 – 3 September 2024

The current term of the Tourism Reef Advisory Committee (the Committee) was established in 2023 to provide advice to the Marine Park Authority Board, through the Reef Authority, on tourism matters. The Committee is appointed for a three-year term. The independent Chairperson of the Committee is Mr Daniel Gschwind.

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country

The Chairperson welcomed the Committee to the 22nd meeting of the Tourism Reef Advisory Committee (TRAC) and gave an Acknowledgement of Country.

Reef Authority update

The Reef Authority provided updates on the:

- release of the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2024
- recent UNESCO World Heritage decision
- additional funding allocated for the Tourism Reef Protection Initiative
- Crown-of-thorns Starfish Control Program, and
- the Great Barrier Reef Aquarium.

Reef Authority CEO Mr Josh Thomas highlighted the 20 years of Marine Park zoning milestone and the positive effects the zoning plan has had on environmental management and protection of the Reef. The Reef Authority congratulated Master Reef Guides, Mr Adam Hinks, and Master Reef Guide Ms Jessica Blackmore from Lady Elliot Island, on their recent awards announced at the Queensland Tourism Industry Council.

The Committee discussed actions under the Blueprint 2030 and agreed it would be beneficial to further explore those at upcoming meetings, particularly around how management and industry will work together on carbon management into the future.

Member updates

Members discussed a range of industry updates including business trends and operations. They agreed that overall tourism numbers are increasing but remain reduced compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Ms Chrissy Grant provided an update on the establishment of the Reef Traditional Owner Taskforce, including the appointment of two co-chairs.

Tourism and Events Queensland launched a new tourism campaign 'Great Things Are Happening Here' on World Nature Conservation Day on 28 July 2024. This was in collaboration with the Queensland Departments of Primary Industries; Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation; and Premier and Cabinet. The campaign focussed on the message that the Great Barrier Reef is the best managed Reef in the world, with produce sustainably sourced from the Reef. It aimed to educate consumers on the significant work tourism and fishing operators are doing, alongside the science community, to protect and preserve the Great Barrier Reef from climate change impacts.

Members discussed how the Committee could enhance their strategic involvement in key Reef Authority priorities and projects and provide valuable and timely insights. The Committee identified they only formally meet two times within the fiscal year.

Global tourism trends and insights

Ms Elissa Keenan, MPA Board member, provided an overview on global tourism trends and insights. The presentation included information about critical watch points for the tourism industry, emerging expectations, and opportunities from both an international and national perspective. Ms Keenan highlighted marketing considerations for promoting sustainable tourism and product offerings after the EU Green Claims Directive (to address greenwashing and protect consumers) and discussed some of the considerations Australia will need to take on board for future tourism marketing. Members discussed operational implications and opportunities for promoting their business and ensuring they are compliant with the EU Green Claims Directive.

Site Stewardship Framework

Ms Fiona Merida provided an overview of the Site Stewardship Framework. Through the Tourism Reef Protection Initiative, the Reef Authority took a case study approach to demonstrate how the framework provides benefits for Reef protection, management, and tourism operators.

Members who have had the opportunity to be involved in the work complimented the process and confirmed how beneficial the development and application of the framework has been — from knowing their site/s better, engaging with staff and acknowledging its positive reception, and for promoting their site/s and business.

The Committee further engaged and discussed how this work could support broader modernisation of the High Standard Tourism Operator program and tourism policies.

Managing tourism into the future – building on the Southern Plan of Management opportunity

The Committee discussed the ideal state for sustainable tourism management in the Southern Planning Area and beyond 2026 including the objectives set out in the Tourism Management Action Strategy.

The Committee engaged in a workshop — facilitated by leads from the Reef Authority's Policy and Planning, and Reef Education and Engagement sections — undertaking a collective thinking exercise on four proposed approaches to reaching the ideal state of managing tourism into the future under a changing climate.

The Committee separated into four groups with each group considering one approach:

- Co-management with First Nations people
- Reef-wide entry fee
- Self-regulation and minimum standards
- Agile management.

The Committee reconvened to present their key ideas and outlined opportunities and factors for consideration. The Committee discussed the next steps for this work and requested further engagement throughout its development.