



TOURISM REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMUNIQUE Meeting 2, 30 April and 1 May 2015

The Tourism Reef Advisory Committee (TRAC) was established in 2014 to provide advice to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) on tourism matters relating to the implementation of the key findings of the Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014, the Great Barrier Reef Strategic Assessment and Program Report and the Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan. The TRAC is a competency-based committee with members providing a cross-section of stakeholder expertise and interests in areas relevant to tourism use of the Great Barrier Reef. The Committee is appointed for a three-year period. Ms Glenys Schuntner is the independent Chair. All members are listed at the end.

Ms Glenys Schuntner paid respect to the Wulgurukaba and Bindal Traditional Owners, their cultures and their Elders, both past and present.

As part of the regular business, TRAC approved the terms of reference, ratified the Communique from TRAC Meeting 1, advised on outstanding actions from that meeting, and noted summary documents from other GBRMPA committees and the correspondence relating to TRAC.

Below is a summary of the discussion and advice provided to GBRMPA for the other agenda items considered at the second meeting which was held in Townsville on 30 April and 1 May 2015.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority update

TRAC noted the report on GBRMPA.

Dr Russell Reichelt, GBRMPA Chairman, provided an update on agency matters and advised members that Mr Andrew Skeat, General Manager, Great Barrier Reef Operations branch, was retiring from GBRMPA in mid-May 2015 and that they would be recruiting to permanently fill the position.

Dr Reichelt advised the World Heritage Committee would be tabling a draft decision on 30 May 2015 about whether the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area should be considered in danger. He had been involved with the liaison work undertaken by the Australian Government to ensure member nations were informed about the management of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Dr Reichelt complimented Mr Peter Gash and other operators for the positive feedback he had been receiving from international delegations who had visited the Reef.

Dr Reichelt advised that the Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee was to meet in June 2015 and there was a commitment to a broader Great Barrier Reef advisory group, similar to that which supported the development of the Long-Term Sustainability Plan. One member raised the importance of multiple Traditional Owner groups being represented across all Committees. Another member suggested this type of briefing about GBRMPA matters should be more broadly available.

Great Barrier Reef tourism industry update

TRAC noted the report on the current status of the Great Barrier Reef marine tourism industry, the visitation information for the Great Barrier Reef and the end of the temporary reduction in the Environmental Management Charge on 31 March 2015.

Mr Col McKenzie, Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators, advised the industry had benefited from the Chinese New Year and continues to build on the recovery seen last year. He indicated that to meet the growth in the carrying capacity for Cairns operations, there may be a need to review the group size limits at some locations under the Cairns Area Plan of Management. The industry has been proactively trying to correct information that wholesale travel have from global campaigns saying 'the Reef is dead and dying' and believes there is lack of understanding about the sheer size of the Reef that we're trying to protect.

Other members raised the following:

- Overall it was positive for the industry offshore Cairns. Day tour operators were having a good season, with February being the busiest month due to the Chinese New Year. The domestic market is down a little bit, due to a reduction in air and discount services coming into the region. Most seats are now taken up by international tourists.
- Whitsundays operators are buoyant with overnight boats and day boats up 20 per cent on the last year. However, there are challenges with the Australian Bureau of Statistics citing a 40 per cent decline in water quality in the last 10 years, a tourist death in the last month, and congestion at some of the sites.



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Members reviewed the Reef visitation figures from the Environmental Management Charge (EMC) records and noted visitation had not yet returned to the level before the Global Financial Crisis. In light of the Queensland Government's aim to double tourism spend by 2020, members felt that TRAC should consider what would significant tourism growth mean for Reef management and how will impacts be measured appropriately. Ms Glenys Schuntner commented there is still more to be done to elevate the voice of tourism amongst other sectors such as mining and industry.

Members were provided with a copy of the new Tourism and Events Queensland brochure 'The Great Barrier Reef – A tourism story'. The brochure summarises three key positive messages:

1. Size and use of the Reef – there are different ways and places to experience the Reef
2. Diversity of species and habitats
3. Conservation and best management – the Great Barrier Reef is a quality experience.

Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan

TRAC noted the release of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan and commended the work that had gone into developing it through partnerships with stakeholders. TRAC encouraged all levels of government to give priority to implementing the Plan with appropriate funding.

Ms Margaret Johnson, GBRMPA General Manager, presented on the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan which provides a line of sight between the issues facing the reef and the actions being taken to address them. There will be a key focus on governance, with a ministerial forum overseeing the Plan and an expert science panel that will assist in the prioritisation of the actions out of the plan and their funding. An annual report against the actions in the Plan and how they are addressing the targets will be completed each year. Over \$200 million is invested in the Great Barrier Reef and this funding is also outlined in the plan. The Plan will be updated in line with the five-yearly Outlook Report next due in 2019.

Mr Col McKenzie noted the tourism industry had been involved in the development of the Plan to date and their concern is that far more investment is needed.

Reef Recovery

TRAC noted the ongoing work on development of a pilot Reef Recovery Plan for the Mackay-Whitsunday region and confirmed their future involvement in the development of the regional plans.

Reef Recovery Plans focus on restoring, maintaining and enhancing values of the Great Barrier Reef. The plans will span the gap between the large whole of reef strategic plans and addressing the issues in a regional area. Likely features of the plans may include:

- A mix of existing and suggested actions
- A mix of voluntary stewardship and statutory based actions
- A mix of easy actions but also difficult actions which will have positive impacts
- Short and long-term gains with a local flavour
- Collaboration with all stakeholders in the region, including Traditional Owners.

Members noted GBRMPA had commenced targeted consultation on a Mackay-Whitsunday region pilot reef recover plan. TRAC confirmed they would appreciate opportunities to comment on the plans and suggested AMPTO and the local tourism industry, such as the Whitsundays Charter Boat Industry Association, are involved in the current regional stakeholder discussions.

Crown-of-thorns starfish

TRAC noted the progress on managing crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS) and supported the continued and potentially increased funding for the program.

Under the current COTS control program, AMPTO teams have culled nearly 350,000 starfish in the Cairns region and coral cover has been maintained above the critical level at 87 per cent of the control sites targeted by the program.

The implementation of the Long-Term Sustainability Plan is all about resilience-based management of the Reef. An integrated resilience strategy to protect biodiversity by strategically managing COTS and other threats is being developed by GBRMPA in partnership with AMPTO and research organisations.

Mr McKenzie noted that \$7 million had been announced by the Australian Government to fund one boat for three years to undertake COTS control. He indicated that if there was enough funding for 5 boats (\$10 million per year) then they could potentially stop the outbreak.



Marine debris

TRAC noted the details of the project and the proposed dates for the Great Barrier Reef wide clean-up and formed a TRAC Marine Debris working group to support this initiative.

Marine debris includes any discarded item that ends up on beaches or in the oceans. It is an international issue with an estimated 298,000 tonnes worldwide (comparable to 1.6 million blue whales). The Australian Government, through Reef Trust, has funded a project to clean up the Great Barrier Reef and reduce the source of marine debris. It will address the impact on biodiversity (dugongs, turtles and seabirds) and visual amenity. The call to action is: 'Don't let your litter bug our Reef'.

TRAC praised GBRMPA's coordination of the successful Cyclone Marcia debris clean-up, supported by local Traditional Owners, rangers and the community. The four-day event held in April 2015 resulted in 5.5 tonnes of debris being collected and prevented from entering the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Members involved directly in the tourism industry nominated for a Marine Debris Working Group in order to improve the tourism industry involvement in reducing marine debris. This could be through promoting clean-up events in local areas or providing staff and logistical support on the day. The working group will also look at reducing marine debris from tourism sources by reviewing use of single use plastic, improving recycling and encouraging behaviour change of visitors.

Amending the Whitsundays Plan of Management

TRAC noted amendments to the Whitsundays Plan of Management are currently being prepared and provided initial advice on matters being considered for amendment, including that commercial superyachts should be treated the same as other local tourism operations and raising the concern of overcrowding at some popular destinations within the Whitsundays.

The Whitsundays receives about 43 per cent of total visitation to the Reef in an area but is only 1 per cent of the total spatial area. The Whitsundays Plan of Management aims to protect the values of the Whitsundays whilst allowing a range of use and experiences. There are a number of matters under consideration for amendment to ensure the Plan is contemporary and continues to achieve its aims. These include:

- Improving access for superyachts
- Improving the position of regular aircraft landing areas
- Improving motorised water sports areas
- Considering strategies to prevent overcrowding in specific locations
- Strengthening statements about the values and clarifying the intent of strategies that the Plan covers.

There was much discussion on these matters, including:

- The capacity of the Whitsundays and concern with overcrowding at popular destinations. Increasing access could detract from the experience the original plan provided for.
- It was felt that issues such as time allowed at sites, getting users in and out of the water safely, and use of tenders needed further consideration.
- How improving access for superyachts might impact on local operations and users. Members indicated that superyachts shouldn't be given any special treatment if they operate commercially in the area.

The issue of more public moorings was raised but this was not a matter limited by the Plan of Management and so could be considered outside of a Plan amendment. TRAC was advised that additional comments on the draft amendments can be emailed to consultation@gbmpa.gov.au. Public submissions on the proposed amendments will be formally sought later in 2015.

Coastal development and blue maps

TRAC noted the presentation on coastal development and blue maps.

Coastal development is seen as one of the key threats to the Great Barrier Reef. To address that threat, there needs to be an understanding of the functions and services that coastal ecosystems provide to the health of the Great Barrier Reef. One of the key understandings required is the hydrology of the area. TRAC were presented with a series of 'blue maps' which showed how land is being used, what it looked like before, what it looks like now and how that has affected its function. This enables a better understanding and helps identify key hydrological areas for on-ground actions to remedy legacy issues of land use and restore the connectivity to the Great Barrier Reef.



Commonwealth Marine Reserves

TRAC were briefed on the Commonwealth Marine Reserves in place of the agenda item on the cruise industry update which was deferred a future meeting.

Mr Martin Russell, on behalf of TRAC member Bianca Priest, Parks Australia, provided an update on Commonwealth Marine Reserves. In 2012, the Australian Government declared a system of Marine Protected Areas around Australia. The reserves are all established but the management arrangements are not in place, excepting for the south east commonwealth marine reserves network. In 2014, a review commenced to provide advice on the best way to manage the reserves. An advisory panel and five bioregional advisory panels have been established to assist with the review. There have been 160 small meetings and eight large multisector meetings around Australia and 13000 submissions and additional responses to online surveys were received. The report to the Australian Government will be submitted this year. Members asked if the zoning plans across the reserves network are the same. Mr Russell advised this is a challenge as existing State marine parks are different but for consistency they are using the IUCN categories, where possible.

Cruise ship policy

TRAC provided advice on the draft cruise ship policy, in particular supporting the application of the Environmental Management Charge as detailed in the draft policy. TRAC endorsed the draft cruise ship policy for public consultation.

The draft policy is being developed jointly by the managing agencies, GBRMPA and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and covers access to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Marine Park and also Island National Parks. The policy captures the improvements for cruise ship operations within the Great Barrier Reef created since the original policy was written in 1999.

Members provided the following suggestions to the policy:

- Highlight upfront that the Great Barrier Reef is internationally recognised as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA).
- Provide interpretation for tourism operators that explain the connection of Traditional Owners to this World Heritage Area and consider if the interpretation should be a permit condition.
- Be consistent with terminology for Indigenous peoples and Traditional Owners.

Members agreed that the Environmental Management Charge (EMC) should be applied equitably and that if visitors paid for the first three days of an extended tour (\$6.50 per day) this was unlikely adversely impact on the attractiveness of an international cruise (a member compared this with the \$100 fee charged for the Galapagos Islands). It was also suggested the role of the visitor to maintain marine park values through payment of EMC should be communicated more broadly.

TRAC endorsed the draft policy be made available for public consultation, noting that it will also be provided to the Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee and circulated to Traditional Owners more generally.

Strengthening permissions compliance

TRAC noted the briefing on strengthening permissions compliance and provided advice on potential compliance issues for consideration, including the need for greater compliance generally, and the specific issues of illegal fishing charters, fishing in green zones, and the non-payment of EMC.

Members were briefed on GBRMPA's permissions (permits) system and of improvements being made to ensure compliance with the system. A Permissions Compliance Strategy and associated Annual Permissions Compliance Plan are being developed. The intent is to audit compliance against conditions for all permission types. For the 2015-16 financial year a number of education activities are proposed, including an annual information guide, EMC poster reinvigoration and updates to the Onboard website. There will also be the development of Permits Online module, similar to EMC online, to allow permit holders to monitor and track their permits and permit applications.

Potential compliance issues raised by members for consideration included:

- Some charter fishing businesses appear to be advertising on social media, publicising and offering tours but were operating without permits.
- Illegal fishing is occurring in the green zones and some operators were frustrated at a perceived lack of management response. Members were advised that a photo with a geo-location, time and date stamp is useful and does inform GBRMPA's risk matrix and compliance actions.
- There is an industry view that people generally doing the wrong thing appear to be getting away with it.
- There should be zero tolerance of operators who are avoiding paying EMC within the timeframes.



Bonds and pontoons

TRAC noted the briefing on the development of guidelines for the management of bonds and pontoons. In relation to bonds, TRAC suggested finance and insurance experts are approached to ensure the best approach is taken to reduce the financial burden to the industry, whilst reducing the risks to the environment. In relation to pontoons, TRAC supported refining and simplifying requirements and working with other agencies and operators to get a consistent approach. TRAC requested that they be engaged further in the development of the guidelines.

Disclosure of interests was made by some members. Ms Schuntner commented that members only need to remove themselves from discussions if there is an interest to one's own organisation or personal conflict. Members were briefed on the progress on developing Bond and Pontoon Guidelines.

GBRMPA primarily uses **bonds** to remove structures from the Marine Park if an operator has gone out of business. The following points were raised by members:

- Did bonds actually make funds readily available for GBRMPA to have the structure removed?
- Insurance policies for national parks include a proviso to remove the structure if required.
- If money is held aside in both bonds and insurance there could be unnecessary duplication.
- If significant funds are tied up in bonds this can be an impediment to expanding a business.
- Rather than remove the structure, other operators may be willing to take over such a limited opportunity.
- The most likely risks should be managed, rather than looking at the worst-case scenario.
- Could a dedicated fund be created which all operators have equal access to? It was noted that it would be a challenge to apportion costs to operators.
- Could bond amounts be rationalised based on the situation of the company (e.g. reliability to pay any costs, the number of structures, and the likelihood of something happening to more than one structure)?

TRAC suggested GBRMPA approach finance companies and insurers to ensure the best approach is taken to reduce the burden to the industry, whilst also reducing the risks to the environment.

GBRMPA permits **pontoons** with environmental considerations but safety aspects are managed by Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) and Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ). A multi-agency audit of pontoons will be undertaken next financial year, with an aim to rationalise and standardise pontoon conditions. In developing the pontoon guidelines, TRAC supported refining and simplifying requirements and working with AMSA, MSQ and operators to get a consistent approach without duplication.

TRAC requested that they be engaged further in the development of the guidelines.

Assessment and decision enhancement

TRAC noted there would be changes required to the permissions system to meet commitments in the Great Barrier Reef Region Program Report and to respond to the findings of the Australian National Audit Office's performance audit.

TRAC were briefed on the GBRMPA's assessment and decision making project and the changes required to meet commitments in the Program Report especially to develop an equivalent approval process to that under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* thereby reducing the need to do both approval processes. The project will also deliver:

- A revised Environmental impact management policy which looks at whole of lifecycle impacts, the suite of management tools which will be used, levels of assessment etc.
- Two sets of guidelines – one for assessment officers and decision makers and one for applicants.

The project will also take into consideration the findings of the Australian National Audit Office's performance audit of GBRMPA's permit system. There will be two phases of public consultation. Implementation date for stage 1 is 1 July 2017.

Tour of compliance operations

TRAC noted the briefing on the Field Management Program, including its compliance operations.

The Field Management Program is responsible for planning and executing field operations in the Commonwealth and State marine parks (including Commonwealth islands) and on island national parks within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Some of the key deliverables include:

- Management activities across the full breadth of the World Heritage Area's marine and island protected areas



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- Practical on ground actions to protect and maintain the Reef's marine and island ecosystems
- Maintenance of facilities at the Reef's popular natural tourism destinations
- Flexibility to respond to incidents and emerging issues.

TRAC appreciated the opportunity to tour the compliance operations room and observe the technologies used to deliver on field activities, particularly compliance and monitoring.

High Standard Tourism programme review

TRAC advised on potential ways to improve on the High Standard tourism programme such as focusing on accreditation and improving standards of interpretation for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

GBRMPA recognises tourism operators who are independently certified as high standard tourism operators in the Marine Park. The programme has been running since 2004 and is currently under review. As part of this review, 22 announced and unannounced 'secret shopper' audits were conducted on a selection of high standard operators. All 15 operators in the announced audits passed the audit process which reviewed all the standards relating to environmental social/cultural and economic standards. The seven secret shopper audits focused on standards only relating to wildlife interactions and interpretation and education. The overall finding was there was a fundamental strength in positive visitor experience but there were significant gaps in interpretation content.

TRAC provided the following suggestions.

- World heritage values and indigenous connection to the Reef should be promoted through tourism operations but also through other medium such as the 'in flight' magazines.
- There is an untold opportunity in terms of the Sea Country story but there is a challenge to get a generic Sea Country story which non-indigenous people may also be able to tell.
- The interpretive delivery standard of operators is not always world class. GBRMPA's Reef Discovery Course should have a particular module on teaching people the art of telling a story.
- Tourism Queensland and Tourism Australia could also promote messages about World Heritage values.
- GBRMPA could provide a standard world heritage message for operators to use, but this must fit into all the other briefings requirements (e.g. safety).
- The difference between announced and secret shopper audits may show that management of the company is not connected to what is happening on the tour.
- More secret shopper audits may provide a better representation of the industry.
- If other certification providers are used, we need to make sure all standards are the same.
- Eye on the Reef and sightings apps could be an excellent tool for enthusiastic young crew and could be used to introduce a new fact of the day as a great avenue to keep people engaged and motivated.
- All marine tourism operators within TRAC supported some level of compulsory accreditation but it was noted there needs to be a simple way for small operators to become accredited. AMPTO's position is that all Great Barrier Reef operators should be accredited at the base level, and then High Standard Tourism programme would be the next level up.

Eye on the Reef

TRAC noted the briefing on the Eye on the Reef.

The Eye on the Reef program is a great tool for enhancing visitor experiences, while providing valuable information to GBRMPA to manage the Reef. The four survey tools used are: Sightings Network where anyone can use the Sightings app to provide information on what they see, Rapid Monitoring which is a community-based program where snorkelers and divers can provide one-off more information, the Tourism Weekly programme where trained tourism staff regularly collect detailed information and Reef Health Impact Surveys undertaken usually by managing agencies for very detailed information. GBRMPA has developed online training courses for Rapid Monitoring, Tourism Weekly and Reef Health Impact surveys.

The Reef Discovery Course has been developed but is currently being converted to an online course to give tourism staff the ability to provide the best information to tourists. Star tourism crew are being approached to provide a 'best of' leadership example for presenting the Great Barrier Reef for this course. The Reef Discovery Course is a modular program with face-to-face intensive interpretation components yet to come.

TRAC members made the following suggestions:

- Could other funds, such as EMC, be used as a way to get the Reef Discovery Course face-to-face components up and running?
- Eye on the Reef could excite visitors to come to the Reef and be a marine biologist for a day.



- Was there potential for sightings to be passed on to Tourism Queensland so it can be used to create positive news stories about the Great Barrier Reef?
- Could Eye on the Reef be tailored for other industries such as bareboats (self-sail vessels), for example ask the bareboaters to report three things they saw that day during 'sunset drinks'.

Tourism and recreation

TRAC deferred the discussion on recreation until a future meeting and noted the Tourism and Stewardship section's approach to engaging with the tourism industry.

The discussion on the management of recreation was deferred to the next meeting when a member representing recreation would be on TRAC.

Members reviewed the current structure of Tourism and Stewardship section and noted the changes in roles and focus which is intended to consolidate stewardship activities across the section. It was noted only two managers were now responsible for engaging with the marine tourism industry.

Other business

TRAC considered other matters raised by members relating to progress on the regulations on dredge and GBRMPA's process for recognising independent certification schemes.

Mr Tony Baker enquired about dredging regulations. Ms Margaret Johnson responded the public submissions have closed and the redrafted Regulatory Impact Statement is with the Department of the Environment.

Mr Col McKenzie requested an agenda item at the next TRAC about the process GBRMPA uses to recognise independent certification schemes for the High Standard Tourism programme.

TRAC members were encouraged to submit any other items for the next meeting out of session.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the Tourism Reef Advisory Committee will be held 26 and 27 November 2015.

Tourism Reef Advisory Committee Membership

Member	Expertise/Affiliation
Ms Glenys Schuntner	INDEPENDENT CHAIR- Advocacy for regional economic development
Mr Tony Baker	Marine tourism operations, including pontoons, in the northern region of the Great Barrier Reef
Mr Tony Brown	Sailing and day tourism operations in the central region of the Great Barrier Reef
Mr Tony Charters	Ecotourism and tourism in protected areas <i>Ecotourism Australia</i>
Mr Mike Drake	International cruise shipping and marketing
Mr Peter Gash	Sustainable tourism and aircraft operations in the southern region of the Great Barrier Reef
Ms Chrissy Grant	Indigenous affairs
Mr Daniel Gschwind	Business acumen and economics <i>Queensland Tourism Industry Council</i>
Mr Gavin Herholdt	Tourism resorts
Ms Annie Judd	Bareboat operations in the Whitsundays and tourism marketing
Mr Geoff Kent	Tourism management in the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park <i>National Parks, Recreation, Sports and Racing (Queensland)</i>
Mr Daniel McCarthy	Charter fishing
Mr Col McKenzie	Marine tourism industry and diving <i>Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators</i>
Mr David Morgans	Regional tourism development <i>Tourism and Events Queensland</i>
Ms Bianca Priest	Commonwealth Marine Reserves <i>Parks Australia (Australian Government)</i>
Ms Margaret Johnson	GBRMPA General Manager, Strategic Policy and Reef Stewardship
Dr Roger Beeden	GBRMPA Director, Tourism and Stewardship

