



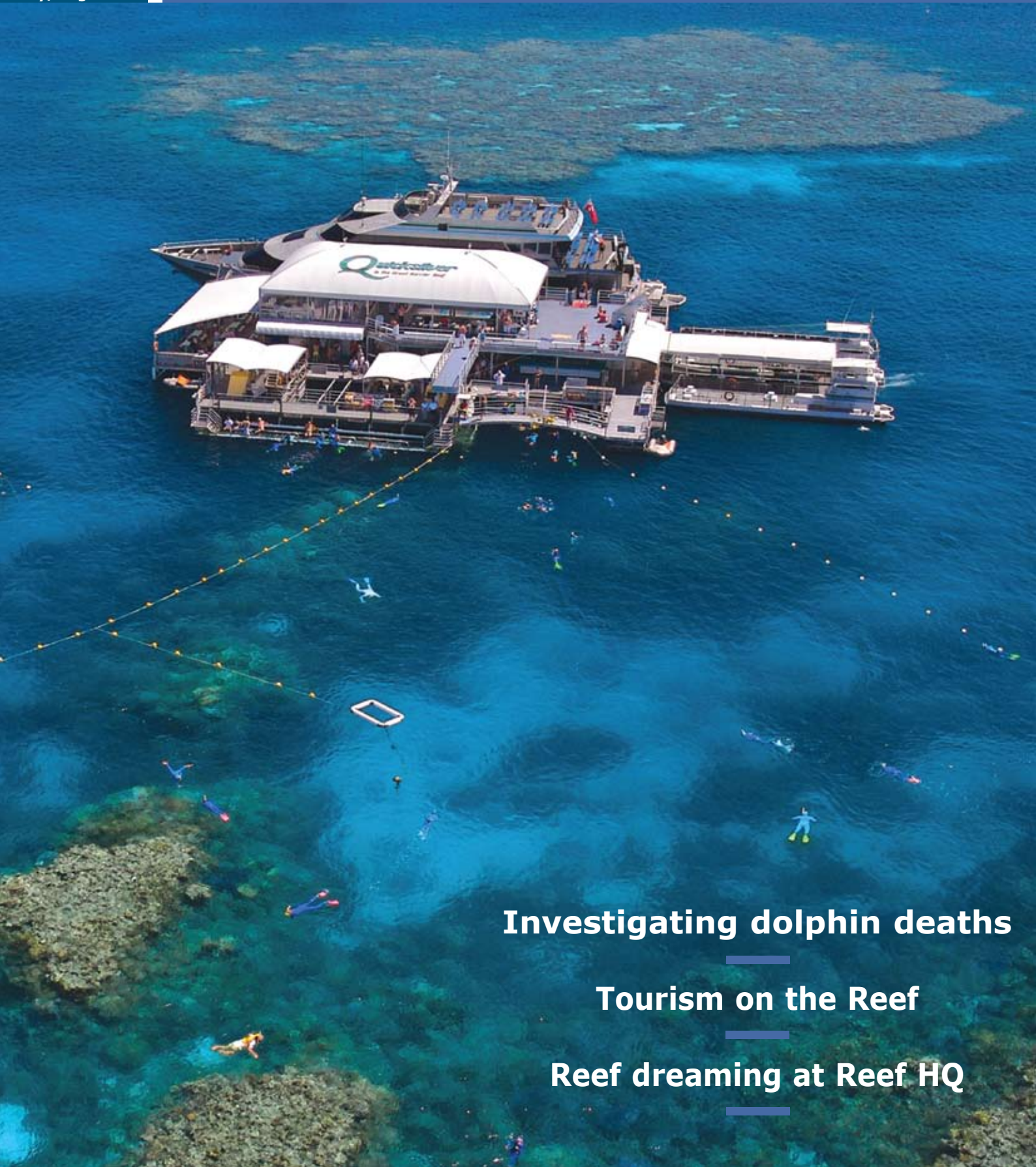
Australian Government
Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority

SEAREAD

FROM CATCHMENT TO CORAL

No. 40
July/Aug 2011

Marine Tourism Supplement



Investigating dolphin deaths

Tourism on the Reef

Reef dreaming at Reef HQ



Cover: Tourists explore Agincourt Reef. Photo courtesy Quicksilver Cruises

In this Issue

Townsville community helps GBRMPA investigate dolphin deaths	3
Students from the other side of the world show their support	4
Marine tourism supplement	5-8
What can I do?	12

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this publication may contain names and images of deceased persons.

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Chairman's message



Our Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is a truly amazing ecosystem with more than 1600 species of fish, about 2900 reefs and six of the world's seven species of marine turtles. It has been listed as a World Heritage Area for almost 30 years.

Many marine parks throughout the world are set up as strict preservation areas that do not allow any extractive activities such as fishing and collecting. However, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is different – it is a multiple-use protected Marine Park.

This means that while the Marine Park is managed to protect the Reef's natural and cultural heritage values, it also allows for a diverse range of sustainable commercial and recreational activities including fishing, tourism, research and education.

In this edition of *SeaRead* we are celebrating our successful partnership with the tourism industry, which brings in more than five million visitors each year and contributes about \$5.1 billion to the Australian economy.

Recently tourism has been experiencing difficult times in the aftermath of extreme weather events and the global economic downturn. The Great Barrier Reef remains the most beautiful, diverse coral ecosystem on the planet and I urge anyone looking for a unique holiday to support local operators and rediscover the Reef.

Visitors can be rest assured their visit will not impact on the ecological sustainability of the Marine Park. Tourism operators work closely with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to monitor and improve the resilience of the Reef.

Their livelihoods depend on a Reef that's vibrant and beautiful, and they're actively involved in helping to keep it healthy into the future.

I'm pleased to see Queensland Tourism Ambassador Ben Southall has started his Best Expedition in the World journey, which treks along the Great Barrier Reef. Ben's adventure is promoting the need to protect the Reef. I am looking forward to tracking Ben's trip up the Queensland coast.

In this same spirit of support, the Reef HQ Aquarium's Turtle Hospital has recently attracted a helping hand from across the globe. The turtle rehabilitation centre came to the attention of 325 American students from Fork Lane Elementary School Long Island in their school studies.

The students sold silicone bracelets and raised \$1000 for the Turtle Hospital.

It's heartening that school students across the world are noticing the good work of our Turtle Hospital and want to help protect the Great Barrier Reef – a place many of the students probably haven't been.

I am proud to see this edition of *SeaRead* reflecting on the positive work being undertaken by our stakeholders, community members and local and international groups who are all working toward a healthier Great Barrier Reef.

Russell Reichelt
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Photo coutesey of Guido J. Parra.



Townsville community helps GBRMPA investigate dolphin deaths

Australian snub-fin dolphins are listed as 'near threatened'.

The Townsville community has been thanked by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) for coming forth with information about two Australian snub-fin dolphins found dead north of Townsville.

The bodies of two rare snub-fin dolphins were recently uncovered by a recreational fisherman in the upper reaches of Two Mile Creek at Toolakea Beach.

The bodies were tied to a mangrove with a rope attached to block of concrete, weighing the bodies down.

GBRMPA Field Management Director Mick Bishop said it appeared as though there was an attempt to conceal the dolphins' bodies and this behaviour was totally unacceptable.

"The dolphins may have been caught accidentally during a legal netting operation," he said.

"However, their deaths should have been reported, instead there has been a clear attempt to conceal the bodies of these dolphins.

"Given the circumstances, the death of these animals is of concern. After the bodies were discovered we appealed for the local community to come forth with any information.

"There has been a lot of interest in this incident and we appreciate community members responding to our appeal for information.

"All valid leads that we receive will be used to assist with our investigation."

Inhabiting the inshore waters of northern Australia, snub-fin dolphins are rare and are listed as 'near threatened' under Queensland law.

They face a number of threats, particularly from habitat loss, illegal netting and coastal development.

Mick said the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park belonged to everyone and we all had a role to play in protecting its plants, animals and habitats.

"Members of the community who are out on the water regularly are important eyes and ears for us and they can

help by reporting any illegal activities taking place," he said.

"We would like to thank the community for the information provided and encourage anyone else with information to come forward."

The animals were found by a recreational fisherman on

23 May and reported to the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

Anyone with information should contact the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on (07) 4726 0588.



Two snub-fin dolphins were found dead north of Townsville.

School holidays brings Reef Dreaming to Reef HQ Aquarium

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Reef HQ Great Barrier Reef Aquarium gave visitors the chance to experience the Reef through the eyes of a Traditional Owner during the aquarium's Reef Dreaming School holiday program.

Reef HQ Aquarium Director Fred Nucifora said the program was a great opportunity for visitors to explore and learn about the unique relationship Traditional Owners have with the Great Barrier Reef.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the Great Barrier Region have a connection to their sea country that dates back over 60,000 years," Fred said.

"The Reef Dreaming program enabled visitors to get a small glimpse of this amazing connection to sea country."

Craft and storytelling featured strongly in the program with visitors able to listen to ancient Dreamtime stories including 'Yamanie'

the creation story about the rainbow serpent.

Visitors gained a greater understanding of the important role Traditional Owners play in the conservation of the Great Barrier Reef as well as an appreciation for the traditional customs still practiced today.

"The Reef Dreaming program allowed visitors to gain a different perspective of the Great Barrier Reef," Fred said.

"This included Banjin/

Warrgamay Traditional Owner Russell Butler Junior sharing his knowledge and cultural ties to the Great Barrier Reef and its marine life."

Organised craft activities saw children being taught how to roll string to make beach hibiscus bracelets as well create their own fiddler crab and mud skipper.

The school holiday program ended on a high note with NAIDOC Week coinciding with the last week of the program at Reef HQ.

Students from the other side of the world show their support

They might be thousands of kilometres away, but a small school in the United States have shown their support for our very own Reef HQ Great Barrier Reef Aquarium Turtle Hospital.

Our rehabilitation centre came to the attention of the 325 children in Fork Lane Elementary School Long Island after they studied Australia and held their very own Australia Day.

Keen to assist with rehabilitating and caring for turtles from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, they sold silicone bracelets and raised \$1000 for the Turtle Hospital.

Reef HQ Aquarium Director Fred Nucifora thanked the students and teachers of Fork Lane Elementary School for their kind donation.

"It's great to see students on the other side of the world

taking an interest in our work and helping care for turtles from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park," he said.

"Their support means the Turtle Hospital can continue to help sick turtles to get better and return home to the Great Barrier Reef."

The mission statement for Fork Lane School is: "To foster an enriching atmosphere that focuses on developing character and student achievement on a daily basis".

Music teacher and organiser of the fundraiser at Fork Lane School Laurie Haddock said this project fulfilled that statement in many ways.

Thousands of staff hours are required to provide around-the-clock care and rehabilitation for the turtle patients. When healthy, the turtles are released back in



Fork Lane Elementary students raised \$1000 selling bracelets.




New York students are helping turtles like Bianca.

to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The Turtle Hospital was made possible by generous donations from sponsors and

members of the community. You can make a donation by contacting Reef HQ on (07) 4750 0700.



MARINE TOURISM

on the Great Barrier Reef

S U P P L E M E N T

Managing tourism for a sustainable future

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is a multiple-use area that allows for a range of activities including tourism, commercial and recreational fishing, shipping, scientific research and Indigenous traditional use.

Tourism on the Great Barrier Reef started in the 1890s and is now a major commercial use of the Marine Park contributing significantly to local and national economies. Each year up to two million visits are made to the Marine Park and there are an additional three million passenger transfers to island destinations on commercial tourism vessels and aircraft.

Almost 800 tourism operators are permitted in the Marine Park.

Almost all of these experiences are nature-based and reliant on a healthy Reef ecosystem. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is the Australian Government agency responsible for ensuring the Marine Park is sustainably managed to protect the Reef's natural and cultural heritage

values now and for future generations.

The GBRMPA closely manages tourism operations in partnership with the tourism industry and uses a number of management tools to ensure tourism remains ecologically sustainable.

The GBRMPA's Zoning Plan sets out what tourism operators can do and where they can go in the Marine Park, including the requirement for all tourism operators to have a Marine Park permit that sets out conditions for individual operations.

There is a focus on the areas of highest use and sensitivity. Plans of Management for the Cairns Area, Hinchinbrook and Whitsundays set out detailed management arrangements and provide for a range of sustainable tourism and recreation opportunities. These arrangements include capping or limiting the number

of operations and defining maximum group and vessel sizes in individual locations.

In addition to the mandatory requirements, tourism operators have the opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of best practice environmental, economic and social standards in their operations by becoming High Standard Tourism Operators.

With tourism operators dependent on a healthy Reef for their livelihoods, it is crucial for them to protect the Reef. There are many tourism operators across the Marine Park regularly working in partnership with the GBRMPA to monitor and improve the resilience of the Reef.

Their work is invaluable and their contributions are recognised through the High Standard Tourism Program, Sightings Network and the Eye on the Reef program.

The Great Barrier Reef – Australia's largest living tourist attraction.

Stretching along the Queensland coast from Cape York to Bundaberg, the Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's most renowned and iconic tourist destinations.

The Reef, protected as part of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, is the largest, most complex and diverse coral reef ecosystem on the planet and is the only living structure that can be seen from space.

It is made up of an array of species from whales to dugongs, to seahorses and clownfish that live in diverse habitats from seagrass meadows and coral cays to sponge gardens.

Local, national and international tourists are drawn to the Great Barrier Reef to experience its wonders through activities such as diving, snorkelling, boating, kayaking, scenic flights, bird watching and fishing.

About 80 per cent of tourism occurs in less than eight per cent of the Marine Park.



World class tourism

Tourists have been visiting the Reef for since the 1890s.

Tourism plays a significant role in the protection of the Great Barrier Reef and in fulfilling Australia's international obligation to present the values of its World Heritage Areas. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) recognises the marine tourism industry's importance in sharing these values to national and international visitors.

There are nearly five million visits made to the Reef and islands annually using commercial tourism operations.

The High Standard Tourism Program is a long-term Australian Government and tourism industry partnership where the industry and GBRMPA work closely together to enhance environmental protection, reef health and tourism sustainability, all of which contribute to a world-class tourism experience.

High Standard Tourism Operators are recognised by the GBRMPA if they are independently certified through the ECO Certification Program managed by

Ecotourism Australia. The certification can be at either the Ecotourism or Advanced Ecotourism level.

Certified operators go the extra mile in providing a high quality experience for visitors. They accept stewardship of the Reef and make an important contribution to the Marine Park and local communities by:

- Demonstrating a commitment to environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability
- Delivering quality interpretation that fosters understanding of the marine environment and sustainability
- Contributing to conservation by participating in monitoring, research and reporting incidents
- Taking climate change action.

These operators also voluntarily follow Responsible Reef Practices. These are guidelines developed in partnership with the industry and outline environmentally responsible ways for tourism operators and their staff to behave

when operating in the Marine Park.

Since 2004, the GBRMPA has been rewarding High Standard Tourism Operators for their commitment to Reef stewardship with a range of benefits, such as extended 15 year permits, showcasing operators on the GBRMPA website and at tourism trade shows, and profiling featured operators in the media.

Today there are 50 High Standard Tourism Operators across the Great Barrier Reef offering a wide range of visitor experiences. The GBRMPA's own Reef HQ Great Barrier Reef Aquarium,

In 2006-07, marine tourism contributed \$5.1 billion to the Australian economy and supported over 50,000 jobs.

the National Education Centre for the Great Barrier Reef, is ECO Certified at the Ecotourism level.

If you are looking to visit the Reef or islands you can choose to travel with a High Standard Operator. Visit www.gbrmpa.gov.au/ highstandards, or you can look for ECO certification logos.





Eye on the Reef

Swimming with whale sharks is one of the many activities tourists can enjoy on the Reef.

Tourism operators make a vital contribution to the care and understanding of the Great Barrier Reef. They spend their lives out on the water and when they report what they witness in day-to-day operations, it is invaluable in assisting the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) to manage the Reef.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is GBRMPA's management partner in sustainably managing tourism.

The Eye on the Reef program allows tourism operators to collect information about Reef health, protected and iconic species and report their sightings to the GBRMPA.

Under the umbrella of the Eye on the Reef program there are a number of monitoring programs that address various environmental and biological impacts, including Reef health, the presence of protected species, water quality, coral bleaching and incident reporting.

Such programs include weekly and rapid monitoring, Sightings Network, Reef Health Impact Surveys (RHIS) and Eyes and Ears incident reporting.

Information collected through the Eye on the Reef program contributes to a data management system that creates a Reef-wide picture of the ecosystem's health. It also helps managers to assess the impact of floods, cyclones, coral bleaching and crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks.

With help from tourism operators, the GBRMPA is able to generate, capture and apply the best available information to improve ecosystem resilience, address risks to that resilience and develop response options. This will lead to better long-term understanding of Reef impacts, ecosystem function and help us protect the Reef for the future.

The Sightings Network

The wonders of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park are always revealing themselves to tourism operators and they share their experiences through the GBRMPA's Sightings Network with the GBRMPA.

Tourism operators are often the first to notice changes as well as experiencing rare, extraordinary and memorable events and interactions with the animals of the Great Barrier Reef.

Over 5000 records of events and animals have been captured by tourism operators through the Sightings Network.

Reporting these encounters and experiences plays a vital role in increasing knowledge and understanding of the Reef's ecosystem and provides valuable information to researchers and managers of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The Sightings Network was established in 2007 and now holds over 5000 records. Tourism operators regularly report unusual events such as waterspouts, spawning, mating and animals of iconic value and interest such as whales, sharks, dolphins, dugongs, turtles, whale sharks and Maori wrasse.



A healthy Reef means a healthy industry

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the largest, healthiest and best managed reef systems in the world but it is not immune to climate change.

The Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2009 states climate change poses one of the greatest threats to coral reefs worldwide and the effects of climate change are already being felt across the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Tourism operators are experiencing higher than average rainfall, coral bleaching in localised areas and extreme weather.

It's widely recognised that a healthy Reef provides for a healthy tourism industry. Taking action against climate change gives the Reef the best chance of survival and ensures it continues to be positioned as a top international and national travel destination.

Tourism industry leaders and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) are working together as the

Tourism Climate Change Action Group (TCCAG). They have developed and released the Great Barrier Reef Tourism Climate Change Action Strategy 2009-12.

The Strategy identifies six objectives for mobilising the tourism industry and its stakeholders to take action on climate change, including:

- Raising awareness about climate change impacts on the Great Barrier Reef
- Reducing carbon emissions
- Supporting climate change monitoring, reporting and research
- Improving the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef

Through an Environmental Management Charge, Reef visitors contribute approximately \$8 million dollars each year to Marine Park management.

- Integrating climate change into business operations and planning
- Influencing and facilitating change.

Taking action on climate change

In a 2010 survey of Marine Park tourism industry stakeholders, nearly 100 per cent were taking steps to reduce their climate footprint and operate more sustainably.

The GBRMPA, through the Tourism Climate Change Action Group, has been working closely with the Reef tourism industry to equip operators with the knowledge and tools to tackle climate change.

Case studies, workshops and tour guide fact sheets are assisting operators, along with practical tools for businesses to reduce their carbon footprint. This includes an online emissions calculator and the Climate Action Certification Program that assists operators to take the

most appropriate actions for their business and the Reef.

There are more than 50 High Standard Tourism Operators in the Marine Park, carrying approximately 60 per cent of the tourists who visit the Reef.

Tourism operators are in direct contact with visitors every day and are uniquely positioned to deliver messages on climate change both on and off the Reef. Individual operators can raise awareness by helping visitors understand how climate change is impacting coral reef systems locally and globally and encouraging visitors to take action at home.

To find out more about the Reef tourism industry's response to climate change, visit www.gbrmpa.gov.au/ onboard or email tourec@gbmpa.gov.au.



Photo courtesy of Tourism Queensland.

Ben Southall gets up close and personal with the Great Barrier Reef.

an excellent opportunity to showcase all the Great Barrier Reef has to offer.

"Ben Southall is an excellent promoter and supporter of the Great Barrier Reef and the Queensland tourism industry in general," he said.

"We hope this trip highlights the amazing beauty and diversity of the Great Barrier Reef, and the importance of protecting this natural wonder for the future.

"As Ben shares his experiences, we hope other people follow his lead and choose to visit the Great Barrier Reef."

Ben will be assisted by a dedicated support vessel and crew and stay in a variety of Queensland hostels in the YHA network when the crew stop on land.

Ben will share his experience through blogs, photos, and videos. Follow his progress at: www.bestexpeditionintheworld.com.

Ben embarks on world's best expedition

He's swapped the best job in the world for the best expedition in the world along one of Australia's great natural treasures.

Former Best Job in the World Island Caretaker and now

Queensland Tourism Ambassador Ben Southall is getting up close and personal with our very own Great Barrier Reef.

His four-month, 1600 kilometre sea trek along the

Reef in his kayak retraces the route taken by British explorer Captain James Cook more than 200 years ago.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Chairman Russell Reichelt said this was

International award recognises environmental achievement

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's (GBRMPA) commitment to a robust environmental impact assessment process has been internationally recognised.

The agency has been awarded the 2011 Institutional Award at the International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA) annual conference in Puebla, Mexico.

The IAIA also commended the GBRMPA for its transparent and rigorous environmental impact assessment process and introduction of a strategic environmental assessment.

GBRMPA Environmental Assessment and Management Director Dr Adam Smith accepted the award on behalf of the organisation.

"It was a great surprise and also a great honour and privilege to receive the award on behalf of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority," Adam said.

The GBRMPA received the award for its commitment to the use of impact assessments in providing for the long-term protection and ecologically sustainable use of the Great Barrier Reef.

It is only the third time that an Australian organisation has won the award and the GBRMPA is the first marine organisation ever to receive it.

As well as being presented with the prestigious award, Adam was invited to give a presentation during the June conference.

The IAIA award is presented each year to a national or



IAIA president Dr Stephen Linter congratulates Dr Adam Smith.

international government or non-government organisation for their outstanding contribution to impact assessment practice or other environment-related activity.

Past winners of the award include the international

development agencies of Sweden and Canada, Australia's Environmental Protection Agency, and the Swiss-based International Union for Conservation of Nature.



Lance Murray with his double header coral trout catch.

The fishing guide that's good for you and the Reef

Do you like to wet a line from time to time? Have a favourite fishing spot that you hope is there for years to come?

Fishing veteran Lance Murray and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's marine expert Mark Read share some responsible fishing practices... and also a few hints on how to get that perfect catch!

Fishing veteran shares his wisdom

Lance Murray has been fishing for more than 50 years and like all good fishermen, he knows what needs to be done to protect his favourite fishing spots.

Introduced to fishing at the tender age of five, the team leader and life member of Sunfish Mackay urges his

fellow fishing comrades to follow his lead in disposing of rubbish and fishing responsibly.

"Nothing gives me greater pleasure than walking the beaches light gear fishing, chasing whiting, bream or flathead," he said.

"But nothing disturbs me more than discarded plastic bags – my number one environmental menace.

"They are everywhere. We could never measure the cost of damage they have caused to marine motors, let alone the tragic consequences to marine mammals.

"I appeal to all anglers, of all ages, to do our planet, the environment and our community a favour – collect them, take them home and dispose of them responsibly."

Simple choices make big difference to the Reef

Did you know choosing carbon steel fishing hooks over stainless steel hooks could be the difference in preventing injuries and deaths of marine species such as turtles?

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority species conservation manager – and regular fisherman – Mark Read said damaging practices could be prevented by making simple choices.

"It's easy for fishers to fish responsibly and help keep their favourite fishing spot thriving," Mark said.

"Stainless steel hooks may seem like a good idea but their use can have a long-term effect on marine life, as they don't rust and break down quickly like carbon steel hooks.

"If stainless steel hooks are left imbedded in fish and other marine life it can cause

Mark's fishing tips:

When out on the water, always watch where the bait bin and prawns are located because where there's blood there is likely to be predators. Live bait in these cases is the best way to catch a feed. Also, match your choice of lure to the bait you're seeing.

If you catch a snag at low tide, take some time to remove old fishing line and rigs from the snag and throw it away responsibly. You'll have the satisfaction of knowing you've removed a potential hazard for turtles and other species and improve the health of our Reef.

damage to their mouths or guts if swallowed."

Mark said old fishing gear and tackle also shouldn't be thrown overboard as over time the trailing line from an imbedded hook can tangle around an animal.

"Tangled lines cut through the skin causing serious wounds and can lead to the loss of a flipper."

"There are simple guidelines we can all follow to make sure the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is kept safe from litter and damaging practices – making simple choices like the type of hook you use will make a big difference."

Lance's fishing tips:

If you are chasing pelagic fish using a chrome lure, change the hook annually, but more importantly "cut and polish" the lure at least once a year, and polish it every time before you take it out it will enhance your prospects of catching mackerel – promise.

If you use yabbies for bait as I do, then you know how hard they are to find in winter. Don't discard them after your trip, take them home, place in a plastic screw top container and place about a tablespoon of methylated spirits in with them, swirl around, and then drain the liquid. They will keep in the freezer in a semi-frozen state for months and months. You can take them out fishing and use what you need then refreeze again.

I appeal to all fishos to take only what you need, please don't get greedy. Unfortunately some of our fish stocks are at a dangerous biomass level. We are custodians of this resource, and it is our responsibility to leave it better than when we found it – what a challenge to mankind that is!

- Cheers, Lance



LMAC members jump on board to express concerns

The Capricorn Coast and Gladstone Local Marine Advisory Committees (LMACs) recently took part in a fact finding boat trip to inspect several sites earmarked for development in the region.

Sites visited included the proposed coal loading facilities at Balaclava Island situated at the mouth of the Fitzroy River and the Great Keppel Island Revitalisation Plant on Great Keppel Island.

During the site visit LMAC members were able to speak face-to-face with representatives from Tower Holdings, Xstrata Coal, the Fitzroy Terminal Project and CQ Consulting Group all of which are directly involved in the proposed projects.

Capricorn Coast LMAC Chair Mark Jeffery said the boat trip and the consultation with the companies involved in the development resulted in a successful day.

"The trip enabled LMAC members to meet with the project developers to exchange views and participate in frank and constructive discussions about each of the projects," Mark said.

"LMAC members now have a better understanding of the location and scale of the proposed projects and have a clear understanding of the intent behind each of them.

"The information LMAC members learnt from the trip will be taken back to inform the stakeholder groups we represent.

"The representatives involved in the development of the projects now have a better understanding of community concerns and issues as a result of this engagement."

The LMAC members present on the tour are representatives of number of community interest groups interested in the development proposals.

This includes environmentalists, the Fitzroy Basin Association, surf riders, recreational fishers and collector industries, educational organisations and the diving, sailing and tourism industries.

BRIEFS

Students learn first-hand impacts of climate change on Indigenous communities

Students from around the world heard first-hand how Indigenous communities are working to improve the resilience of their local environments in the face of climate change at an international virtual conference hosted by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Students held discussions with Traditional Owners from Australia, Canada, Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico and New Zealand about the potential impacts climate change will have on Indigenous culture and how communities are adapting.

Small school has big plans to protect the Reef

Millaroo State School may be a small school of 27 students but they have big plans when it comes to protecting the Great Barrier Reef.

The Burdekin school is the latest school to pledge their support for the Reef by joining the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's Reef Guardian Schools Program.

The voluntary stewardship program involves partnerships between schools and their communities working towards a sustainable future for the Great Barrier Reef.

Local cane farmer signs up as a Reef Guardian

Cane farmer Jeff Cantamessa is one of the first farmers in the Herbert region to be part of the pilot for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's Reef Guardian stewardship program.

Jeff volunteered to be part of the Reef Guardian Farmers program for the cane sector because he believes in a productive and sustainable sugar industry.

Calendar of events 2011

July

3 – 10	NAIDOC Week
29	Schools Tree Day
31	National Tree Day

August

9	International Day for World Indigenous People
22 – 28	Keep Australia Beautiful Week

Future events in

September

26 – 29	5th World Congress of Conservation Agriculture
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What can I do?

Humpback whales visit the Marine Park between May and September on their annual migration. If you're lucky enough to see these majestic giants make sure you stay a safe distance and follow these responsible practices:

When you encounter whales or dolphins, either from a vessel, aircraft or in the water. You must:

- Not kill, take, injure and/or interfere with whales and dolphins - interference includes harassing, chasing and herding
- Not restrict the path of whales or dolphins
- Not touch or feed, or attempt to touch or feed, a whale or dolphin

- Not enter the water within 100 metres of a whale or within 50 metres of a dolphin
- Not approach closer than 30 metres to a whale or dolphin if you are in the water. If a whale or dolphin approaches you while you are in the water, move slowly, do not touch or swim towards it
- Minimise noise when closer than 300 metres from a whale or dolphin

When operating a vessel or aircraft:

- A vessel must not approach closer than 100 metres to a whale, or 50 metres to a dolphin
- If the whale or dolphin is a calf, a vessel must not enter within a radius of 300

metres of the whale and 150 metres of the dolphin

When in the Whitsunday Planning Area, there are some additional rules in relation to whales:

- A vessel must not approach closer than 300 metres to a whale in the Whitsunday Whale Protection Area
- A helicopter must not approach below 2000 feet or within 1000 metres of a whale.

By following these responsible practices you're not only playing a big part in their conservation but you're also providing a safe environment to watch them.

Creature feature

Sea snakes

Just like land snakes, sea snakes breathe air, have a forked tongue and are covered with scales that they shed from time-to-time.

Despite sharing many characteristics with land snakes, a 'true' sea snake won't ever voluntarily leave its marine habitat to venture onto land, as opposed to a sea krait (a different type of sea snake) which leaves the water to lay its eggs.

Sitting in a global hotspot of sea snake diversity, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is home to 14 different species of sea snake. This high number of different species is largely due to the Marine Park's variety of suitable habitat found underneath the surface.

In the Marine Park some sea snake species occupy a range of different habitat types, while others prefer particular habitats such as coral reefs, shoals and muddy areas.

The Marine Park's sea snakes feed on an array of different food, ranging from small crabs and fish eggs, to different types of small fish.

They can range in size from half a metre to two metres when fully grown, and some species, like the Stokes sea snake, can weigh several kilograms.

Being slow breeders, sea snake populations are particularly vulnerable to impacts. For example, the female olive sea snake reaches breeding age at about four to five-years old and the male at about three years old. They breed approximately every two years with courting and mating occurring in winter, a long gestation period of 11 months and a low number of young (usually less than three), born in summer.

The long time between breeding and the low number of young produced means that sea snake populations aren't able to bounce back quickly when numbers are low. This makes addressing all the pressures acting on sea snakes particularly important for the ongoing survival of this group of animals.



The olive sea snake is a slow breeder so it is important to address all pressures acting on this and all sea snake species.

In Queensland waters, all sea snakes are 'protected species' under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and the *Great*

Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975. This means that the direct harvest of sea snakes is prohibited.