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Benzaken, D.

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Values do matter: managing cultural and social diversity leads to better protection

D Benzaken

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, PO Box 1379, Townsville Qld 4810

Abstract

Values are social constructs arising from belief systems which provide individuals and society with a framework for organising and interpreting their surroundings and for acting according to agreed social norms. Valuing selected aspects of the natural or social environment is giving those aspects special significance according to shared beliefs about their importance. Environmental values therefore are not properties of the environment per se, but rather a statement by the beholder (individuals, groups, cultures society) of their importance. In environmental management, 'values' are defined as valued attributes of the natural environment for their ecological, social, economic and cultural significance.

According to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area Strategic Plan vision, stakeholder agencies have the responsibility to maintain and enhance the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area aesthetic, ecological cultural and social value. Managing for a range of 'values' requires both knowledge of those values as well as equitable processes to maintain present and future values and opportunities for the local, national and global communities.

Developing an inventory of Great Barrier Reef 'values' (to whom, why, what, where) is the first step from which tools can be developed to assist decision making. Once identified, 'values' may be 'mapped' and integrated with other information such as distribution of reef use and reef ecology. Subjective maps of 'values' will assist the decision making process by making explicit what underpins stakeholder positions including the identification of areas of potential conflicts and common grounds. While values may be 'mapped' according to who holds them, geographical location or nature of interest, their weighting in decision making is problematic. Economic tools have been developed to address this issue either by assigning a dollar value to values traditionally not traded in the market (e.g. intrinsic value, ecological value, subsistence value) and by developing decision support tools such as multicriteria analysis and use allocation criteria based on highest economic value. While these techniques will assist the decision making process, they should not replace participatory decision making mechanisms where stakeholders' values are negotiated and traded off to achieve agreed outcomes.

The current status of knowledge on Great Barrier Reef values has been acquired through agencies' public participation exercises, commissioning research studies and post graduate research. Relevant information can also found in various databases. While information on values associated with direct use is available (e.g. tourism and recreation studies, economics studies) and has been compiled in various databases (e.g. human use database, Department of Tourism database), its use is limited to identify patterns and trends because of the scale and scope of those projects. Overall, the information base is incomplete particularly as it relates to values associated with indirect use (e.g. global and national community), non use (e.g. cultural, conservation) and values of those excluded from participatory processes. An integrated approach is required to ensure that time series at a range of scales can be developed in key areas such as World Heritage, recreation and tourism, indigenous use and economics. Recent reports to address Great Barrier Reef wide values include the economic value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (Driml 1993), the development of a inventory of World

Heritage values, and a national survey of public perception of wilderness in the Great Barrier Reef.

References

Driml, S. 1994. Protection for profit: economic and financial values of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and other protected areas. Research Publication No. 35. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville. 83 pp.