



## TOURISM REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMUNIQUE Meeting 1, 14 and 15 October 2014

*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 opened the first meeting, paying respect to the Wulgurukaba and Bindal Traditional Owners, their cultures and their Elders, both past and present. Below is a summary of the discussion and advice provided to GBRMPA from the meeting which was held in Townsville on 14 and 15 October 2014.

### Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority update

#### TRAC noted the report on GBRMPA.

Dr Reichelt welcomed TRAC members and provided an update on agency matters including Abbot Point dredge disposal and the development of a policy to address and manage capital and maintenance dredging and disposal in the Marine Park. It was noted the objectives of the Remote Natural Area zoning overlay for Princess Charlotte Bay in the far north of the Marine Park aims to ensure the area remains largely unaltered by works or facilities. TRAC indicated their interest in being involved in the development of the policy.

In addition, it was noted the IUCN has recognised the Outlook Report as the model for international reporting on protected areas, there was also discussion on water quality targets and the successful partnership with industry to manage the outbreak of crown-of-thorns starfish.

### Vision, operating approach and terms of reference for TRAC

#### TRAC agreed on a vision, operating approach and agreed to provide feedback on terms of reference for TRAC.

The vision adopted by TRAC to guide its advice to GBRMPA is: *The Great Barrier Reef is universally recognised as the world's best managed reef system providing outstanding reef experiences now and into the future.*

The operating approach will include a communiqué to be prepared as advice to GBRMPA and as a publically available synopsis of the meeting. They also agreed on some standing agenda items, and meeting frequency, with some flexibility in order to respond to issues and provide input into policy as the matters arise. Finally, TRAC are to provide feedback on the terms of reference as an action from the meeting.

### Great Barrier Reef tourism industry update

#### TRAC noted the report on the current status of the Great Barrier Reef marine tourism industry, and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park visitation information.

Industry members informed the TRAC that the last 12 months had seen growth across all sectors and for all regions along the coast, including the Mackay/Capricorn region. There has been very high occupancy rates, and solid bookings and passenger numbers for most vessel operations and island resorts, and some investment in new vessels generally and refurbishments to resorts.

- For Cairns, traditional markets such as Europe, UK and USA have improved, however the Chinese market is now static and there has been some softening in the domestic market, possibly due to shorter school holiday periods due to the change in dates and reduction in discount airfares.
- For the Whitsundays, there has been an expansion in the Chinese market in the region, which has raised some complexities in catering for this market. New discounted flights have also increased tourism visitation in this area.



## TRAC Meeting 1, 14 and 15 October 2014 COMMUNIQUE

Members commented that tourism in the Great Barrier Reef is far from being out of favour and Australia is now the fastest growing and most penetrated market in the world from a cruise ship perspective. Members felt they could make better use of social media etc to promote positive perceptions of the Reef.

Data from the Environmental Management Charge (EMC) presented to members reflected growth in visitation across the Great Barrier Reef.

### Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment and Program Report

**TRAC noted the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Program Report is being operationalised through GBRMPA's corporate and annual operating planning processes.**

Members were provided a briefing on the Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment which focussed on the improvements to management and protection of the marine component of the Great Barrier Reef Region. It was noted this was complemented by the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Zone Strategic Assessment, led by the Queensland Government, which focused on management arrangements in coastal areas adjacent to the Region.

Discussion was focused on the five key areas identified in the GBRMPA Program Report:

- Management framework based on outcomes and targets and setting standards and thresholds for biodiversity
- Cumulative impact assessment guidelines
- Net benefit policy to facilitate decisions that minimise the damage at a site, and result in an overall environmental gain through actions in an area which is directly linked to the site
- Reef recovery program to maintain and restore sites of high environmental value
- Integrated monitoring and reporting to facilitate collection and sharing of environmental data to aid decision making.

### Draft Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan

**TRAC was asked to advise on the draft Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan as input into the public consultation. TRAC decided not to provide input as a committee but invited members to provide individual submissions on the draft by 27 October 2014.**

The draft Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan, a response from the Australian and Queensland Government to address the World Heritage Committee concerns was presented. The Plan, which provides a line of sight between the vision, outcomes, objectives, targets and actions, takes into account the Strategic Assessments, Program Reports and Outlook Report 2014. An integrated monitoring framework will be put in place to report on progress.

Members' attention was drawn to actions in the Plan relating to tourism areas. There was discussion around the Queensland Government's aim to double visitor expenditure by 2020 and whether this was addressed in the draft Plan. Similarly, there will likely be tensions between the draft Plan and other future developments on land. Members were concerned that the institutional agreements are not in place to manage standards for land-based developments which would impact the Reef. There was discussion about the role of the tourism industry in this Plan and the strong relationship between community interest in protecting the Reef and the value of the area as a tourism destination. It was also noted that the action to implement the Queensland Ecotourism Plan aims for a world-class experience of tourism on the Reef.

### Corporate Plan and Annual Operating Plan

**TRAC noted the 2014-19 Corporate Plan and 2014-15 Annual Operating Plan.**

Ms Margaret Johnson, General Manager, Policy and Stewardship, GBRMPA, outlined GBRMPA's role, direction and priorities for the next five years as detailed in GBRMPA's 2014-19 Corporate Plan. The vision is 'A healthy Great Barrier Reef for future generations'. The five strategies are developing an outcome-based adaptive management framework, ensuring best available knowledge for management decisions, ensuring effective and efficient environmental regulation, strengthening engagement, and maintaining a high performing organisation. The Corporate Plan is strongly aligned with the Strategic Assessment, Program Report, and draft Long-term Sustainability Plan.



The 2014-15 Annual Operating Plan details GBRMPA's work program to deliver on the Corporate Plan. It includes 17 priority projects which are aligned to the recommendations of the GBRMPA Program Report, as well as strengthening (business improvement) projects and foundational management activities (day-to-day services) of GBRMPA.

Members' discussion focused on one of the priority projects relating to the amendment of the Whitsundays Plan of Management. The amendment is being driven partly through stakeholder requests such as improved access for super-yachts and motorised water sports; partly to align with research regarding seabird closure dates and to make technical corrections to the aircraft landing areas.

### Tourism and Stewardship work program

**TRAC noted the current work of the Tourism and Stewardship section and was asked to advise on ways to deliver the tourism aspects of the Tourism and Stewardship work program. Advice was deferred to specific agenda items on these matters.**

Ms Karen Vohland, Director, Tourism and Stewardship section, GBRMPA, identified that section's priority projects relating to tourism for 2014-15 are the crown-of-thorns starfish management program which is being conducted in partnership with the tourism industry and another new project to focus on reducing marine debris. Foundational and strengthening activities will include finalising the Tourism Management Strategy and the Moorings policy, reviewing of the Cruise Shipping Policy and working with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) to improve the joint approach to managing the Great Barrier Reef. There will also be a greater focus on high standard tourism, industry involvement in the Eye on the Reef monitoring program and improving products such as the Onboard website to assist operators working in the Marine Park.

### Reef Recovery

**TRAC advised on the proposed approach to the development of Regional Reef Recovery Plans.**

TRAC was informed that Reef Recovery Plans will be developed at a regional scale and will be the marine equivalent of a Water Quality Improvement Plan. Focussed on enabling local people to develop local solutions for local problems, the key elements of developing Reef Recovery Plans will be: community involvement in identifying key values, assigning a current and preferred state for values, identifying threats to values and tools to address the threats. The first Reef Recovery Plan will focus on the Mackay-Whitsundays Natural Resource Management Region and will be developed with the Mackay-Whitsundays Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership.

In discussing the proposed Reef Recovery Plans, members felt it was important for the whole catchment to be included in each Plan. It was also considered important to communicate more broadly with the all people who care about the Reef and engage them effectively to enable them to become advocates for the Reef. Members felt strongly that the tourism industry should be involved in Mackay-Whitsunday Reef Recovery planning process. There is also a clear overlap between Reef Recovery action plans and the proposed industry sector implementation plans provided for under the Long-term Sustainability Plan. TRAC made Reef Recovery (Action) Plans a standing item for future meetings.

### Science strategy and integrated monitoring and reporting

**TRAC noted the draft Science Strategy and Science Information Needs 2014-2019 and noted the development of an Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program.**

The Science Strategy and Science Information Needs 2014-19 identifies GBRMPA's science needs for management and is a tool to open dialogue between GBRMPA and science providers. The tool allows scientists to align their research with GBRMPA's needs and therefore generate better science information for management.

The Reef Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program is also under development to report on progress of the Long-term Sustainability Plan and the Program Report. Outcomes of the program include: informing adaptive management, building capacity to predict, identify and respond to change in the ecological/human system, coordinating communication of findings, and informing future Outlook Reports.



## TRAC Meeting 1, 14 and 15 October 2014 COMMUNIQUE

TRAC discussed the benefits of such a program to predict, identify and respond to change because it would link many existing databases. Noting the size and complexity of the project and the likely timeframes, members suggested that there needed to be intermediate outcomes identified to inspire completion of the project.

### Crown-of-thorns starfish

**TRAC noted the information on the biology, history and management of crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS). TRAC was asked to advise on how tourism operators could be encouraged to undertake permitted COTS control activities at their tourism sites.**

GBRMPA and the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO) are currently working in partnership to manage the current outbreak through a direct control program. QPWS, through the Field Management Program, are undertaking surveys to guide control effort. However, all users of the Marine Park can also provide intelligence and surveillance to assist the targeting of control effort. TRAC members were encouraged to promote the Eye on the Reef Sightings app to their wider community for individuals to report sightings of COTS.

Tourism operators are also able to cull COTS at their sites if permitted. GBRMPA has prepared updated COTS Control Guidelines which include information on the recently developed single-injection control method. Operators are also able to view AMPTO videos on Youtube which provide information on how to undertake a COTS control program and assemble equipment for injecting COTS.

TRAC members' assistance was sought in to communicate the opportunity for operators to apply for a new COTS permit that includes the single shot injection.

A more strategic approach to manage COTS outbreaks into the future is needed. An Integrated Management Framework for COTS is currently being developed by GBRMPA, in partnership with the research community and other Government departments, based on the Integrated Pest Management model which has been used for land-based pests. Over time, the application of this Framework aims to help to decrease the level and frequency of COTS outbreaks by managing the factors which cause outbreaks to occur.

### High Standard Tourism

**TRAC noted the information on GBRMPA's high standard tourism program and advised on potential synergies between the High Standard Tourism Program and the Reef Guardian Program. TRAC deferred advise on the strengths and weaknesses of the current High Standard Tourism Program and instead nominated a TRAC working group to progress both the strengthening of the high standard tourism program and the possible development of a Reef Guardian tourism program.**

GBRMPA's high standard tourism program commenced in 2004 and invited operators who were appropriately certified through Ecotourism Australia to be recognised as high standard operators, qualifying them to apply for a 15-year permit term (a standard permit term is six years) and promotion on GBRMPA's website, at trade shows, conferences and events. The program will be reviewed to determine whether it is still fit for purpose. In conjunction with this review, GBRMPA is also looking to pilot a Reef Guardian Tourism program. Reef Guardians is a stewardship recognition program whereas the High Standard Tourism Program is a certification program. Options are being investigated as to whether these programs could be merged, interlinked or should be kept separate. TRAC members had a lengthy discussion around the merits of eco certification, and how to provide greater incentives to operators to become eco-certified. There was also discussion on mandatory certification versus other ways to improve the minimum standard of all operators.

The TRAC working group will consist of Mr Col McKenzie, Mr Tony Brown, Mr David Morgans, Mr Geoff Kent, and Ms Bianca Priest.



### Moorings Policy

**TRAC noted completion of the public consultation period for the moorings policy and incorporation of submissions (where appropriate); endorsed the draft policy Moorings in the Great Barrier Reef and noted the supporting information sheet to the moorings policy.**

The revised moorings policy covers public, private and recreational vessel moorings. The policy aims to promote environmental protection, ecologically sustainable access to the Great Barrier Reef, and best practice management and use of moorings. Following public consultation in June 2014, the policy was amended to:

- Recognise the range of experience that may be required to undertake mooring maintenance
- Provide guidance on the sharing of private moorings
- Recognise joint management arrangements for moorings in the Great Barrier Reef
- Include a reference to World Heritage Status
- Include reference to Traditional Owners
- Provide greater focus on moorings compliance.

### Tourism Management Strategy

**TRAC noted progress in developing a tourism management strategy; advised on the way forward (specifically on its vision, objectives and targets); and nominated members for a TRAC working group.**

The 2014 Outlook Report process confirmed the need for an overarching Tourism Management Strategy to be finalised. TRAC's advice was sought on the vision, objectives and five-year targets for the Strategy. TRAC requested that the vision for the Strategy be the same as the vision developed by TRAC for its terms of reference (refer second agenda in this communique). TRAC also provided comments regarding the objectives and targets of strategy, including:

- The objectives should include a stronger emphasis on the role GBRMPA undertakes in relation to tourism and its partnership with the tourism industry in managing tourism in the Great Barrier Reef
- The objectives should emphasise continuous improvement of tourism best practice
- Further clarity is required for targets identifying percentages of active operators participating in stewardship programs
- Priority should also be given to the targets relating to reviewing the minimum standard, adapting to climate change, improving presentation of the World Heritage Area (including provision of training and resources to tourism staff).

It was proposed to utilise the participants of the high standard tourism/Reef Guardian tourism working group to provide more detailed advice on the development of the Strategy, with TRAC to be consulted more broadly as the Strategy reaches finalisation.

### Permissions system and environmental impact assessment

**TRAC noted the priority projects for the Environmental Assessment and Protection section; the presentation on GBRMPA's permission system and environment impact assessment processes; and progress on the dredge synthesis consensus projects. TRAC provided 12 principles as advice to GBRMPA on developing the whole-of-government approach to dredge and spoil disposal.**

TRAC was briefed on the various legislation and jurisdictions that relate to the Great Barrier Reef and the complexities of assessing and granting permissions for the Great Barrier Reef. The presentation also covered the key priorities for the Environmental Assessment and Protection section which included assisting with the Australian National Audit Office Performance Audit, development of a permits compliance program and streamlining environmental decisions with the Queensland Government. Permit Compliance will be a standing agenda item at future TRAC meetings and the opportunity for TRAC members to be involved the development of the compliance program will be provided.



## TRAC Meeting 1, 14 and 15 October 2014

### COMMUNIQUE

Other matters raised were the status of permit assessments, the dredge synthesis project and a whole-of-government approach to develop a policy on dredging and spoil disposal in the Great Barrier Reef. There was lengthy discussion around issues associated with dredging, dredge spoil disposal, legislated and regulatory requirements and scientific research. Mr Bruce Elliot, General Manager, Biodiversity, Conservation and Sustainable Use, responded to enquiries from TRAC members.

TRAC developed the following 12 principles as advice to GBRMPA on the policy on dredging and spoil disposal. These are:

1. Recognise, respect and continue to preserve the pristine status of the Far Northern Great Barrier Reef (from Port Douglas north) – no new capital dredging in that area and well-managed maintenance dredging at Cooktown.
2. Match vessels to geography as a matter of priority in order to minimise requirement of maintenance and capital dredging for both small and large operations.
3. Recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach to management of dredging will not be appropriate, and the approach should not adversely affect small and medium-sized facilities such as marinas.
4. Commit to no disposal of capital dredge spoil in the Marine Park through legislation.
5. Encourage continual improvement of dredging, dredging design and disposal techniques to have world's best-practice, including options for beneficial reuse of dredge material.
6. Seek opportunities to avoid or minimise dredging in the first instance (for example use of trestles).
7. Require assessments to cover the life of the project and include assessment of ongoing maintenance dredging requirements as well as initial capital dredging.
8. Improve knowledge around ecological impacts of dredging (including use of hind-casting).
9. Develop a strategy collaboratively to reduce the volume of maintenance spoil disposal in the Marine Park over time.
10. Engage all stakeholders early (including the tourism industry) in proposals and approvals process for developments. The decision-making process needs to be transparent and information provided to all stakeholders.
11. Recognise the current stress the Great Barrier Reef is under, when undertaking cumulative impact assessment. A sense of urgency and a stronger environmental stance should be taken while the southern two-thirds of the Reef is in decline.
12. Recognise marine tourism as an enduring industry and a major employer and export earner – so long as Reef quality is sustained. Any assessment must examine the impact of the project on the sustainability of the tourism industry.

#### Joint Permitting

**TRAC noted the initiative to deliver a new, integrated, Great Barrier Reef joint tourism permission covering Marine Parks permits and commercial activity permits for operations on national park islands and the Green Island Recreation Area.**

Currently tourism operators hold a Marine Parks permit for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park. In addition, many operators also hold a Commercial Activity Permit to access island National Parks. GBRMPA and QPWS have developed and will trial an integrated Great Barrier Reef permit in November 2014. Transition to the Great Barrier Reef permit will be optional. TRAC were extremely supportive of this streamlining initiative. It was noted that certified high standard operators would be able to apply for a 15-year Great Barrier Reef permit but that the integrated permit would not apply to Commercial Activity Agreements in the Whitsundays.

#### Other business

TRAC members were encouraged to submit items and papers for future TRAC meetings. Two items were proposed by members, one relating to moorings in the Whitsundays and the other to cruise ships in the Great Barrier Reef.

#### Next meeting

The next meeting of the Tourism Reef Advisory Committee will be held in March 2015.



**Tourism Reef Advisory Committee Membership**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Expertise/Affiliation</b>
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
Ms Karen Vohland	GBRMPA Director, Tourism and Stewardship

