



From the Deck

MAY 2011
NEWSLETTER - 32

A team effort over summer

This summer has brought some extra challenges for both the Great Barrier Reef tourism industry and the Great Barrier Reef itself.

During late December and January we saw flood plumes flow out from the Burnett and Fitzroy catchments extending as far as the Capricorn Bunker area of the Marine Park. Then further north, in February, we experienced two cyclones in the space of a week – firstly Tropical Cyclone Anthony, a Category 1 system crossed the coast near Bowen, and then the massive Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Yasi, centred on Mission Beach and Dunk Island and affected areas from Townsville to Cairns.

At the GBRMPA, we are very conscious of the impact these events continue to have on the Reef's tourism industry. We know that some of you have suffered damage to your vessels and infrastructure and that you may still be experiencing the disappointment of booking cancellations and lower than normal sales. The extent of damage to the Great Barrier Reef was patchy, as outlined elsewhere in this newsletter.

In partnership with industry associations we are doing what we can to help, by ensuring our media and public statements emphasise that the effects of these events are localised; that almost all of

the tourism industry of the Great Barrier Reef remains open for business; and that the Reef is still a great, world class destination to visit. During the floods, the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO), the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) and the GBRMPA released a joint media statement encouraging people to keep visiting, explaining that the majority of popular holiday locations were unaffected. Straight after TC Yasi, we reassured the public that tourism operators in the popular sites of Cairns, Port Douglas, Townsville and the Whitsundays would be back up and running within days.

I am confident that the Great Barrier Reef's tourism industry will be resilient in rebuilding after the summer of 2011 and I encourage you to contact the GBRMPA if you have any specific issues where we would be able to help you in the months ahead.



I recognise the importance of this newsletter as one way to keep the tourism industry informed. However, given increasing costs (printing and postage) and GBRMPA's concerns about minimising our carbon footprint, I have requested that this newsletter be converted over the next three editions, to an e-newsletter format.

While this will have implications for some, I am confident that the long-term benefits are worth it, while still ensuring the industry is kept informed.

I want to recognise Lisha Mulqueeny's contribution to the GBRMPA and wish her well in her new role with the Australian National Maritime Museum.

I congratulate Chris Briggs on his appointment to the position of Director of Tourism and Recreation with the GBRMPA. Many of you will already have worked extensively with Chris through his role as Industry Engagement Manager, and I am confident Chris's appointment will further strengthen the valuable relationships the GBRMPA has with our tourism industry partners.

RUSSELL REICHEL
Chairman

CLIMATE CLIPS

Cyclone Yasi assessment

In the immediate aftermath of cyclone Yasi, the tourism industry's ability to get back up and running within days of the event was invaluable in assisting the GBRMPA with scientific assessments of Yasi's impact on the Reef.

Tourism operators that run to locations in the impact zone carried staff from the GBRMPA and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, as well as tourism crew from the *Eye on the Reef Monitoring Program*, to undertake Reef Health and Impact Point Survey assessments of damage caused to the Great Barrier Reef.

In extreme weather events such as Yasi, the ability to undertake an early assessment of impacted areas is vital for ensuring damage is accurately assessed before nature takes its course and damaged coral is further shifted by currents, covered by sediment and algae or reduced to rubble.

Nearly 1000 individual surveys covering 78 reefs were completed using the Reef Health and Impact Point Survey assessment, post-Yasi. As expected,

damage was most severe in the eye, and to the south of the eye of the cyclone. Across the surveyed area, damage was patchy, which is good news for the Reef's ability to recover. The ongoing data collected through the *Eye on the Reef Monitoring Program* will also assist in determining the rate of recovery, post-Yasi.

As a result of these surveys, the GBRMPA was able to confirm that the majority of the Great Barrier Reef remains unaffected and the main tourism sites in Cairns, Port Douglas and the Whitsundays remain healthy and thriving with marine life.

Yasi presented challenges for tourism operators and management agencies alike, including accurate reporting of the cyclone's impact: The response from tourism operators in helping with the damage assessment is a testament to the industry's commitment to stewardship of their individual sites, and to working in partnership with management agencies for a sustainable tourism industry.

Government assistance for the Queensland tourism industry's recovery

On 9 March, Acting Prime Minister and Treasurer Wayne Swan and Queensland Premier Anna Bligh announced details of a \$10 million joint recovery marketing plan for the Queensland tourism industry.

The global tourism marketing strategy is based around the message: *Nothing beats Queensland – Where Australia Shines*, and began in late March through a series of TV, radio, print and online ads.

Marketing support for tourism operators under the recovery strategy includes subsidising a 12 month subscription to the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse. For more information see www.tq.com.au/marketing/australian-tourism-data-warehouse/bonus-time-available.cfm

Grants and concessional interest rate loans are also available to businesses affected by the flooding and cyclone events. The Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority is coordinating access to Federal and State financial assistance, and you can find further information, including eligibility and application requirements, on their website at www.qraa.qld.gov.au

As a part of the recovery strategy, Tourism Queensland and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council are encouraging tourism operators to take *The Queensland Pledge*. This is a voluntary undertaking that will inform visitors that Queensland is not damaged beyond repair and that to bring visitors back, our businesses are prepared to go that extra mile. For more information visit www.tq.qld.gov.au/pledge.



PRE-YASI



POST-YASI

Reef 18-023, within the very destructive wind zone

Compliance matters

The last quarter of 2010 saw 111 compliance actions for Commonwealth offences, including 17 prosecutions. More than \$27 300 in fines was issued.

Offences reported in the October to December 2010 quarter

Activity	Far Northern	Cairns/ Cooktown	Townsville/ Whitsunday	Mackay/ Capricorn	Total
Commercial Line/ Net Fishing	1	2	4	4	11
Commercial Line, Unattached Dory	0	2	1	2	5
Commercial Trawling	1	0	4	2	7
Indigenous Hunting/ Fishing (State)	0	1	0	0	1
Recreational Visitors *	0	23	11	3	37
Tourism Vessels *	0	5	10	6	21
Shipping Vessels	0	0	0	1	1
Groundings Commercial Vessels	0	0	0	0	0
Groundings Recreational Vessels	0	0	0	1	1
Groundings Tourism Vessels	0	1	1	0	2
Moorings	0	1	2	0	3
TOTAL	2	35	33	19	89

* Includes Fishing, Unpermitted Activity, Breach of Permit, Plan of Management, and State Offences

Bringing Benefits to High Standard Operations

On 14 March 2011, the GBRMPA hosted a pilot information session to raise awareness of the High Standard Tourism Program and to showcase high standard operations to Whitsunday booking agents.

The evening was highly successful with over 50 attendees present to listen to information from the GBRMPA, Ecotourism Australia, Tourism Queensland, the Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry and operators. Participants gained a fuller appreciation of high standard operations and their commitment to best practice.

Feedback from booking agents has been overwhelmingly positive with many noting that it gave them an insight into why they should book high standard operations and the quality they can expect from ECO Certified operations.

CPI Increase to EMC

An increase of the full day and part day Environmental Management Charge (EMC) from \$5.50 to \$6.00, and from \$2.75 to \$3.00 respectively, will take effect on 1 April 2012.

The increase is determined by the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983* and is linked to movements in the Consumer Price Index, to take effect on 1 April in the 2nd charge year after the indexed amount exceeds \$0.40. The money collected via the EMC plays a vital role in funding projects which promote conservation and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.

Scientific review of the zoning of the Great Barrier Reef

In 2010, a comprehensive scientific review of the 2004 rezoning of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was published. The paper was authored by 21 leading Great Barrier Reef scientists, and key findings included:

- "The network of marine reserves on the GBR has brought major, sustained ecological benefits, including enhanced populations of target fish, sharks, and even corals, the foundation of the coral reef ecosystem."
- "Given the major threat posed by climate change, the expanded network of marine reserves provides a critical and cost-effective contribution to enhancing the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef."

The benefits to the tourism industry from the rezoning are now supported by the Great Barrier Reef scientific community. The full article and supporting documentation can be accessed online at: www.pnas.org/content/early/2010/02/18/0909335107.abstract

Environmental Management Charge (EMC) Update

HAVING TROUBLE COMPLETING YOUR LOGBOOKS?

The GBRMPA has been working towards an electronic system for you to submit EMC data and payments. A step towards this has been the streamlining of EMC logbooks, and the ability for you to submit EMC data in a spreadsheet format.

If you are having trouble completing your new look logbooks and any of the necessary paperwork, or you're having difficulty understanding the conditions of your permit, please do not hesitate to contact the GBRMPA on **07 4750 0700** or emc@gbmpa.gov.au.

AUTHORISED CONTACTS

An "Authorised Contact" is a person who is nominated to act on behalf of a permittee in a variety of roles, such as administration, permit applications, bookings and management of EMC obligations. The GBRMPA is not able to discuss specific permit details with people who are not listed as appropriate authorised contacts by the permittee.

It is important to ensure that all EMC charge return declarations are completed by an authorised contact, otherwise they will be returned to the permittee. To notify the GBRMPA of appropriate authorised contacts, please email details to emc@gbmpa.gov.au or complete an *Authorised Contact* form, which can be downloaded from www.gbrmpa.gov.au. *Authorised Contact* forms were also included with the 2011 EMC logbook and information packs sent out in December 2010.

High Standards Growing Higher

The GBRMPA welcomes True Blue Sailing, from the Whitsundays, as the 50th Marine Park operation to become certified as high standard with Ecotourism Australia's ECO Certification Program. Certified operations represent best practice in the fields of protection, presentation and partnerships, helping achieve environmental protection, reef resilience and a sustainable marine tourism industry.

Making sure high standards stay high... Auditing is one way Ecotourism Australia monitors performance and identifies issues that may need improvement. It is also an important part of ensuring the ongoing integrity of the ECO Certification Program. An audit may result in operators being required to undertake corrective actions, such as improvements to business operations or environmental standards.

In November 2010, Ecotourism Australia introduced unannounced 'mystery shopper' audits and the ability to cancel certification in extreme cases. Operators

must undertake any corrective actions within six months or Ecotourism Australia may downgrade their level of certification, suspend, or where required revoke certification.

In late 2010, 12 certified Marine Park operations were assessed by independent external auditors for the ECO Certification Program.

Ecotourism Australia continually monitors its certified operations and investigates any complaints, so if you are concerned that a certified Marine Parks operation is not operating to the high standards of the Eco Certification Program, please contact Ecotourism Australia directly on admin@ecotourism.org.au.

You can learn more about the GBRMPA's High Standard Tourism Program at: www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/tourism/how_to_choose_a_tour.



OCEAN SAFARI

Our profiled High Standard Operator...

Ocean Safari operates at the junction of two world heritage areas, the Daintree rainforest in the Wet Tropic World Heritage Area, and the Great Barrier Reef. Owners of Ocean Safari, Jan and Peter Claxton, feel that eco certification is essential for this unique location. "We are currently the only tour that visits the beautiful Mackay Cay so we feel that we are the stewards of this pristine reef and operate with great sensitivity and eco awareness."



When they started Ocean Safari at Cape Tribulation they had already operated the ECO-Certified sister company, Ocean Rafting, in the Whitsundays which had been certified since 2000. Jan and Peter then built on this experience to set up the Cape Tribulation operation using ECO Certification principles as the foundation.

"Having an official ECO Certification logo on our Ocean Safari marketing material is advantageous. We find that it attracts international guests and eco tourists who especially enjoy the unique location and our informative tour with its emphasis on education and preservation," Jan says.

A secondary benefit of the ECO certification process is that Jan and Peter have found the required documentation of their operations, with its underlying eco principles, to be an extremely useful reference manual when training new staff.

BULLETIN BOARD

- Don't forget to submit a signed Charging Return with your hard copy or electronic logbooks. The declaration must be signed by the Permittee(s) or a nominated Authorised Contact, as advised to the GBRMPA by the Permittee(s). The *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* imposes heavy penalties for giving false or misleading information.
- In April, Minister for Tourism, Martin Ferguson AM MP, launched Australia's first national symbol of Tourism Quality and associated accreditation, known as the TQUAL mark. Tourism businesses will have the opportunity to apply for the TQUAL mark through a number of sector accreditation programs. Operators who hold Ecotourism Australia certification will be eligible to use the TQUAL mark.
- *Strategic Tourism Investment Grants* of up to \$1 million (plus GST) are also a new feature of the *TQUAL Grants program*. This is a targeted grants program which aims to address key tourism priorities that, without Australian Government seed investment, may not occur. For more information on both these initiatives see www.ret.gov.au/tqual
- The Tourism and Recreation Reef Advisory Committee (TRRAC) met in Townsville on 3-4 March 2011. Members considered the current status of the marine tourism industry and provided advice on the development of three important strategic documents being developed for the Great Barrier Reef; a recreation management strategy, a coastal strategy, and a biodiversity strategy.



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