

## 8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

Perhaps the single most important result for managers, from the GBR recreation experience research at Lady Musgrave Island and Reef, is identification of the complexity and diversity in the Lady Musgrave experience. Use of the term 'a coral cay camping experience' clearly disguises the richness of human experiences which the great variety of users seek and obtain. By carefully examining the measured experiences of visitors to Lady Musgrave, managers can derive a better appreciation of the values of the Park and subsequently prepare better directed management plans. Some specific examples of this process are outlined below.

Perhaps, a not unexpected outcome was the identification of very strong views about management. Visitors expected and welcomed very strict management and seem prepared, or eager, for greater restrictions and conditions on use. Managers should feel supported by the users in any efforts they make to preserve both the natural environment and the experience opportunities currently enjoyed by visitors to Lady Musgrave. Concerns that restrictive management practices may alienate the visitors are misplaced in the case of Lady Musgrave. Such a finding may be much more widespread throughout the Marine Park, with higher levels of support for managers from the community than some managers believe.

### 8.1 What are the Visitor Experience Values of Lady Musgrave?

Typical discussions of visitor use of parts of the GBRMP and other protected areas focus on numbers of people and types of activities. This is understandable due to the ease of measurement, but is not particularly helpful in identifying specific values of particular parts of the Marine Park or National Park system.

The range of categories in the taxonomy presented above (results for questions 1, 2, 22, 23 and 24) superordinate with subsets, shows the great diversity of salient elements of experience at Lady Musgrave. Analysis of these results, from the open-ended questions on experience, identified a number of values for Lady Musgrave Island and Reef. Thus a management plan should make it clear what the values of the island and reef to different user groups are. Beyond addressing the nature conservation, navigation, cultural, heritage and usage values, a management plan should also state the experiential values summarised below.

The Lady Musgrave study indicated that there is a complex and wide range of values attached to this Park. These values cannot be seen homogeneously across all user groups nor can they be inferred from a mere examination of the activities in which people engage. Campers express very strong contrasts with day visitors and yachties in the value they place upon tranquillity, peacefulness, relaxed environment, family togetherness and a sense of escape. Clearly, a strong aspect of the Lady Musgrave camping experience is this sense of isolation from everyday life in a peaceful, quiet and restful setting. This contrasts quite strongly with the day visitors for whom novelty is the key phrase. Unique and new experiences, and mental stimulation figure highly for day visitors whereas escape or peacefulness are minor elements. Day visitors express their experiences more commonly as activities when compared to campers and yachties.

Although all visitors value contemplating nature, there are some differences in the physical environmental emphasis, with day visitors seeming to focus more broadly on the marine environment with less emphasis, than campers, on the terrestrial environment. Campers, by comparison with daytrippers, focused more evenly on both terrestrial and marine environments. Yachties share values with both campers and daytrippers. In common with campers, they value tranquillity, peacefulness and relaxation but tend to have a bit more of a marine orientation rather than terrestrial, akin to daytrippers.

A key value is naturalness. This quality emerged as a crucial part of the experience dimensions for all visitors and has clear implications for management decisions and the ways in which they may be implemented. Where options exist, the choice should be for those actions which retain and

reinforce naturalness. Any proposal which undermines the naturalness of the Lady Musgrave environment should be reconsidered in the light of possible destruction of experience values.

## **8.2 Contrasts and Overlap of Activities and Environmental Perceptions**

Beyond the broad pattern described above however, there remain many similarities and a great diversity of values. For example there is much overlap in the range of activities through which people gain their experiences. This can be identified in the sample results from the activity-related question (Q3). An interesting comparison to make, however, is between the results for the broad question on experience (Q1) and the question which asked participants to talk about what they did while they were at the location (Q3) .

One good example to discuss, relates to the opportunity to walk around the island. Although a large proportion of day visitors undertook the walk along a track or around the island (see results Q3) this activity had minimal impact on their overall experience of Lady Musgrave (it scored low in salience, see results Q1). This result seems in contrast to claims made by boat skippers of the day trip operations that the island access is a crucial part of their overall operation. A further factor, from other results in this study, was that many daytrippers sought a higher quality of environmental interpretation than they had received (see results Q15 and Q15a). There is also some perception of crowding by the campers and a very high contact between campers and daytrippers.

The considerations above also place in relief the differences between simple measurement of activities and an attempt, as was done here, to capture what is salient in the complexity of experiences. An activity-based approach to management would clearly find the importance of the activity of walking around the island central, yet, these results suggest that, at least in its present form, a walk around the island is not a particularly salient aspect of daytrippers' experiences, although many of them undertake such an activity seeking something from it.

Addressing a number of management questions:

1. Should there be another operator at the lagoon?
2. Should there be more or less campers than the present 50?
3. Should generators be allowed on Lady Musgrave Island?
4. Should large camping groups be prevented from coming to Lady Musgrave Island?
5. Should commercial fishing be permitted on Lady Musgrave reef?
6. Should there be restrictions on daytrippers' use of the island?

How can the research shed light on any of these questions?

## **8.3 Should there be Another Operator at the Lagoon?**

The main issues of relevance here relate to the potential interaction between day visitors and campers, largely seeking a very different experience. The sense of feeling crowded, expressed by many campers, is not in keeping with the expressed experience values (relaxed, peace, tranquillity, escape). The potential to further aggravate this exists if even more contact occurs between numerous day visitors and campers. If an additional operator was located away from the island with strictly limited or no access to the island, the consequent increased numbers of day visitors is unlikely to have significant effects on the camping experience.

The situation with daytrippers is a little more complex as the data were all collected at conditions of less than maximum capacity (typically 60% or less of capacity). Even at these levels, 21% of daytrippers said fewer people would be better despite the 61% who said numbers of people were fine. However, besides inspection of individual tables of results, the overall index of perceptions of being crowded was high for daytrippers as well (see end of section 6.4.3). Quite clearly there are daytrippers who have a preference for less crowded conditions. It is difficult to predict the effects of another operator who was located close to existing operations and therefore imposed visual and

practical effects on the existing infrastructure. Some of the concerns about this situation are likely to relate to options for areas to undertake activities such as coral viewing and diving. Another operator located at a distant part of the lagoon, with no access to the island, is unlikely to have an appreciable impact on existing visitor experiences.

#### **8.4 Should there be more or less Campers than the Present 50?**

The evidence on this matter is much clearer but may also need careful interpretation. Campers generally had very high levels of awareness about the social setting of Lady Musgrave and expressed much greater concerns about crowding. Some 46% of campers felt that there were too many people visiting Lady Musgrave Island and only 20% of campers felt there were not too many. Nearly all campers experienced being crowded (96%, see perceptions of being crowded index in section 6.4.3).

It was also clear from a wide range of responses that some campers experienced the negative social impacts of crowding including loss of privacy and disturbance from other people's behaviour. In response to direct questions about camping numbers, most campers wanted a smaller quota (majority 40 or less). The sense of crowding was aggravated by a perception of a small camping area and large group size. If the consideration of camper experience is important in setting quotas, then the number of campers should be set at less than the present 50. It will be important to try to monitor perception of crowding in response to any change in conditions.

#### **8.5 Should Generators/Compressors be Banned from Lady Musgrave Island?**

This question raises a number of issues going beyond the results of the GBR recreation/tourism study. It should properly be addressed by analysis of the regional recreation opportunities to ensure that existing appropriate experience opportunities are not accidentally lost.

The results of the study are, however, surprisingly strong. Despite many of the respondents being in groups which use the generators/compressors, most people recognise the disturbance that generators/compressors produce and see this as conflicting with other people's use of the area. The noise of generators/compressors clearly conflicts with the expressed experience values for Lady Musgrave Island and it is therefore not surprising that most of the campers express concern (37 out of 54 campers said either they found it disturbing or it should not be allowed). The overall evaluation of campers' responses to this question suggests that the use of motorised equipment on Lady Musgrave Island is inappropriate.

In this particular case, the primary value of compressors is as a source of energy so that tanks can be refilled for scuba diving activities. An alternative might be refills from day vessel operators, but this is less than satisfactory for the large-group scuba dive visitors who like to get the maximum dives in, especially as the current vessels do not come every day. A key factor is the fact that such large groups normally travel to the island by chartered barge and are therefore able to choose other destinations where people not part of their group (or similar) are less likely to be present. By examining regional recreation opportunities (ROS approach), a possible solution is to establish one island as the key large-group camping destination for those wishing to use generators and compressors. Either Masthead or North West might be appropriate.

#### **8.6 Should Large Camping Groups be Prevented from Coming to Lady Musgrave Island?**

Once again the campers' responses seem to be clearly in the direction of not only fewer campers, but also smaller groups. Some 44% said group sizes were too large, with 31% saying that only small groups should be allowed; together these categories were in greater proportion to those who felt group size was acceptable. Given that many of the campers were themselves from large groups, this result does suggest an antipathy for large groups. Clearly, the experience values already identified are in conflict with large groups due to the inevitable difference in social behaviour between small and large groups. The issue of group size is not entirely unrelated to the

issue of motorised equipment for it is usually large groups who bring generators and compressors. The best solution may be to combine the opportunities for motorised equipment and large groups (with their capacity to hire barges) at an alternative destination such as North West or Masthead. This would allow the ferry serving Lady Musgrave to cater for the distinct small group opportunities which are not otherwise available at a reasonable cost.

### **8.7 Should Commercial Fishing be Permitted on Lady Musgrave?**

This is a difficult question. Visitors to Lady Musgrave are quite clearly strongly supportive of conservation and are concerned about environmental impacts. In this context the fact that 41% of all visitors mentioned the banning of fishing is significant (Q16). When commercial fishing specifically was mentioned very strong negative views were expressed by all user groups (Q18). This view is supported by a general belief that management of the area should be restrictive for conservation purposes (see Q20). Overall, the issue is clear from the visitor point of view. The poor image of commercial fishing activities in association with a tourism and recreation destination could be addressed by either banning commercial fishing locally or by attempting to inform people about the reasons it is permitted. It is likely that in the absence of either, campers at least will be concerned with the sight of commercial trawlers at Lady Musgrave Island. It should also be noted that there appears to be very limited appreciation of the zoning regulations of GBRMPA amongst visitors to Lady Musgrave.

### **8.8 Should there be Restrictions on Daytrippers' use of the Island?**

Results from this study suggest two very contrasting sets of experiences—the day visitor finding stimulation, excitement, novelty and uniqueness; the camper finding relaxation, escape, peacefulness and tranquillity. The physical separation of the two groups clearly enhances the prospects of maintaining this dichotomy and minimising conflict.

This suggests a couple of specific actions by management. To alleviate a sense of crowding amongst campers, attempts should be made to restrict access by day visitors. This could best be achieved by establishing an intensive use area in the north-east corner of the Island where interpretation could be provided for the daytrippers. A guided tour, with explanation, would complement the kind of experience which daytrippers obtain, and add in the identified missing elements for many. Such a positive approach, with numbers limited by the appropriate group size which could be handled in the period of time available, would require little supervision through prohibition rules. The fact that most day visitors walked the island track indicates they were seeking some island experience. However, because the actual island track experience was of very low salience in the measured experiences of day visitors it can be seen that managers may ban visitors to the island without significantly affecting the Lady Musgrave experience. But this may not produce the best outcome, and there is some risk of inducing psychological reaction and producing negative emotion through perceptions of having one's curiosity openly restricted and controlled. Rather, the option of developing an interpretive program with controlled access may cater not only to the camper conflict issue, but also to the demands for further interpretation by the day visitors. Such an approach seems preferable.

### **8.9 Summary of Recommendations**

Following from the experience values and other results of the study, some of the management recommendations with respect to use are:

- There should be a physical separation between daytrippers and campers;
- The land-based component of the daytrip experience should be enhanced with an interpretative track which provides for a compact and intense land-based experience;
- There should only be a small group of daytrippers on the island at any one time;
- The perception of being crowded by campers should be alleviated;
- The size of camping groups should be small; and
- Generators/compressors should not be allowed.

Management objectives in a management plan should include:

1. Lady Musgrave Island should provide an opportunity for small group camping with emphasis on relaxation, tranquillity and contemplation of nature. Interactions between campers and daytrippers should be minimised and no motorised equipment should be allowed.
2. Lady Musgrave Island should provide an interpreted-track walking opportunity for small groups of daytrippers. Only a limited number of daytrippers, sufficient to take on the interpreted walk, should be allowed on the Island at any one time. The track should be located away from the camping area.