

9.0 MONITORING OF RECREATION/TOURISM EXPERIENCES AT LADY MUSGRAVE ISLAND AND REEF

It is beyond the brief of the present report to design a monitoring program for Lady Musgrave Island and Reef, but the results of the study suggest some possible ways to tackle the issue. Such a design should be prepared using the results reported here.

Of greatest significance is the development in this report of a taxonomy of experiences which have direct application on Lady Musgrave. This taxonomy will prove useful for future data collection and analysis, and the preparation of both management goals and associated monitoring programs.

This study provides baseline data which allows for the first time a very comprehensive understanding of recreational experience in a marine park setting. As such, monitoring of selected elements of these experience data will provide clear indication of changes. There is a need to examine the outcomes reported here to identify potential aspects of particular value in monitoring change and some possible examples are presented here.

Perceptions of crowding

Because the issue of carrying capacity is often of central concern to managers, the question of whether the volume or type of use is exceeding desirable levels may be addressed by measuring the perception of crowding from time to time, in association with accurate measures of the level and type of visitation. Change in the proportions of visitors in different categories who indicate a concern about visitor numbers should be readily evident.

Inter-group differences and conflict

The clearly distinct experiences of campers and daytrippers have led to suggestions that future management may seek to separate these two groups more than at present. If some of the specific suggestions are taken up, and this leads to reduced contact, the effects may be monitored by interviews of campers.

Nature of the experience

Throughout this work it has become clear that visitors value Lady Musgrave in a number of different ways and that most see the island, reef and lagoon as very special. The data collected in this study allow the managers to reassess how visitors feel about their experiences at Lady Musgrave in the light of any changes either locally or within the region.

The composition of visitors

The baseline figures given here should be compared with future data to help give an indication of change which may be occurring. This should include simple ratios of repeat visitors in each of the categories, usually a good indication of change in the experience being provided.

The values of the island most salient to visitors

Presumably changes in the Lady Musgrave environment may be reflected in changes in salience of various aspects of visitor activities and experiences. Setting modifications can also lead to this outcome. By surveying visitors in the future, an immediate indication may be gained that changes are taking place. Reference to the characteristics of the visitors, in conjunction with evidence of values different from those reported here, may serve as an early warning of possible problems.

Other issues

The process of monitoring is usually undertaken in the context of management objectives and therefore requires careful specification of objectives in a form most appropriate for monitoring

needs. The results of the present work may be used to help devise both management objectives and associated monitoring programs.

One way to develop a useful monitoring program would be to workshop the results of this study with managers and attempt to identify appropriate objectives within both the local Lady Musgrave environment and the broader regional context.

One other question remains unanswered. How applicable will the results of this work be to other parts of the GBRMP? Clearly there are similarities in the activities and social settings of some sites, and the authors expect that the experience taxonomy will be broadly applicable, however the full spectrum of recreation opportunities are bound to reveal other dimensions not encountered here. Additional contrasting sites should be subjected to similar detailed study to extend the knowledge base, both to understand the interaction between people and this World Heritage Area, and to help develop more meaningful management plans.