

1.0 THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AND OUTDOOR RECREATION PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (hereafter GBRMP or Marine Park) extends over 2000 kilometres along the east coast of Australia with a number of islands and coral cays. The overall management of the Park is undertaken by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage (QDEH) (now referred to as the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service). The latter agency undertakes the day-to-day management of the Marine Park and is independently responsible for management of the islands and coral cays within the Park.

The GBRMP is a multiple-use area in which reasonable use of the Marine Park is allowed (including extractive activities), and areas of the Reef are set aside for appreciation and enjoyment by the public. Moreover, any proposal to use the Marine Park is assessed by GBRMPA in terms of the impacts of the proposed use on the existing and future amenity of the users of the area in question, and of adjacent areas. Within this multiple-use system, the Park caters for a variety of recreation and tourism activities: from daytrips to more extensive stays on islands, either camping or in resorts. There are large and small-scale resorts, specialised dive and sailing operations, boat charters, scenic flights and high-speed catamarans.

Recreation/tourism is the greatest use of the Park and managers of the Marine Park are currently facing questions and issues such as:

- What level and type of use affects amenity of an area?
- How many boats can be allowed in a lagoon before there is an impact on the amenity of users?
- How can crowded, moderately crowded and uncrowded experiences be defined?
- When is the visual amenity of a site degraded?
- What factors affect a visitor's experience on reefs and islands?
- What is a wilderness experience on the reef?
- What potential conflicts might emerge in specific areas among specific user groups?
- How does understanding visitors' experiences help us to develop more effective management plans?

Despite the complexity of some of these questions, GBRMPA's approach to looking at the management of recreational and tourism activities in the Park is still (1998) very much an activity-based management approach (i.e. zoning is primarily based on managing and regulating activities). Movement towards an experience-based management approach (Driver 1991) is beginning to emerge in GBRMPA. In such an approach, management objectives need to take into account the opportunities for experiences to be provided in each area. In this context it is important to understand the experiences that visitors have in the Marine Park. Management objectives must go beyond such generalities as 'protect the resource' and 'provide satisfying experiences' (Heberlein 1977). To be effective, management objectives need to define the type of experience to be provided in terms of appropriate ecological and social conditions (Stankey 1980). In addition, to provide objectives which are amenable to monitoring, emphasis must be placed on explicit qualities rather than on broad conditions. This approach is central to the concept of 'Limits of Acceptable Changes' (LAC) (Stankey et al. 1985) and 'Visitor Impact Management' (Graefe et al. 1990) frameworks used to manage the interaction between visitors and the environment. These frameworks explicitly highlight both ecological and experiential components of this interaction, and seek to define explicit qualities of each of these.

In this study, an outdoor recreation experience is defined as a multi-dimensional concept (see figure 1). The dimensions include physical and social setting, activities, perceptions and emotions (self/experience), management regulations, presence and actions which simultaneously interact (Scherl 1988a, 1990).

For instance, a descriptive term such as 'camping', disguises the rich complexity of the experience of camping which has a number of the dimensions mentioned above. It is important to be reminded that outdoor recreation/tourism experiences need to be managed in the context of other human uses

of the Park, and in accordance with the GBRMP Act and regulations and corporate aims and goals of GBRMPA.

Within the general functions of GBRMPA there is recognition of, and provision for, human use of the Marine Park and there is a role for social scientists to provide information and analysis which will contribute to the effective management of the Marine Park. Moreover, when considering human use, there is a need to integrate the management of the GBRMP with adjacent island National Parks.

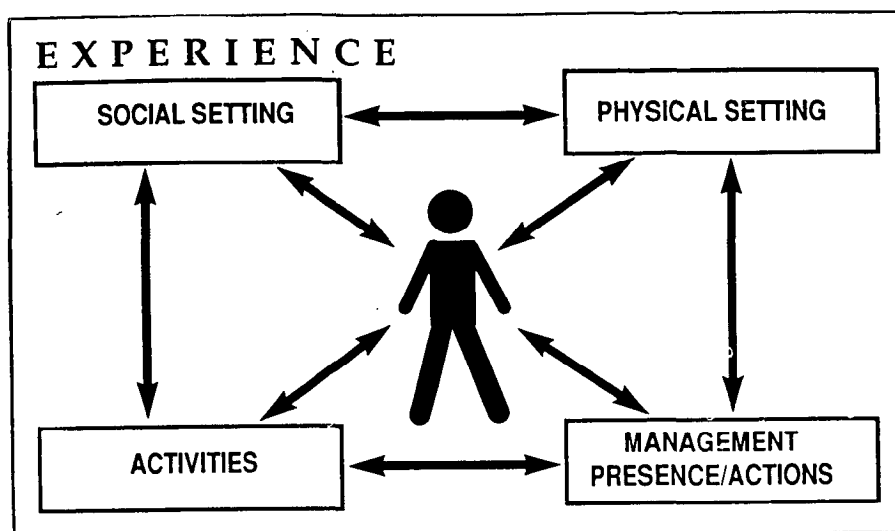


Figure 1. Outdoor recreation experience: A multi-dimensional concept

A number of aspects of the legislation, which specifies GBRMPA's powers and functions, and of the Corporate Plan, which specifies operational aims and goals, are relevant to the social sciences. Aspects of direct interest are those which address human use of the Park and the need for GBRMPA to liaise with and inform both user groups and the general public about the Park. These aspects are summarised and listed elsewhere (Scherl 1990). Some examples are mentioned below.

Under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, one of the functions of the Authority is 'to provide, and arrange for the provision of, educational, advisory and informational services relating to the Marine Park' (s. 7(1)(cd)).

In the preparation of zoning plans, among a number of factors that need to be considered are:

- a) 'the regulation of the use of the Marine Park so as to protect the Great Barrier Reef while allowing the reasonable use of the Great Barrier Reef region';
- b) 'the regulation of activities that exploit the resources of the Great Barrier Reef region so as to minimise the effect of those activities on the Great Barrier Reef'; and
- c) 'the reservation of some areas of the Great Barrier Reef for its appreciation and enjoyment by the public' (s. 32(7)).

In considering an application for permission to use the Park, the Authority shall pay regard to 'the likely effect of granting permission on future options for the Marine Park'; 'the nature and the scale of the proposed use in relation to the existing use and amenity, and the future or desirable use and amenity, of the relevant area and of nearby areas'; and 'the likely effects of the proposed use on adjoining and adjacent areas and any possible effects of the proposed use on the environment and the adequacy of safeguards for the environment' amongst other likely events.

A stated goal of GBRMPA is 'to provide for the protection, wise use, understanding and enjoyment of the Great Barrier Reef in perpetuity' by, among other things, 'involving the community meaningfully in these processes.'

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's corporate aims include 'to enhance community understanding, appreciation, experience of and support for the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), the Marine Park and the Authority by providing and arranging for the provision of advice, education and information materials and services.'

To be of value to management, this research needs to link an understanding of visitors' perceptions of their experiences and management issues to the management functions and obligations of GBRMPA and QDEH. The research was coordinated through GBRMPA by the first author and conducted jointly with QDEH and researchers from James Cook University. The general purpose of this research was to understand recreation and tourism experiences in the GBRMP. The specific purpose is tied to its application to management. The goals and regulations mentioned above highlight some of the management responsibilities with respect to human use, and hint on the possible applications of this type of research to management.