

POLICY ROLES FOR TOURISM
(Chairman - Dr Des Connell)

The Role of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
Authority in Relation to Tourism on the
Great Barrier Reef

by

DR JOE BAKER - (Member, Great
Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority)

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is an Authority established under the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975, which as evidenced by the wording of the Act, was envisaged as working closely with existing local, State and Commonwealth agencies. Certainly it cannot work alone. Its role may well be seen as an integrating one, drawing on the strengths of existing agencies, and local interest groups and minimising unnecessary duplication in education, research, planning and management of this unique natural resource.

One of the Authority's principal functions is the planning for conservational management in the Great Barrier Reef Region while making provision for the appreciation and enjoyment of the Great Barrier Reef by the public.

If our message can be spread and the educational program be made effective, the Reef can be appreciated, enjoyed and valued for what it is, with minimum human modification, by the widest possible cross section of the public from Queensland, from the rest of Australia and from overseas.

An educated, value conscious user may well be our best long-term insurance for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

In our interactions with other bodies, and in knowledge of the concept of a marine park, one must stress that there is, at present, considerable confusion. Under the Queensland Fisheries Act the term marine park is more closely allied to the concept of a terrestrial national park in the Australian situation.

In the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act a marine park is a term for an area under management control, where zoning takes place to allow different types of usage. The only activities specifically forbidden in a marine park established by the Authority are oil drilling and mining.

Hopefully in the future, differences in meaning can be resolved.

PLANNING FOR TOURISM IN THE REEF REGION

Workshop participants know of the various reports which have been prepared on the problems and the potential of Great Barrier Reef tourism particularly since the Pannell, Kerr, Forster (PKF) Visitor Plan of 1971. You will have also, within and outside this meeting considered the potential for increased Great Barrier Reef regional tourism which should flow subsequent to the introduction of cheaper international and internal airfares.

However, cheaper international airfares are currently directly beneficial only to those areas close to major international airports, and the Reef is remote from such facilities. It is my personal view that Reef tourism can only develop its full potential when a major mainland city in Queensland within the length of coast fringed by the Reef, is established as a major international airport. Otherwise the competition from the remainder of Australia is too enormous and the cost differential and airfares too great to ever get the number of tourists we want.

The tragedy of Reef tourism is that scant notice has been taken of past analyses of tourism potential on the Reef. The PKF report and others have never been pursued to and through the necessary decision-making bodies.

Unless we are careful, all that may come out of this workshop is yet another report without direction, impetus or enthusiasm to propel it to government.

We are at this workshop because the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Department of Tourism, recognising their extensive common interests, decided to hold a joint workshop to explore the possibility of taking action to facilitate extended tourism in the Reef Region.

"Taking Action" are the operative words! The workshop will have failed unless some firm resolutions emerge, which are practicable in a reasonable time-frame. Some may be very fundamental, involving your own recognition of a common need, and therefore encouraging great co-operation and mutual trust. Others will require subsequent, consistent pressure on local, State and/or Commonwealth politicians. It is worth stressing again that, the resolutions you pass must be practical and achievable. The resolutions themselves will be useless unless you guarantee to practise and pursue them actively with every thing you do.

THE ROLE OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF
MARINE PARK AUTHORITY

The best interests of the Authority and the tourist industry lie in resource management to protect the Reef and thus conserve the long-term benefits which the Reef can confer upon Australia through the local, national and international tourist markets. Reef management and tourism are inextricably entwined.

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

The Authority sees its major function as one of people orientated management of the Great Barrier Reef, this means:-

(1) Maximising reasonable access to the Reef:

I am particularly concerned with the facts that:

- (i) it is very difficult for tourists to see the Great Barrier Reef - as opposed to the continental islands which may or may not have fringing reefs.
- (ii) it is not uncommon for tourists buying Great Barrier Reef holidays, and interested in seeing the Great Barrier Reef, to go home without seeing at close quarters, even so much as a fringing reef much less the Great Barrier Reef itself.

(2) Minimising any harmful impact on the Reef:

When tourists can be guaranteed ready access to the Reef, the Authority must be in a position to recommend and implement procedures which will ensure enjoyment and utilisation, not only for the enjoyment of this generation, but also, for all future generations of tourists.

The Authority is actively involved in planning, developing and testing facilities to improve the level of environmental tourism in the Great Barrier Reef. By environmental tourism, we mean participation by a tourist in activities which are designed to enable him to learn about and appreciate the natural environment of the Great Barrier Reef.

We want to allow reasonable access to and use of the Reef through:

- (i) co-operation and joint initiatives with all appropriate government and private enterprise bodies;
- (ii) research, both at our own initiation and in collaboration with other groups; and
- (iii) education of the user, the owner and the Governments by processes largely involving interpretive programs, newsletters and educational literature.

Details of the projects being developed and planned by Authority staff will be covered in Session Four. For this discussion, I can indicate that they include:

- (i) reef walks with specific features discreetly marked and explained in special accompanying leaflets;
- (ii) buoyed and roped trails for snorkel swimmers to view reef crest and lagoon pools;
- (iii) buoyed dive sites with accompanying water-proof literature describing features of interest;
- (iv) prepared glass-bottomed boat trails with accompanying literature describing features of interest;
- (v) audio-visual programs explaining and illustrating some aspects of the Great Barrier Reef in general and containing specific material explaining features of the developed walks, trails and dive sites; and
- (vi) training of tourist resort interpretive staff.

To effectively undertake its task the Authority needs to understand to the best of its ability the natural processes at play in the marine ecosystem and the present and likely human-use impact of that system.

Research is therefore a key function of the Authority.

It is essential that we co-ordinate existing knowledge and extend knowledge ourselves, on the nature of this complex ecosystem referred to as "the Reef". How do we define it? What is the secret of its stability? How fragile is it? How resilient is it? How will changing human usage patterns affect it? What will be the most significant demographic factors which influence the Reef stability in the future?

The questions are endless. Research projects must be carefully planned, and will be necessarily inter-disciplinary and management orientated, flowing from the biological/geomorphological to the economic/social.

Management is only necessary because people are using the system. Many of your incomes are gained from Reef enterprises, and personal pleasures are had from Reef use. Our research is aimed at discovering what these values are, so that management plans can be formulated on the basis of best use from:

- (i) an environmental (conservation) perspective;
- (ii) an economic efficiency perspective; and
- (iii) a social and personal value perspective.

From bio-physical research the environmental impact of present and likely human uses will come to be known, and from economic and social research the value to people of these uses will be known.

Where management is needed to protect the natural environment of the Reef, the economic and social consequences will be investigated.

Where management is aimed at enhancing Reef-based industries, the environmental costs will be investigated.

There is much basic research needed on the nature of the Reef itself. We must be cautious, at least in the Authority's role, to not make statements unless we can justify them by factual experimental evidence.

In this way the Authority and those involved in tourism must work closely together, and each understand the other's needs and actions.

CO-OPERATIVE ENDEAVOURS

The Authority cannot offer a blank cheque but within its limited resources of professional staff and equipment the Authority seeks to collaborate with the tourist industry and other government bodies on a shared cost. We want to develop the facilities for environmental tourism.

THE FUTURE

As a member of the Authority, I see tourism as an inevitable and rapid growth industry, the growth consequent upon increased affluence, increased leisure time, and increased travel and resort facilities.

The first two are largely beyond your control. Increased travel and resort facilities demand your careful and immediate attention.

Travel to mainland ports in proximity to the Reef must be encouraged, made more attractive (both financially and by appropriate decor) and more publicised on a world-wide basis. Travel to the Reef and around the Reef must be carefully assessed. Speedy and comfortable transport to the Reef resort must be achieved. Once the tourist is at the resort, leisurely boat cruises of relatively short duration are pleasant - but a 5 to 6 hour bumpy, swaying trip up and down endless waves with only the horizon to look at, does not stimulate the tourist to come again or to tell others that they "simply must visit the Reef".

And that is what we need for the word to spread. Mainland to Reef resort travel could be your biggest single challenge.

At the resort itself the buildings must be given careful consideration as to appropriate design, the activities available must be carefully planned and appropriate - hopefully unique - to your particular part of the Reef.

On the Reef, knowledgeable guides will stimulate the interests of your guests.

In the future the Authority sees environmental tourism as an important and increasing element in the future use of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Authority considers that it has a responsibility to pioneer and continue development of interpretive techniques appropriate to the Great Barrier Reef.

The Authority expects that the provision of these facilities will become an important and profitable part of many Great Barrier Reef tourist enterprises.

The Authority intends that in the shortest time possible the stage will be reached where no visitor who comes for a Great Barrier Reef holiday will need to return home without having had the opportunity to experience and learn about the Great Barrier Reef, hopefully after access to the medium of high quality up to date audio visual programs, which prepare the visitor for responsible enjoyment of this remarkable resource.

For your part in our future, we need support in ensuring that Governments are made aware of the essential need to provide the Authority with the manpower and facilities to fulfil its role in research, education, planning and management of this Great Barrier Reef Region so that the Authority may pursue its objectives which will benefit you.

Once the legislative problems have been resolved, we look forward to close collaboration with you, with local, State, and Commonwealth bodies in developing a better understanding and even greater enjoyment of the wonders of the Great Barrier Reef.