

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background and Purpose

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (Authority) is charged with the responsibilities, amongst others, of making recommendations on those sections of the Great Barrier Reef (Reef) which should be declared as parts of the Marine Park and of preparing zoning plans for the Marine Park. To meet these responsibilities, the Authority directs a research programme involving the assembly and analysis of data from a diverse range of specialists in the science and social fields.

As part of this programme, Economic Associates Australia was commissioned on the 15th June 1979 to undertake an economic study of Green Island and its reef as a tourist/recreation resource. This document forms the report arising from the project. It contains an economic assessment of the value of Green Island with and without changes to present uses together with an examination of the linkages of activities on Green Island with the economy of North Queensland and elsewhere in Australia.

The decision by the Authority to focus research on Green Island at this time arises primarily from the selection of the Cairns area for investigation as the next section of the Marine Park. With well over 100,000 visitors per annum, Green Island plays a major role in Reef tourism both in the northern sector and for the Reef as a whole.

A further reason for the study was that the research complements the concurrent investigations by the Green Island Management Committee (Committee). This body was established by the Queensland Government to assess present and future management of the island and its reef.

Thus, the report has three purposes:

- As a stand-alone document which, within the scope set by the Terms of Reference, presents an evaluation of future uses for Green Island and the consequential effects elsewhere.
- As an important input to the subsequent comprehensive research programme of the Authority for planning of the northern sector.
- As a body of information useful to the Committee.

In writing the report the Consultants have recognised that the minority of its readers will be specialists in environmental economics. The aim has, therefore, been one of minimising technical language and discussion of theory and other points which, though of interest to economists, are not central to the main purposes for which the report is intended.

2.2 Study Objectives

The broad description of the objective of the study was set down in the Terms of Reference as "an economic evaluation of the existing and alternative uses of Green Island and its reef as a tourist/recreation resource".

More specifically the aim of the research may be summarised in the following terms;

- A thorough appreciation of existing conditions on Green Island, particularly as they relate to tourism and general economic and financial matters.
- The identification of possible changes to existing use arrangements which are of benefit to the public, are practical to implement and are politically acceptable.
- A comparison of the effects over the foreseeable future of changing selected features of existing use arrangements. The comparison of effects to be in terms of:
 - The level of tourist use.
 - The value placed on the resource by the Australian public.
 - The impacts on the Cairns, Queensland and Australian economies (concentrating on employment as the main indicator).
 - The financial viability of tourist enterprises.

It is appropriate to draw attention to two aspects which, in accordance with the Terms of Reference, are outside the scope of the present investigation.

Firstly, the identification of the optimum plan for the island is not a requirement of the study. Though the present study provides useful guidance on the best alternative, a final choice cannot be made without more detailed consideration of the context of Green Island within future plans for the Reef as a whole.

Secondly, management planning for the island is specifically excluded. Hence, there is no discussion in the report on the manner in which any envisaged changes would be implemented or on any general aspects related to management responsibilities and organisational arrangements. In the present study concerns with management are limited to broad estimates of management costs and to ensuring proposed changes are practical to implement. If management actions are necessary for a change to take place, the proposals have been accepted as realistic only if the requisite powers are currently held by public bodies or could be obtained through the enactment of what was judged to be politically acceptable legislation.

2.3 Conduct of the Study

The assignment was conducted by discussions with many persons, examination of various publications and documents, and analysis of the information collected.

As the ability to undertake research of the kind faced in this study depends to a significant degree on the data base able to be accessed or established during the study, the assembly of information was given high priority. Information was obtained from many public and private organisations and through original field research.

Public bodies who formed major data sources were the Authority, the Committee and, through it, State Government Departments. An official meeting was held with the Committee during the course of the study to discuss the project and to define information gaps.

Information was collected from over 30 private organisations, most of which were centred in North Queensland. A visit was made to Green Island and Cairns from 17th to 21st July 1979. Interviews were held with owners/responsible senior management of each private facility on Green Island, and with representatives of accommodation establishments, tour operators and firms serving the tourist industry in North Queensland.

Two field surveys of tourists were conducted to supplement other data sources. One was made on-board the public ferries serving Green Island and the other in accommodation establishments in Cairns.

Analysis consisted of four main steps - estimation of the level of and value attached to usage of Green Island, comparison of alternatives, economic impact assessment, and overall evaluation. The approaches and techniques used in these steps follow accepted "best practice" procedures.

2.4 Acknowledgements

At this point Economic Associates would like to acknowledge the assistance which they received from many parties during the conduct of the study. Staff of the Authority, members of the Committee, operators of tourist facilities on Green Island and in Cairns, and officers of the North Queensland Development Board have all played an important part in the study through their assistance and co-operation.

Much information of importance to the study was obtained from these sources. The data was often of a highly confidential nature and for this reason does not always appear directly in the report.

2.5 Report Outline

Following the Summary and this introductory chapter there are five sections and a number of appendices in the report.

The next chapter, Section 3, contains a brief description of the main features of Green Island with most attention being given to tourist facilities. Section 4 explores visitor preferences and attitudes with respect to Green Island and the Cairns region. Section 5 examines the current effects of Green Island tourism on the economy. Prospects and options for the future are discussed in Section 6 along with a review of the historic trend in the patronage of the island. Section 7 contains the evaluations performed in the study.

The appendices provide supplementary information. They contain copies of the questionnaires employed in the study, together with details of the various analysis performed in the study.