

The Queensland Fisheries Service and Tourism  
in the Great Barrier Reef Province

by

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1. SUMMARY

The role of the Queensland Fisheries Service is to provide for the wise management of the living aquatic resources of the State for the enjoyment and benefit of its citizens (both present and future), and within this framework to promote the good order, development and welfare of the fishing industry.

The paper briefly relates the Service's objectives and responsibilities to tourism generally throughout the State. Such a relation is largely an indirect one, operating through the implementation of the conventional fisheries regulations governing both recreational and commercial fishing activities, as well as the protection of marine fauna and flora.

However, the Queensland Fisheries Service is also developing a more direct interaction with the tourist industry through its responsibilities under the marine park legislation.

The paper highlights the differences between the concept of a marine park under the Queensland Fisheries Act and that under the Commonwealth Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act, and outlines the main features of the Queensland legislation.

The Service's developing policies (and the term "developing" is stressed in view of the comparative novelty of the marine park concept) are presented in relation to such matters as visitor centres, interpretive facilities, creation of opportunities for observation of marine wildlife and the management of recreational and other activities in marine parks. It is stressed that any initiatives taken by the Service in such matters are aimed at complementing or supplementing actions by tourist resort managements and avoiding any competition therewith.

Finally, a brief resume of action taken to date by the Queensland Fisheries Service to implement these policies is given.

2. THE QUEENSLAND FISHERIES SERVICE AND TOURISM  
IN THE GREAT BARRIER REEF PROVINCE

The role of the Queensland Fisheries Service is to provide for the wise management of the living aquatic resources of the State for the enjoyment and benefit of its citizens both present and future and within this framework to promote the good order, development and welfare of the fishing industry. Many people tend to think that the fishing industry is a matter of big trawlers, purse seiners and factory ships, but single people along beaches or on small boats fishing for fun are part of that industry.

The actual value of recreational fishing is always difficult to assess, due to the far reaching ramifications of recreational spending and the lack of comparably simple indices such as gross sales of fish, which make economic surveys of commercial fisheries a much simpler task. Nevertheless those few economic studies that have been carried out in America and in this country reinforce the belief that recreational fishing may be worth several times that of the commercial industry. There are something like 75,000 privately owned pleasure boats in this State and the graph of growth is rapidly approaching the vertical. The game fishing fleet, we heard from Jock Izatt yesterday, is worth \$3.8 million. At the moment, I might add there is an economic survey of the game fishing industry being carried out by the Fisheries Division of the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industry.

The value of recreational fishing in the economy has been used by many holiday maker oriented groups to urge the fostering of angling at the expense of commercial fishing, but I would remind such bodies that a significant element in the tourist attractions of this State is the number and variety of superb seafoods which we have to offer and it is the oft-despised commercial fisherman that puts those seafoods on the tables of restaurants and hotel dinner tables.

My Service has the responsibility of ensuring a well balanced but not necessarily equal sharing of the fisheries resources amongst all legitimate users. While we draw the line at dynamiters and Taiwanese clam boats, we must recognise the rights of a wide variety of competing users, be they trawlers, anglers, scientists, spearfishermen, red blooded marlin hunters or just plain viewers. Besides the discharge of its conservation and fishery management responsibilities, per medium of conventional fisheries regulations, my Service also has responsibilities for the State's existing marine parks.

There seems to be a widespread belief that the Great Barrier Reef is completely unprotected unless brought under Commonwealth marine park legislation. Coral in the sense of its collection has been legislatively protected through Queensland territorial waters for a quarter of a century. In the fisheries legislation is a variety of management and protective tools for the Reef. Sanctuaries, habitat reserves, closed waters, closed seasons, protected animals, all these concepts used on their own or in combination, give a wide spectrum of management tools or options. The State Marine Park legislation provides additional advantages over the Commonwealth Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act. I think the main one is that it is much more difficult for politicians to change the rules except by reference to Parliament. A marine park declaration is not the only sort of protective device available. There are many classifications in our Act. To describe them briefly, they are:

- . a recreation area in which the Queensland Fisheries Service would maintain the area as much as possible in the natural state conducive to the enjoyment by members of the public for boating, recreation, angling, swimming, and underwater exploration. In other words, the types of activities experienced at Heron and Green Islands today;
- . a natural environment area in which the marine community is maintained to the greatest possible extent in its natural state commensurate with a moderate degree of use by the members of the public;
- . a wilderness area, maintained as its name implies, in a wild state. Visitor entry opportunities are not provided, and in fact are actively discouraged. The wilderness area community might serve as a baseline or bench mark to allow detection of any signs of deterioration in the more heavily used parks;
- . a special provision is made for research activities in scientific areas. These are areas where priority is given to scientific studies and where researchers can experiment with moderate scale manipulations of the environment which would not be appropriate in other areas. This doesn't mean of course that scientific research wouldn't be allowed in other zones. In wilderness zones, for example, we might allow some research but perhaps restrict it to scientists with an established reputation engaged in non-manipulative research; and

- finally, the legislation includes special feature zones and a historic area zone.

Our marine regulations are enforced by a team of specially recruited marine park rangers who can be assisted if necessary by the Queensland Fisheries and Boating Patrol. The marine park rangers are now operating on Green Island, on almost a daily basis, and at Heron Island regrettably, on a much reduced scale of visitation. I had hoped that I would appear before you today in the marine park ranger uniform but unfortunately I couldn't find a pair of trousers amongst the rangers that would fit me. Their uniform is white shirts with identification badges and symbols on the shirts and dark blue shorts or long trousers if it happens to be a cool day, topped off with a Joe hat. If you see these people on Green or Heron Islands you'll know who they are.

In terms of visitor use policy, the Queensland Fisheries Service believes that the quality of marine park use depends on an informed understanding by the visitor of the park and its resources. An imaginative and meaningful information and interpretive program which provides this understanding is essential. It is our intention to provide these centres in various areas in the future or where these services may already be provided by private entrepreneurs. The marine park staff would provide technical assistance and information as well as encouraging park visitors to make the best use of these privately established facilities. I might add that the Queensland Fisheries Service has already acquired the Monkman lease on Green Island for development as a marine park ranger station, an interpretive centre, and a reef biological field research base to supplement the Fisheries Laboratory now being built at Cairns.

The first marine park ranger station in Australia as far as I am aware, is nearing completion at Green Island and will provide information to what we estimate as 50,000 enquiries a year. Guided reef walks are already in operation and proving a big success with tourists and resort management alike. Research into the effects of visitors on the coral community at Green Island was initiated last year and promises to shed much light on the important business of protecting this and other reefs subject to heavy visitor pressure. A series of trial pamphlets and information sheets have been printed and distributed and final printings are budgeted for in the next financial year. More than 2,200 marine park visitors have been interviewed and their needs and complaints fed into appropriate management agencies for action.

A broad program of environmental education is part of a ranger's duties. Co-operation with schools, colleges, publishers and other organisations is encouraged. The Service is communicating to visitors an environmental consciousness both within and beyond the marine park system. The Service has embarked on a modest program of providing greater opportunities for visitors to view and understand park wildlife. The current activities will be extended to the construction of a variety of interpretive trails including board walks through mangrove areas. Some of the marine parks we have in mind are on the mainland area in muddy mangrove swamps.

Thus you can see that our parks do not merely cater for the blue water man. As the park system expands, the Service would hope that these initiatives will be linked with similar concepts which the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority might develop in the areas under its responsibility. It must be stressed that the initiatives taken or about to be taken by the Service in matters of interpretation, information and visitor assistance are aimed at complementing or supplementing actions by resort managers. The Queensland Fisheries Service is anxious to avoid any direct competition with tourist industry entrepreneurs.

Our role is entirely one of resource management and service to the public. Where a private attraction already exists, assistance will be lent to increase the quality of the visitors experience. Where an attraction is needed this Service will encourage the development of a tasteful facility.

Finally, I would like to provide a brief status report of our marine park activities on the Great Barrier Reef. There are two marine parks in the Queensland State system. Many more proposals for the addition of significant and important areas to this system have been developed over the last few years but have been delayed by the difficulties in resolving overlapping State and Federal jurisdiction. I can assure the industry that as soon as this conflict is settled, this backlog will be cleared and a well selected system of marine parks within the State concept will be declared and managed to supplement, and I would hope be co-ordinated with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's system.

A number of research projects are under way which will add valuable information to the recorded natural history of our coral reefs. These include studies on the life histories of the giant clam, the population status of the main species of beche-de-mer, the impact of coral collection for the trinket trade, and the continued monitoring of crown of thorns starfish infestations and coral regeneration in the wake of such

infestations. We believe we have recently made a breakthrough in the assessment of reef fish stocks. Research has been under way for three years on the effects of fishing on reef fishes. The results tend to confirm that exploitation is at a disturbingly high level on many areas of the Barrier Reef.

Aerial photography is being used to map the marine life on existing and proposed marine parks in order to monitor changes which may be caused by visitor impact and just over 200 reefs have been surveyed to assess their potential for inclusion in the Queensland park or reserve system.

The Queensland Fisheries Service is represented on the Department of Education's Environmental Committee and is involved in producing films and slides of reef life for educational purposes. The Service is seeking the acquisition of office space in Cairns for visitor and tourist information about the Reef and the new \$1.2 million Fisheries Laboratory complex mentioned previously will provide laboratory space for research which hopefully will lead to better management of our marine resources.