

WORKSHOP OPENING

(Chairman - Peter Wakeling  
Director of Marketing, Department of Tourism)

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WELCOME:                   The Mayor of Mackay,  
                            Alderman A.F. Abbott, C.B.E.

I would like to extend to you a most sincere welcome to the city of Mackay, the heart of the tourist industry of North Queensland. For those of you who do not know, the Mackay region is the largest sugar producing and exporting centre in Australia. Another industry of great significance to this region is the mining of coking coal for export. Other smaller industries include a very good beef industry with an export abattoir, a dairying and a timber industry. Mackay being stationed so closely to the Barrier Reef, has vast tourist industry potential.

This is a most important workshop and a highly commendable project. The Department of Tourism and the Queensland Government Tourist Bureau have over the years played a major role in promoting Queensland's natural attractions. Queensland is extremely fortunate in having one of the great tourist attractions of the world - the Great Barrier Reef - stretching along some two thirds of its eastern seaboard, but for a number of reasons, the tourist potential is at present under-exploited and under-capitalised. It is difficult to compete with international tourist markets because of the relatively high cost of internal domestic air transport and accommodation charges.

Full utilisation of the Reef compatible with its protection is extremely important, and the setting up of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Great Barrier Reef Region are wise and progressive steps.

Tourism in Australia has regrettably not achieved the industrial importance it has achieved in many other countries, due in no way to a lack of major attractions, but more so to our remoteness from the source of supply of potential visitors and to our great distances and small population.

I believe that tourism has not yet been accepted by governments in Australia as a major industry with vast potential. In addition, the tourism industry itself is too insular and too fragmented. There must be a co-ordinated approach to publicity and a proportionate acceptance of the cost of that publicity by the people who benefit. Too many within the industry are prepared to accept the benefits without personal contribution.

I believe it is important to sell the Reef as a unique and beautiful feature and as individual operators, to provide the visitor with individual requirements. This progresses to specialised regional and individual selling, service and customer satisfaction, which is undoubtedly the most effective selling forum.

This workshop must be viewed as an industry education program from which benefits can be gained on a proportionate basis to input, derived from an intelligent participation in the discussions. I would like to briefly elaborate on a couple of points I raised about operators who believe that the industry and the world owes them a living. They must learn to expect from the industry only what they are prepared to contribute to it. Too many for too long have sat back and said "What am I going to get out of it? Who's going to pay for me?" There seems to be a general trend in believing that the public views tourism as being on a pedestal, producing the tourist dollar which will bring great wealth to everyone within the region.

I have agitated and stated for years that I believe the tourist dollar does circulate and benefits do accrue within the region, and to everyone within it. But does the average person see this? As far as he is concerned, the tourist operator is getting money for himself through his business. To some degree this is quite right. You are in the industry to make a living from it. You are there to offer service and to pay a contribution towards the cost of publicising that industry.

I have been recently criticised quite strongly for talking on a regional basis. I say to you again now, the only way tourism can be sold is on a regional basis and then for the individual operators to come back and sell their own commodity, their own particular area and the parts they can sell to the visiting public.

The Great Barrier Reef is a natural feature that can be exploited for tourism. To do that we must try and bring people from overseas. We must bring them directly to North Queensland, and to do that we need to look at where we should bring them, and how we can get an international airport. Ladies and gentlemen, not that I've got any brief for Townsville, but I will say this, Townsville would be the only logical place that any government would look at when considering the expenditure required for an international airport. Townsville is geographically central to the Reef region and has facilities for good commuter services.

If industry is going to exploit Reef tourism, it should look at supporting an international airport for North Queensland and that should be at Townsville.

So, ladies and gentlemen, whether that's hypocritical, whether that's taking it away from my own place or not, I do not know, but I believe that would bring to Mackay and to other centres along the Reef, the type of tourist the industry is seeking.

This is a seminar where you must express your views. There will be a very high standard of paper presentation. You will be able to go away with some indication of your own feelings and the requirements that you think are needed. You must make an input to get a feed-back.

To you all I say thanks for coming to Mackay. We are happy as a Council to participate in this workshop, we are happy to have you in our home. I hope that the two and half days of your workshop are successful, and I wish you well with it. Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have great pleasure in officially declaring this workshop 'Tourism and the Great Barrier Reef' open.