

1 INTRODUCTION

The Great Barrier Reef is the largest living organism in the world, is one of the natural wonders of the world, and is one of five locations in Australia listed as a World Heritage area. With increases in tourist visitation to the area, and other potential threats to the survival of the reef such as the crown-of-thorns starfish, management plans for the area are required.

This report provides information about one of the factors that must be considered when preparing management plans - tourists. Tourists have impacts on the reef that must be managed, but they are also affected by management plans. Therefore, the responses of tourists are important to the success of Reef management plans.

Since the Great Barrier Reef is an important tourist attraction to north Queensland, and a major stimulus to economic activity in the region, care must be taken to manage the resource properly, so that tourism in north Queensland can be a sustained industry. Since many tourists may be attracted to the natural environment and low scale development of the Reef, further development on the reef, especially development that does not capitalize on the unique nature of the Reef, may in the long run, not contribute to sustained tourism. Uncontrolled development would then destroy the very thing that attracted tourists to the Reef in the first place.

This report discusses the nature and opinions of tourists visiting the Great Barrier Reef in order to provide background information useful in the decision making process required for the preparation of management plans for the area.

Project Objectives:

To undertake a study of attitudes of tourists in north Queensland to selected aspects of their holiday with particular emphasis on determining the importance of the Great Barrier Reef in their holiday choice and their opinions on some reef-related issues.

The project shall be executed in the following manner:

- (a) A questionnaire developed, in consultation with the GBRMPA Project Officer, to determine: general reasons for undertaking a holiday in north Queensland, travel history and preferences, experience of and importance of the Great Barrier Reef and attitudes to specific issues of reef quality, level of development and phenomena which may affect their enjoyment e.g. cyclones, crown-of-thorns starfish, box jelly fish. The questionnaire is to be developed from unstructured interviews (to identify issues important to tourists) and tested.
- (b) Surveys are to be conducted by personal interview. As far as practicable to minimize costs, the surveys should be conducted in conjunction with the research being undertaken by the Institute of Applied Environmental Research on the socio-economic effects of crown-of-thorns starfish.
- (c) The sample should be selected to represent tourism on the Great Barrier Reef and based on published information on north Queensland tourism.
- (d) The survey should be conducted to represent the 'peak' winter season and a summer 'off-season' period.