

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF
MARINE PARK AUTHORITY WORKSHOP
20 APRIL 1978

ADDRESS OF WELCOME BY PROFESSOR K.J.C. BACK
VICE-CHANCELLOR, JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY.

Mr. Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today is a most important occasion for James Cook University: firstly, because it marks the opening of this Workshop and secondly, because it was on the 20th of April 1970 that Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II gave assent, in person, to the James Cook University of North Queensland Act, thereby establishing the University.

The coincidence of the opening of this Workshop with the University's eighth anniversary gives me the opportunity to review the progress that we have made and to point out the significance of marine science in this progress.

First I must go back to 1964, when the University was the University College of Townsville. I make reference to the report of the "Martin Committee" or to give the full title, "The Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia" and I shall quote a sentence from the section dealing with the Townsville development:

The Committee believes that the Townsville University College, because of its location in the tropics and because of its proximity to the Great Barrier Reef, has unique opportunities to develop studies in the special problems of tropical areas, for example, ... marine science.

The general policy guidelines set down in the Martin Report were included in the recommendations of the Australian Universities Commission for the 1967-69 and 1970-72 triennia and, looking back, I think we can say with some confidence that we have achieved the objectives set down in those guidelines.

Our prime objective has been to make James Cook University a centre of teaching and research in a wide range of tropically oriented disciplines. We can, to some extent, measure our success in terms of the increasing activity in hosting and organising workshops and seminars in those disciplines. Today's Workshop is a most significant addition. We have just completed a Seminar on Natural Disaster and Community Welfare held first in Townsville, then in Mackay and next month it will be repeated in Cairns. Later this year we will sponsor a Seminar on Cyclones and Storm Surges and next year, in conjunction with the Australian Development Assistance Bureau, we will hold an International Seminar on Tropical Animal Production. Thus James Cook University can rightfully claim to be a centre of research and teaching in Tropical Science and Technology.

In the field of Marine Science this was the first University to establish a Chair and Department of Marine Biology. We were intimately involved in the planning and establishment of the Australian Institute of Marine Science, a development of which as a nation we can be justly proud. I pay tribute to the Foundation Director of the Institute, Dr. Malvern "Red" Gilmartin for guiding the Institute through the difficult formative years. The completion of the excellent laboratory facilities and the near completion of the Institute's 24 metre Research Vessel must be a source of great satisfaction to him. I am sure you will be most impressed with what you see at Cape Ferguson when you visit the Institute's laboratory complex on Saturday morning.

There is no doubt that the funding of Marine Science in Australia has, until quite recently, been sadly neglected. It is only in the last decade that major advances have been made and I cite as examples the increased emphasis given by universities, the establishment of AIMS and the establishment of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority with its headquarters here in Townsville. It must not be forgotten however that there has been, for many years, a dedicated group of concerned marine scientists which has campaigned tirelessly for an expansion of effort and funding for marine science research.

I refer of course to the Great Barrier Reef Committee and many of the workshop participants here today are members of that Committee either personally or by institutional membership. These members will know only too well of the struggles and achievements of the Committee and I have no doubt that the recent progress I have outlined is due in no small measure to its dedicated work.

One of the Committee's major achievements was the establishment of the Heron Island Research Station. It was for many years the only research station on or adjacent to the Barrier Reef. It is only recently that other stations have appeared - the University of Sydney's at One Tree Island and, in the far northern region, the Australian Museum's Lizard Island Station. It is with pride and pleasure that I can now announce that James Cook University is in a position to make its contribution to the development of off-shore research stations. Negotiations have been successfully concluded for the acquisition of a Special Lease at Pioneer Bay, Orpheus Island where the James Cook University Marine Research Station will be established. This Station will provide staff and students with easy access to an island with remarkably rich fringing reefs and in close proximity to the main Barrier Reefs. It is ideally located to complement the other research stations being at the mid-point between Lizard Island to the north and Heron Island to the south. The new station will increase still further the capacity of James Cook University to give special emphasis to the teaching and research of marine science. More importantly it will provide an additional facility to marine scientists generally and I see its role as being complementary to, and supportive of, the existing Barrier Reef research stations.

Mr. Minister, this Workshop is the first of a series to be sponsored by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and will be a reference point for those seeking information about or conducting research into problems of conservation and management of the Great Barrier Reef, matters which have become so much more urgent with the announcement of the proposed 200 mile zone.

I commend the Authority for its initiative and, in welcoming the participants, and especially in welcoming you, Mr. Minister, I express to you all the hope that this Workshop will prove to be a stimulating, rewarding and thought-provoking experience.

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OPENING SPEECH BY THE HON. RAY GROOM

MINISTER FOR

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING &

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Minister, Hon. Ray Groom: Professor Back, Dr Baker, Mr Mayor, Members of the Authority and Consultative Committee, ladies and gentleman. I'd like to add my own welcome on behalf of the Commonwealth and to say how much we appreciate your attendance at this Workshop today.

One of the Authority's first decisions, was to decide that its headquarters should be here in Townsville. I think today's gathering indicates the wisdom of that initial decision because, of the participants here at the workshop, over a third are scientists living in Townsville and I'm told about half are based in North Queensland.

This is my first chance since becoming a Minister to come to Townsville; though I must say I've been here three or four times previously Mr Mayor, and have enjoyed myself very much. Later today, we're going on to Cairns to visit Green Island before visiting Lizard Island to see the Research Station there. I must say I'm very pleased this programme has been arranged for this time of the year, its becoming rather cool down in Tasmania at the moment.

Green Island is perhaps the most popular tourist attraction on the entire Reef. It serves to remind us of how important it is that Australian and overseas visitors can see such beautiful, unique and characteristic places like Green Island. The Authority, as you know, is concerned to make such visits, brief as they often are, as rich and as rewarding as possible. The impact of something like 180,000 visitors a year on a small cay and reef like Green Island presents many serious management problems, and so tourism in the northern sector of the Reef is one of the matters that I understand you'll be looking at very carefully during this workshop.

The workshop represents a significant step in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's progress towards planning for the conservation of the Great Barrier Reef and indicates one of the ways in which this challenging task is being tackled.

I'd like to take a few moments to give you an idea of how the workshop fits into the overall work programme of the Authority, and to very briefly review some of the activities of the Authority in the past year and a half. Of course a great deal of work does lie ahead of us before the complexities of the Reef system can be fully understood and the effects of human use of the Reef area identified and monitored.

Authority staff have been developing techniques in association with other scientists which will permit reefs to be described as rich, varied and beautiful; or damaged, under pressure and in need of protection. Detailed survey and mapping programmes are already in progress. A broad programme of socio-economic studies will also gather information about such things as recreation, tourism, the fishing industry and the associated infra-structure in coastal centres. The results of all the studies carried out by the Authority will form the basis of a number of reports recommending the declaration of parts of the Marine Park. The first report dealing with the Capricorn and the Bunker Group of reefs has already been prepared and it's anticipated that this area before too long might be declared as the Capricornia section of the Marine Park.

The declaration of course is only one step along the road to rational reef management. After declaration the Authority will prepare zoning and management plans; this will include discussion of alternative approaches with the local people who know and use the reefs, scientists working in the area, conservationists and others living in various parts of Australia who are concerned for the proper management of the Reef. The Authority will not only call for formal submissions, but will also be involved in a quite extensive informal public participation programme. Information will be available in the main coastal centres of Queensland and in all State capitals, and that's seen as a most important part of the informal public participation programme. A mobile planning office and information centre will take the plans to the people of Rockhampton, Gladstone and Bundaberg and will ensure that they have adequate opportunities to express their particular views.

A draft zoning plan which will take account of all submissions and comments will then be prepared. This plan will be exhibited for a further period of public evaluation and again further submissions will be sought.

Public participation and co-operative planning have become rather fashionable terms in recent years, but I think it is fair to say that both are probably still more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Steps are being taken in this case to ensure that this will not be true of the approach taken by the Authority. The Authority will combine rigorous scientific appraisal of the reefs and of the many uses of the area, thorough discussion with State Government bodies, and free and open public debate. This should lead to general agreement about the best ways of managing the Reef so that it is protected, and continues to serve the needs of not only present generations, but also future generations.

The gathering of data is the first step in this process and underpins all later activities. That, of course, is what this particular workshop is concerned with. The northern sector of the Great Barrier Reef is one of the great wilderness areas of this country, wild, remote and rarely visited even by scientists. It is radically different from the Capricornia area, which is in comparison, very much used, accessible and which has already been intensively studied. Early declaration and protection of the northern reefs will keep our options open for the future, so that environmental quality should not be gradually eroded or compromised. Research in other areas will indicate what levels of use are compatible with long term conservation; future increases in use will then be able to proceed rationally. Planning for the care of the Great Barrier Reef must not become a rearguard action, attempting to keep up with events, but rather a thorough systematic process of investigation and consultation leading to timely decisions which will be supported by the total community.

I would hope that during the next financial year the Authority's staff numbers will increase to meet those demands and lessen the burden upon those involved. The heavy demands placed on such a small group of people will intensify as successive areas of the Reef come under examination and investigation. Until recently, the Acting Chairman of the Authority was Dr Don McMichael, who many of you would know, has had a long association with the Great Barrier Reef. Dr McMichael was recently appointed the Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs and his place on the Authority has been taken on an acting basis by Mr Horry Higgs, who many of you would know. (Mr Higgs is the Acting Director of Environment in my Department at the present time.) As the planning process gathers momentum, the job obviously will require the attention of a full time Chairman, and I again would expect to make an appointment of a full time Chairman at some stage later in the year.

As well as establishing close relationships with the Australian Institute of Marine Science and the James Cook University, the Authority has been co-operating with the Queensland Fisheries Service, Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service and with a number of other Queensland Government agencies. For instance, a recent survey of the Fisheries Service has established the extent of the Crown of Thorns starfish in the Swain Reefs area.

From the point of view of my Government, we see this as a joint enterprise with the Queensland Government and with the agencies of that Government. Later this year, the Authority and the Queensland Department of Tourist Services hope to hold a joint workshop on tourism in the region. I regard these co-operative activities as an essential contribution to the proper management of the Great Barrier Reef Region.

I am delighted to welcome to this workshop so many scientists; officers from other Departments, both State Departments and Federal Departments; representatives of the Torres Strait pilots; representatives of the Aboriginal communities in the area and some of the boat owners who make other people's expeditions to the northern part of the Reef possible. I trust that everyone involved has a pleasant time and a most rewarding experience. With those words I have much pleasure in officially opening this workshop.