



Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

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Sharks help live-aboard dive boats rake in tourism dollars

The live-aboard dive boat industry in Cairns and Port Douglas is worth at least \$16 million per annum to the region, according to scientific research results that will be announced at the Annual Conference of the Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTSRF).

The results also showed that live-aboard divers travelling to Osprey Reef valued shark sightings more highly than sightings of other wildlife.

“While tourists travelling to different parts of the reef – or on other kinds of trips – might feel slightly differently, sharks are obviously very important to this industry sector,” said A/Prof Natalie Stoeckl, the MTSRF-funded researcher from James Cook University who led the study.

“We found that visitors to Osprey Reef would be willing to pay more for a ‘guaranteed’ shark sighting than they would be for a ‘guaranteed’ sighting of large fish, marine turtles or a ‘wide variety of wildlife,’” she added.

Natalie’s team of researchers (including Dr Alastair Birtles, A/Prof Peter Valentine, Arnold Mangott, Marina Farr and Matt Curnock) have been investigating the regional economic impact of the live-aboard dive boat industry and which marine species tourists value most.

“We collected data from more than 1000 tourists on live-aboard dive boats operating in the Cairns/Cooktown management area of the Great Barrier Reef to estimate the regional economic impact of that live-aboard industry,” A/Prof Stoeckl said.

“We found that each year, the live-aboard dive boats are directly responsible for generating at least \$16 million worth of income to the Cairns/Port Douglas region,” she said.

“We look forward to finding out what visitors’ value most in other sectors of the tourism industry in the next phase of our research,” she added.

The Australian Government’s \$40 million MTSRF aims to increase the sustainability of management and use of north Queensland’s key environmental assets: the Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics rainforests, and the Torres Strait. More than 70 scientists are presenting the results of their research at the 2009 Annual MTSRF Conference in Townsville on April 28-30th.

