



Key marine species in the GBR: Issues, impacts and sustainable management

Background

Australian populations of iconic marine wildlife species (e.g. marine turtles, sharks and rays, large fishes such as potato cod and Maori wrasse, whales, dolphins, anemone fish and even giant clams among other key species) are under pressure from a range of human related threats. These marine wildlife species are important resources for Reef tourism operators and a significant proportion of tourists' expenditure can be attributed to sightings of these animals and interactions with them. Tourism has the potential to contribute to the conservation of these species whilst providing economic benefits to the local community; however it must be managed to be ecologically sustainable.

This James Cook University research project is investigating the social and economic values of iconic marine wildlife species to inform the sustainable management of tourism in the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). **Part of this investigation includes an assessment of the current and potential threats to these highly valued reef species, including any impacts of tourism and evaluation of management tools to help minimise them.** To help with this, we are seeking input from experienced Reef tourism industry representatives from Port Douglas, Cairns, Townsville and the Whitsundays to help identify (i) the Reef species most valuable to their operation, (ii) their concerns about impacts and management of these species and their habitats, and (iii) research and management needs to address such impacts.

During March and April 2010, we will be conducting interviews with experienced staff from a range of Reef tourism operations in these areas. The issues that arise from these interviews will then be summarised and discussed in a scoping workshop to be held in Cairns in late May 2010 (proposed for 21st May), involving industry, management agencies, Reef researchers and other key stakeholders. The outcomes of this workshop will be reported to the participants, Reef managers and the Australian Government via the [Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility](#) (MTSRF), and will help to identify key areas for new research and issues for the sustainable management of tourism based on these Reef species.



Reef tourism operators' participation in this research project is highly valued, and it is hoped that the outcomes of this study will benefit the GBR tourism industry and contribute to the sustainable management of these iconic Reef species.

Industry Interviews

A sample of highly experienced industry personnel from a range of Reef tourism operations will be sought in each area and asked to participate in a short interview about the Reef species that are of high value to their operation. **Participation is entirely voluntary and interviews will take approximately 30 minutes.** Interviews will be recorded for subsequent transcription and analyses. All interview data will be treated with confidence in accordance with James Cook University Human Ethics Policy. Results will be de-identified and no statements will be attributable to either individual participants or tourism operators.

Scoping workshop

A scoping workshop will be held towards the end of May 2010 (proposed for 21st May) to bring together GBR tourism operators, Reef managers and other key stakeholders. This workshop will review summary results of the industry interviews and discuss key issues and research needs for the sustainable management of high value GBR species. Objectives of the workshop will include:

1. An evaluation of the impacts, risks and threats facing the Reef's high value species and their habitat;
2. A review of management protocols (including those associated with tourism interactions) and issues affecting these species; and
3. Identification of new research priorities for the sustainable management of tourism interactions with these species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

An 'issues' paper will be circulated to participating operators prior to the scoping workshop. Copies of the final report from the project will be made available for download from the [MTSRF website](#).

We look forward to your feedback and ideas on the sustainable management of our iconic Reef wildlife species.



James Cook University researchers involved in this project include Chief Investigators: Dr Alastair Birtles (Senior Lecturer in Environmental Management and Ecotourism, School of Business); Associate Professor Peter Valentine (School of Earth and Environmental Sciences); Dr Natalie Stoeckl (Senior Lecturer in Economics, School of Business) and Research Assistants Matt Curnock, Susan Sobotzick, Marina Farr and Alicia Schmidt-Roach.

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