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#14

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- ▶ VALUE OF DIVE BOAT INDUSTRY TO NQ
- ▶ SUSTAINING NQ TOURISM DESPITE SEA LEVEL RISE
- ▶ TRENDS IN DOMESTIC REEF TOURISM



What is the Communique?

The Communique provides the latest up-to-date leading-edge research from the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre. The Communique is compiled to assist you to make informed decisions for your future.



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Through a consortium of over 300 scientists, 15 research agencies and at least 38 end user organisations, the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre manages and delivers solution science that specifically addresses the problems facing North Queensland's key environmental assets: the Great Barrier Reef and its catchments, tropical rainforests including the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, and the Torres Strait.

REPORT # 14 – JUNE 2009



VALUE OF THE LIVE-ABOARD DIVE BOAT INDUSTRY TO NQ

Tourism is the biggest revenue raiser for NQ, but what is the value of particular segments within the tourism industry? MTSRF researchers from James Cook University are looking into the live-aboard dive boat industry in the Cairns and Cooktown region of the Great Barrier Reef.

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SUSTAINING NQ TOURISM DESPITE SEA LEVEL RISE

Tourism businesses are extremely vulnerable to the problems posed by climate change, including rising sea levels. How can we increase the sustainability of North Queensland's highest earning industry?

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DOMESTIC REEF TOURISM: WHAT ARE THE TRENDS?

With the global economic downturn, domestic reef tourism is important for keeping the industry alive. MTSRF researchers from James Cook University are analysing some of the differences between international and domestic visitors to the Great Barrier Reef.

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RRRC thanks Suzanne Long, Hayley Gorsuch and David Souter for use of photographs.

Live-aboard dive industry worth \$16 million annually to Far North Queensland

We know that tourism is North Queensland's biggest revenue raiser, but what is the value of particular segments within the industry? The Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTRSF) has funded a team of researchers from James Cook University (JCU) to look into the live-aboard dive boat industry operating in the Cairns and Cooktown region of the Great Barrier Reef. The group's research has concluded that live-aboard dive boats generate a minimum of \$16 million in income for the Cairns and Port Douglas region annually, and that a sizeable portion of that income flows through to land-based businesses such as motels and restaurants.

The team has also uncovered some interesting details about the experiences of visitors on live-aboard dive boat trips. They found that visitors gained very high levels of satisfaction from interacting with key species such as marine turtles, large fish and dwarf minke whales. Visitors also highlighted the importance of biodiversity, indicating they derived great satisfaction from seeing a wide variety of species. Shark encounters were an outstanding highlight for many visitors, particularly on trips to Osprey Reef. These visitors indicated they would be willing to pay more for 'guaranteed' sightings of sharks (especially rarer species such as hammerheads and silvertips), than they would for 'guaranteed' sightings of other species such as large fishes or marine turtles.

The next phase of JCU research will investigate the relative 'value' of a range of iconic marine species to visitors on other types of reef trips, for example those going to the Far Northern Section of the Great Barrier Reef during summer, and those targeting dwarf minke whales during winter. Associate Professor Stoeckl presented some of the group's latest results in detail at the third Annual Conference of the MTRSF in Townsville (28-30 April 2009) and outcomes from the conference will be made available on the MTRSF website soon.

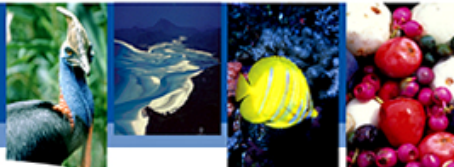
[Click here for further information about MTRSF reef tourism research.](#)

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MTRSF-funded research has revealed that visitors to Osprey Reef value sightings of sharks more than sighting of other marine wildlife.

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Sustaining marine tourism despite sea level rise

Tourism businesses are extremely vulnerable to the problems posed by climate change, including rising sea levels. How can we increase the sustainability of North Queensland's highest earning industry?

There is increasing concern in national media about the serious impacts of sea level rise on all kinds of coastal infrastructure ([see recent example in The Sydney Morning Herald](#)).

In conjunction with the Queensland Office of Climate Change and the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre, the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre will host a series of free seminars presenting tools you can use to estimate the risk of sea level rise for your business, to enable you to plan for your future in North Queensland.

The free, open-to-all seminars will be held in Cairns and Townsville:

Cairns: Tuesday, 23 June 2009, 4:00pm - 6:30pm
The Reef Hotel Casino, Wharf Street, Cairns CBD

Townsville: Wednesday, 24 June 2009, 4:00pm - 6:30pm
Rydges Southbank Hotel, Palmer Street, South Townsville

[To register to attend either of these free seminars, click here.](#)

[Visit the RRRRC website for further information about the seminars.](#)

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Seminars to be held in Cairns and Townsville will summarise the present state of sea-level science and will describe the method for incorporating this knowledge into risk-based planning.

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What do Australians like to do when they visit the reef?

The global economic downturn means that there are likely to be shifts in the characteristics of tourists visiting the Great Barrier Reef, potentially including an increase in the importance of domestic visitors for the region. The MTSRF has funded James Cook University researchers to analyse some of the differences between international and domestic visitors to the reef. Interestingly, the group has found that over half of domestic visitors had been to the Great Barrier Reef before, underlining the importance of repeat visitation for the economy of the region. Visitors to the southern regions, such as the Capricorn Coast and the Whitsundays, were more likely to be domestic than international, especially during Australia's winter months when the proportion of domestic visitors increases across the entire Great Barrier Reef.

Domestic visitors are more likely to travel in family groups or with their partner, and more commonly stay in holiday apartments and resorts, relative to international visitors. Visiting the reef is important for domestic visitors, but they also rank opportunities for rest and relaxation and family time highly. Domestic visitors are more likely to undertake a variety of activities such as snorkelling, swimming and glass-bottom boat tours, relative to international visitors, and are less likely to go diving. They are also more likely to report seeing marine wildlife on their trip. Satisfaction levels were high for both international and domestic visitors, and both were likely to feel the reef trip provided value for money and to recommend the trip to others.

This information plus much more is freely available from the MTSRF website and can be used by reef tourism operators to increase the sustainability of their businesses during these uncertain economic times.

[Click here for further information about visitation to the Great Barrier Reef.](#)

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