

REEF TOURISM  
QUARTERLY REPORT # 3  
Townsville  
May – July 2007

This quarterly report forms part of a series of reports presented by the Australian Government's Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTRSF), represented in North Queensland by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, and James Cook University (JCU) on reef tourism in the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). The aims and methodology of this research are presented in the introduction below. The data presented in this report summarise the results from the third quarter of data collection in the Townsville region between May and July 2007. A total of 50 surveys were returned. The results include socio-demographic characteristics, travel behaviour, alternative destinations, motivations and planning, and reef experience.

**Note:** Results from the first and second quarters of data collection (November 2006 – January 2007; and February – April 2007 respectively) are included in this report for the purpose of comparison and are shown next to the current quarter's results in brackets. In some cases figures may have been rounded. A total of 155 surveys were collected in the first two quarters.



## 1. INTRODUCTION



The research described here falls under MTRSF's research program to identify **sustainable use and management of marine resources of the Great Barrier Reef** and specifically the **analysis of tourism use and impact on the Great Barrier Reef for managing sustainable tourism**. This program will identify annual visitor usage patterns of the GBR to enable the identification of key trends and drivers of visitor patterns.



## 2. METHODOLOGY



The principle methodology for this research is visitor surveys distributed through participating tourism operators. Crew from these marine tourism operators distribute and collect the surveys at five locations across the Great Barrier Reef (Port Douglas, Cairns, Townsville, Airlie Beach and the Southern Region). Results are available in an aggregate form as well as regionally, such as the report presented here. Ten operators are currently involved

in this research. A total of 50 surveys were collected. Data is collected on reef visitors' socio-demographic characteristics, as well as travel patterns, motivations, activities, alternative destinations considered, and satisfaction (including expectations and best and worst experiences).



## 3. LIMITATIONS



Visitor numbers decreased from the last quarterly report as a result of some operators undertaking out-of-water maintenance work on their vessels.



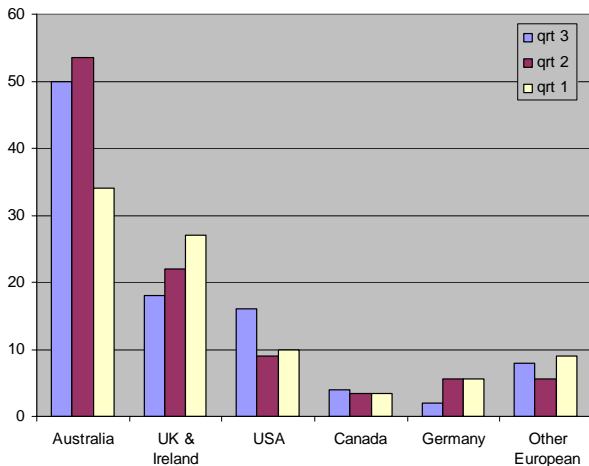
## 4. FINDINGS



### *Origin of Respondents*

The sample consisted of a lower proportion of males (34%) than females (66%) compared with previous quarters. Half of the respondents were from Australia, of which 23% were from Queensland.

**Figure 1: Origin of respondents.**



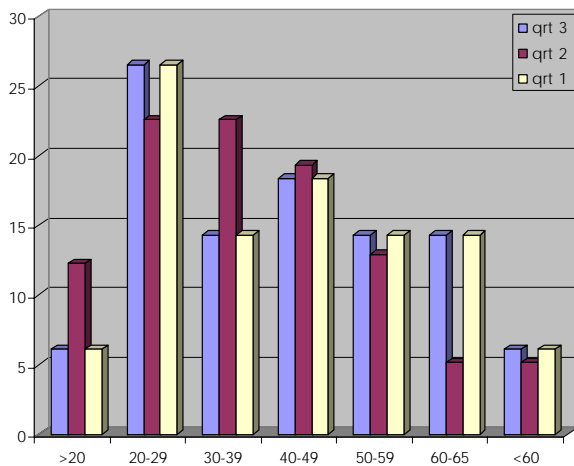
**Employment**

In terms of **employment**, the most common responses were:

	Quarter 3	Quarter 2	Quarter 1
Professionals	23%	26%	22.5%
Students	16.5%	18.5%	16%
Retired	4%	13%	5%

**Age of Respondents**

**Figure 2: Age of respondents.**



**Travel Party**

The majority of respondents were **traveling**:

	Quarter 3	Quarter 2	Quarter 1
With a partner or spouse	36%	35%	26%

With friends	26%	20.5%	13%
Alone	8%	7.5%	7%
With family / relatives	14%	11%	52%

**Previous Visits**

For 73.5% (46%) of respondents, this was their first visit to Far North Queensland. Of those who had visited the region previously, 69% had visited the region more than once before.

**Accommodation and Transport**

Unlike previous quarters, the option of staying with friends and relatives was a less popular choice for accommodation. In this quarter, 31.5% of respondents chose to stay in holiday apartments, with only 12.5% of respondents choosing to stay with friends and relatives. Another 14.5% of respondents were staying in hotels (15.5%), with another 16.5% (9%) staying at resorts.

Half of the respondents, 51% (36.5%) flew into the region as their chosen mode of transport, while private or rented vehicles was the next most popular mode of transport with 30% (30.5%). Another 6.5% (13%) of respondents chose to travel by bus or coach to reach their destination.

**Previous Holiday Location**

The **most popular single destinations** given in response to "Where did you spend your last holiday?" are provided in the table below.

OVERALL RESPONDENTS (N=50)	
USA	20%
United Kingdom	20%
Gold Coast	12%
Airlie Beach	8%
Europe	8%

A **thematic / regional analysis** shows the following trends:

OVERALL RESPONDENTS (N=49)		
Europe	24.5%	(18%)
Australia (except	20.5%	(20%)

Queensland)		
North America (including Carribean)	14.5%	(9.5%)
NZ, Pacific and South-east Asia	10%	(13%)
Asia	8%	(3.5%)
Africa and Latin America	4%	(3.5%)
<b>INTERNATIONAL RESPONDENTS (N=24)</b>		
Europe	46%	(39%)
North America (including Carribean)	25%	(16%)
NZ, Pacific and South-east Asia	4%	(19.5%)
Queensland	8.5%	(6%)
Africa and Latin America	8.5%	(6%)
Asia	8%	(1.5%)
Australia	0%	(8%)
<b>DOMESTIC RESPONDENTS (N=25)</b>		
Australia (except Queensland)	40%	(23%)
Queensland	28%	(40%)
NZ, Pacific and South-east Asia	16%	(10%)
Asia	8%	(2.5%)
Europe	4%	(8%)
North America (including Carribean)	4%	(8%)
African and Latin America	0%	(2%)

### Alteranative Destinations Considered

The most popular **alternative destinations** considered when planning this trip were:

Destination	%
Cairns	5%
Fraser Island	5%
Sydney	4.5%
Brisbane	3.5%
Great Ke	
ppel Island	3.5%

### Motivations

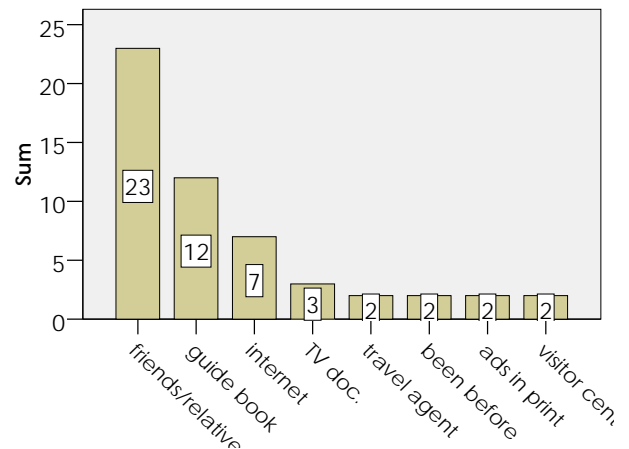
The most **important motivations** for visiting the region (ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most important) include:

- Visit the GBR..... 4.51\* (4.5)
- Snorkelling and diving ..... 3.94 (4.15)
- Rest and relaxation ..... 4.13 (3.8)
- Experience the natural environment ..... 3.79 (3.75)

\*Shown as a mean.

### Information Sources

**Figure 3: Information sources used for holiday planning.**



### Previous Visits

For 72% (70%) of respondents, this was their first visit to the reef. Of those who had been to the reef before, 80% (55%) had been between one and four times before.

### Choice of Tour Operator

The most common reasons for **choosing their reef tour operator** were:

- Availability ..... 30% (**34.5%**)
- Advertising ..... 17% (**8.5%**)
- Price ..... 7.5% (**16.5%**)
- Recommended by travel agent (5%) or others (2.5%) ..... (**30%**)

### Diving Profile

When visitors were asked if they planned to dive the reef, 25% (27%) of respondents said 'Yes'. Fifty-eight percent (30%) of respondents had no previous diving experience; 16.5% (43%) of respondents had completed between one and four dives previously; no respondents (12.5%) had completed between five and ten dives previously; and 25% (20%) had completed more than ten dives.

### Visit to Other Reefs

Over 43% (42%) of respondents said they had visited other coral reefs before coming to the Great Barrier Reef. The most commonly cited alternative destination was other Australian reefs, mentioned by 24% (13%) of respondents\*,

followed by South-east Asian reefs, mentioned by 12% of respondents. Ninety percent (80%) of respondents felt that other Australian reefs were the same or better than the Great Barrier Reef, and 66.5% (53%) felt that the reefs of South-east Asia are the same or better than the Great Barrier Reef.

\* Whilst respondents were asked if they had been to reefs in Australia other than the Great Barrier Reef (e.g. Ningaloo, WA), it is apparent that some respondents replied that they had been to other reefs located within the Great Barrier Reef.

### Perceptions of the Reef Trip

In descending order of frequency, **perceptions of the reef tours** were:

	Quarter 3	Quarter 2	Quarter 1
"A relaxing fun filled day on the reef"	62%	59.5%	42.5%
"A fantastic reef tour for all"	36%	39%	51.5%
"Introduction to the reef"	30%	15%	19%

### Activities Undertaken

The most common **activities** undertaken during the trip were:

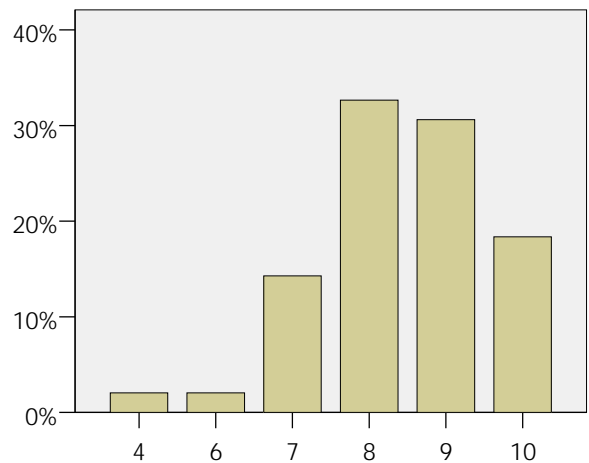
	Quarter 3	Quarter 2	Quarter 1
Snorkelling	86%	87%	75.5%
Glass-bottom boat	34%	70.5%	43%
Swimming	52%	42.5%	44%
View marine mammals	48%	32%	24.5%
Went diving	18%	15%	17%

### Satisfaction Levels and Recommendations

**Satisfaction ratings** (measured on a scale of 1 = low satisfaction, to 10 = high satisfaction) were generally high, with scores of 9 and 10 accounting for 49% (48.5%) of all responses. The mean satisfaction score was 8.4 (8.4).

Ninety-two percent (88%) of respondents felt that they achieved **value for money**, but only fifty percent (92%) said they would recommend the trip to other travellers.

Figure 4: Satisfaction scores.



The first four factors that influenced the satisfaction (either positively or negatively) most frequently include:

	Quarter 3	Quarter 2	Quarter 1
Staff / service / professionalism	34.5%	8.5%	26%
Weather / sea state (sea sick)	12%	-	-
Facilities and boat	10.5%	14.5%	3.5%
Natural environment	7.5%	20%	17.5%

Tourists' **best experiences** include:

	Quarter 3	Quarter 2	Quarter 1
Diving / snorkelling	47.5%	40.5%	36%
Marine life	17.5%	12%	15%
Staff / service / professionalism	10.5%	5%	9%

Tourists' **worst experiences** include:

	Quarter 3	Quarter 2	Quarter 1
None	44%	30.5%	-
Weather /	13.5%	19%	21%

sea state (sea sick)			
Boat and facilities	11.5%	-	-

When asked if the trip met their expectations, the following answers were recorded:

	<i>Reef</i>	<i>Trip</i>
Not at all	2% (1%)	0% (2.5%)
Not very much	6% (6.5%)	2% (24%)
Somewhat	38% (37%)	30.5% (14%)
Very much	54% (53%)	67.5% (57%)

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