

GREAT BARRIER REEF INDIGENOUS TOURISM: TRANSLATING POLICY INTO PRACTICE

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1. PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

- Firstly, to find out why there is so little involvement by GBR Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities in the GBR tourism industry, despite a generally favourable policy environment; and
- Secondly, what can be done to encourage more Indigenous people to engage in GBR tourism as business owners and/or partners with mainstream tourism operators.

Overall objective:

To create the optimal environment for Indigenous businesses to flourish along the Great Barrier Reef

2. FOCAL POINTS OF PRESENTATION

- Indigenous voice in tourism industry governance
- Creating an optimal environment for Indigenous tourism businesses to flourish
- What it takes for Indigenous businesses to be “tourism ready”

3. CONTEXT

- All tourism and events in Queensland take place on the traditional estates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nations peoples – therefore should have a “voice” in the governance structure of the industry
- 2020 has been jointly designated by the Qld Premier and the Minister for Tourism as the “Year of Indigenous Tourism”
- Tourism & Events Queensland has set the objective of making Queensland the nation’s #1 destination for Indigenous tourism experiences
- Queensland Tourism Industry Council recently launched its First Nations Tourism Potential Plan
- Timeliness of this report

4. POLICY CONTEXT

- *Qld Ecotourism Plans 2013-2020 and 2016-2020* – the plans strongly link ecotourism with Indigenous cultural experiences – a “natural partnership”.
- *Queensland Tourism Workforce Plan 2017-2020* (Jobs Queensland)
 - * Acknowledges barriers Indigenous people face in getting into the tourism industry and proposes actions to overcome them;
 - * Notes that there were 225,000 direct and indirect jobs in the Qld tourism industry (2015/16);
 - * Indigenous. Population = 4% of Queensland total; Indigenous employment equity = approx. 9,000.

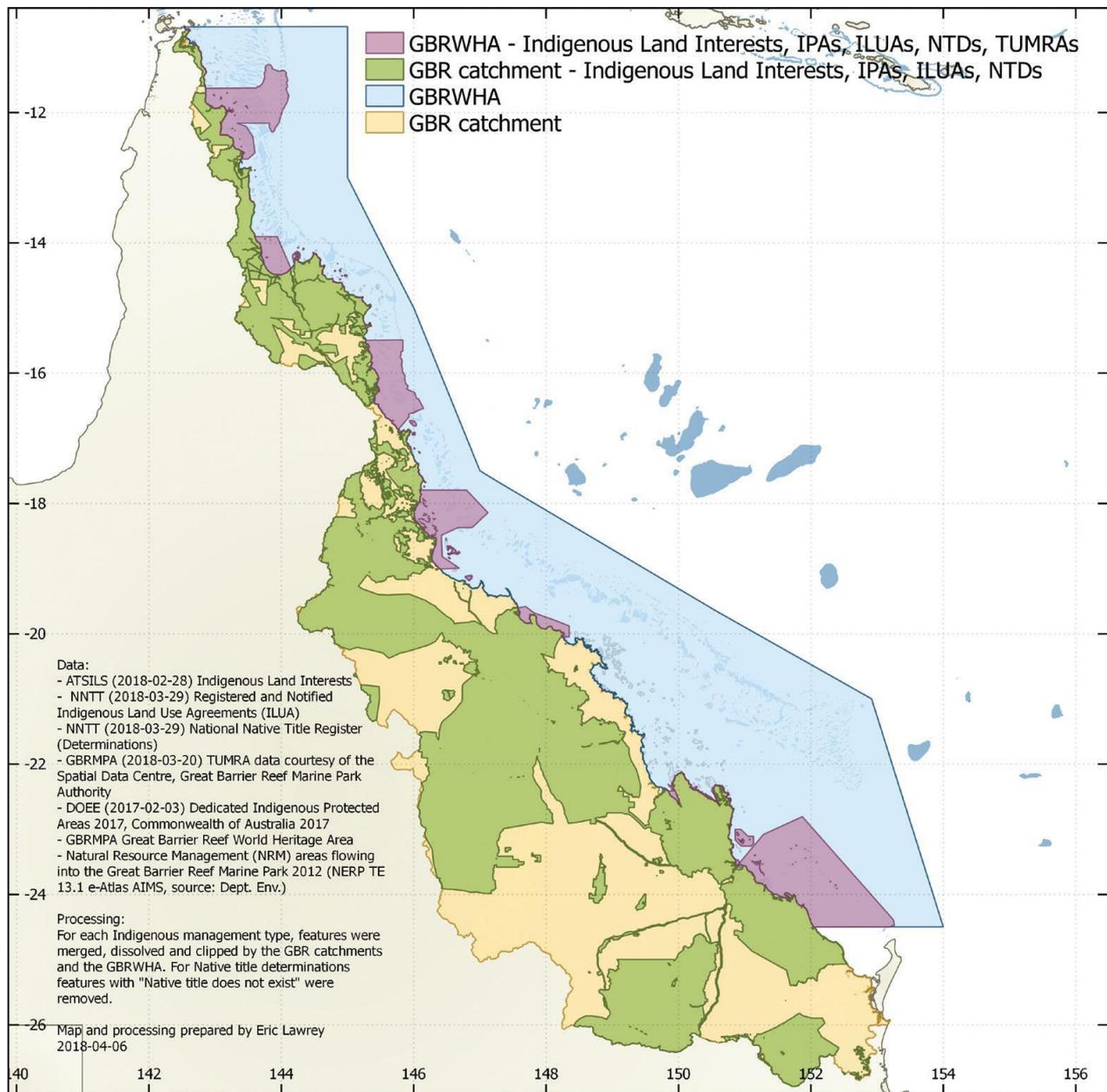
[Deloitte Access Economics (2017). GBR economy worth \$6.4 billion; 64,000 jobs. Notional employment equity for Indigenous employment based on 10% of GBR population = 6,400 jobs]

- *Best of Queensland Experiences Program* (TEQ, 2017) – provides industry standards to which tourism businesses should aspire to be “tourism ready”

5. FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES AND THE GBR

- Region = the GBRMP + adjacent coastal regions (Eastern Torres Strait down to Bundaberg)
- Over 70 Traditional Owner groups with interests in sea country along the GBR – among the land holding bodies: identified 20 Registered Native Title Body Corporates (or PBCs); 23 Indigenous Land Trusts; and 9 TUMRAs
- Indigenous Local Governments - important providers of infrastructure and services that support tourism
- Emphasis on experiences rather than Indigenous engagement/employment within the industry as, for example, hospitality workers.

Figure 1: Traditional Owner land and sea interests in the GBR and catchments (CoA, 2018d)



6. INDIGENOUS VOICE IN GBR TOURISM INDUSTRY GOVERNANCE

- There are 13 Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) in Queensland, 7 include the sections of the GBR within their regions
- Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) is their peak advocacy body.
- The seven regions which include sections of the Great Barrier Reef, from north to south are:
 - * Tropical North Queensland
 - * Townsville North Queensland
 - * The Whitsundays
 - * Mackay Region
 - * Capricorn Region
 - * Gladstone Region
 - * Bundaberg North Burnett
- The role of the RTOs is to develop and market their regional brand - primarily by identifying 4 or 5 “hero experiences” which encapsulate the best of their region, and provide advocacy, training and support to their membership.
- While there are variations in corporate structures and responsibilities, RTOs are membership-based, industry-funded incorporated private companies, and, as such will largely reflect the attitudes and priorities of their members.
- All partner with and receive significant funding from TEQ to develop and promote their brands, and therefore it is a legitimate expectation that they will faithfully implement TEQ’s policies and strategies.

7. ENGAGING WITH TRADITIONAL OWNERS: INDICATORS OF ENGAGEMENT – THE GBRMPA EXAMPLE

- Official acknowledgement of Traditional Owners
- Statutory Traditional Owner representation on the GBRMPA Board
- A Traditional Owner advisory committee – Indigenous Reef Advisory Committee
- A policies specifically to advance/protect the Traditional Owner interests in the GBR – the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Strategy for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park*
- A Reconciliation Action Plan
- Commitment to Traditional Owner consultation
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in the organisation

8. CREATING AN OPTIMAL ENVIRONMENT FOR INDIGENOUS TOURISM BUSINESS TO FLOURISH

- Indigenous tourism business opportunities determined by the nature of tourism visitation – Cairns-Port Douglas-Daintree markets particularly benefit from both international and domestic visitors because of the Cairns Airport's international and domestic connections;
- 80% of tourism occurs within 7% of the GBRMP
- 86% of tourism concentrated in the waters adjacent to Cairns, Port Douglas and the Whitsundays
- north and south of the Cairns region, tourist visitation dominated by the domestic drive tourism markets, with domestic visitors generally not being interested in Indigenous experiences
- Potential for collaborations/business partnerships between mainstream tourism operators and Traditional Owners (cultural ambassadors, Indigenous rangers as guides on trails/walks, etc .)
- Strategies to improve the enabling environment for Indigenous tourism businesses include:
 - * “twinning” of European and Indigenous place names, eg, for GBR islands;
 - * roadside signage to indicate to visitors whose traditional country they are on;
 - * Indigenous experience icon for use in maps and brochures;
 - * encourage souvenir/gift shops to stock more locally made Indigenous products

9. WHAT IT TAKES FOR INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES TO BE “TOURISM READY”

- Maintain consistent delivery of an exceptional experience
- Have a website with a secure online booking platform
- Maintain an active and engaging social media presence (eg, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc)
- Be a member of their area’s Regional Tourism Organisation
- Have product/experience accreditation (eg, Ecotourism Australia’s ROC – Respecting Our Culture certification; Australian Tourism Industry Council – Quality Tourism Accreditation – “Trust the Tick”; Indigenous Art Code Member)

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