INDIGENOUS TOURISM INVOLVEMENT IN QUEENSLAND
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INDIGENOUS TOURISM INVOLVEMENT IN QUEENSLAND

SUMMARY

Currently, Indigenous participation in the tourism industry within Queensland tends to sit on the outer edge of the industry proper. Apart from businesses like Tjapukai, few are integrated into the mainstream world of packages, cooperative marketing campaigns and regional tourism organisations. There could be a myriad of reasons for this ‘marginalisation’ and some of them could be related to geographic location, lack of understanding of the needs of the industry and a lack of financial resources to spend on participation.

Very little research has been conducted which examines why Indigenous tourism operators have not engaged with the mainstream tourism industry or the attitudes of the mainstream tourism industry towards Indigenous participation.

The aim of this research is to examine mainstream and Indigenous tourism operators and key industry stakeholders’ ideas, attitudes and experiences of Indigenous involvement in the tourism industry. In addition, the research was used to gauge perceived opportunities for further Indigenous tourism development.

Methodology

This study uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 36 members of the mainstream and Indigenous tourism industry in Queensland. The interview questions were based around participants’ current roles, activities, opinions and experiences in regard to the Indigenous involvement in the tourism industry. The interviews were held in four regions of Queensland—Far North Queensland, The Whitsundays, Rockhampton and South East Queensland.

Key Findings

The study revealed substantial differences between the regions. For example, there were a number of Indigenous tourism products in Cairns and the surrounding region while there was no product in the Whitsundays region. In fact there is little Indigenous presence in the region.

Generally, the non-Indigenous operators in all regions had a positive view of Indigenous involvement in the tourism industry. Indigenous people involved in tourism also had positive views of the industry although there was a feeling that the domestic market may have less interest in Indigenous product due, in part, to racist views.

Various factors were suggested for the lack of involvement by Indigenous people. Indigenous people raised factors such as shyness, self-confidence and a lack of previous involvement with white people as issues. In addition, a loss of ownership and control and what is appropriate to share with visitors were also raised as possible issues.

Some non-Indigenous people also raised similar issues. However, non-Indigenous people also raised issues such as reliability and the level of racism against Indigenous people as other issues preventing involvement. A number of non-Indigenous people in the regions suggested that there would be no reason Indigenous people could not work in the industry if they had the requisite skills and qualifications. Some operators also suggested that subsidised employment, mentoring and joint ventures could be useful facilitators for engagement. In Cairns and south-east Queensland, the Indigenous operators were not involved to any great extent in the tourism networks. This was in direct contrast to the non-Indigenous operators in all the regions. In Rockhampton however, the Indigenous operator was very well connected into the industry and seemed to enjoy a high level of respect and acknowledgement amongst the industry. In fact, this operator seemed to be overburdened by the requests for his involvement.
Finally, as suggested in the literature, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous operators felt that there was a much higher level of interest in Indigenous tourism from the international market than the domestic market. In addition, many of the non-Indigenous operators believed that Indigenous tourism should be sold as an ‘add on’ to mainstream product rather than be presented as a stand alone product.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Currently, Indigenous participation in the tourism industry within Queensland tends to sit on the outer edge of the industry proper. Apart from businesses like Tjapukai, few are integrated into the mainstream world of packages, cooperative marketing campaigns and regional tourism organisations. There could be a myriad of reasons for this ‘marginalisation’ and some of them could be related to geographic location, lack of understanding of the needs of the industry and a lack of financial resources to spend on participation.

Very little research has been conducted which examines why Indigenous tourism operators have not engaged with the mainstream tourism industry or the attitudes of the mainstream tourism industry towards Indigenous participation. The aim of this research is to investigate tourism industry stakeholders including Indigenous operators’ attitudes and ideas about Indigenous involvement in the tourism industry.

The specific objectives are:
- Explore mainstream tourism businesses’ attitudes and ideas about Indigenous tourism business involvement in the tourism industry.
- Investigate industry associations’ attitudes and ideas about Indigenous tourism business involvement in the tourism industry.
- Examine Indigenous tourism operators and other key Indigenous tourism stakeholder attitudes and ideas about Indigenous tourism business involvement with mainstream tourism activities and organisations.

This study uses 36 in-depth, semi-structured interviews undertaken in October and December 2006 with mainstream and Indigenous tourism operators and key industry stakeholders to determine insight into ideas, attitudes and experiences of Indigenous involvement in the tourism industry. In addition, the interviews are used to gauge the perceived opportunities for further Indigenous tourism development.

There are a number of differing views of what constitutes Indigenous tourism. Butler and Hinch (1996: p. 9) define Indigenous tourism as ‘tourism activity in which Indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction’. This study adopts a slightly more expansive view that Indigenous tourism includes all forms of participation by Indigenous people in the tourism industry and therefore includes Indigenous people acting as employers, employees, land owners, business owners, investors and product supply (see ATSIC 1997).

The report begins with a brief overview of the literature relating to the importance of networks and Indigenous tourism. This is followed by a description of the methodology used for this study, the results and a conclusion.
Chapter 2

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

The Tourism Industry

The 2003 Tourism White Paper: A Medium to Long Term Strategy for Tourism (Australian Government 2003) identified Indigenous tourism as a major special interest area that provides Australia with a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive international market. Importantly from an Indigenous perspective, there is potential for Indigenous tourism to provide economic and social benefits for Indigenous people. The 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report (Commonwealth of Australia 1994) identified tourism, along with the cultural and pastoral industries, as potential sources of economic growth and employment for Indigenous people. Successful engagement with tourism will also encourage cross-cultural exchange, the preservation of traditional cultures and support natural resource management.

Despite the various efforts of governments over recent times, the participation by Aboriginal people in the tourism industry remains very limited. A number of factors have prevented the successful involvement of a number of Indigenous people in the tourism industry. These factors include:

- lack of skills, qualifications and general business knowledge
- lack of ownership/control
- lack of available finance
- a low tourism market profile
- competition from eco/nature-based tourism
- cultural factors
- the complex relationships between interest in Indigenous culture, the demand for Indigenous tourism products and their supply
- the structure and administration of government programs and assistance
- problems relating to any small and remote business
- non-Indigenous tourism operators offering Indigenous tourism product.

(see Schaper 1999, Foley 2003, Buultjens & Fuller, 2007)

In addition to the above mentioned factors, there are another two interrelated factors that are likely to inhibit the growth of the Indigenous tourism. One factor is the lack of formal and informal networks between Indigenous people and businesses and the mainstream tourism industry. The other is the mainstream industry’s perceptions of Indigenous tourism.

The tourism industry (or industries) is difficult to define accurately due to its diverse and fragmented nature (Leiper 2003). The sector is comprised of businesses involved in various aspects or retail and involves the services and goods of many other industries in order to succeed, so the boundaries of the tourism industry often blur into others.

Another feature of tourism is that it is a very competitive industry. Low barriers to entry and the lifestyle attraction of running a tourism business results in numerous, often small, operators attempting to find their strategic advantage in an overcrowded sector. The result is that the industry is characterised by low profit margins, relatively low wages and high labour turnover and high vulnerability to seasonality and changing consumer preferences (see Pizam 1982, Hall 2007). Visitor perceptions of particular tourism products can also be very influential determining the success of the business.

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It is important to note that while reference is often made to the tourism industry, the tourism sector is in fact made up of a number of industries. In this report where reference is made to the tourism industry it is referring to all the industries that constitute the sector.
The highly competitive environment and the fragmented nature of the industry means that a high level of cooperation needs to exist amongst the collection of businesses and organisations that constitute the industry. Cooperation forms the foundation of the tourism industry (Leiper 2003). As stated previously, tourism does not occur in isolation; it is heavily reliant on the goods and services of many different providers. The industry consists of a complex system of linkages that exist between people, businesses and other institutions that enable the interlocking of the global supply and demand system (Butler & Pearce 2002). If a business is unable to link with the rest of the industry then its chances of success are considerably reduced.

The Tourism System

A system is considered to be an ‘interlinked network of parts exhibiting synergistic properties where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’ (Flood & Jackson, 1991, cited Lawrence 2005). Many academics have applied systems theory to the study of tourism (Laws 1995, 2003; Mill, Christie and Morrison 1992; Leiper 2003) in order to explain the intricate network necessary for a tourism business to exist within the tourism industry.

Leiper’s tourism system comprises five elements: tourists; generating regions; transit routes; destination regions; and tourism industries. All are necessary in order for tourism to take place (Leiper 2003). He goes on to explain that these elements within this open system interact with one another, but are also impacted upon by environmental influences. These influences may be human, sociological, economic, technological, physical, political, cultural or legal—and while these environments impact upon tourism, so does tourism impact upon these environments (Leiper 2003). Therefore any business operating within the tourism industry is dependent upon an elaborate network of functioning systems. The reverse may also be true. That is, any business operating within the tourism industry that does not have access to the elements within Leiper’s tourism system, may find it very difficult to survive.

Networks are essential for survival in the tourism industry.

Interdependency is the basis for management in the tourism sector, for none of the tourism community can survive without the others. Each has something to exchange with the other and ideally, it is a relationship of partnership. (Elliot, 1997 cited Kelly and Taylor 2003: p. 51)

Clearly for any business, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to succeed in the tourism industry there is a need for it to develop extensive networks. The contemporary, mainstream tourism industry tends to have highly developed relationships with all kinds of different service providers, which enables them to provide a competitive product. Package development, cooperative marketing and regional tourism organisations are just some examples of the importance of networking and cooperative relationships within the tourism industry. Due to vast developments in information technology, networks within the tourism industry now exist at scales from local to global (Kelly & Taylor 2003).

Previous research (Tinsley & Lynch 2001; Braun 2005; Morrison, Lynch & Johns 2004) has stressed the importance of networks, value chains and cooperation as drivers of success for businesses in the tourism industry. Networks can provide businesses with increased access to knowledge and as well as time and costs savings due to ‘the integration, distribution, promotion and commercialisation of destination tourism supply’ (Ndou & Passiante 2005: p. 441). In addition, networks can increase the flexibility and responsiveness of businesses as well as opening them up to new actors, services and technologies. Small and medium enterprises (SMES) can benefit from networks through the advantages from economies of scale gained through collaboration.

Despite the benefits offered by networks, there are also possible negative outcomes. For example networks have the capability to discourage entry by new business, to collaborate on prices and to establish monopolies (Kelly & Taylor 2003: p. 55). Businesses not belonging to such a network may be at a considerable disadvantage.

Tourism Queensland acknowledges the importance of building relationships and networks within the tourism industry by making its first Key Action in the Queensland Tourism Strategy, Coordination,
Partnerships and Community Engagement (Tourism Queensland 2006). Over $7 million was directed towards improving government and industry coordination, creating and building partnerships, and engaging with communities (Tourism Queensland 2006). ‘We must build on the destination management model to create a collaborative and inclusive regional tourism planning and implementation network to drive regional tourism development’, (Tourism Queensland 2006).

In order to develop efficient and successful networks it is critical to have open communication, trust, an equal power relationship, commitment, reliability, flexibility, credibility, a compatible interest, and common objectives are all characteristics of an efficient network (Morrison et al. 2004: p 199). Trust is a very important feature of any properly functioning network or partnership.

‘Unequal power may make it nearly impossible for the more powerful to convince the less powerful of the credibility of their trustworthiness ... Often trust seems to require that the more powerful treat the less powerful with respect and fairness, or that the more powerful treat the subordinate in the relationship as trustworthy by reducing monitoring and other intrusive interventions’. (Cook, Harden & Levi 2005: p. 4)

The aspect of trust in building networks could have significant ramifications for those networks between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The mistrust and disappointment experienced by Indigenous Australians due to the history of colonisation must be overcome for the successful engagement of Indigenous people in networks and could be an important factor in limiting Indigenous engagement in tourism networks.

Tourism Queensland’s Draft Indigenous Tourism Strategy recognises the limited engagement of Indigenous communities with the mainstream tourism industry (Tourism Queensland 2004: p. 3). It is stated in the Strategy that in order to be successful Indigenous tourism operations must operate within and engage with the mainstream tourism industry network (Tourism Queensland 2004: p. 3). The Strategy stresses the importance of integrating Indigenous tourism operators within the established mainstream tourism network as ‘networks continue to provide critical links between tourism operators and the majority of their clients’, (Tourism Queensland 2004: p12). Another aim of the Strategy is to assist the mainstream tourism industry to identify Indigenous tourism opportunities and to develop partnerships with both Indigenous communities and Indigenous tourism operations, (Tourism Queensland 2004: p. 6).

In order to accomplish increased integration and networking, the Strategy recommends providing financial incentives and marketing benefits for businesses within the mainstream tourism industry to engage in partnerships with Indigenous people (Tourism Queensland 2004: p. 16). However no research exists which illustrates how the mainstream tourism industry views Indigenous tourism businesses and similarly no research exists that examines the Indigenous tourism industry views of the mainstream industry. Unless there are positive perceptions amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses, the action is unlikely to be successful.

**Indigenous Tourism**

Harris, Kerr and Foster (1965) highlighted tourism as a possible means for the economic advancement for Indigenous Australians in their report Australia’s Travel and Tourism Industry. The report recommended fostering Indigenous and nature-based tourism, through the establishment of more national parks and reserves, and conserving the culture of traditional Indigenous communities (Hockey 2002).

Over time other reports have also stressed the potential of Indigenous tourism in Australia. For example, the Tourism Whitepaper (Australian Government 2003) suggested that Indigenous tourism presents a competitive advantage to the Australian tourism industry. Indeed, most current marketing campaigns and advertising collateral for Australian tourism contain images portraying Indigenous Australian culture.

Despite the potential that exists for Indigenous tourism there are relatively few sustainable Indigenous tourism businesses. There are businesses offering a diverse array of experiences from
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guided bush walks; live performances of dance, music and drama; visual arts experiences; fishing
tours; bush foods courses; and even short stays amongst Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families
and communities (Whitford, Bell & Watkins 2001). However, many of these businesses remain fragile.

relies upon ‘geographical location, Indigenous control of land and resources and developing effective
links with the wider tourism industry’. As discussed previously, the development of effective links is
crucial. It is clear that having access to established networks is essential for the survival of businesses
in tourism and the linkages formed with other organisations can make or break a business. In
recognition of this importance, the Victorian, Northern Territory and Western Australian Indigenous or
Aboriginal Tourism planning documents all address this aspect.

Despite the importance of the links with the mainstream industry, there has been little research
examining how the mainstream tourism industry views Indigenous tourism and Indigenous tourism
operators. The exceptions are studies by Finlayson (1991) and Nielsen (2006). In a series of case
studies on Australian Aborigines and Cultural Tourism, Finlayson (1991) established that, although
networking is invaluable in the tourism industry and is widely practised in marketing and promotions,
the tourism industry networks in Queensland, for example, ‘have little or no involvement with
Aboriginal enterprises’. Indeed comments throughout the paper suggest that in some areas of Australia,
Indigenous tourism is not even recognised as a valid or viable section of the industry, let alone part of
the industry network—’Where the tourism industry in Queensland has not seen Aboriginal tourism as
having any legitimate or substantial role to play within the tourism industry, this must be reversed’
(Finlayson 1991).

Nielsen (2006), who investigated Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people’s attitudes towards
Aboriginal tourism development in North West New South Wales, found that ‘Non-Aboriginal people
hold most of the mainstream tourism and economic development positions, as well as most of the
power in how decisions and policies are made, however research is basically non-existent with regard
to how they view their important role in supporting Aboriginal involvement in tourism’, (Nielsen 2006:
p. 1).

The aim of this study is to examine the views that the mainstream industry holds of Indigenous
tourism as well as Indigenous views of the mainstream industry. This study will also examine the
potential for the expansion of Indigenous tourism in the selected regions of Queensland.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This study was funded by STCRC and Tourism Queensland as a partnership project. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority lent the project invaluable assistance. These organisations provided the researchers with the names of the various mainstream tourism operators, Regional Tourism Organisations, Indigenous tourism operators and other key stakeholders such as Indigenous Business Australia, Indigenous Land Councils, traditional owners and sea rangers that they wanted interviewed as part of this project. The proposed list of participants provided by Tourism Queensland and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority were considered to be representative of the industry in the regions examined as part of this project.

Between October and December 2006, 36 interviews were held with members of the mainstream and Indigenous tourism industry in Queensland. These interviews were conducted as in-depth focused conversations, whereby a number of set questions were asked, but—as in a normal conversation between two people—a degree of flexibility was anticipated to ensure a sense of informality, as well as the exploration of other tangential issues. Questions primarily centered on interviewees’ experience with and attitudes towards the development, facilitation and engagement of Indigenous people in the tourism industry.

Prior to the researchers entering the field and undertaking interviews, most of the potential interviewees were contacted by Tourism Queensland and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority personnel. The majority of those identified in this manner were interviewed, though there were several who were either uncontactable or not available while researchers were visiting their regions. While it was unfortunate that not all identified participants were interviewed it is unlikely that they would have changed the findings greatly had they been interviewed.

Interviews were conducted in South East Queensland (SEQ), Central Queensland (CQ), The Whitsundays (WS) and Far North Queensland (FNQ). Across these regions, interviewees represented five ‘sections’ of the tourism industry:

- Mainstream tourism operators (nine interviewees)—included major sailing, reef and resort tourism operations.
- Tourism organisations/consultants (nine interviewees)—included regional and local tourism organisations, tourism and development planning consultants and environmental consultants.
- Mainstream Indigenous tourism operators (four interviewees)—included non-Indigenous operated tourism businesses that have significant Indigenous experiences.
- Indigenous tourism operators (11 interviewees)—included Indigenous-operated tourism businesses and tourist experiences.
- Indigenous community organisations (three interviewees)—included Indigenous-operated community organisations and CDEP (Community Development Employment Program) organisations.

To conduct the interviews, two researchers employed by the Australian Regional Tourism Research Centre (ARTRC) travelled to the four different regions, staying approximately one week in each of these areas.

Conversations were conducted in a relaxed, non-judgmental fashion, and interviewees were encouraged to express their true feelings and experiences regarding Indigenous tourism in Queensland. Interviews were usually conducted at the interviewee’s place of work or at other locations of ease.

Of the 36 people interviewed, almost all (34) were happy for the conversations to be tape recorded, with the understanding that their anonymity would be protected. Interviews lasted anywhere between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours. The interviews were transcribed for analysis and coding soon after being
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Chapter 4

CAIRNS/FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

Background

Cairns is located approximately 1700 kilometres north of Brisbane and currently has a population of 130,594 permanent residents, including the surrounding Shire (ABS cited Cairns City Council, 2007). The population is predicted to rise to around 250,000 by 2010 (Cairns City Council, 2007). According to the 2001 Census, the Cairns region has an Indigenous population of 3133, which is the fifth largest Indigenous population in the country, behind Townsville (4369), Brisbane (3484) Coffs Harbour (3416) and Wagga Wagga (3358) (ABS, 2007a). A large number of Cairns region’s Indigenous population reside in Yarrabah—a self governed Aboriginal community about 37 kilometres south from Cairns overlooking Mission Bay.

Cairns, the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef and the World Heritage listed Wet Tropics Rainforest, has long been a popular destination for both domestic and international tourists. Tourism accounts for 31.6% of the Cairns regional economy. For the year ending June 2006, tourism contributed $2.45 billion to the local economy or 47% of Tropical North Queensland’s regional export earnings. Approximately 30,000 direct and indirect jobs are created by the industry. The other sectors of the Cairns economy include the retail sector (28.4%, much of which is tourism related), manufacturing (15.8%) and mining (6.3%). The remaining sectors contribute 17.9% (Advance Cairns cited Cairns Convention Centre 2007). Cairns is known as Australia’s premier regional city.

For the year ending September 2006, the number of international visitors to Tropical North Queensland numbered 851,916—just short of the number of international visitors to the State’s capital Brisbane (854,729), making it the second most popular destination in Queensland for international visitors (Tourism Research Australia (TRA) 2006). International visitors spent an average of 7.3 nights in Cairns with the majority originating from Japan (27%), the United Kingdom (19%) and Europe (excluding UK and Germany at 15%). Cairns’ international airport is the second largest airport in Queensland and the fifth busiest airport in Australia in terms of international passengers (Cairns Port Authority 2007).

Cairns and Tropical North Queensland are also popular destinations for domestic tourists with 1,509,000 domestic tourists staying an average of 4.9 nights during the year ending September 2006. During this period, Tropical North Queensland was the fourth most popular destination for domestic visitors in Queensland—behind Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast (Tourism Research Australia 2006).

The major focus of tourism activity in Cairns is the Great Barrier Reef however there are a number of terrestrial activities for tourists to undertake. There are 884 hotels/motels and serviced apartments in the Tropical North Queensland Region, in comparison to 868 in the state’s capital Brisbane. The Great Barrier Reef itself has 72 hotels/motels and serviced apartments (ABS 2006). According to Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ), there are 37 attractions in the Tropical North Queensland Region which includes the Tablelands, Port Douglas and Johnstone Shire areas, and a further 26 attractions in Cairns itself (Anon., TTNQ, Pers. Comm. 6/3/07). Attractions in Cairns and the surrounding area are wide and varied and include:

- charter flights and helicopter rides
- bungy jumping
- 4WD outback tours
- animal sanctuaries and zoo
- a wide variety of rainforest and national parks tours
- hot air ballooning
- national parks bushwalking
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- swamps, wetland reserves and waterfalls
- fishing tours
- art galleries
- river cruises through the Daintree
- crocodile tours and Aboriginal rock art tours.
There are a number of Indigenous tourism products in Cairns and the region. The Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park is the only operation in Cairns. The other businesses are located in the Cairns region or the wider North Queensland region. These are:
- Pamagirri Aboriginal Dancers and Dreamtime Walk
- the Mayi Wanba dancers at Kuranda
- the Menmunjy Museum
- the Bama Ngappi Ngappi dancers from Yarrabah

In the wider North Queensland region there are the following Indigenous businesses—Willie Gordon’s Guurrbi Tours—Cape York; Kuku Yalanji Cultural Habitat Tours; Nganyaji Interpretive Centre; the Quinkan and Regional Cultural Centre and Quinkin Rock Art Tour; Cape York Turtle Rescue in Mapoon; The Daintree Eco Lodge and Spa six Day Aboriginal Expedition; Aurukun Wetland Charters—Cape York; The Bama Way Tour—Cape York. There are also the Jidda Girri dancers from Ravenshoe, the Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku dancers from Mossman Gorge, and Jama Dreaming Arts and Craft Centre, Palm Cove (Anon., TTNQ, Pers. Comm. 6/3/07).

**Interview Details**

Interviews were conducted with 17 people in Far North Queensland, including six Indigenous tourism operators offering Indigenous tourism product, three non-Indigenous tourism operators offering an Indigenous product, four mainstream tourism operators, three tourism organisations/consultants and an Indigenous community organisation. Interviews were conducted across the region from Townsville in the south, through to Cairns, Kuranda, Port Douglas and north to Cape Tribulation.

Interviewees were selected from many areas of the tourism industry including operators of dive boats, island resorts, skydiving and adventure operators, backpacker accommodation providers, major cultural and natural attractions, community operated Indigenous cultural museums, Indigenous guided tours, airport transfers as well as tourism and economic development consultants and tourism marketing organisations.

**Indigenous People in Far North Queensland Tourism**

*Indigenous perspectives of tourism*

Throughout the interviews, Indigenous operators and community organisations often mentioned the enjoyment they gained from working in tourism in Far North Queensland and Cairns. Through tourism, many felt able to provide opportunities for reconciliation, to teach tourists about Indigenous culture, to demonstrate their pride in their people, as well as to provide ‘on-country employment’.

*Nothing better in the world—you want to teach culture, the tourists want to come* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*We wanted to bring economic development back to the community* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*Our tourism business helps facilitate rediscovery of cultural information, the past, and helps our people connect* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

While the Indigenous operators saw the benefits of being involved in tourism, many felt challenged in business by their perceived shyness, lack of self-confidence, and ability to interact with non-Indigenous people.

*Before getting into tourism I was thinking, ‘I’ve never met a lot of white people before, it’s going to be scary’* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*These guys certainly have the experience and knowledge … but with public speaking, they lack self-confidence* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*I had 30 CDEP workers with me, but when the coaches turned up … they ran away. After breaking the ice, then they begin to mingle* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*If this works, it’ll be the first Aboriginal shop here* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Several of the Indigenous tourism operations were community owned, funded and managed by
community councils. This management structure caused difficulties for some as they felt that community councils did not have the experience, interest or time to provide the tourism management guidance required.

We need to separate from Council. We are willing to work after hours, weekends, and nights. This is not possible with the Council overseeing us (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

The Board’s not necessarily involved ... they have old way of thinking ... people making decisions without the on-the-ground experience (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Fear that the tourism industry would ‘take’ Indigenous stories or other facets of their culture also proved an inhibiting factor for Indigenous people entering into the Far North Queensland tourism industry.

People are reluctant to talk about their culture. Most people are reluctant, and protect what they know ... They have story places from under the sea, they used to live out there ... White man got no story to tell ... That many thousands of years ago, the sea rose up and they had to move back in ... I don't think they want to tell those stories. If we give that away, the other people [white tourism operators] will say that 'we know it' (Indigenous Community Organisation).

Non-Indigenous perspectives of Indigenous tourism

Many non-Indigenous interviewees spoke of how they personally benefited from their interactions with Indigenous people and wished for a greater involvement with them in business and in everyday life.

Personally, it (our involvement with Indigenous people) has been fantastic; we can't get enough of them ... that's why we live down here ... on their days off our kids play with the Bama kids .... I personally learn from them everyday (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

I feel compassion towards Aboriginal people. They’re beautiful people ... the more they are shown respect—there’s a sense of pride and confidence just grows (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

However, there was a noted lack of Indigenous employment in mainstream tourism. Indeed, one person said that ‘there are no Aboriginal people employed in Mosman or Port Douglas’. Despite this, several of the non-Indigenous operators had had rewarding, long-lasting employment of Indigenous people in their businesses.

We are the largest employer of Indigenous people ... 100 staff, 80 Indigenous ... we have won every tourism award and are packaged with everybody (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

We have three Aboriginal staff that have been here longer than 10 years, and six that have been here 8 to 10 years (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Significant benefits from taking on Indigenous staff—it broadens our experience for customers (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Others spoke of less rewarding Indigenous employment experiences, such as Indigenous employees leaving abruptly without warning or explanation.

I've had three or four [indigenous employees] over the past few years. They have all failed—lasted less than three months and just one day, didn't turn up ... death in the family or something (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

While some of the mainstream Indigenous tourism operations had been successful at blending non-Indigenous and Indigenous people to provide tourism experiences, there were discussions of joint ventures that had produced less than successful outcomes. In particular, some of the cases where Indigenous communities and tourism operators had developed partnerships on Indigenous land had fallen through.

Three years ago we looked at establishing Indigenous tourism on [an island]. We identified locals who we saw as traditional owners ... we got to the business planning stage ... we found there was another group of traditional owners who would not approve it. Then negotiations fell through (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Networking and Relationships

Tourism networks

Nearly all of the non-Indigenous interviewees were heavily involved with their local and regional tourism organisations, as well as with specific industry-based organisations (e.g. backpackers, marine
INDIGENOUS TOURISM INVOLVEMENT IN QUEENSLAND

operators). In contrast, very few of the Indigenous operators were involved in the local/regional tourism organisations. Some Indigenous tourism operators felt these organisations were not relevant or were too ‘disorganised’. Other Indigenous operators felt that industry associations were not relevant to their needs.

*We have had little to do with the tourism association. They were having a lot of trouble—fighting. We didn't want to get sucked into it ... and we have stayed away—such a mess. It may be a good idea to stay out of there until they sort their stuff out* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*A lot of what they [tourism associations] talk about is not relevant to Aboriginal tourism* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Several Indigenous tourism operators spoke of their desire to know more about what others were doing in tourism or how they might benefit from a coordinated approach.

*We would like to go around and see other Indigenous tourism operations* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*We need a coordinated approach, a book that has all the Indigenous culture— a more coordinated approach. It’s difficult knowing who’s out there* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*We try to stay in touch with all the other mobs getting into tourism* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

**Barriers to relationships**

There was a range of issues that seemed to cause barriers to long-lasting relationships between Indigenous operators and the mainstream tourism industry. Primary inhibiting factors included views towards Indigenous operators as competition, the reliability of Indigenous tourism businesses, and a perceived lack of benefits in the relationship.

*The industry thinks they are unreliable, lazy. They can’t understand them* (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

*Other people in the industry probably feel that they are unreliable and basically: what benefit will they bring my business?* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

*There are not enough people who are passionate enough about Aboriginal people and if they are, it’s later in life when they don’t have to do business* (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Additionally, separation of white and black populations, lack of cultural understanding and outright racism were often raised by Indigenous and non-Indigenous operators alike.

*There is a major separation between black and white communities here* (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

*This is a racist community* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*This place is getting so racist, true as I’m sitting here* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

There was a spoken need for better understandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Far North Queensland tourism industry. Much of the discussion was focused on establishing protocols, not only for non-Indigenous people when dealing with Indigenous people’s land and culture, but also for Indigenous people when choosing to participate in the tourism industry. Essentially, there was a feeling that it ‘had to go both ways’.

*They [other tourism operators] don’t ask Indigenous people [about going through the country] … no one asks* (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*We must have the upmost respect for their traditional owner system* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

*If they want Aboriginal content, get an Aboriginal person to do it. A lot of white operators just don’t understand* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

**Capitalising on Opportunities**

**Indigenous tourism opportunities**

There was general agreement on the need to increase Indigenous participation in tourism—into all aspects of the industry, not just Indigenous-focused tourism experiences. Many non-Indigenous operators thought that increased participation by Indigenous people would be highly beneficial for the industry as a whole.

*The more Aboriginal people involved, the better for tourism ... Aboriginal people should get into all areas of tourism. Aboriginals would have an advantage, everything else being equal* (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*The market is there but the product is not ... there are opportunities at all levels of the market* (Mainstream Tourism Operator).
The very asset of the living culture is a competitive advantage, a strategic asset (Tourism Organisation/Consultant). It really is about getting genuine jobs at all levels and facets of the industry. Not just on the bush tucker tour (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Operators also revealed their interest in employing Indigenous people and saw no particular barriers, on their side, especially if they were prepared to do the job ‘the same as anyone else’.

To be the best we could be as an ecotourism business would be to have Indigenous guides on our boat (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

I'd love Aboriginal and Islander people working on the boats. I think that would be a great show for Australia ... doing the same as the other staff (Mainstream Tourism Operator).
I don’t think there are any barriers at all [to employing Indigenous staff]. There is no reason why any qualified person would not be given the job ... as long as they wear the uniform and follow the company’s policies (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Several operators spoke of challenges with developing an Indigenous workforce, such as being able to provide the support required and having other staff on side.

There needs to be an awareness amongst tourism operators that when employing Indigenous people that they may need to go home or to community to be in touch with the community and land. We need to be a bit more flexible (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

I brought this 23-yea-old in and gave him the job. All my other staff were going out and having a good time. All my other staff knew when to stop, so they could get to work the next day. He didn’t, and just kept on going. He didn’t understand about money, you’ve got to live within your means ... I was not there 24 hours a day to help him and I realised that that's what you need—family support .... You need to help them and help their family. They need a support network (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

While many thought that the tourism industry did not have barriers to employing ‘qualified’ Indigenous people, there was a belief that Indigenous people themselves had barriers to overcome, such as the gaining of skills and confidence.

It’s very hard to access Aboriginal staff. We need to have people who want to come and do the job as it has to be done (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

The cultural barriers are more critical than any external ones [e.g. discrimination] (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

They [Indigenous people] have to learn how to live in two worlds (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

The jump for Indigenous people would be bigger, skills communication, presentations ... but there are plenty of people around to show that if you can master the skills there are opportunities (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Furthermore, traineeships and work experience in the tourism industry were seen to be some of the best methods to assist Indigenous people entering the industry and developing a greater Indigenous presence.

We need traineeships, young people coming out of school going into tourism, assisted traineeships with subsidisation (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Traineeships are the way to go. Government funding is there. Communities should be looking for these types of partnerships (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

What we have to do is to provide Aboriginals the opportunity to integrate into mainstream, so they can get a perspective of what it’s all about (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

**Visitor demand for Indigenous tourism product**

There was general agreement that international visitors were more interested in Indigenous tourism experiences than much of the domestic market, other than schools, which were a considerable contributor to Indigenous operations.

_Aussie kids, they love it; they love to be painted up_ (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous interviewees spoke of disinterest and racism as being constraints for the domestic Australian market.

_Tourists [as opposed to local Australians] showed interest in Aboriginal people_ (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

_Obviously people enjoy it, but people have different ideas about it. All international people are interested, but Australians aren't really interested. But if you get Australians to see the show and do the other activities they always come away surprised, and that's good. But if you offer it they say 'I'm not really fussed about it'_ (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

_A lot of Australians have negative ideas about Aboriginal tourism_ (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).
While the current Indigenous tourism experiences offered were seen to be meeting considerable market demand, there was also a perceived need for experiences which might offer closer contact with Indigenous people.

Customers want to be able to associate with Aboriginal people on their terms. Some people are predisposed to the theme parks and some are predisposed to the natural ones (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Customers want to know more one-on-one … about atrocities, culture, the truth … to know about the land … how they [Indigenous people] live off the land (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Further, there existed a perception that tourists were largely unsure about how to access Indigenous experiences or unaware of the type of experiences wanted.

Ninety percent of tourists are keen and interested in Aboriginal tourism, but just not sure how … It's that they don't know about particulars, customs and taboos (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Visitors don't know what they want because Indigenous tourism is all too new (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Indigenous cultural experiences were seen to exist 'outside' of normal visitor expectations, particularly with regard to reef trips. Marine operators spoke of how the Great Barrier Reef was viewed by tourists as principally a ‘natural’ asset, not a cultural experience.

An Aboriginal reef tour would not be viable … the reef’s not cultural—it's not in people's psyche, it has no place (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

I don’t think the market would go for an Aboriginal reef experience. It is more about the time on the reef, departure times, quality of the reef (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Operators don't tie coral to Aboriginal people …. With the islands there are more [cultural] opportunities (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Trip to the reef is all about the reef (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Indigenous experiences were thus often talked about in terms of being an ‘add-on’ to other activities and also needing to find particular niches within the market.

Aboriginal tourism is an add-on to some other activity or product... the Aboriginal part is an add-on to the bush camp, fishing, wilderness experience (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

[Indigenous tourism] doesn't stand alone, but provides us with substantial competitive advantage [at a destination level] (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Support for and facilitation of Indigenous tourism

Several of the non-Indigenous interviewees stressed the need for support of Indigenous tourism to be focused on the Indigenous people’s desires and needs.

The government needs Indigenous tourism—it sees it in white man's terms, not necessarily in Indigenous terms... our success is about connection to country... getting a job with a tourism company doesn't mean much to me (Indigenous Community Organisation).

The tourism training was very general, not really specific enough ... they could have been selling baked beans at Coles. It needs to be specific to us (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

This issue was also raised by non-Indigenous interviewees:

The [Indigenous] lady next to me in the training session said ‘do you think he [the presenter] knows we only went to fifth class’. I was having a hard time following him, too (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

We have to try it in their own ways of doing it, or it will never work. What we have to do is help them [Indigenous people] achieve their own objectives (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

The requirement for potential Indigenous tourism operators to understand how the tourism industry functions was viewed as paramount. Many non-Indigenous interviewees spoke of Indigenous people having had such different life experiences (such as growing up on communities and not being tourists) that they were unable to see products as tourists do. Further, operators also spoke of the so-called ‘rules of tourism’ to which everyone should adhere, Indigenous or not.

You must show up ... some rules can't be broken. There's nothing wrong with three days a week, but when they get here from Germany you are going to be there (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

If you can't provide 360 days a year, you lose your reputation (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

The mainstream tourism industry in Australia is not interested in rocking up and finding they are not there or not the same as they were on the famil (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).
Tourism business is committing your life to it all the time, not some of the time (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

In tourism, you go with one as you would go with twenty (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Financial support for the development of Indigenous tourism businesses was recognised as crucial. Inherited wealth and social capital—those factors which support the development of so many non-Indigenous businesses—were deemed either non-existent or insufficient amongst Indigenous tourism operators. Therefore government funding was required in a coordinated, long-term and strategic manner.

The opportunities [for Indigenous people] are considerably less because they don't have inherited wealth. Non-Indigenous people get money from family, inheritance, mortgage the family home. The Indigenous people don't have that collateral (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

The government has no coordination over the support of Indigenous tourism ... some government organisations don't care about commercial objectives (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

It’s a nightmare to try and find where the dollars are ... there are too many departments ... we need to have a common-sense approach (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Mentoring, case management and project facilitation were perceived as being required to support Indigenous people to develop their tourism businesses. These services needed to be frequent, ongoing and provided by Indigenous people wherever possible.

Mentors have got to follow up ... until you can do it on your own, and then keep dropping in every two months or so (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Facilitation into tourism—slowly, slowly, through culture ... Good Aboriginal mentoring and management is hard to find ... must be slowly, slowly; good mentors and managers, they have got to be Aboriginal (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Sending whitefellas in is demeaning ... it says you can’t do it. (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

As a final point in the support of Indigenous tourism businesses, several non-Indigenous interviewees suggested the value of joint ventures. Such ventures between Indigenous and non-Indigenous tourism operators were seen as a positive way to facilitate the development of Indigenous tourism.

Maybe it's only joint ventures that work (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

The government needs to facilitate the right sort of joint ventures (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Summary of Findings for Cairns

Indigenous perspectives
The Indigenous people interviewed believed tourism provided opportunities for reconciliation, to teach tourists about Indigenous culture, to demonstrate their pride in their people, as well as to provide ‘on-country employment’. It was felt that a number of Indigenous people are challenged in business by their perceived shyness, lack of self-confidence, and ability to interact with non-Indigenous people. The Indigenous people interviewed suggested that the community-owned management structure of many Indigenous tourism businesses caused difficulties because community councils did not have the experience, interest or time to provide the tourism management required. Finally a number of Indigenous interviewees feared that the mainstream tourism industry would ‘take’ Indigenous stories.

Non-Indigenous perspectives
The non-Indigenous interviewees stated that they had personally benefited from their interactions with Indigenous people and wished for a greater involvement with them in business and in everyday life. Many indicated that they had been successful in working with Indigenous people to provide tourism experiences, though some joint ventures had failed. In addition to failed joint ventures, a few interviewees had some less than rewarding Indigenous employment experiences, such as Indigenous employees leaving abruptly without warning or explanation. Finally, the lack of Indigenous employment in mainstream tourism was raised as a concern.

Tourism networks
It was apparent that most non-Indigenous interviewees were heavily involved with their local and regional tourism organisations. In contrast, very few Indigenous operators were involved in these types
of organisations. Some Indigenous tourism operators felt these organisations were not relevant or were too ‘disorganised’, while several other Indigenous operators spoke of their desire to know more about what others were doing in tourism or how they might benefit from a coordinated approach.

**Barriers to relationships**

A range of issues was identified in the interviews in Cairns that seemed to be causing barriers to the development of Indigenous tourism. These issues were: the views towards Indigenous operators; the highly competitive nature of the industry; the reliability of Indigenous tourism businesses; a perceived lack of benefits in the relationship; separation of white and black populations in the region; and a lack of cultural understanding and outright racism.

The need for better understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Far North Queensland tourism industry; the establishment of protocols, not only for non-Indigenous people when dealing with Indigenous people’s land and culture, but also for Indigenous people when choosing to participate in the tourism industry, were suggested as necessary precursors to greater Indigenous involvement.

**Opportunities**

In a discussion of opportunities it was consistently noted that there was a need for increased Indigenous participation in all aspects of the tourism industry. There was a high level of interest shown by many non-Indigenous operators in employing Indigenous people and operators saw no particular barriers, especially if Indigenous people were prepared to work. A need for Indigenous people to gain skills and confidence was identified as a high priority and traineeships and work experience in the tourism industry were seen to be some of the best methods to assist Indigenous people to enter the industry and develop a greater Indigenous presence.

**Demand**

There was a high level of agreement amongst all participants that international visitors were more interested in Indigenous tourism experiences than much of the domestic market. It was felt that the domestic market were either disinterested and/or prejudiced. In addition, the marine operators spoke of how the Great Barrier Reef was viewed by tourists as principally a ‘natural’ asset, not a cultural experience. Cultural experiences were seen to exist ‘outside’ of normal visitor expectations, particularly with regard to reef trips. These operators felt Indigenous experiences were seen in terms of being an ‘add-on’ to other activities and also needed to find particular niches within the market.

Many interviewees perceived a need for Indigenous tourism experiences which might offer visitors closer contact with Indigenous people. It was also felt that many tourists were largely unaware of the type of experiences available and unsure about how to access existing Indigenous experiences.

**Support and facilitation**

There was a strong belief amongst the participants that there was a need for support of Indigenous tourism to be focused on the Indigenous people’s desires and needs. In addition, it was felt there was also a need for potential Indigenous tourism operators to understand how the tourism industry functions. Indigenous people have substantially different life experiences to non-Indigenous people and are often unable to see products as tourists do.

A crucial aspect of support identified in the Cairns region was financial support. There is a clear need for Government funding provided in a coordinated, long-term and strategic manner. Mentoring, case management and project facilitation were perceived as being the best ways to support Indigenous people to develop their tourism businesses. In addition, several non-Indigenous interviewees suggested the value of joint ventures as a positive way to facilitate the development of Indigenous tourism.
Chapter 5

THE WHITSUNDAYS

Background

The Whitsunday Shire includes the towns of Airlie Beach, Cannonvale and Proserpine and is situated 1094 kilometres north of Brisbane and 614 kilometres south of Cairns. Airlie Beach in the Whitsunday Coast lies at the foot of the Cannon Ranges and is a gateway to the Whitsunday Islands and the Great Barrier Reef. The marketing slogan Whitsunday Tourism uses to market the destination is ‘74 Islands Out of the Blue’.

The Mackay Whitsunday Regional Economic Development Corporation (MWREDC) estimated the population of the Whitsundays in 2001 to be 20,990 people of which 251 people (or 1.2% of the Whitsunday’s population) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (MWREDC 2007). The 2001 Census revealed a population increase of 37.8% since 1991 (ABS, 2007a) with a median age of 37 in 2001 compared with a median age of 32 ten years earlier (ABS, 2007a). The aging population is likely to be the result of ‘seachangers’ retiring to the Whitsundays.

In the Whitsundays, the Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurant sector is the largest employer, employing 1761 people or 19.5% of the employed population, followed by retail trade (employed 1203 or 13.3%), transport and storage (896 people or 9.9%) and manufacturing (761 persons or 8.4%) (MWREDC 2007). The other main industries are sugar cane and cattle (MWREDC 2007).

The distance to travel to the Whitsundays is seen as disadvantaging the region in terms of attracting day trippers or even the overnight domestic market. Another disadvantage of the Whitsundays particularly in terms of its isolated location is the lack of an international airport. On the other hand however, its isolated location may add to its appeal in terms of exclusivity.

The Tourism Queensland (TQ) 2004 Whitsundays Visitor Survey revealed that 38% of visitors to the Whitsundays come from overseas (208,434 to the year ending September 2004) with 18% originating from the United Kingdom, by far the biggest visitor market (TQ 2004b). In the year ending September 2006, there were 580,000 domestic visitors. Of the domestic tourists, 32% come from interstate and 30% from within Queensland. Overall, 55% of all visitors to the Whitsundays are under the age of 34 years. Of the visitors to the region, 41% traveled as part of an adult couple and 70% of respondents were visiting for holiday or leisure purposes (TQ 2004). Most respondents heard about the Whitsundays by word of mouth (30%) or through the Internet (36%). Approximately 60% of overnight visitors to the Whitsundays stayed for five or more nights with the majority (85%) planning to stay at least one night in Airlie Beach and 31% planning to stay at least one night on one of the islands. Hotels or Youth Hostels were the favoured forms of accommodation (25% and 24% respectively) followed by caravans and tents (12%) or visiting friends or family (12%) (TQ 2004b).

Tourism Research Australia (TRA) estimates that for the year ending September 2006, domestic tourists to Whitsundays spent an average of 6.6 nights in the region. This is by far the most number of visitor nights for any Queensland destination (TRA 2007).

The ABS estimates there are 184 hotels/motels and serviced apartments in the Whitsundays area (ABS 2006). The Tourism Queensland 2004 Whitsundays Visitor Survey revealed the most popular activities for tourists were visiting Airlie Beach (84%) and going to a café/coffee shop (81%). The majority of respondents also ate at a hotel/restaurant (64%), went drinking/visited nightclubs (59%), went shopping (59%), went snorkelling (57%) and went swimming at the lagoon (57%). Sailing (45%), visiting the Great Barrier Reef (43%) and Whitehaven Beach (39%) were the next favoured activities (TQ 2004). There are 43 attractions listed on the Whitsunday Tourism database (Anon., Whitsunday Tourism. Pers. Comm. 06/03/07).

There are no Indigenous tourism businesses or product in the Whitsundays.
Interview Details

In Airlie Beach and the Whitsundays region, there was a noticeable absence of Indigenous presence. Indigenous issues (such as employment, welfare, land rights, etc.) did not seem evident in the local media or tourism industry. In general, there seemed a general lack of awareness of the Indigenous presence in the region, other than several well-visited cultural heritage sites on the islands.

While there are limited Indigenous experiences in the area, such as a visit to the Nara Inlet and Hook Island, and cultural interpretation on several of the mainstream operations—‘The Flames of Polynesia’, a Polynesian floor show, has been operating for some 20 years every Friday night, on South Molle Island. It is based around several Polynesian dances, including the hula dance, the haka and firestick performances. Guest participation is encouraged. The performance is open to resort guests as well as visitors within the region who arrive on several pre-arranged tours.

Interviews in the Whitsundays region were conducted with four marine tourism operators, three tourism organisation/consultants and a non-Indigenous manager of an Indigenous community organisation (CDEP). Nearly all interviews were conducted in Airlie Beach, the major tourism centre within the region, at the interviewee’s place of work. Numerous attempts were made to contact local Indigenous people who had been involved or showed interest in tourism, however, these attempts were unsuccessful.

Indigenous People in Whitsundays Tourism

Indigenous perspectives of tourism

No Indigenous people were interviewed within the Whitsundays. Several potential people were identified, though no contact could be made while the researcher was in the region. There were no Indigenous tourism businesses or employees in the Whitsundays region at the time of this research.

Non-Indigenous perspectives of Indigenous tourism

Most Whitsunday tourism operators had very limited exposure to Indigenous culture in the region, but several had employed Indigenous people in their businesses. Others had worked with Indigenous people as consultants or sat on government committees with them.

Some operators had sat on tourism, event and natural resource management committees with Indigenous people. Within these committees, which were predominantly non-Indigenous, the Indigenous representatives were generally seen as ‘shy and quiet’. Several interviewees questioned whether the inclusion of Indigenous people on some of these committees and was simply tokenism rather than non-Indigenous people really feeling that they wanted Indigenous input.

Those who had employed Indigenous people discussed how these employees had left abruptly and without explanation. This had forced some operators to use non-Indigenous staff to provide Indigenous cultural information, which led to a number of challenges.

Applying for accreditation through Ecotourism Australia had forced some operators to consult with traditional owner groups—a criterion for ‘advanced’ level accreditation. Acquiring Ecotourism Accreditation increases operators’ permits with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park from six to 15 years, so there is an understandable motivation to apply. However, achieving advanced accreditation has proved challenging for some operators, as they have not been able to develop the necessary links with representative traditional owners.

As far as I know, we are the only company [in the region] that tries to incorporate Indigenous tourism in our experience … It’s been a challenge to incorporate it into our tour… people within the company have different focuses (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

This was the only bit of the accreditation that was a problem (Mainstream Tourism Operator). The cultural heritage section was difficult—finding the people (Mainstream Tourism Operators).
Networks and Relationships

Tourism networks
There were no identifiable network relationships between operators/tourism organisations and Indigenous people in the Whitsundays region. Apparently some time ago there was an Indigenous tourism performance troop that operated on one of the islands. At this earlier stage there may have been relationships between operators, tourism organisations and the Indigenous people involved. Unfortunately, researchers were unable to interview anyone who had directly participated in this Indigenous tourism experience.

It seems also that the resort owner of Hook Island had a regular Indigenous dance performance targeting the backpacker market. Due to poor management and the resort’s run-down infrastructure, the experience was not successful. It seems that few tourism operators were actually involved in taking guests to the performance, thus details on the operation remain vague.

Barriers to relationships
The most significant barrier to establishing relationships in the Whitsundays region was the so-called perception of the ‘invisibility’ of Indigenous people.

The problem is that we don’t have that many Indigenous people around ... I’ve seen so few (Mainstream Tourism Operator).
I have not come across any identifiable group in the area (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).
I don’t know how many Indigenous people live in the area who are between 18—30, who could work on the boats ... I don’t know any that live in Airlie Beach (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Operators discussed the limited availability of cultural heritage information about the region’s Indigenous people, sites and significant areas. A Queensland Parks brochure and several comments within a sailing guide provide nearly all the accessible Indigenous information available within the Whitsundays region. There was a perception of a lack of operator knowledge about sacred sites throughout the region and its many islands.

That majority [of tourism operators] wouldn’t know about them [cultural sites]. There’s been no education (Mainstream Tourism Operator).
It’s hard getting information ... everything we have, we have had to pay researchers to get, but it really value-adds to our product (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

It appears—perhaps because of the distinct lack of information available—that some even question whether Indigenous people have ever lived in the area.

The Indigenous people don’t live on the islands. They weren’t out there—that was my understanding. There was a group of islanders who travelled around but not staying out there (Mainstream Tourism operator).

Capitalising on Opportunities

Indigenous tourism opportunities
Any increase by Indigenous people in the Whitsundays tourism industry was seen by many as a positive, providing new experiences and marketing benefits.

Aboriginal culture is part of tourism. It’s a tourist attraction. The industry is always looking for something new (Mainstream Tourism Operator).
I think that it [Indigenous tourism] would be great ... it would add sophistication to a pretty unsophisticated industry (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).
The Whitsundays are super-competitive ... but you would think that [adding Indigenous culture] would give you that edge (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Some operators stated that they saw no substantial barriers to employment if Indigenous people were prepared to follow standard procedures, such as ‘wear the uniform and follow the company’s policies’ (Mainstream Tourism Operator). At the same time, however, Indigenous shyness and perceived lack of skills were noted as distinct challenges for Indigenous people wishing to enter the industry.
I don’t think there are any barriers at all [to employing Indigenous staff]. There is no reason why any qualified person would not be given the job (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

I've had very little experience of Aboriginal people ... They seem very shy people ... it would take an Ernie Dingo type of guy to sing and dance, dive and be really entertaining ... that's what it takes to work on the boats ... you've got to have that personality (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

It’s really about getting genuine jobs at all levels and facets of the industry. Not just on the bush tucker tour (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

Several operators spoke of the challenges for a new marine Indigenous operator in the area. The current tourism situation in the Whitsundays was perceived to be quite ‘sophisticated’ to that of a decade ago: there is now an oversupply of boats, the boats are bigger, the competitiveness of mainstream operators is fiercer, and there is a higher failure rate for independent operators. Thus, some thought that integrating Indigenous product into the existing industry would be more viable than developing new marine experiences.

There is an oversupply of boats. If anyone started up another operation they would have to be extremely competitive or very different...Only one of the five [Indigenous] permits would be viable at the moment (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

There are too many operators, and many permits that aren’t being used (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

The best way it would work is if we could integrate it into the existing product ... There are sacred sites all over the Whitsundays (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Visitor demand for Indigenous tourism product
Similar to the interviews in Far North Queensland and Cairns, Whitsunday operators believed that Indigenous cultural experiences were too ‘outside’ of normal visitor expectations (that is, the natural assets such as islands, reef, climate). Thus, it was perceived that tourists would be expecting specific activities, such as relaxing, sailing or snorkelling, rather than cultural interpretation.

They are here for sailing, so they wouldn't even know that [Indigenous heritage] exists ... They come here to go sailing and enjoy the natural side of things (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

However, while interviewees accepted that Indigenous culture was not generally within visitor expectations when they arrived in the region, several spoke of the positive response from visitors when they were provided even limited interpretation.

If we had not have brought it [Indigenous experiences] up, tourists wouldn’t have thought about it. But once it’s there they love it (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Support for and facilitation of Indigenous tourism
The notable lack of Indigenous presence in the region caused operators and tourism organisations/consultants to question their role in developing and promoting Indigenous tourism.

Sometimes I wonder are we sticking our noses into something [Indigenous tourism] that we should leave alone ... Maybe we are trying to lead people who don’t want to be led (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

The question is, have we got the [Indigenous] people who really want to do it? (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

We talk about how we want Indigenous product, but there is no point bringing in people from outside (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

If there is no desire from the Indigenous people maybe we should just keep out of it (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Summary of Findings for the Whitsundays

Indigenous perspectives
No Indigenous people were interviewed within the Whitsundays region.

Non-Indigenous perspectives
The non-Indigenous participants had very limited exposure to Indigenous culture in the region although several had employed Indigenous people in their businesses. A number of these Indigenous employees had left abruptly and without explanation. Some operators had sat on tourism, event and natural resource management committees with Indigenous people. A number of these Indigenous representatives generally appeared shy and quiet.
The lack of Indigenous presence in the region is demonstrated by the fact that some operators have had to use non-Indigenous staff to provide Indigenous cultural information.

Some operators had been required to consult with traditional owner groups when applying for accreditation through Ecotourism Australia. Consultation was a criterion for ‘advanced’ level accreditation. Achieving advanced accreditation has proved challenging for some operators since they have not been able to develop the necessary links with representative traditional owners.

**Tourism networks**

No network relationships were identified between operators/tourism organisations and Indigenous people.

**Barriers to relationships**

The most significant barrier in the Whitsundays was the perceived ‘invisibility’ of Indigenous people. There was also a perception of a lack of operator knowledge about sacred sites throughout the region and its many islands.

**Opportunities**

Due to the lack of Indigenous presence, any increased involvement by Indigenous people in the industry was seen by many as a positive and would provide new experiences and marketing benefits.

The Whitsundays operators did not perceive any barriers to employment if Indigenous people were prepared to follow standard procedures. It was felt that Indigenous shyness and perceived lack of business skills were considered substantial challenges.

There was a feeling amongst the participants that there was an oversupply of marine operators which was resulting in a high failure rate amongst mainstream tourism businesses. Because of the oversupply there was a feeling that integration of Indigenous product into the existing industry would be a more viable alternative than developing new marine experiences.

**Visitor demand**

The operators believed, like those in Cairns, that Indigenous cultural experiences were ‘outside’ of normal visitor expectations of islands and reef experiences. Despite this perception it was noted that there was a positive response from visitors when they were provided with even limited interpretation of Indigenous culture.

**Support and facilitation**

The participants questioned whether they should have a role in developing and promoting Indigenous tourism.
INDIGENOUS TOURISM INVOLVEMENT IN QUEENSLAND

Chapter 6

ROCKHAMPTON

Background

Rockhampton is located in Central Queensland. In 2003, the town was estimated to have a population of 59,120 with another 100,000 in the surrounding area (Rockhampton City Council 2007). According to the 2001 Census, 2881 people or 5.2% of the Rockhampton population were identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

The town is located adjacent to Queensland's largest river, the Fitzroy River, and is home to the primary campus of Central Queensland University. Rockhampton is probably most well known as being Australia's beef capital though in recent times it has become a destination for both lifestyle changers and tourists to Central Queensland.

Rockhampton, like Cairns, neighbours the Great Barrier Reef (approximately 40 kilometres inland) and is close to the Keppell Bunker group of islands. Rockhampton also boasts close proximity to Roslyn Bay, Wreck Point, Cooee Bay and Yeppoon all offering different tourist attractions from fishing, snorkelling and diving. Carnarvon Gorge and Blackdown Tableland National Parks are within an easy driving distance. Naming itself the Capital of the Capricorn Region, the Rockhampton slogan is ‘Where the outback meets the reef’.

The accommodation, cafes and restaurants industries contribute 5.6% to the Rockhampton economy while cultural and recreational services contribute 2%. Retail trade is the largest contributing sector with 17.1% followed by health and community services (11.6%) education (10.2%) manufacturing (9.8%) and property and business services (7.0%) (ABS 2007a).

Approximately 100,000 international tourists and one million domestic tourists visit the Rockhampton district each year (Capricorn Tourism 2007). The 2003 Tourism Queensland (TQ) Rockhampton Visitor Survey found that 56% of all visitors to Rockhampton are intrastate visitors, the majority of visitors were in the 55—64 age group (24%) and one third were retired couples (TQ 2003). Approximately 40% of visitors had been to Rockhampton four or more times showing a large repeat market, and came to Rockhampton for the purpose of holiday (53%) or to visit family and friends (25%) (TQ 2003). Forty-three per cent of those surveyed also planned to visit Yeppoon and 19% planned to travel to Great Keppel Island. Visitors chose mostly to stay with friends or family (35%), in a caravan or cabin (21%) or in a hotel/motel (27%) (TQ 2003). Sixty five percent of respondents drove their own vehicle to Rockhampton and the most popular activities were visiting the Botanical Gardens (91%) or the Rockhampton Zoo (79%) (TQ 2003).

Other main attractions in the region include the Dreamtime Cultural Centre, Heritage Village Museum and Archer Park Railway Station and Steam Tram Museum. The area also offers gem fields, limestone caves, an art gallery, tropical rainforests, national parks and a crocodile farm. A rapidly growing segment of the tourism industry in Rockhampton and surrounding region is Geotourism—where Capricorn, Mt Etna and Camoo caves can be explored, and 150 million-year-old dinosaur footprints viewed (Capricorn Tourism 2007). Rockhampton Tourist and Business Information advise there are 14 tourist attractions in Rockhampton city and 40 attractions in the surrounding region. There are 44 accommodation providers in Rockhampton including hotels, motels, serviced apartments, caravan parks and backpackers (Anon., Rockhampton Tourist and Business Information, Pers. Comm. 06/03/07).

Interview Details

In Central Queensland interviews were conducted with the one Aboriginal tourism operator, one
Indigenous community organisation and three tourism organisation/consultants representatives.

There is one major Indigenous tourism attraction in Central Queensland: The Dreamtime Cultural Centre. It has been in operation for nearly 20 years and is an integrated part of the mainstream tourism industry in Rockhampton. It is considered one of the area’s four major attractions, and the major Indigenous cultural experience between Brisbane and Cairns.

The Dreamtime Centre includes the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural park in Australia (with guided walks, dances, boomerang and spear throwing, didgeridoo performances and a retail outlet) as well as a 30-suite lodge hotel and major conference centre. The hotel and conference operations subsidise the Cultural Centre.

**Indigenous People in Rockhampton Tourism**

*Indigenous perspectives of tourism*

There was a feeling amongst the Indigenous operators in Rockhampton that there was ‘no money in culture’—that visitors interested in Indigenous culture could simply go to the museum in Brisbane and experience it for free. However, there was recognition that the Dreamtime Cultural Centre provided tourists with the opportunity to meet and learn about Indigenous people, which was seen as its major role: ‘we do reconciliation on a daily basis’.

To maintain the Cultural Centre’s experiences and cultural protocols, a large number of people are employed. Clearly, this was not always affordable. Some employees had to be supported through subsidisation programs such as traineeships and/or CDEP. Securing and maintaining these funding relationships takes much time and sometimes causes management issues as well as the threat of losing employees if funding is not received.

*If we lost funding we would drop two-thirds of our staff. We need six people to look after our cultural centre ... I wish we would have someone who would support us for five years to provide Indigenous culture [and reconciliation] (Indigenous Tourism Operator).*

In contrast to the Cultural Centre, the Conference Centre at Dreamtime was found to be a much more predictable market and generated significantly more income for the business. However the manager felt there was an expectation to use these other funds to support the Cultural Centre financially.

*There is an expectation (from government) that the motel and conference centre funds the cultural centre ... but a business cannot afford to support another business (Indigenous Tourism Operator).*

The Dreamtime Cultural Centre staffing is based on Indigenous people and had been very stable compared to the wider mainstream tourism industry. The manager spoke of how he had been there almost 20 years, with many staff members employed for more than 12 years. The management at the Centre emphasised the need for workers to manage the tourism experience above all other matters, and that it needs to be a team effort. Sorry business and funerals were a regular part of business and the Centre staff was expected to ensure that the business of the Cultural Centre was maintained before people took leave.

*Non-Indigenous perspectives of Indigenous tourism*

In Central Queensland, most of the tourism organisations had Indigenous people on their staff in the past, currently, or were aiming for it in the future. Most of this employment had been through ‘identified’ and subsided traineeship programs.

*We had two Aboriginal tourism trainees for 12 months—it is a very positive way to get into Indigenous tourism (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).*

*We have a grade 11 girl who comes in every Wednesday; we sponsored her for Miss NAIDOC and she won (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).*
Several interviewees commented on the lack of ‘identified’ Indigenous tourism product in the region when compared to further north, such as Cairns. Others spoke of how Indigenous people were integrated into the local community to the extent that perhaps there was no need to be involved in ‘identified’ Indigenous tourism activities.

*You don’t see art, boomerangs, etc … In Cairns you see it everywhere (Tourism Organisation/Consultant). The Indigenous community is part of Rockhampton (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).*

**Networking and Relationships**

**Tourism networks**

The Dreamtime Cultural Centre was well-known to the tourism organisations and involved in three of the local/regional tourism groups in the region. These organisations provided the formal links into the tourism industry however the Cultural Centre management felt the burden of being involved across so many of them. Additionally, the tourism organisations saw the Cultural Centre as the major contact organisation for any Indigenous tourism issues in the region.

*We are part of three regional tourism groups, but when you start getting on the committees … I can’t give obligations every week (Indigenous Tourism Operator).*

*The Cultural Centre Manager is on everything. He’s someone who’s got people’s respect. If we have any questions we go to him (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).*

Further, all of the tourism organisations said they encouraged any visitors to the region to go to the Dreamtime Cultural Centre, seeing it as part of the mainstream tourism industry and one of their four major attractions.

*The Cultural Centre is completely integrated … it is there as an attraction not necessarily as an Indigenous attraction (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).*

**Barriers to relationships**

Many interviewees thought that relationships between the Indigenous tourism operators and mainstream tourism seemed to function without any major misunderstandings or challenges. All believed that if there were any issues or questions about Indigenous tourism they should go straight to the Cultural Centre, who would address such issues in an upfront and professional manner.

Interviews with the Indigenous community organisation, however, did raise a number of issues related to the separation of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and how their tourism development experience had in fact led to many positive outcomes for both. For this interviewee (an Indigenous woman in her 50s), being involved in the project had introduced her to the first ‘white’ person that she felt she could trust. For others, involvement in the mainstream tourism industry provided opportunities to work with non-Indigenous businesses to which they had never been exposed.

*The Cultural Centre manager also raised the issue of changes within the mainstream tourism industry as a barrier to forming relationships. There has been more change in the rest of the tourism industry than us … CEOs and tourism positions (Indigenous Tourism Operator).*

**Capitalising on Opportunities**

**Indigenous tourism opportunities**

Central Queensland tourism organisations spoke of a major regional worker shortage. As such, they felt the industry would welcome anybody, Indigenous or not, who was interested in work and could ‘get the job done’.

*If you’re warm-blooded, breathing, have a nice smile and are nice to customers, there’s work (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).*

*In tourism, we are the most welcoming and open to people as an industry … I couldn’t imagine discrimination as an issue (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).*
At the same time, and as in other Queensland tourism regions, operators and organisations recognised the unique challenges for Indigenous engagement.

*The jump for Indigenous people would be bigger—skills, communication, presentations ... but there are plenty of people around to show that if you can master the skills there are opportunities* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

*If you’re willing to come in and do the job, they would take you. Gathering the skills is always the issue with Indigenous employment* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

It was considered that there was room in the market for more Indigenous tourism experiences, but that adding these to the Cultural Centre would be most logical.

Additionally, traineeships and work experience programs in the mainstream tourism industry were seen to be some of the best methods to assist Indigenous people entering the industry. In fact, at least one of the tourism organisations was currently seeking funding to employ new Indigenous tourism trainees.

*There should be more Aboriginal people in tourism, we are looking for new trainees* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

**Visitor demand for Indigenous tourism product**

International visitors were perceived to be the major market for the Cultural Centre. In coastal areas of the region, where visitors were predominantly domestic, there was a view that visitors may be interested in less contrived experiences. It was felt that Indigenous tourism activities would best be developed recognising visitors’ recreational activities such as camping and relaxing.

*We have a large international visitation and the Dreamtime Centre is a major attraction* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

*Indigenous tourism] is probably more marketable to the rest of the world than the domestic market* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

*Domestic visitors don’t want experiences which are contrived* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

**Support for and facilitation of Indigenous tourism**

Membership-based tourism organisations felt that it was at their members’ discretion as to the facilitation of Indigenous tourism. Further, while having positive relationships with the Cultural Centre, these organisations seemed generally unsure about their role in the development or support of Indigenous tourism across the region.

*Indigenous tourism—it’s not a major issue with other regional tourism managers. It doesn’t really come up* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

*It’s one of our major philosophical questions: do we promote Indigenous culture?* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

*Tourism organisations are fundamentally marketing organisations. While there could be a focus on Indigenous culture, the organisation should focus on marketing* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

*We are a membership-based regional tourism organisation; we work with our members. How do we get Indigenous people walking in the door?* (Tourism Organisation/Consultant).

**Summary of Findings for Rockhampton**

**Indigenous perspectives**

There was recognition that the Dreamtime Cultural Centre provided tourists with the opportunity to meet and learn about Indigenous people. The manager observed that the Conference Centre at Dreamtime is much more profitable than the Cultural Centre and that there is a general expectation that funds from the Conference Centre should support the Cultural Centre.

**Non-Indigenous perspectives**

There appears to be a lack of Indigenous tourism product in comparison to Cairns. There was a feeling amongst the non-Indigenous participants that Indigenous people appear to be integrated into the local community to the extent that perhaps there is no need for them to be involved in ‘identified’ Indigenous tourism activities.
Tourism networks
The Indigenous manager of the Dreamtime Cultural Centre is involved in three of the local/regional tourism groups. The tourism organisations in the region saw the Cultural Centre as the major contact organisation for any Indigenous tourism issues in the region. As a consequence of the success of the Cultural Centre all of the tourism organisations said they encouraged any visitors to the region to go to the Centre. It was apparent from the interviews that the Cultural Centre is viewed as part of the region’s mainstream tourism industry and one of four major Rockhampton attractions.

Barriers to relationships
As a consequence of the position of the Dreamtime Cultural Centre, relationships between the Indigenous tourism operators and mainstream tourism are seen to function without any major misunderstandings or challenges. Despite this view an Indigenous community organisation did raise a number of issues related to the separation of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. They also stated that tourism development experience had led to many positive outcomes for both groups.

The Cultural Centre manager raised the issue of changes within the mainstream tourism industry as a barrier to forming relationships.

Opportunities
The interviewees in Rockhampton suggested that regional labour shortages meant Indigenous people could find work as long as they could ‘get the job done’. However it was recognised by the operators and organisations that there were unique challenges for Indigenous engagement with the tourism industry. Traineeships and work experience programs in the mainstream tourism industry were seen to be some of the best methods to assist Indigenous people entering the industry.

Visitor demand
International visitors were perceived to be the major market for the Cultural Centre. There was a feeling that domestic visitors were interested in less contrived experiences.

Support and facilitation
The membership-based tourism organisations in Rockhampton felt that the facilitation of Indigenous tourism was at their members’ discretion. These organisations seemed unsure about their role in the development or support of Indigenous tourism across the region.
Chapter 7

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND

Background
The region of South East Queensland (SE QLD) stretches south from the New South Wales border, west to Toowoomba and north to Gladstone. It takes in the densely populated areas of the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, Brisbane and Ipswich. The population of the region is estimated to be approximately 2.5 million people (ABS 2007b). In June 2001, 65.5% of all Queenslanders resided in SE QLD (ABS 2007b) and this number is set to rise with more than 1,000 people moving to SE QLD every week, making it the fastest growing area in Australia (Queensland Government Office of Urban Management (OGOUM) 2007). It is estimated the population of this region will quadruple over the next 20 years (QGOUM 2007). The ABS estimates there are 6111 Indigenous Australians living in both Brisbane and the Gold Coast which equates to 2.5% of the total Indigenous population (ABS 2007a), however there are no figures available specifically relating to the South East Queensland region.

There are 224 State Forests and 143 National Parks accessed by the population and tourists to the region, resulting in an estimated 7.6 million visitor-days to these areas each year. The economic value estimated by consumer surplus is estimated to be between $75 and $118 million per year (Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFFA) 2007). Projected to 2021, this economic value could reach up to $2 to 3 billion. Recreation and tourism in the forests of SE QLD could increase by 36 per cent to the year 2011, and to 57 per cent by the year 2021 (DAFFA 2007). Information on the employment characteristics of the tourism and recreation industries in South East Queensland is incomplete, although case study evidence indicates that in many rural towns at least three-quarters of the businesses have some reliance on tourism and recreation (DAFFA 2007).

In the year ending December 2005, 1,553,200 international visitors came to the SE QLD region and 73% of all visitors to Queensland stopped over in SE QLD. International visitor nights in the region totaled 18,559,500 and accounted for 62% of all visitor nights spent in the State during the same period (Queensland Government Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 2007). International visitor numbers increased over the three years to December 2005 by 4% each year while visitor nights increased by 7% each year for the same period (EPA 2007).

Domestic visitors to SE QLD in year ending December 2005 totaled 10,229,000 and 62% of all visitors to the state made a stopover in this region during this period (EPA 2007). Domestic visitors to SE QLD spent 47,557,500 visitor nights in the region, accounting for 57% of all domestic visitor nights spent in Queensland (EPA 2007). Domestic visitation to SE QLD increased only marginally during the three years prior to December 2005 with a 1% increase per year, whilst domestic average length of stay declined by 0.2 nights over the same period (EPA 2007).

There are three Indigenous tourism attractions in the South East Queensland area. These are Mirrabooka Dance Group—part of Riverlife, located in Brisbane; an art and craft centre on the Sunshine Coast and an Indigenous tour operator based in Calwun on the Gold Coast (Anon. Tourism Queensland, Pers. Comm., 13 March 2007).

Interview Details
In South East Queensland seven interviews were conducted, including three Indigenous tourism operators providing an Indigenous tourism product, three mainstream tourism operators providing an Indigenous tourism product, and a mainstream tourism operator. While the Indigenous presence is probably lower in the South East corner of Queensland than in some other regions of the state, there were several notable Indigenous tourism businesses.
Indigenous People in South East Queensland Tourism

**Indigenous perspectives of tourism**

Similar to regions like Cairns/Far North Queensland, the Indigenous people interviewed in South East Queensland discussed how their involvement in tourism provided opportunities to teach others about Indigenous culture. Engagement in the tourism industry also allowed for the development of self-confidence. Further, tourism was a means by which elders could communicate their knowledge in the spirit of reconciliation.

*It took me a long time for me to let people know I was an Aboriginal woman ... everyone always knew ... I was the little black girl at the primary school ... but it took me up till I was working here [in the business] to talk about it* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*It’s everybody’s right to pass on the education and not worry about making a profit. It’s in Indigenous lore that once you become an elder you have to pass on information to others ... he [an elder] was doing the tours for free* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

An independent Indigenous tourism operator who had been in business for over 15 years spoke of the difficulties of securing funding for their business. In the past, only Indigenous community organisations were eligible for development support funding. Another Indigenous operator who had secured funding was aware that it would soon run out, meaning his Indigenous staff would have to return to welfare.

*Fifteen years ago I went for a grant, it was a joke ... I’ve funded myself for over 10 years ... it’s had its ups and downs* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

*It’s [funding] a joke—government bullshit. They only give money to communities, not to individuals ... We can’t have Aboriginal people being successful* (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

A non-Indigenous operator offering an Indigenous tourism product spoke at length of the need for flexible work conditions (Indigenous or not), especially with young people who were more interested in lifestyle than income. He has had to adopt pay and incentive programs that allow his Indigenous workers to return to their communities on a regular basis—one at a time—which ensures that there is always an Indigenous presence. Further, this operator claims that he is learning more from his Indigenous employees than they are from him.

While this gives a positive picture of involvement with Indigenous people, some of the mainstream tourism operators in South East Queensland discussed the challenges in employing Indigenous people.

*We had a good tour with the right guy. He was on as a casual but wanted holiday pay. And then he just didn’t come back after his holiday* (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

*We couldn’t find the right person to do it [cultural tour]. We’ve tried five or six other people but it hasn’t worked ... the market then lost interest* (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Additionally, an interviewee who had worked for many years as the manager with an Indigenous dance troupe had to withdraw as she found the dancers were not maintaining their professionalism.

*I pulled out in the end [from management] ... there were problems to keep them professional ... they started turning up in bare feet ... it all became too hard for me. I stepped out of that but stayed in close relationship with them* (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Several mainstream tourism operators and Indigenous community organisations or Indigenous individuals examined the possibility of forming joint venture agreements or partnerships. While a few
of these had not come to fruition, there was at least one partnership that was successful. In another possible joint venture it seems the development was stopped completely over ownership agreements, while in another case the tourism operator employed other Indigenous people from those who entered the joint venture to continue the tourism experience.

**Networking and Relationships**

**Tourism networks**
The non-Indigenous interviewees were generally very involved with their local and regional tourism organisations, as well as specific industry-based organisations (e.g. backpackers, etc). Similarly, several Indigenous tourism operators had positive relationships with their local/regional tourism organisation and participated in activities particularly when they saw there were business opportunities. Networking, that's the best bit, I love it—it's gotta be a win-win where I can make money out of it ... I don’t wanna be part of the government (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

I’m new to it, I need to network, definitely (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Other Indigenous tourism operators, only new to their businesses, were keen to meet with the tourism organisations, though had not yet arranged a meeting. There was also a feeling the mainstream tourism industry was not particularly interested in Indigenous tourism unless they were in competition for markets or government funding.

An Indigenous tourism operator who was in partnership with a non-Indigenous person found that they were able to use the networks of their partner to further develop their own business.

**Barriers to relationships**
Relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous operators seemed to be inhibited in the South East Queensland region by several issues such as mainstream operators’ view of Indigenous tourism as ‘competition’ or just ‘incompetent’. For the Indigenous interviewees, a lack of respect and acknowledgement for Indigenous culture and sites was also noted as a challenge in building good working relationships with the mainstream tourism industry.

I think we can benefit the white tourism industry ... but most other operators would feel threatened. The challenge is [white operators] seeing us as competition ... and they think that we don’t have the intelligent people working here (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

The attitudes from tourism are getting worse ... They don't want to acknowledge Aboriginal people ... they don't want to ask permission or work with Aboriginal people. The tours go everywhere; Australia is Aboriginal land (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

People don't know the significance of our sites (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

From the non-Indigenous operators’ perspective, relationship barriers existed around cultural issues like permission to access Indigenous land.

The suggestion that tour operators seek permission to operate on their land. I don’t see that as very effective ... I don't see it as helpful. Both groups have to accept that we have to give and take on both sides—culture and business (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Additionally several non-Indigenous interviewees spoke of their surprise of finding the racism that exists within the general public and business community that they had not encountered before employing Indigenous staff.

**Capitalising on Opportunities**

**Indigenous tourism opportunities**
As in other regions, the development of Indigenous tourism experiences were talked about as ‘add-ons’ to other visitor activities, rather than experiences worthy in and of themselves. Linked with this idea was the perception that Indigenous people needed to be brought into the mainstream tourism industry.
A lot of ignorance by [tourism operators] about Aboriginal tourism opportunities ... to break down those barriers we need to bring Aboriginal people into mainstream tourism, so they are not just seen as cultural components (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

I think that there are some opportunities for those who are prepared to be flexible with their culture. It's about fitting the two together (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Training and skill development were suggested as necessary means to assist Indigenous people to enter the industry, with traineeships being a popular avenue. Several non-Indigenous interviewees spoke of concerns within the industry towards Indigenous reliability.

Reliability, it's definitely one of their weaknesses ... they are their own worst enemies (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Visitor demand for Indigenous tourism product
Several non-Indigenous interviewees actually perceived an anti-Indigenous element within the domestic tourism market relating to ignorance or racism. A similar sentiment was echoed by the Indigenous tourism operators, who noted that the international visitor interest in Aboriginal culture seemed to sit in contrast with the lack of interest shown by local Australians.

Australians don’t believe there is authentic Aboriginal people ... they don't believe that there is real culture ... basically Australians are ignorant (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

I'm loved more overseas than here in my own country... that's because of the original set-up of white man coming in and taking over (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

We’re very popular with the Asian market (Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Furthermore, several non-Indigenous operators questioned the strength of general demand for Indigenous tourism experiences, and challenged the boosterism statistics produced by governments. Rather than feeling that there was great demand, these interviewees spoke of the need for potential operators to closely assess the market for particular niches. There was also debate as to whether visitors were more interested in entertaining Indigenous experiences or more intimate one-on-one interactions.

Some people believe there is strong demand ... I don't agree ... We don’t get calls from people saying we want to do a cultural experience (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

The customers don't want to go deep ... just didge, boomerangs etc. It needs to be put in the international context (Mainstream Tourism Operator).

Experiences with Indigenous people, asking them questions and learning first hand about their culture (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Support for and facilitation of Indigenous tourism
There were issues with assistance around the ownership and assessment of Indigenous people’s business proposals. One Indigenous operator spoke of how an experience of a business assessment process made him feel the proposal was no longer his. Later on, he found an Indigenous business support organisation that helped facilitate much more favourable outcomes.

Problems come when your proposal gets put up and then everybody comes along ‘That won’t work, that won’t work’ ... by the end of it is not your idea ... Black Business—they analyse the business proposal—Aboriginal fellas—black fellas and black fellas working with black fellas—the way it should be.

In contrast to the feeling that special government assistance should be used to support Indigenous tourism operators, at least one mainstream tourism operator interviewed believed that potential Indigenous operators should not be given special assistance.

There is a perception that they should be given government assistance ... realistically if you want to set up the business you have to go out and do what anybody else would have to do ... need to treat all equal (Mainstream Indigenous Tourism Operator).

Summary of Findings for South East Queensland

Indigenous perspectives
The South East Queensland Indigenous participants felt that Indigenous involvement in tourism provided opportunities to teach others about Indigenous culture and for Indigenous people to develop self-confidence.
The Indigenous operators were having difficulties in securing funding. It seemed that Indigenous community organisations find it much easier to access funding. Despite the easier access to funding the participants felt that community organisations have difficulty focusing on tourism because the Boards of Management are dealing with other more urgent community issues such as housing and health.

A lack of support networks among Indigenous operators was identified as an important issue and the Indigenous tourism operators indicated a desire to know what others were doing in tourism.

**Non-Indigenous perspectives**

A number of non-Indigenous participants acknowledged that there are challenges in employing Indigenous people and there is a need for flexibility in employment of Indigenous people. However they also noted there is a need to maintain professionalism.

The potential of joint venture agreements or partnerships were being investigated with some already initiated.

**Tourism networks**

Non-Indigenous interviewees were generally very involved with the local and regional tourism organisations, as well as specific industry-based organisations. In South East Queensland several Indigenous tourism operators also had had positive relationships with their local/regional tourism organisation and participated in activities particularly when they saw there were business opportunities.

The new Indigenous business managers were keen to meet with the tourism organisations.

There was also a feeling the mainstream tourism industry was not particularly interested in Indigenous tourism unless they were in competition for markets or government funding.

**Barriers to relationships**

It was stated that the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous operators seemed to be inhibited by several issues such as mainstream operators’ view of Indigenous tourism as ‘competition’ or just ‘incompetent’. Indigenous operators felt there was a lack of respect and acknowledgement of Indigenous culture and sites. In addition, there was a feeling relationship barriers also existed around cultural issues like permission to access Indigenous land. Prejudice was also seen to exist within the general public and business community.

**Indigenous tourism opportunities**

A number of operators viewed Indigenous tourism experiences as ‘add-ons’ to other visitor activities, rather than experiences worthy in and of themselves. Linked with this idea was the perception that Indigenous people needed to be brought into the mainstream tourism industry. In order to facilitate the entry of Indigenous people into the industry training and skill development were seen as important. Non-Indigenous interviewees spoke of concerns within the industry towards Indigenous reliability.

**Visitor demand**

As in the other regions there was a view that an anti-Indigenous element seems to exist within the domestic tourism market because of ignorance or prejudice. A number of operators suggested there was a need for potential operators to closely assess the market for particular niches.

**Support and facilitation**

Some of the participants argued that special government assistance could be used to support Indigenous tourism operators but this was not universally supported by all operators. There was a feeling that Indigenous business support organisations helped facilitate much more favourable outcomes from an Indigenous perspective. The possibility for Indigenous people to lose control when seeking assistance with the assessment of business proposals and in entering joint ventures were raised as a concern.
Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS

Four regions/destinations were examined as part of this study. One region (Cairns/Far North Queensland) had a relatively high level of Indigenous involvement in the tourism industry compared to the others. The Whitsundays not only had no Indigenous tourism product or involvement but there was a lack of an Indigenous presence in the community. The non-Indigenous operators in Cairns generally had a positive view of Indigenous involvement in the tourism industry. This could be because of the existing level of involvement of Indigenous people in the industry. The non-Indigenous tourism representatives in Rockhampton also had a very positive view of the Indigenous operator in the town.

Despite this presence of Indigenous people in the industry in Cairns, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous felt there were factors that prevented great involvement of Indigenous people in the industry. These factors were also put forward in the other three regions. Indigenous people raised factors such as shyness, self-confidence and a lack of previous involvement with white people as issues. In addition, a loss of ownership and control and what is appropriate to share with visitors were also raised as possible issues.

Some non-Indigenous people also raised similar issues. However, non-Indigenous people also raised issues such as reliability and the level of racism against Indigenous people as other issues preventing involvement. A number of non-Indigenous people in the regions suggested that there would be no reason Indigenous people could not work in the industry if they had the requisite skills and qualifications. Some operators also suggested that subsidised employment, mentoring and joint ventures could be useful facilitators for engagement.

In Cairns and South East Queensland the Indigenous operators were not involved to any great extent in the tourism networks. This was in direct contrast to the non-Indigenous operators in all the regions. In Rockhampton however, the Indigenous operator was very well connected into the industry and seemed to enjoy a high level of respect and acknowledgement amongst the industry. In fact, this operator seemed to be overburdened by the requests for his involvement.

Finally, as suggested in the literature, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous operators felt that there was a much higher level of interest in Indigenous tourism from the international market than the domestic market. In addition, many of the non-Indigenous operators believed that Indigenous tourism should be sold as an ‘add on’ to mainstream product rather than be presented as a stand along product. In complement to this finding demand for more intimate, rather than entertaining experiences are predicted.

There is general agreement that increasing Indigenous engagement in the Queensland tourism industry would be good for the industry, but it was also noted that this would require committed facilitation and support from both the tourism industry and government. Such support needs to centre on the self-determined goals and ambitions of the Indigenous people involved, or risk being ineffective. Financial support is critical, as is mentoring. Joint ventures, in some locations and if developed properly, can provide a useful model for future Indigenous tourism operations.
Chapter 9

RECOMMENDATIONS IN RELATION TO MARINE TOURISM PERMITS IN THE GBRMP

There are a number of marine tourism permits set aside for Indigenous operators in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP). It would appear from this study that there is very limited potential for application of Indigenous tourism permits in the GBRMP. There appear to be a number of barriers and these are outlined below.

The first barrier is the existing high level of competition any potential entrant would face. Most marine tourism operators in all relevant regions noted that there are too many operators already in the market place.

Another obstacle would be access to substantial establishment funds. Any new Indigenous operator would have to have significant funds to invest in boats and other equipment. Traditionally it has been difficult for Indigenous businesses to access substantial investment funds.

In addition to having substantial investment funds, Indigenous operators would have to have high level business skills and know-how to be successful. These are often not immediately available amongst Indigenous communities.

Another barrier, especially in the Whitsundays, would be to identify appropriate Indigenous entrepreneurs to take up the permits.

Finally, even if funding and identification of Indigenous entrepreneurs was overcome, it is clear that these entrepreneurs are likely to need ongoing support in the short to medium term to be successful in the longer term.
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