sustainable development and management of tourism in Moreton Bay

Executive Summary

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS

B&B  Bed and Breakfast
BMB & I  Brisbane’s Moreton Bay and Islands
EPA  Environmental Protection Agency, Queensland
GIS  Geographic Information System
MBTF  Moreton Bay Taskforce
MSQ  Maritime Safety Queensland
NSI  North Stradbroke Island
QPWS  Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
SEQ  South-East Queensland
SQID  Stormwater Quality Improvement Device
STCRC  Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre
STP  Sewerage Treatment Plant
VIC  Visitor Information Centre
VIM  Visitor Impact Management

DISCLAIMER

This report has been prepared for consideration by the Local Government Authorities constituting the Moreton Bay Taskforce. It does not represent the opinions or policy position of these Authorities. The report provides evidence from research in order to assist in the planning and programming of sustainable tourism and recreation within the Moreton Bay region. Neither the STCRC nor any of its partners are liable for any action taken or not taken as a result of this document.

PHOTO CREDITS

The photographs used throughout this document are the property of Michelle Whitmore except where otherwise stated. The cover photograph of dolphin feeding is provided courtesy of Tourism Queensland.
Australia’s coastal zone is presently under major developmental and consequential environmental stress. The majority of the Australian population lives in the coast zone and tourism has to compete for sites with urban development, aquaculture and other industries, including local recreational facilities, as all these activities have an interest in similar sites.

Tourism development in the coastal zone will continue to grow. If long-term (20 years) projections of a 200% growth in international visitation materialise, the implications for Australia’s coastal systems are very large. Tourism has a clear need to be a part of the developmental and environmental planning decisions in all coastal regions.

De Lacy, Gschwind and Craik (n.d.) Tourism and Sustainability: proposal for establishment of a national advisory committee on tourism and sustainability.

There are opportunities to grow the regional tourism sector through development of more nature-based tourism, conventions and conferences and building on the artificial attractions to broaden the opportunities for visitors. Transport connections with adequate capacity to move expected numbers of patrons and event visitors and developing vibrant Activity Centres and the CBD are important for the continued development of the industry. Protection of the natural attractions and character of the region is also important to the sustainability of the industry in the region.


Nature-based opportunities on the coast are the basis of Queensland’s tourism industry, which provides valuable economic and social benefits to the community. Consequently, there needs to be effective and equitable management and protection of these nature-based opportunities and the coastal resources on which they rely to ensure they are not adversely affected by incompatible land uses and uncontrolled and inappropriate visitor activities.


Sustainable Development and Management of Tourism in Moreton Bay
Tourism is Australia’s largest employment sector and generator of small business. Tourism can deliver jobs for residents of Moreton Bay and Islands in their own local area, without having to travel distances on the increasingly congested roads of south-east Queensland – a significant contribution to a sustainable south-east Queensland. Experience has shown that poorly planned and managed tourism can destroy the natural resources on which it relies; hence it is important that it is developed sustainably. The tourism potential of Moreton Bay and Islands (Moreton Bay) has been largely undiscovered. Moreton Bay has great beaches, water, wildlife and a relaxed atmosphere but it is the combination of these features with the environmental sustainability of all aspects of the region that should form the foundation of promotion. The opportunity exists to create Moreton Bay as a sustainable tourism destination, delivering all of the advantages of tourism with minimal negative consequences. As its point of difference Moreton Bay needs to establish itself as a sustainable, Platinum Plus destination. The focus should be on increasing tourism yield rather than simply increasing tourism numbers. The Moreton Bay and Islands brand needs to be established as one synonymous with sustainability. But the Brand must be authentic. This will require the industry to put its ‘house in order’, most importantly through implementing environmental best practice. In conjunction with this, provision needs to be made for additional public and private tourism infrastructure to cope with the requirements of an ever increasing tourist and local population.
MORETON BAY AND ISLANDS

The Moreton Bay region, as defined by this study, spans from Bribie Island in the north to North Stradbroke Island in the south and incorporates the marine park and each of the coastal and island Statistical Local Areas (SLAs), as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in between (Figure i). The region contains a plethora of environmental and cultural values. For example, the sand islands of Moreton and North Stradbroke, which form the eastern fringe, both have a rich Indigenous and European heritage and support a range of species surviving at their environmental limits. The bay itself provides habitat for dugong, turtles and numerous species of fish, and the shores are recognised as being significant for migratory bird populations. Whilst the fauna and flora of the Bay have intrinsic value they also have commercial value, as dugongs and whales are important tourist attractions, and the seagrass and mangroves provide nurseries for many commercially important fish species. The cultural and environmental values of Moreton Bay, along with a growing residential population, are sure to lead to an increase in tourism and recreation in Moreton Bay.

Figure (i): Moreton Bay region as defined using the boundaries of the statistical local areas.
Four of the local government authorities responsible for Moreton Bay and Islands, Brisbane and Redcliffe City and Redland and Caboolture Shire Councils, have recognised the potential for this region to be a key tourist attraction for south-east Queensland, and established the Moreton Bay Taskforce (MBTF). Coastal regions are under increasing pressure from urban encroachment and visitation and hence any growth in tourism would have to be sustainable. Hence the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) was requested to establish a framework for sustainable tourism growth in the Moreton Bay region.

The ensuing project involved a review of relevant environmental and tourism information on Moreton Bay and similar ecosystems, surveys of recreational groups and tourism operators, followed by individual and focus group interviews with stakeholders around Moreton Bay. Tourism operators and recreational groups were asked for information about their activities in Moreton Bay, their concerns in regard to environmental and social issues, and their suggestions for management of tourism and recreation in Moreton Bay. The focus of the report is on tourism; however, the activities of local recreationists were of equal concern when considering the cumulative environmental impact. Tourists, as opposed to local recreationists, are defined as those people travelling and staying over night or travelling more than 50km return on a day trip. The term ‘visitors’ refer to both tourists and recreationists.

VISITATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

No-one knows the true extent of visitation to Moreton Bay. Using the averages generated from an accumulation of nationally collected NVS and IVS data over four years, to improve statistical accuracy, the number of tourists to Moreton Bay was estimated at approximately 1.7 million per year (Table i). This data also demonstrates that the majority of visitors are domestic day-trippers (Figure ii). There are some figures for visitation to the larger islands, but we believe these are extremely unreliable. In addition, there are indications of the total number of recreationists who undertake particular recreation activities (i.e. fishing and boating) and where they concentrate (see Map 3). From the survey responses we have an indication of the peak months of visitation to Moreton Bay (Figure iii).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Domestic Overnight*</th>
<th>Domestic Day-trip*</th>
<th>International Visitors*</th>
<th>Total Visitation*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caboolture</td>
<td>131,000</td>
<td>408,500</td>
<td>5,158</td>
<td>544,658</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redcliffe</td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td>268,500</td>
<td>5,217</td>
<td>306,717</td>
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<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>75,250</td>
<td>236,250</td>
<td>17,823</td>
<td>329,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redland</td>
<td>158,750</td>
<td>318,250</td>
<td>11,257</td>
<td>488,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Moreton Bay</td>
<td>397,000</td>
<td>1,231,000</td>
<td>38,805</td>
<td>1,666,805</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. : * figures are the average per year over 4 years
Figure (ii): Source of visitors to Moreton Bay.

Figure (iii): Tally of peak months of tourism activity in Moreton Bay.
A comprehensive tourist information system needs to be developed for visitors and tourism product for the Moreton Bay region before major planning can be undertaken. This in itself would ensure a much greater integration of destination management for Moreton Bay. With such a tourism information system, a sustainable vision and alternative futures can be mapped for tourism in Moreton Bay. (STCRC, in partnership with CSIRO, has produced similar systems for other destinations).

It is evident that tourism has significant economic benefit to Moreton Bay. Utilising the estimated tourist figures reported above and the assumption that tourist expenditure and employment in Moreton Bay is similar to the national average, estimates of $400 million per annum of spend and 6,000 jobs created are a very approximate indication of tourism’s economic impact in Moreton Bay. These figures are extremely problematic and do not include the impact of local visitation. It is important to better estimate the economic impact, but this will require gaining reliable visitor numbers and spend, as well as investment in economic modelling.

Informants in our study continually alluded to tourism having a social impact in Moreton Bay. There is no objective information available on social impacts. It is important to secure such information if tourism is to grow sustainably. It is imperative that before any major tourism planning or development exercise there should be considerable community consultation and the social impacts of tourism activities should be assessed. STCRC has prepared a range of social indicators and surveys that could be adapted for application in Moreton Bay should the stakeholders request it.
INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure and services right around the bay need to be sufficient to cope with the growing demands of visitors as well as the local population. An important component of this project was an audit of the public and private facilities available throughout Moreton Bay. This information has been summarised using GIS maps. Map 1 provides a summary of accommodation and boat ramp facilities. Map 2 shows the marine park zoning and sensitive areas overlaid with the ferry and charter boat service routes. Map 3 demonstrates major areas of vessel usage, in terms of boat hours, and major boat ramps. Map 4 overlays information provided by recreational groups on activities in the bay with population density around the bay and remnant vegetation.

Feedback from tourism operators in regard to infrastructure suggested that the foreshore at Redcliffe was a major success; Manly and Cleveland participants hoped to see similar designs implemented in their areas. Respondents suggested that there was a shortage of space at marinas and that improved facilities for commercial vessels were desperately required – it was claimed that provisions for tourism operators was often over looked in designing new marinas. The lack of accommodation in most areas of the Bay was a concern. There is an urgent need to secure private investment. It is recommended that an integrated strategy be developed to encourage such private investment – for example, via planning schemes, investment missions, marketing and so on. In order to get more tourists to visit the Bay area there may need to be additional built attractions and improved public transport services. As most people currently utilise private vehicles to get to the Bay improvements to access roads, signage and parking facilities were also highlighted as concerns. It is important that such development does not encroach or have negative consequences on the natural environment.

THE BAY ENVIRONMENT

At this stage it is the best estimate of STCRC that present tourism use of Moreton Bay is not approaching environmental capacity. However, research has shown that whilst the impacts of boating, at current levels, are not large there is evidence that higher levels of nutrients and heavy metals are associated with boating hotspots (see Map 5). Hence, during peak periods and with increased boating activity there is potential for significant environmental impacts. A broad scale model has been developed to indicate the flow of impacts (Figure iv and v). By combining this with empirical ecological studies the impact of tourism could be assessed. Visitor impact models need to be tested and made more robust to guide development. Consequently, policies and strategies must be developed to address this.
Terrestrially the main environmental impact concerns, expressed by stakeholders, were from camping and four-wheel-driving on North Stradbroke and Moreton Islands. The numbers of people participating in these activities, and doing so at inappropriate locations, appears to be on the increase. Both of these islands have very sensitive environments and provide habitat to nationally and internationally significant species. Environmental best practice needs to be implemented together with education and communication strategies.

Reported aquatic environmental concerns included a shortage in fish stocks and the outbreaks of Lyngbya in the northern parts of the Bay. The major cause of this is urban development and the quality of water being discharged through the catchments into Moreton Bay. Stormwater run-off from urban areas, particularly the nutrients and sediment in this run-off, is capable of destroying seagrass meadows, with consequent adverse affects on fish species, dugongs and green turtles.

The health of Moreton Bay is dependent on limiting the pollutant loads from the catchment. However, the impacts of recreational and tourism activities are not to be dispelled.
SUSTAINABILITY

Experiences throughout the world show that poorly planned and managed tourism that fails to support its environment base will eventually be economically unsustainable. With the potential for self-destruction, achieving a more sustainable tourism option is the most important issue facing tourism. As the most frequently stated appeals of Moreton Bay are the natural islands, beaches, water, peace and serenity, marine wildlife, and fishing, it is evident that if the Bay environments are degraded the attraction for visitors would disintegrate.

There are a range of strategies that can be implemented to enhance tourism sustainability in Moreton Bay. Effective communication, education and interpretation are essential to help change the behaviour of visitors to the Bay. Providing additional interpretive services would also enhance the tourism experience available in Moreton Bay. An integrated communication program, involving all local and state government organisations and tourism operators is required. More information needs to be available for visitors and operators about the marine park and the islands to make people more aware of the location that they are visiting and to highlight relevant regulations. Techniques include providing information on interpretive signage or as pamphlets. Interpretation has been shown to be effective in changing how people think about and behave in the environment they are visiting. Moreton Bay is a highly sensitive natural environment and it is important to ensure that visitors are aware of this.
The whole of the Moreton Bay region should be promoted as a single destination - ‘Destination Moreton Bay’. Collaboration between each of the local and state government agencies and tourism operators is required in order to establish an overarching management and marketing organisation. With tourism operators working with Tourism Queensland and Brisbane Marketing a consistent marketing and promotion strategy could be developed. Moreton Bay should be marketed as a Platinum Plus destination, with a focus on increasing tourism yield rather than tourism numbers. This allows the economic benefits of tourism to Moreton Bay to increase without increasing damage to the environment. Along with this joint planning and marketing approach there needs to be a solid base of sustainable operations.

If Moreton Bay is to be differentiated as a sustainable destination then a system needs to be instigated that ensures best practice by operators and the community, and certification is a powerful way to achieve this. Green Globe has been suggested as the certification program that would be most applicable to a range of tourism sectors and destinations. It is performance based, requiring regular measurement and auditing, and it is internationally recognised. The Eco Certification Program, ecoBiz, Green STARS and Clean Marinas are also important certification schemes that could be adopted by appropriate sectors.

TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS

The EPA/QPWS, as custodians of the Marine Park and Moreton Island National Park, are major stakeholders in any planning for tourism in Moreton Bay and Islands. Significant responsibility resides with QPWS to implement an effective tourism and visitor management system. Information about the number of visitors, their activities and patterns of use is needed to assess impacts of use on biological features, and thus allow strategies to be implemented to conserve the local ecosystems. In consultation with Tourism Queensland and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council, QPWS has proposed integrating tourism management with park management by implementing a ‘Tourism in Protected Areas’ (TIPA) initiative. This initiative addresses a range of issues to improve management of commercial tourism in sensitive environments. It is important that this initiative is applied in Moreton Bay as soon as possible as it is one means through which some of the other recommendations can be implemented.
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The priority recommendations from this report are:

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<th>PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION</th>
<th>KEY ORGANISATIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Require the establishment of a destination management committee of stakeholders to develop ‘Destination Moreton Bay’ as a sustainable, Platinum Plus destination.</td>
<td>Tourism operators, local councils, Tourism Queensland, Brisbane Marketing and QPWS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Conduct tourism futures modelling and visioning for Moreton Bay including developing a tourism information system in order to better understand the tourist market and plan for a whole of destination.</td>
<td>STCRC could work with Councils and industry to develop a model and information system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ensure environmental sustainability through adoption of certification programs (such as Green Globe for communities and general tourism operators, Eco Certification, ecoBiz, Green STARS and Clean Marinas) and implementing communication and interpretation strategies.</td>
<td>Local councils, QPWS and industry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Consider applying the TIPA initiative in Moreton Bay.</td>
<td>QPWS and tourism industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conduct a social impact assessment to gauge tourism’s impact on the local community.</td>
<td>STCRC could work with the local councils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Adopt policies and strategies to ensure greater public and private tourism infrastructure.</td>
<td>Local councils, state government and private investors.</td>
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sustainable development and management of tourism in moreton bay

The comprehensive report, *Sustainable Development and Management of Tourism in Moreton Bay*, is available through STCRC’s online bookshop. Alternatively, you can contact the authors at STCRC.

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