



WET TROPICS MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

13 November 2006

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Standing Committee on Employment,
Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation,
House of Representatives
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Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and
Workforce Participation

Submission regarding Inquiry into Workforce challenges in the Australian tourism sector

I would like to thank the Standing Committee for the opportunity to provide this submission regarding the above inquiry on behalf of the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA).

Background

Tourism in tropical Queensland rides on its natural assets, in particular, nature-based activities associated with the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and the adjacent rainforests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WTWHA). WTMA is a statutory authority responsible for the protection and management of the WTWHA.

One of the primary roles and responsibilities of the Authority is to present the Area so people can enjoy and appreciate its many outstanding values. The Authority works closely with the tourism sector with the aim of ensuring quality presentation of the Area to its many visitors (estimated to amount to 4.65 million visits each year to over 100 visitor sites). Another primary role of WTMA is to ensure the WTWHA plays an important role in the lives of the regional communities. The Authority recently conducted a community attitudes survey of the regional communities in the vicinity of the Area. The survey showed that there is strong support for the World Heritage Area and that there is strong recognition of the quality of life benefits the Area provides to the regional communities.

The Rainforest Cooperative Research Centre has also recently undertaken research into the 'Economic Values of Tourism in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area'. A report on this research is to be published very shortly; however, initial advice (pers comm) is

that the gross economic value of tourism directly attributable to the WTWHA is in the order of \$450M p.a.

The Authority released its Wet Tropics Nature Based Tourism Strategy in 2000. This Strategy was developed in association with the tourism sector, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and other key stakeholders. It establishes policy statements and a planning framework for engaging the tourism sector in management and presentation of the WTWHA. The Strategy can be viewed at:

http://www.wettropics.gov.au/mwha/mwha_pdf/Strategies/naturebased_tourism.pdf

The Authority established a Tourism Industry Liaison Group (TILG) several years ago. The TILG meets quarterly and has proved a very useful forum for liaison between the Authority and tourism interests associated with the WTWHA. The Authority does not regulate commercial activities *per se*; however a Commercial Activity Permit must be obtained from QPWS to operate on national parks within the Area (which comprise approx. 80% of the WTWHA).

Terms of Reference

Current and emerging skills shortages and appropriate recruitment, coordinated training and retention strategies.

Given the international significance of the Area and the need to ensure quality presentation of the Area to visitors, the Authority intends to introduce an accreditation system for tour operations within the WTWHA. Best practice presentation is also seen by the Alliance for Sustainable Tourism as a key component of ensuring a quality visitor experience and a sustainable future for nature based tourism in tropical Queensland.

Workshops have recently been conducted with the tourism sector to consider the best approach to introducing such an accreditation system. One of the key components identified for successful implementation is the need for developing a training package to assist in the accreditation of guides. Obviously one of the major challenges in making the accreditation system work is the need to be able to recruit staff with the capacity to gain accreditation, and also the challenge to retain staff such that the demands for repeat annual training is kept within reason and trained staff can continue to build their knowledge base about the special World Heritage features of the WTWHA.

Strategies to ensure employment in regional and remote areas; and Innovative workplace measures to support further employment opportunities.

In 2005, the Authority along with QPWS and the Australian Department of Environment and Heritage, signed a Wet Tropics Regional Agreement with the 18 Rainforest Aboriginal tribal groups. One of the key objectives of the Agreement is to seek opportunities for employment and training of Rainforest Aboriginal people in management of the WTWHA.

There would appear to be significant opportunities for training and employment of Rainforest Aboriginal people in tourism management and tourism operations within the WTWHA. A recent visitor survey by WTMA indicates that international tourists, in particular, are seeking opportunities for meeting Rainforest Aboriginal people and experiencing Rainforest Aboriginal culture. The parties to the Regional Agreement also recognise that there are opportunities for greater involvement of Aboriginal people as

educators and interpreters of the Wet Tropics rainforest and Rainforest Aboriginal cultural heritage within the WTWHA.

The building of the capacity of Rainforest Aboriginal people to engage in tourism in the WTWHA is considered a key innovative workplace measure:

- to provide further employment opportunities;
- to increase the successful retention of skilled staff given Rainforest Aboriginal peoples ongoing aspirations to care for country; and
- to supply the international visitor with a sought after World Heritage quality visitor experience.

Yours sincerely

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