



Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association  
PO BOX 212  
AIRLIE BEACH QLD 4802  
P: 07 4948 0601 / 0439 48 06 01  
F: 07 4948 0606  
Email: [deb.lewis@wcbia.com](mailto:deb.lewis@wcbia.com)

ABN: 47 323 613 763

[www.wcbia.com](http://www.wcbia.com)

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

Submitted by email: [ewrwp.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:ewrwp.reps@aph.gov.au)

Friday, 1<sup>st</sup> September 2006

**Re: Inquiry into workforce challenges in the Australian tourism sector**

Please find below a position paper of challenges faced by the Whitsunday Marine Tourism Industry and the solutions being implement to address such issues. If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact Deb Lewis, Executive Secretary of the Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association Inc as per the contact details at the top of this letter.

**Workforce Challenges in the Whitsunday Marine Tourism Industry 2006:**

The Whitsunday Marine Industry employs in excess of 650 staff on a fulltime, casual and contract basis at any one time.

The marine tourism sector is a significant employer and contributor to the local economy turning over in excess of \$100 million per annum. Additionally, for every dollar received from passengers approximately another \$4 is generated in the local economy from continued spend in the area by these tourists.

*Staff are employed in the areas of :*

- Onboard – crew (skippers, deckhands, hostesses, sail trainers etc)
- Shore based – management, office, marketing, operational and reservations staff, as well as maintenance, provisioning and other support services.

*Current and Emerging Shortages:*

The Queensland Department of Employment and Training funded a Marine Skills Formation Strategy during 2003-4 which identified huge skills shortages currently and into the future across the entire marine industry.

Retention and recruitment, as well as, reluctance by operators generally to invest in training, traineeships and apprenticeships due to staff transience, were key factors identified.

Most marine tourism operators, due to fluctuations in passenger numbers over each yearly period of operation, engage staff on a casual basis.

Generally, the industry suffers from a lack of appropriately skilled, experienced, and qualified staff, particularly in the areas of onboard crew (skippers) and marine support services.

*Some of the Contributing Factors to these staff shortages:*

- A requirement for onboard crew to be multi-skilled (marine, hospitality, customer service skills and a level of safety consciousness are requirements to perform duties effectively on charter vessels).
- Conversely, employment in the marine industry has been regarded as short term, not an opportunity for a career pathway, and a choice for only transient and unskilled labour.
- Maritime training has been offered in the region in an ad hoc manner; with an inflexible and expensive delivery method.
- Additionally, due to staff turnovers, operators have been unwilling to invest in staff's training, and therefore discourages staff from considering marine tourism as a long term employment option.
- There has been a level of 'burn out' in crew engaged in marine tourism, particularly in the overnight charter industry due multi-skilled duties, and continual rosters in an industry that previously had no industrial relations instrument to provide fair and equitable wage rates and conditions for crew. (The Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Award was introduced in May 2005 to provide minimum conditions and rates for crew to ensure better standards in workplace and better employment opportunities.)
- Low yield for operators due to cost of compliance in a heavily regulated industry (recent calculations identified over 17 government and other agencies to whom operators are accountable) detracts from an operators ability to invest in employment and training incentives to commit staff to longer term employment contracts.
- Inflated commission structures in an extremely aggressive and competitive market also discourages operators from investing in above minimum standard employment inducements.
- Cost of living and availability of affordable housing (rental and ownership) is a deterrent for many to remain permanently in the Whitsunday region.

- Lack of support, social and specialist services including medical services is another deterrent to long term residency.
- As a regional centre, there is also a lack of diverse entertainment and cultural opportunities particularly for younger crew and staff.
- Employment in the marine tourism industry is regionally challenged by financial inducements offered by the mining industry which is booming in central Queensland.

*Strategies to resolve Staff and Skills Shortages:*

The Recommendations outlined in the Report “Regional Marine Industry Skills Formation Strategy – Mackay Bowen and Whitsundays” have been considered and are being implemented through the following groups and forums:

**Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association (WCBIA)** through development of a group traineeship model for school based students and participation on relevant industry and training forums at a regional and state level.

**The Marine Safe Committee Airlie Beach** (which implements a Pilot Project funded by Maritime Safety Queensland to raise safety awareness and maritime operational standards). Training and Crew Education and Awareness Programs are being continually implemented.

**The Local Training Sub-Committee** that comprises industry, trainers, crew and government is actively addressing marine tourism and other relevant training issues. The development of a Marine Industry Induction Program and working with the local TAFE (Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE) to ensure deliver of a high level training that is affordable, flexible, blended, appropriate and workplace related are two key objectives currently being addressed.

**The Whitsunday Crew Committee** is a grass roots forum that feeds into other relevant committees to address staffing and training issues in the marine tourism industry. The crew representative directly influence outcomes and strategies with a major objective being to grow a more professional industry that provides a career path of choice for new recruits and in particular, the local regional youth.

**The Whitsundays Skills Formation Strategy Steering Committee.** Marine is represented on this committee to ensure consistent and relevant strategies are engaged across the region for to address staff attraction, recruitment, retention and training issues across the wider regional tourism sector.

**The Whitsunday Marine House Concept** is a major project from the Whitsunday 2015 Vision Strategy with the objective being to develop a Whitsunday’s Flag Ship for all things pertaining to marine. A key component of this project is to provide resource, library, internet, conferencing and training facilities for marine crew, high school students undertaking marine and tourism related studies, and new recruits to the industry. It is

hoped that this project will assist raise the profile of marine as a career path of choice, with the Whitsunday regions becoming known as a centre for excellence for all marine and service standards.

The marine tourism industry is committed to addressing issues that impact on the long term sustainability and professionalism of a sector of tourism that continues to grow significantly. Industry believes strong partnership arrangement with government agencies assist to address such challenges as those discussed in this submission, particularly in regard to long term, secure and stable employment and career opportunities.

The WCBIA looks forward to any further dialogue with the House of Representatives Standing Committee in order to address relevant issues in tourism workforce challenges.

Many thanks

*D C Lewis*

**Deb Lewis**

**Executive Secretary**

**WCBIA Inc**

Secretary Whitsunday Bareboat Operators Association

Secretary AMPTO Southern Group

Project Officer – Marine Safe Pilot Project (MSQ Funded)