

26 June 2006

Committee Secretary
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

AMPTO's Submission for the Senate Inquiry into National Parks

On behalf of the AMPTO, I wish to make the following submission. There are rarely enough resources for national parks, hence it is essential management be efficient and work closely with industry. The GBR has World Heritage listing. This should mean it receives priority treatment and attracts more government funding than it does at the moment.

First some background on marine tourism and AMPTO.

The Queensland Marine Tourism Industry

According to the latest Access Economics report commissioned by the Commonwealth Government, tourism in the Great Barrier Reef region is worth \$5.8 billion and employs 63,000 people. It is a major export earner and dwarfs other industries in the area (for example commercial fishing contributed \$120m and employed 640 [Productivity Commission].)

AMPTO

AMPTO is the peak body of the marine tourism industry. Its members carry more than 97% of the tourists to the Great Barrier Reef. Smaller operators are members of regional associations which, in turn, are members of AMPTO. Some of those association members are:

- a. Dive QLD
- b. Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association
- c. Whitsunday Bare Boat Industry Association
- d. Code Hole And Ribbons Reef Operators Association
- e. Great Barrier Reef Charter Boat Operators Association

AMPTO has its offices in Cairns and pays for a full time executive officer.

Principle Activities

The principle activities on behalf of the industry are to:

- a. Act as an interface with government agencies.
- b. Lobby government on issues relevant to the marine industry
- c. Represent industry at public forums
- d. Represent industry in the media Help ensure the long term economical and environmental sustainability of the industry
- e. Conduct the COTS Control Program

Environment Management Charge

Visitors to the region are required to pay an environment management charge which is collected by AMPTO members on behalf of the Commonwealth. In 2004/05 this amounted to a total of \$8 million. This money goes towards funding the GBRMPA's \$30 million annual budget.

The EMC started as a vehicle by which industry could provide funding to the CRC Reef as industry's contribution. The EMC was voluntarily accepted by industry at a cost of \$1.00 per tourist with \$0.75 going to the CRC Reef and \$0.25 going to the GBRMPA. When it was introduced, it was promised by the commonwealth government that it would never ever be increased.

The EMC has now been increased to \$4.50 and increases again next April to \$5.00. When it was increased from \$1.00 to \$4.00 the government promised that the extra money collected would be added to the GBRMPA's budget so that it could deliver more services and programs. Despite the promise, the increased charge did not result in a net increase to the GBRMPA's budget but now the marine tourism industry finds itself providing more than 25% of the GBRMPA's funding.

Tax

A Hassell and Associates study by Tourism Queensland shows the marine tourism industry pays \$187.5 million in income tax, \$8 million in EMC and \$19.9 million in company tax. A total of \$215.4 million to the Commonwealth and it pays out \$30 million for the GBRMPA. A net gain of \$185.4 million for the Commonwealth!

GBRMPA and AMPTO Relationship

To say that the relationship with the GBRMPA and industry has in the past been dark and stormy is an understatement.

However over the last 5 to 6 years, under the leadership of Virginia Chadwick AO, this relationship has become a true partnership with very strong linkages and is considered a role model for other protective area managers and industry. Communication, access, consultation and common goals all underpin the partnership.

The marine tourism industry helps the government fulfill its obligation to showcase the World Heritage Area and at the same time is dedicated to sustainable practices.

GBRMPA Review

Real fears are held about the possible outcomes of the Review into the GBRMPA. The uncertainty about the future of GBRMPA is a cause for considerable concern. It is essential that government announces its decision on the Review ASAP and end the hiatus that exists at the moment. Sorting out new governance arrangements will also divert resources from day to day activities of management

AMPTO made a submission to the Review Panel and recommended that changes be made to the MPA to make it more "expertise" based but strongly urged that the basic structure of the GBRMPA remain intact and that decision making, other than Ministerial level decisions, be retained in Townsville where our industry members have easy access to the decision makers who live in our communities. Our submissions and letters of support for the GBRMPA are attached.

GBRMPA Funding

It is noted that in the QLD Department of Premier and Cabinet's submission they state that for every dollar invested by the state into their parks, they see a 40 fold return in economic value. (1:40)

Using the same methodology, with the GBRMPA having a \$30 million annual federal budget and an economic value of tourism within the GBR catchment of \$5.8 billion, the federal government has an astounding 193 fold return (1:193) or using the federal tax figures it has a better than 700% direct return on its investment. (\$30 million: \$215.4 million or 1:7.18)

While the GBRMPA has had some small increases in its budget over the last few years with some one of project funding, there was no increase provided to cover the estimated (by AMPTO) \$1.5 million annual cost of opening and running community engagement offices throughout the region. This program has cut directly into other program areas.

The costs of policing the new Green Zones obtained through the Representative Areas Program and costs of the Day To Day Management Program have dramatically increased over the last two years and real concern is held by our industry as to whether or not the compliance and day to day management programs will collapse through lack of funds.

The QLD Government has offered to increase the funding for these programs by an extra \$2.2 million in 2006/07 rising to \$3.5 million in 2008/09 - but this is conditional on the Federal Government providing matching funds. AMPTO strongly urges the federal government to match these funds.

Increased funding is urgently needed for on water infrastructure that protects the Marine Environment - eg. Moorings, reef protection markers installation and patrols.

GBR Survival

The federal and state governments have worked in concert to protect the GBR from over fishing and are working to address the issue of water quality. The GBR Water Quality Protection Plan has been slow to show any headway and more is needed to be done. Most of the things needing to be done are dependant on farmers having to make the changes and AMPTO feels that this will not happen unless the farmers are compensated for changing their work practices and for undertaking significant activity such as fencing and tree planting along river and creek beds, utilizing different fertilization techniques and constructing of and use of siltation traps.

Water quality underpins the ability of the GBR to bounce back from environmental disasters such as coral bleaching and Crown of Thorns Starfish (COTS) infestations. Water quality and over fishing have been scientifically linked to COTS outbreaks. The cycles of COTS outbreaks are now shorter than the time needed to recover. (7 years: 10-15 years respectively)

Governments are not just responsible for the management of the GBR alone. The impact of water quality on the future of the GBR and that costs of mitigating this threat should be met from the public purse.

Global warming is a significant problem. The projections of a 2° C temperature rise by 2050 and in some scenarios by 2030, spells the end of the GBR as a coral reef system with it becoming an algae habitat of little interest to tourists. 63,000 jobs are on the line! The federal and state governments need to start investing in educating the public in better energy use and reducing green house gas emissions while keeping the pressure on internationally to help influence other nations.

Research

With the GBR under enormous survival pressures and the urgent need for research to help find answers, AMPTO was very happy to see that before the last federal election in 2004, the Prime Minister promised \$40 million over 4 years to set up a replacement of the CRC Reef and CRC Rainforest. At the time of writing, with just 5 days left before the closure of those CRC's, no announcement has been made as to the operation of the new research body.

While the \$10 million annual budget at first glance seems adequate, when all the research tasks were collated and funding discussions commenced, it became very obvious that there was not enough funds to adequately do all the priority tasks and as such the research effort will be hampered by lack of funds.

Research questions that need urgent answering are:

- a. Water quality monitoring to see if we are making a difference.
- b. RAP monitoring to see if the protection of 33% of the GBR is adequate.
- c. Fisheries monitoring to see if recreational catches are getting better and commercial catches are sustainable.
- d. What other option exist for the control and management of COTS infestations?
- e. Can we develop heat resistant corals?
- f. Is transplantation of corals and site restoration a viable alternative?
- g. Can we prevent coral bleaching or enhance recovery?

The above questions are by no means exhaustive and do not include many of the other stakeholder interests nor all of AMPTO's but they are all environmental questions and there is not enough funding to answer them, let alone all the others.

Closure

AMPTO's members are totally committed to environmental best practice. Without sustainable practices we will see the demise of our \$5.8 billion industry and the loss of over 63,000 jobs. The findings of this Senate inquiry will be of enormous interest to our members.

Yours truly,



Col McKenzie
Executive Director

Attachments:

1. **Letter to the Prime Minister date 2nd March 2006 RE – GBRMPA REVIEW& REPRESENTATIVE AREAS PROGRAM (RAP)**
2. **Letter to David Borthwick dated 2nd March 2006 RE – GBRMPA REVIEW**

- 3. AMPTO's first Submission of the GBRMPA Review**
- 4. AMPTO's second Submission of the GBRMPA Review**