

# Managing visitors and commercial operators for ecological sustainability

*Final report of the review of tourism activities in the Great Sandy Region*



*May 1998*



QUEENSLAND  
GOVERNMENT

**Department  
of Environment**

## Minister's message

Use of the Great Sandy Region has changed considerably over the last three decades with the increasing recognition of the Region's outstanding natural values. This recognition led to the World Heritage listing of Fraser Island in 1992.

Sand mining and logging activities in the Region have ceased and the only remaining significant use of the Region is by visitors and a limited number of residents. While mining and logging were seen as the major threats to the Region, management of visitor use was considered a lesser concern. The EDAW report, which was prepared as part of the review process, has confirmed the views of many people that current visitor use within the Region is unsustainable, given the existing levels of infrastructure and management resources. One of the objectives of protected area management in Queensland is of course that use of these areas should be ecologically sustainable.

The natural and cultural qualities of the Region are valued highly by many people and need to be protected. Therefore, it is time for positive action to be taken to improve the management of visitors and commercial operators in the Region. This final report contains a series of actions which will achieve this.

Late last year I released a progress report which contained a series of proposed strategies and actions. There has been a positive response to these proposals and as a result most of these actions have now been accepted and will be implemented.

Implementing these actions will change the way visitors and commercial operators are managed and will reduce the environmental impacts of visitor use in the Region. Over time, this will lead to better visitor experiences and greater appreciation by visitors of the values of the region.

The review process has included consultation with many community and industry organisations and individuals. The contributions from these people and organisations have been an important part of the review process and they are greatly appreciated. I wish to thank all those who have contributed to the review process.

I commend this final report to you and look forward to its implementation, and the improvement that will bring to visitor management in the Great Sandy Region.



Brian Littleproud, MLA  
Minister for Environment

### Disclaimer

*Recommendations in this document do not indicate that necessary funding will be made available for implementation. Funding requirements will be considered within the Queensland Government's overall funding priorities.*

### Review of tourism activities in the Great Sandy Region

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## Terms of reference

### *Review of tourism activities in the Great Sandy Region*

#### **Overview**

The Department of Environment, in conjunction with the Department of Tourism, Small Business and Industry, will review tourism activities in the Great Sandy Region. The review will include consideration of tourism opportunities, access, tour operations, and permitting arrangements and charges for commercial activities.

#### **Great Sandy Region Management Plan**

The review will contribute to the implementation of the management plan, the achievement of the desired outcomes and completion of some of the plan's proposed actions.

The review will focus on the following key outcomes from the management plan, as they relate to commercial activities:

##### **3.01 Recreation, tourism and visitor use**

By or before 2010, to have a diversity of high-quality recreation opportunities consistent with protection of the natural and cultural values of the Region.

##### **3.04 Permit arrangements**

By or before 2010, to have a permit system in place which provides a mechanism for visitor management to control visitor numbers, collect money in a cost-effective, simple and convenient manner, and to collect visitor use data.

##### **3.05 Charges for access and use**

By or before 2010, to have permit fees which reflect the cost of providing recreation opportunities available to visitors to the Region and which should not adversely affect access by any particular social group.

##### **3.10 Tourism**

By or before 2010, for tourists to have access to the Region's natural and cultural heritage for appreciation and enjoyment consistent with the sustainable use, protection and presentation of the Region's heritage.

A large number of other outcomes will also be considered as they relate to the above key outcomes. These will include World Heritage obligations, Aboriginal interests, roads, provision of services, recreational activities and impact assessment.

#### **Review objectives**

Within the Great Sandy Region:

- assess the physical impacts of the current level of tourism and recreational activities;
- assess the opportunities for increased tourism and recreational activity;
- recommend levels of visitor use which provide quality visitor experiences while protecting natural, cultural and social values; and
- recommend policies and practices for the management of tourism and recreation.

#### **Review process**

The review will include an assessment of previous studies of the Region and relevant literature. Government agencies, local government authorities, tourism associations and operators and community organisations will be consulted. An issues paper will be prepared as a basis for consultation, comment and submissions. A report will be prepared for consultation prior to the preparation of the final report.

## Contents

### **Summary**

|     |                                      |   |
|-----|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1   | Current situation .....              | 5 |
| 2   | Vision .....                         | 5 |
| 3   | Need for change .....                | 5 |
| 4   | Objectives .....                     |   |
| 5   |                                      |   |
| 5   | Short-term actions .....             | 5 |
| 5.1 | Visitor management .....             | 5 |
| 5.2 | Commercial activities .....          | 5 |
| 5.3 | Funding .....                        | 5 |
| 5.4 | New opportunities .....              | 5 |
| 5.5 | Communication .....                  | 6 |
| 6   | Medium-term actions .....            | 6 |
| 6.1 | Planning and management .....        | 6 |
| 6.2 | Consultation and co-ordination ..... | 6 |
| 6.3 | Revenue and funding .....            | 6 |
| 6.4 | Visitor infrastructure .....         | 6 |
| 6.5 | Visitor and operator conduct .....   | 6 |
| 7   | Performance indicators .....         | 6 |

### **Part 1 Report**

|     |                                      |    |
|-----|--------------------------------------|----|
| 1   | Vision and objectives .....          | 7  |
| 1.1 | Vision .....                         | 7  |
| 1.2 | Need for change .....                | 7  |
| 1.3 | Objectives .....                     | 7  |
| 1.4 | Actions .....                        | 8  |
| 1.5 | Performance indicators .....         | 8  |
| 2   | Short-term actions .....             | 9  |
| 2.1 | Visitor management .....             | 9  |
| 2.2 | Commercial activities .....          | 10 |
| 2.3 | Funding .....                        | 12 |
| 2.4 | New opportunities .....              | 13 |
| 2.5 | Communication .....                  | 13 |
| 3   | Medium-term actions .....            | 15 |
| 3.1 | Planning and management .....        | 15 |
| 3.2 | Consultation and co-ordination ..... | 15 |
| 3.3 | Revenue and funding .....            | 15 |
| 3.4 | Visitor infrastructure .....         | 15 |
| 3.5 | Visitor and operator conduct .....   | 16 |
| 4   | Implementation .....                 | 17 |

### **Part 2 Background information**

|      |  |    |
|------|--|----|
| 1    | Review process .....                                     | 18 |
| 1.1  | Background .....   | 18 |
| 1.2  | Great Sandy Region Management Plan .....                 | 18 |
| 1.3  | Review objectives .....                                  | 18 |
| 1.4  | Review area .....  | 18 |
| 1.5  | Review management .....                                  | 18 |
| 1.6  | Background information .....                             | 18 |
| 1.7  | Preliminary consultation .....                           | 18 |
| 1.8  | Issues paper .....                                       | 19 |
| 1.9  | Meetings .....   | 19 |
| 1.10 | Submissions .....  | 19 |
| 1.11 | Progress report .....                                    | 19 |
| 2    | Regional values .....                                    | 20 |
| 2.1  | Natural heritage .....                                   | 20 |
| 2.2  | Cultural heritage .....                                  | 20 |
| 2.3  | Tourism and recreation .....                             | 20 |
| 2.4  | Economic .....   | 20 |
| 2.5  | Scenic and aesthetic .....                               | 20 |
| 3    | Legislative provisions .....                             | 21 |
| 3.1  | Fraser Island Public Access Act 1985 .....               | 21 |
| 3.2  | Recreation Areas Management Act 1988 .....               | 21 |
| 3.3  | Recreation Areas Management Act Amendment Act 1990 ..... | 21 |
| 3.4  | Nature Conservation Act 1992 .....                       | 22 |

|     |  |    |
|-----|--|----|
| 4   | Great Sandy Region Management Plan .....                 | 23 |
| 5   | Commercial tour operations .....                         | 25 |
| 5.1 | Legislative definitions .....                            | 25 |
| 5.2 | Department of Environment Corporate Plan 1998–2000 ..... | 26 |
| 6   | Visitor statistics .....                                 | 27 |
| 6.1 | Commercial tours .....                                   | 27 |
| 6.2 | Private visits .....                                     | 27 |
| 6.3 | Camping .....  | 27 |
| 7   | Tourism outlook .....                                    | 28 |
| 8   | Tourism impacts assessment .....                         | 29 |
| 8.1 | Consultancy brief .....                                  | 29 |
| 8.2 | Methodology .....  | 29 |
| 8.3 | Findings .....   | 30 |
| 8.4 | Conclusions .....  | 34 |
| 9   | Submissions .....  | 36 |
| 10  | Bibliography .....                                       | 36 |

## Summary

### 1 Current situation

Visitor impacts at half of the major visitor sites and access routes in the Great Sandy Region are above acceptable limits and current levels of visitor use are unsustainable, given the existing levels of site management, infrastructure and management resources. Consequently, while visitor use continues to increase, the quality of the visitor experience is declining.

### 2 Vision

The vision for the future of visitor use in the Region is:

*For visitors to have access to the Region's diverse natural and cultural assets for appreciation, enjoyment and recreation, in a way that is ecologically sustainable and consistent with the protection of the natural and cultural values of the Region.*

### 3 Need for change

Achieving this vision requires significant changes in the ways the Department of Environment manages visitor use in the Region. This might also require commercial operators to change their operations.

At many sites, the levels of use are now exceeding the ability of the environment and the facilities to meet the demands and impacts of visitor use. Demand for visitor use, that is the capacity of the natural environment and/or the built facilities at these sites, now exceeds supply. This change in the relationship between supply and demand requires a changed management regime, a change to positive management of visitor use, determining what is appropriate, providing the required infrastructure and management resources, and where necessary, limiting use accordingly.

### 4 Objectives

The objectives for visitor management in the Region are:

- better planning and management of all visitor activities;
- reduced visitor impacts as a result of improved site infrastructure and visitor conduct;
- government funding and revenue from other sources to meet the costs of planning, management, site infrastructure and visitor facilities; and
- lower environmental maintenance and infrastructure servicing costs.

### 5 Short-term actions

#### 5.1 Visitor management

- Develop a visitor management strategy
- Develop a camping management plan
- Categorise roads, define vehicle size limits and determine road maintenance priorities and practices
- Prepare a master plan for visitor access and facilities for the southern lakes area and construct priority facilities as stage one of a capital works program

#### 5.2 Commercial activities

- Amend the Recreation Areas Management Act 1988 to enable the introduction of a permit system for the commercial operators hiring vehicles for Fraser Island tours or vessels for accessing Fraser Island
- Develop operator licensing criteria and procedures for all commercial activities
- Convert current commercial tour operator permits to transferable site access permits
- Develop criteria and procedures for permitting four-wheel drive hire operators
- Develop criteria and procedures for permitting commercial guiding operators
- Develop criteria and procedures for permitting commercial operators providing transport to Fraser Island
- Develop policies for permitting Aboriginal cultural tourism operations
- Develop criteria for guide authorisation
- Clarify permit requirements for the Cooloolo Section of the Great Sandy National Park
- Improve provision of information to visitors on regulations and permit requirements, and enforcement

#### 5.3 Funding

- Endeavour to obtain increased funding from the Commonwealth Government

#### 5.4 New opportunities

- End the moratorium on new permits and call for applications for new permits for the limited number of sites in the Cooloolo Section of the Great Sandy National Park assessed as having additional capacity
- End the moratorium on the issue of new permits and call for applications for new permits for the limited number of sites on Fraser Island assessed as having additional capacity



### 5.5 Communication

- Establish consultation procedures with commercial operators
- Encourage tourism marketing organisations to diversify the promotion of Fraser Island

## 6 Medium-term actions

### 6.1 Planning and management

- Dedicate land and selected water areas as protected areas under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*
- Review the Department's visitor management responsibilities and functions in the Great Sandy Region and investigate opportunities for obtaining services by contract
- Monitor and research visitor use and impacts

### 6.2 Consultation and co-ordination

- Negotiate agreements under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* with the major accommodation providers

### 6.3 Revenue and funding

- Maximise contributions from local governments
- Negotiate service agreements for functions undertaken for other government agencies and local governments
- Ensure the efficient and effective use of all resources

### 6.4 Visitor infrastructure

- Negotiate agreements with the private sector to provide and manage facilities

### 6.5 Visitor and operator conduct

- Provide information to visitors on the World Heritage and protected area values of the Region, on the range of activities and facilities available, and on expected conduct
- Promote codes of conduct for visitors and commercial operators

## 7 Performance indicators

Indicators to be used to assess the outcomes of this review are:

- improved condition of the environment at the major visitor sites and routes
- management and use of sites and routes in accord with the management plan
- enhanced quality of visitor experience
- improved viability and ecological sustainability of the tourism industry

## Part 1 Report

### 1 Vision and objectives

#### 1.1 Vision

The *Great Sandy Region Management Plan* recommended a series of outcomes for the Region, two of which are particularly relevant to this review.

##### Recreation, tourism and visitor use

*By or before 2010, to have a diversity of high-quality recreation opportunities consistent with protection of the natural and cultural values of the Region.*

##### Tourism

*By or before 2010, for tourists to have access to the Region's natural and cultural heritage for appreciation and enjoyment consistent with the sustainable use, protection and presentation of the Region's heritage.*

From these outcomes, the vision for the future of visitor use in the Region is:

*For visitors to have access to the Region's diverse natural and cultural assets for appreciation, enjoyment and recreation, in a way that is ecologically sustainable and consistent with the protection of the natural and cultural values of the Region.*

#### 1.2 Need for change

The current approach to managing commercial activities in the Region was initiated in the early 1980s when the Department of Forestry introduced permits authorising operators 'to traverse a State Forest'. At the time it was appropriate for the level of visitor use and the expectations of those who visited the Region. This approach was based on the tour operations being a secondary use of an area of State Forest. There were more visitor sites and opportunities than the operators and visitors needed to use.

Over the intervening 15 years, the number of visitors has increased significantly. The demands for access to visitor sites and the use of those sites have grown and the present system of managing visitor use has been shown to be inadequate for current and future needs. The call for the environment to be managed better is widespread and this should be the first priority.

The Department of Environment engaged EDAW (Aust) Pty Ltd, Landscape Architects and Environmental Planners, to assess the environmental impacts of tourism activities in the Region. EDAW produced a report that assessed the condition of the environment at more than 100 major visitor sites and routes in the region.

The EDAW report assessed the current level of visitor use as unsustainable, given the current levels of infrastructure and management resources. At many sites, the levels of use are now exceeding the ability of the environment and the facilities to meet the demands of visitor use. At these sites, demand for visitor use now exceeds supply.

This change in relationship between supply and demand requires a changed management regime, a change to positive management of visitor use, determining what is appropriate, providing the required infrastructure and, where necessary, limiting use accordingly.

The Department of Environment's role is to actively manage the supply of visitor sites and opportunities — to plan for the future use of visitor sites, to consult on those plans, implement them by providing facilities and services and then manage site use and visitor impacts in accord with those plans.

There are finite limits to the amount of facilities, services and management which can be provided. Visitors and commercial operators have to accept there will be limits on visitor use. To do otherwise would be to modify the natural environment beyond acceptable limits, provide visitor experiences that do not meet reasonable expectations, and depreciate the values that attract people to the Region.

Where facilities and services have been provided and demand for recreation opportunities exceeds supply, limits on use will need to be adopted. Restrictions have been put on commercial tour operators for many years, but not on other commercial operators who also gain from the values of the Region. A more equitable sharing of these limits among commercial operators is required.

#### 1.3 Objectives

The objectives for visitor management in the Region are:

- better planning and management of all visitor activities;
- reduced visitor impacts as a result of improved site infrastructure and visitor conduct;
- government funding, and revenue from visitors, to meet the costs of planning, management, site infrastructure and visitor facilities; and
- lower environmental maintenance and infrastructure servicing costs.

## 1.4 Actions

To achieve these objectives a number of short and medium-term actions will be implemented:

### Short-term actions

- 1 visitor management
- 2 commercial activities
- 3 Funding
- 4 new opportunities
- 5 communication

### Medium-term actions

- 1 planning and management
- 2 consultation and co-ordination
- 3 revenue and funding
- 4 visitor infrastructure
- 5 visitor and operator conduct

## 1.5 Performance indicators

Throughout the review process, many calls have been made for the review to achieve real and tangible results. Participants in the review process have been concerned that the review should lead to real change. In response to these calls, performance indicators have been developed.

Indicators to be used to assess the outcomes of this review are:

- improved condition of the environment at the major visitor sites and routes
- management and use of sites and routes in accord with the management plan
- enhanced quality of visitor experience
- improved viability and ecological sustainability of the tourism industry

## 2 Short-term actions

### 2.1 Visitor management

#### 2.1.1 Develop a visitor management strategy

Visitor management throughout the Region will be co-ordinated through the development of a policy and planning framework which will become the basis for managing visitors, visitor use areas and all commercial activities. The strategy will enable staff and existing and potential commercial operators to better understand how visitor use is managed. The strategy will be developed over time as new components are added to it in response to emerging issues.

The visitor management strategy will be based on the current *Great Sandy Region Management Plan* and will provide for the management of access routes and visitor sites for all visitors. The recreation opportunity classes defined in the management plan will form the basis for the more detailed site and route planning.

The strategy will be supported by industry codes of practice for environmental management, education, interpretation and client service. Strategies for backpackers, campers and walkers will be components of the overall strategy.

#### 2.1.2 Develop a camping management plan

The EDAW report has identified the environmental impacts of beach camping in areas with no facilities as a major concern. Beach and lakeside camping is a traditional recreational activity in the Region and is also a popular activity with international visitors. As with many activities, the impacts of beach camping were acceptable at low levels of use, when areas had time to recover. This is often no longer possible.

The Commonwealth Government, through the World Heritage Unit of Environment Australia, has provided funding to prepare a camping management plan. This will identify potential sites for managed camping, how they can be developed, how beach camping can be better managed, how environmental impacts can be reduced, whether a booking system can be introduced and how the general conduct of campers can be improved.

#### 2.1.3 Categorise roads, define vehicle size limits and determine road maintenance priorities and practices

Roads will be categorised according to the intended level of use and appropriate size of vehicle. Vehicles will be classified according to size and the road category will determine which classes of vehicles can be used on which routes. These measures will be introduced in consultation with road users. If, as a result of these measures, commercial operators are required to change the routes they use or the vehicles they operate, they will be given adequate time to comply in accordance with reasonable commercial requirements and vehicle replacement schedules. Road maintenance standards and priorities will be determined on the basis of the road category. One-way systems will be introduced where practicable.

#### 2.1.4 Prepare a master plan for visitor access and facilities for the southern lakes area and construct priority facilities as stage one of a capital works program

Facilities and services at most sites have been developed piece by piece over time to meet emerging demands. Many sites are now being used beyond their capacity, resulting in environmental degradation and diminished visitor experiences.

Visitor sites will be designed, developed and maintained in accord with their recreation opportunity class, natural and cultural values, type and level of use and desired visitor experiences. The *Great Sandy Region Management Plan*, the EDAW report and the camping management plan provide a starting point for this process. Interested parties will be consulted and priorities determined. Funds will be sought and investment in new and redeveloped facilities will continue as funding becomes available.

At some sites facilities and visitor numbers will be limited to protect site values and to achieve desired visitor experiences. Site plans will also determine visitor capacities and the range of activities to be permitted at a site. Once site plans are prepared, work will proceed as soon as possible on implementing them. Not all actions will require high levels of spending. In some cases, actions might involve only changes in on-site management.

The first priority for the development of visitor infrastructure is the southern area from Lake McKenzie to Lake Boomanjin. Planning will be done on an area basis so a range of environments, facilities and user groups can be considered.

## 2.2 Commercial activities

### 2.2.1 Amend the Recreation Areas Management Act 1988 (RAM Act) to enable the introduction of a permit system for commercial operators hiring vehicles for Fraser Island tours or vessels for accessing Fraser Island

Backpacker tours are generally arranged by backpacker hostels which provide camping equipment and help backpackers to organise everything they need for their tour, but do not provide a driver. Tours are conducted using hire four-wheel-drive vehicles driven by one of the backpackers. These tours are promoted vigorously in Hervey Bay and other places frequented by backpackers, and in backpacker publications.

Backpacker tours are the growing sector of the market. Over the last three years the number of vehicles available for hire in Hervey Bay has increased from 86 to 142. The number of people buying camping permits at the River Heads Store, mainly backpackers, has increased from 21 000 to 40 000 in four years. Any continuation of growth in visitor numbers of this magnitude will place severe pressure on the environmental resources of Fraser Island and lead to further degradation of key visitor sites. Growth of the hire boat market is also expected in future and these operations should also be covered by these provisions.

The Act defines commercial activities but can be used only to control commercial activities which are carried out in the recreation area. This means that commercial operators who arrange backpacker tours are not controlled as other tour operators are.

The aim is to introduce a permit system for the backpacker hostel arranged tours which are operated with commercial four-wheel-drive hire operators. This will be done on a similar basis to the current commercial tour operator permit system so all commercial transport operators who gain from accessing Fraser Island are treated equitably. Introduction of these permits will require amending the Act.

The objectives of introducing a permit system for backpacker tours will be to:

- treat all commercial operators equitably;
- gain co-insurance cover for the Department of Environment in the event of accident claims;
- improve vehicle safety standards in an effort to reduce accidents and personal injury;
- regulate the number of backpacker tours to the island;
- gain a means for recovering fines for offences; and
- gain information on visitor use to better manage visitor impacts.

Backpacker groups, like all other visitors to the island, are required to obtain vehicle access permits and camping permits and pay fees. These groups will continue to pay the existing fees.

This change will enable the Department of Environment to regulate the number of hire four-wheel-drive vehicles available for tours on Fraser Island, or on the number of tours going to Fraser Island at any time.

### 2.2.2 Develop operator licensing criteria and procedures for all commercial activities

Current commercial activity permits contain conditions which relate to the permit holder or the operation of the tour. The conditions which relate to the permit holder, and which in future will have to be met before a permit is issued, will be formalised into a set of criteria to ensure that the responsibilities of operating commercial activities in protected areas are met. Depending on the outcome of on-going consultation with industry, these criteria could be contained in a separate operator licence or alternatively could be incorporated as permit conditions. These criteria will be different from those of the recently introduced National Ecotourism Accreditation Program which accredits ecotourism products and services, rather than tourism operators. Only operators who meet the criteria will be issued with permits for any commercial operation.

Possible criteria could include:

- a knowledge and understanding of the Act and Regulations, the management plan and visitor management requirements;
- evidence that the operator is a suitable person by considering, for example, any recent criminal record, any recorded offences against the Act or bankruptcy; and
- evidence that the operator has a good understanding of nature-based activities in protected areas.

Operators will be required to meet co-insurance requirements and comply with relevant Acts, Regulations and management plans. Periodic update courses could be a requirement. These requirements will not overlap with Queensland Transport's current requirements. Where possible, application and compliance procedures will be co-ordinated.

### 2.2.3 Convert current commercial tour operator permits to transferable site access permits

Current commercial tour operator permits will be converted to site access permits. Tour routes will not be part of the permit system, but operators will be required to travel by the most direct route in accord with road categories and vehicle classes. For greater security, operators will be issued six-year permits.

Tour operators will then be allowed to divide or amalgamate site access permits and consequently will be able to change and adapt their tours to meet changing market conditions. Elements of permit capacity will become transferable between operators, which is not allowed under current policies. Transfer requirements will be defined clearly.

In 1988 the Queensland Recreation Areas Management Board introduced a policy which allowed operators who carried over 70 percent of their permit capacity to be sold a 10 percent increase in capacity. This policy included provision for a review if increases in capacity resulted in excessive use of particular sites. After two years, the 10 percent increases were withheld pending the introduction of a new policy. Over the last eight years, operators who have qualified for 10 percent increases have been notified that they qualify, but that increases have been withheld.

This has led to considerable expectation among operators that these increases will be granted eventually. Priority will now be given to resolving the issue of these increases in consultation with permitted operators. The full extent of the increases which have been offered but withheld will be determined and the impact of the increased number of visitors on the condition of the environment at each of the sites assessed.

Where environmental conditions allow, and where appropriate peak site capacities and site access conditions can be established, it is proposed that increases in capacity will be offered to those operators who have qualified. In accordance with the original policy, the additional capacity will be sold to operators at market rates that will be assessed on a commercial basis.

At some sites, granting all of the withheld increases would lead to a significant increase in capacity and ultimately an increase in visitor numbers beyond sustainable levels. Had the moratorium not been introduced, in response to concerns about the condition of some sites, it is doubtful that the policy of 10 percent increases would still have been in force. Whether or not the full extent of the withheld increases can be offered will be dependent on the above environmental and site management factors.

Once this issue has been resolved with the existing operators, the policy of offering 10 percent increases in capacity will be revoked as it is no longer sustainable. In line with the need to provide for the sustainable use of visitor sites, provisions for reducing unused capacity will also be introduced, but will include allowance for general economic conditions and adverse natural events.

Once site capacities had been determined as part of the site planning process, additional site capacity would be made available only where it had been determined that additional use would be ecologically sustainable. This could be where additional facilities or on-site management had been provided. The additional capacity would be made available through an open process of tendering or balloting.

Each operator will be issued a single permit detailing the capacities held at each site and any conditions which are attached to these capacities. This permit will be updated and re-issued each time capacity is traded. Site capacity will be made available for a rolling six-year period with three-yearly reviews.

The transition from the current permit arrangements will be negotiated with operators holding permits.

### 2.2.4 Develop criteria and procedures for permitting four-wheel-drive hire operators

This action will follow changes to the RAM Act. Commercial operators will be required to meet co-insurance and reporting requirements. This change will enable the Department of Environment to regulate the number of visitors using hire four-wheel-drive vehicles. This could include limits on the number of hire four-wheel-drive tour vehicles available for use on the island, or on the number going to the island at any time. Alternatively, limits could be placed on the total number of people using hire vehicles in the Region at one time. In accordance with the 1998-99 State Budget new fees will not be introduced for these permits.

### 2.2.5 Develop criteria and procedures for permitting commercial guiding operators

There is demand for commercial guiding services by visitors to Fraser Island. This demand comes from local and international visitors who are unfamiliar with the island or inexperienced at four-wheel-driving on sand. Some of these visitors are believed willing to pay for a guide, who might or might not drive the vehicle, to obtain a better understanding and appreciation of the island. People travelling with an experienced guide would be better informed on appropriate conduct on the island which should result in less impact.

Commercial guiding can be permitted under the current legislation but permits have not been issued because of the moratorium on the issue of new permits. Criteria for obtaining these permits will be developed and applications sought. Permits will only be for the provision of a guiding service and not for the operation or hire of any tour vehicle. The criteria will need to ensure that these services do not become pseudo commercial tour or four-wheel-drive hire operators. In accordance with the 1998–99 State Budget, new fees will not be introduced for these permits.

### 2.2.6 Develop criteria and procedures for permits for commercial operators providing transport to Fraser Island

The aim is to include barge, taxi and air service operators in the permit system on a similar basis to current commercial tour operators so all commercial transport operators who access Fraser Island are treated equitably.

These services come within the current definition of commercial activities in the RAM Act. To date, operators have been granted authorities under the Act but have not been issued permits and therefore have not been required to meet the same permit requirements as other commercial operators.

Objectives of including these operators as permit holders will be to:

- treat all commercial operators equitably;
- gain co-insurance cover for the Department of Environment in the event of accident claims;
- gain a means of regulating visitation to the island at some future date; and
- gain information on visitor use to better manage visitor impacts.

Criteria for obtaining permits will be developed and applications sought. In accordance with the 1998–99 State Budget new fees will not be introduced for these permits.

### 2.2.7 Develop policies for permitting Aboriginal cultural tourism operations

The Aboriginal history of the Region is not reflected in the current range of tourism products. Aboriginal groups have expressed a desire to have greater involvement in tourism to meet the growing demand for Aboriginal cultural tourism, particularly from international visitors. Early consideration will be given to facilitating greater Aboriginal involvement in tourism in the Region.

The genuineness and appropriateness of any proposed Aboriginal cultural tourism operations will be considered by the Department of Environment with a representative Aboriginal group. Policies for assessing these proposals will be agreed and established before a call is made for applications.

### 2.2.8 Develop criteria for guide authorisation

Everyone who conducts commercial guided tours in the protected areas and therefore assumes a responsibility for visitor management will need to be authorised. This will include tour vehicle drivers, guides in private or hire vehicles and leaders of tag-along tours. As with operator accreditation, the objective will be not to overlap with Queensland Transport requirements.

Guide authorisation will be continuing and be subject to course attendance requirements. Personal authorisation will not be transferable.

### 2.2.9 Clarify permit requirements for the Cooloolo Section of the Great Sandy National Park

Some minor changes will be made to simplify and improve the current commercial activity permit administration procedures and to align them as closely as possible with the Fraser Island permit system. However, as the RAM Act does not apply to the Cooloolo Section there may continue to be some differences.

### 2.2.10 Improve provision of information to visitors on regulations and permit requirements, and enforcement

The degree of compliance of visitors with regulations and codes of behaviour affects the cost of visitor management. The recent appointment of a regional enforcement officer based in Maryborough will significantly improve the Department's enforcement

capability. Local staff will receive guidance and training in enforcement. A more active enforcement role will reduce visitor impacts and improve the quality of other visitors' experiences. Current efforts to provide better information to visitors will be continued.

## 2.3 Funding

### 2.3.1 Endeavour to obtain increased funding from the Commonwealth Government

Visitors to the Region now pay more than \$2 million a year towards its management. While this is a considerable amount, the total cost of managing visitor use and commercial activities in these protected areas is significantly higher. Some of the cost of managing the Region, including its basic natural resource management costs, are incurred regardless of visitor requirements.

There is a widespread view that to recover all operating costs from the visitors to the Region would be unfair and unrealistic. To do so would require substantially increased fees which would have serious implications for individual businesses, the tourism industry, the general economy of the surrounding regions, and the provision of equitable access for all visitors.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts' report *Managing Australia's World Heritage* identified Fraser Island as being in particular need of increased funding.

The Commonwealth Government currently provides funds on a project basis and this process is, subject to normal budgetary processes, expected to continue in the future. Over the last four years, annual funding from the Commonwealth has increased from around \$300,000 to \$950,000 in 1997–98.

The Department of Environment will liaise more closely with Commonwealth agencies in an effort to gain increased funding for agreed projects.

## 2.4 New opportunities

### 2.4.1 End the moratorium on new permits and call for applications for new permits for the limited number of sites in the Cooloolo Section of Great Sandy National Park assessed as having additional capacity

Changes to simplify and improve the current permits for the Cooloolo Section and some other actions will be given high priority. These changes to the existing permits will be completed before any call is made for new applications. Policies and procedures will need to be in place before applications are called for.

The Department of Environment will call for applications for these new permits. The EDAW report will be used to determine where there is excess capacity for commercial operations. Guidelines will list which sites have spare capacity and what activities will be acceptable. New and existing operators will be able to apply for these new opportunities. Applicants could be required to provide assessments of the likely impacts of their activities and how these impacts would be managed. As there has been a moratorium, a number of applications are likely.

As only limited changes to the permit system are proposed for Cooloolo, this area will be done first.

### 2.4.2 End the moratorium on new permits and call for applications for new permits for the limited number of sites on Fraser Island assessed as having additional capacity

The EDAW report determined that only 12 of the visitor sites which were assessed had excess capacity. Some could be attractive to commercial operators seeking to provide different experiences in different areas, but others might not be. No additional capacity will be made available at the other sites which have been assessed as overused or at capacity, unless more facilities are provided. A number of steps will need to be completed before applications are called for new permits.

Included in this series of actions are some which will be given high priority. Once these priority actions are under way and staff resources are available, opportunities for new permits will be considered. The conversion of existing permits to the new system will need to be completed as a priority action. Policies and procedures for considering applications for new permits will need to be in place before applications are called for. The EDAW report will be used to determine where there is excess capacity for commercial operations.

The Department of Environment will then call for applications for these new permits. The guidelines will list which sites have spare capacity and what activities will be acceptable. New and existing operators will be able to apply for these new opportunities.

As the moratorium has been in place for some time, a number of applications is likely. Applicants could be required to provide assessments of the likely impacts of their activities and how these impacts would be managed.

## **2.5 Communication**

### **2.5.1 Establish consultation procedures with commercial operators**

Management of the Fraser Island World Heritage Area has changed with the establishment of a Ministerial Council, Management Committee, Community Advisory Committee and Scientific Advisory Committee. This new management structure will play an important role in setting the future directions for the management of Fraser Island. A consultation process is needed for the other parts of the Region.

Direct consultation will be required with tour operators, transport providers, adjoining accommodation providers, residents, conservation organisations, Aboriginal groups, tourism organisations and local governments. This will enable day-to-day issues involving site planning and development and visitor management to be resolved within the overall policies determined by the Ministerial Council and associated committees.

There will be considerable consultation with tourism operators during the implementation of the review. On-going consultation procedures will be established to build on the progress achieved during this review, so as to create a productive partnership between the Department of Environment and the tourism industry.

### **2.5.2 Encourage tourism marketing organisations to diversify Fraser Island promotion**

The advertising and promotion of Fraser Island relies heavily on a limited range of images, notably of Lake McKenzie. This has led to a high level of demand for access to Lake McKenzie and the consequent high level of impacts. The Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation, regional and local tourism associations and others involved in tourism marketing will be encouraged to use a diverse range of images to promote Fraser Island.

## **3 Medium-term actions**

### **3.1 Planning and management**

#### **3.1.1 Dedicate land and selected water areas as protected areas under the Nature Conservation Act 1992**

There would be substantial benefits in adding some foreshore and marine areas, including Cooloola Beach and parts of the Noosa River, to the protected area system. By dedicating these areas, all planning, management, administration and regulation of commercial activities in the Region could be better co-ordinated. The cardinal principle of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* — preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values — could then be adopted consistently throughout the Region.

#### **3.1.2 Review the Department's visitor management responsibilities and functions in the Great Sandy Region and investigate opportunities for obtaining services by contract**

The remoteness and difficulty of access to many parts of the Region have led to the Department of Environment becoming highly self-reliant in many areas of its operations and undertaking a range of community functions normally provided by other government agencies and local governments. Some should revert to these agencies, and some maintenance and servicing activities currently undertaken by the Department could be undertaken by the private sector. Increasing demands are being placed on the Department at a time when resources are insufficient to meet all these varying demands. The cost of various functions should be reviewed. Where it is cost effective to do so, these activities should be undertaken by contract.

#### **3.1.3 Monitor and research visitor use and impacts**

The use that visitors make of sites and routes will be monitored and researched. The effectiveness of the strategies and actions to manage visitor use and reduce impacts could be assessed and then modified as necessary.

### **3.2 Consultation and co-ordination**

#### **3.2.1 Negotiate agreements under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 with major accommodation providers**

The *Nature Conservation Act 1992* provides for agreements to be negotiated as an alternative to permits for commercial activities. The nature and scale of operations of the major accommodation providers are such that a broader agreement than that available as a tour permit is required.

### **3.3 Revenue and funding**

#### **3.3.1 Maximise contributions from local governments**

The natural values of the Region play a major role in attracting visitors to the area. Many of the economic benefits which are derived from these visitors occur in the adjoining urban areas. Local governments which gain from this increased level of economic activity have a role to play in contributing to the management of the protected areas. An appropriate level of contribution from local governments would help to maintain the quality of the protected areas from which these local communities gain.

#### **3.3.2 Negotiate service agreements for functions undertaken for other government agencies and local governments**

On Fraser Island in particular, the Department of Environment takes on the role of providing a range of services across all levels of government. No other government agencies at any level has a permanent presence. Consequently the Department becomes the first point of call in any emergency. In a remote area where access is difficult this can be time-consuming. Basic services such as road access and rubbish removal are provided by the Department, rather than local government, and some costs are met by the ratepayers.

#### **3.3.3 Ensure efficient and effective use of all resources**

The coastal, sand-based and largely island nature of the Region make it a difficult and costly area to manage and service. The Department of Environment seeks continuous improvement in its business practices and there is an on-going effort to improve the efficient and effective use of all resources. In seeking additional funding from outside sources, the Department should show it is making best use of the funds and resources it receives.

### **3.4 Visitor facilities**

#### **3.4.1 Negotiate agreements with the private sector to provide and manage facilities**

To date, the public and private sectors have both had a role in providing visitor facilities and accommodation. The underlying cost of providing and maintaining management infrastructure and client services in a number of locations, effectively in remote conditions, is not widely appreciated or understood. The private sector provides built and camping accommodation on private holdings adjoining or surrounded by



protected areas. The public sector provides camping grounds and some limited built accommodation in the protected areas. The public sector generally provides and maintains the visitor infrastructure such as boardwalks, toilets, roads and walking tracks in the protected areas.

In the face of many competing demands, governments at all levels have found it difficult to justify allocating the level of funds necessary to provide and maintain services. There is evidence this has led to low levels of maintenance and unacceptable levels of environmental impact at a large number of sites and on many access routes. The public and private mix of facility provision and management should be reassessed in an effort to reduce environmental degradation and provide better visitor experiences.

### 3.5 Visitor and operator conduct

#### 3.5.1 Provide information to visitors on the World Heritage and protected area values of the Region, on the range of activities and facilities available, and on expected conduct

Many visitors to the Region have little prior knowledge of its values or of the need to take care in visiting these protected areas. Continuing efforts will be made to provide better information to visitors in readily accessible ways.

#### 3.5.2 Promote codes of conduct for visitors and commercial operators

This is an additional way of improving conduct without having to impose more regulation. It allows for industry development and enforcement of agreed standards.

## 4 Implementation

The following implementation schedule has been developed for the short-term actions:

|                              |                                  | 1998 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1999 |     |     |     |     |     |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|                              |                                  | May  | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan  | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun |
| <b>Visitor management</b>    |                                  |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.1.1                        | Visitor management strategy      |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.1.2                        | Camping plan                     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.1.3                        | Roads, vehicles                  |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.1.4                        | Southern lakes master plan       |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| <b>Commercial activities</b> |                                  |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.2.1                        | RAM Act amendments               |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.2.2                        | Operator licensing               |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.2.3                        | Site access permits              |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.2.4                        | Four-wheel-drive hire operations |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.2.5                        | Commercial guiding operations    |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.2.6                        | Commercial transport operations  |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.2.7                        | Aboriginal cultural operations   |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.2.8                        | Driver/guide authorisation       |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.2.9                        | Cooloolo permit administration   |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.2.10                       | Information and enforcement      |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| <b>Funding</b>               |                                  |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.3.1                        | Commonwealth funding             |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| <b>New opportunities</b>     |                                  |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.4.1                        | New permits, Cooloolo            |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.4.2                        | New permits, Fraser Island       |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| <b>Communication</b>         |                                  |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.5.1                        | Consultation procedures          |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.5.2                        | Tourism marketing                |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |



## Part 2 Background information

### 1 Review process

#### 1.1 Background

The Department of Environment, in conjunction with the Department of Tourism, Small Business and Industry, undertook this review of tourism activities in the Great Sandy Region. The review included consideration of tourism opportunities, access, tour operations, permitting arrangements and charges for commercial activities.

#### 1.2 Great Sandy Region Management Plan

The review has contributed to implementing the management plan, achieving desired outcomes and completing some of the plan's proposed actions.

The review focused on the following key outcomes from the management plan, as they relate to commercial activities:

##### 1.2.1 3.01 Recreation, tourism and visitor use

By or before 2010, to have a diversity of high-quality recreation opportunities consistent with protection of the natural and cultural values of the Region.

##### 1.2.2 3.04 Permit arrangements

By or before 2010, to have a permit system in place which provides a mechanism for visitor management to control visitor numbers, collect money in a cost-effective, simple and convenient manner, and to collect visitor use data.

##### 1.2.3 3.05 Charges for access and use

By or before 2010, to have permit fees which reflect the cost of providing recreation opportunities available to visitors to the Region and which should not adversely affect access by any particular social group.

##### 1.2.4 3.10 Tourism

By or before 2010, for tourists to have access the Region's natural and cultural heritage for appreciation and enjoyment consistent with the sustainable use, protection and presentation of the Region's heritage.

A large number of other outcomes were also considered as they relate to the above key outcomes. These included World Heritage obligations, Aboriginal interests, roads, provision of services, recreational activities and impact assessment.

#### 1.3 Review objectives

Within the Great Sandy Region:

- assess the physical impacts of the current level of tourism and recreational activities;
- assess the opportunities for increased tourism and recreational activity;
- recommend levels of visitor use which provide quality visitor experiences while protecting natural, cultural and social values; and
- recommend policies and practices for the management of tourism and recreation.

The first two objectives were met by the EDAW report as detailed in Part 2, Section 8, Tourism impacts assessment. As the review progressed, less emphasis was placed on the third objective as the priority became better management of the current levels of visitor use. The fourth objective was met by the short and medium term actions in Part 1, Sections 2 and 3. The work of the review became increasingly oriented toward Fraser Island which was considered to be the highest priority.

#### 1.4 Review area

The review area was the Great Sandy Region as defined in the management plan. The area included the Fraser Island World Heritage Area, the Cooloola Section of Great Sandy National Park, Inskip Peninsula, Noosa River, Lake Cootharaba, Tin Can Inlet, Great Sandy Strait and Hervey Bay. Mon Repos Conservation Park was not included. Whale watching activities in Hervey Bay are being reviewed separately.

#### 1.5 Review management

The review was managed by a steering committee comprising the Manager (Great Sandy) Lachlan Fullerton and the Director, Tourism Projects, Ralph Henderson.

#### 1.6 Background information

The review included an assessment of previous studies of the Region and relevant literature.

#### 1.7 Preliminary consultation

Government agencies, local government authorities, tourism associations and operators and community organisations were consulted.

#### 1.8 Issues paper

An issues paper *Managing tourism in the Great Sandy Region* was issued in July 1997 and 600 copies were distributed as a basis for consultation, comment and submissions.

#### 1.9 Meetings

Public meetings to discuss the review were held in Hervey Bay, Maryborough, Rainbow Beach and Noosaville early in August 1997. The meetings were well attended and a wide range of issues was discussed. Meetings were also held with industry and community groups and the advisory committees.

#### 1.10 Submissions

There was a positive response to the issues paper and 47 submissions were received. A number of the submissions gave detailed consideration to many issues and were a significant contribution to the review process.

#### 1.11 Progress report

A progress report *Meeting visitor expectations and managing visitor impacts* was issued in November 1997 for consultation before the final report was prepared. Four hundred copies were distributed and 32 submissions were received.

## 2 Regional values

### 2.1 Natural heritage

The Region contains the oldest and largest number of independent coastal dune systems recorded in the world, as well as the oldest known time sequence of soils with giant profiles more than 25m thick.

The habitats of a number of threatened terrestrial and marine animals and plants occur within the Region. The marine areas, associated tidal wetlands of Hervey Bay and the Great Sandy Strait and adjacent beaches seasonally support and harbour a diversity of marine life including populations of humpback whales, dugong, dolphins, turtles, and trans-equatorial migratory wading birds that depend upon the Region for roosting and staging during their annual migrations. Woodlands and forests provide habitats for several species of migratory and sedentary birds.

The Region's extent, diversity, isolation and relative freedom from disturbance allow for the continuation of interrelated and interdependent ecosystem components required for viable populations of species and for continued maintenance of all biological, ecological and evolutionary processes.

### 2.2 Cultural heritage

The Region contains extensive archaeological evidence of past Aboriginal occupation and use of the land. In addition many Aboriginal people claim a traditional association with the area and strong cultural ties with particular localities.

The Region contains more than 50 shipwrecks of varying significance, including the *Maheno* and *Cherry Venture*. There are five lighthouses and two light stations dating from 1866. A secret World War II Z Force commando training site was located at North White Cliffs on Fraser Island.

### 2.3 Tourism and recreation

The Region provides recreation opportunities ranging from the experiences of the townships and resorts to the natural experiences of the remote beaches, forests, lakes and streams.

Fraser Island and Cooloola provide some of the best areas for coastal four-wheel-driving in eastern Australia. The Great Sandy Strait, Hervey Bay, the Noosa River system and the ocean waters from Sandy Cape to Noosa are popular recreational fishing areas. These waterways offer a range of boat-based recreation opportunities including sailing, sailboarding, pleasure boating, skiing, canoeing and boat-based camping.

Some locations within the Region are highly regarded by local communities for the recreation opportunities they provide. The Region is also valued for its opportunities for picnics, short walks, photography, relaxation and nature appreciation.

### 2.4 Economic

Tourism and commercial fishing are important to the economic base of the region providing direct and indirect employment. Tourism generates substantial economic benefits and employment particularly in adjacent communities.

### 2.5 Scenic and aesthetic

There are outstanding landscapes of exceptional beauty within the Region including long uninterrupted sweeps of ocean beach. The spectacular dune landscape is interspersed with numerous sandblows. Fraser Island has more than 40 freshwater dune lakes of diverse size, elevation, shape, depth, colour and surrounding vegetation. The extensive wallum and heathland communities, the Noosa River and the Great Sandy Strait add significant scenic value to the Region.

## 3 Legislative provisions

### 3.1 Fraser Island Public Access Act 1985

In the early 1980s, there was considerable public concern about the impacts of recreation activities on the environment of Fraser Island. In particular, camping and four-wheel-drive vehicles were having major impacts on the beach and foredune areas. There were also concerns about the large number of four-wheel-drive vehicle accidents on the Island and about the rubbish being left lying around. At the time, Fraser Island was predominantly state forest, with the northern part being national park. The beaches were not part of the state forest or the national park and many of the most popular foredune areas were within mining leases.

As these problems could not be resolved with the legislation that existed at the time, the *Fraser Island Public Access Act 1985* was enacted. The Act provided for the control of vehicles, the management of recreation activities and for raising revenue from visitors. The Fraser Island Recreation Area was declared under the Act. The recreation area extended to the low water mark around the island and incorporated most of the island's state land, including national parks, state forests, beaches and land under mining leases.

The Act established the Fraser Island Recreation Authority which was responsible for the administration of the Act. The Authority consisted of the two Ministers who were responsible for most of the land on the Island. Responsible to the Authority was the Fraser Island Recreation Board on which the two departments were represented. The Act provided the Board with a wide range of powers for the management of the recreation area.

While the Board was legally independent of the two departments, it was not a separate government agency. The Board's role was to facilitate recreation management on Fraser Island by the two departments. The Board established policy and broad administrative procedures for recreation management on the Island and resolved differences in approach between the two departments. Field management continued to be undertaken by departmental staff using the additional powers under the Act.

The Fraser Island user-pays system was the first such system for State land in Queensland and the proposal caused a degree of public debate. To overcome public concern that the revenue raised from fees might be directed to consolidated revenue or other Government purposes, the Act stipulated that a separate fund would be established for the funds of the Board and that expenditure of the Board's funds would only occur for the purposes of the Act.

### 3.2 Recreation Areas Management Act 1988

In 1988 the *Fraser Island Public Access Act 1985* was replaced by the *Recreation Areas Management Act 1988*. The new Act continued the operation of the Fraser Island Recreation Area and extended the recreation area concept to enable additional recreation areas to be established in other parts of Queensland.

The *Recreation Areas Management Act 1988* was based on similar principles and was similar in operation to the *Fraser Island Public Access Act 1985*. There were some administrative differences between the Acts, but many were minor, reflecting developments in legislative drafting practices and government management style designed to provide more flexible methods of operation.

The major differences between the two Acts were:

- the recreation area concept was extended beyond Fraser Island to other parts of the state;
- private lands could be included in recreation areas, with the landholder's consent; and
- the Board was required to prepare management plans for recreation areas.

### 3.3 Recreation Areas Management Act Amendment Act 1990

After the *Recreation Areas Management Act 1988* was declared, there was concern that the Act might be used to allow development in recreation areas, and in particular in national parks in recreation areas. The Government responded to these concerns by making a number of amendments to the Act in the *Recreation Areas Management Act Amendment Act 1990*.

The amendments included:

- minor revision of the statutory objectives of the Act;
- clarification that the Act could not prevail over the objectives of primary management legislation for tenures within recreation areas;
- minor revision of the statutory functions and powers of the Board;



- alteration of the Board membership; and
- clarification and expansion of the management planning provisions of the Act, to provide the plans with stronger legal status, and to provide better mechanisms for amending and revising management plans.

### 3.4 Nature Conservation Act 1992

In 1994 the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1975* was superseded by the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. The Nature Conservation Act provides for a system of protected areas as part of a comprehensive strategy for nature conservation in Queensland. Protected areas include national parks, national parks (scientific), national parks (Aboriginal land), national parks (Torres Strait Islander land), conservation parks, resources reserves, nature refuges and coordinated conservation areas. The Act provides for the making of regulations and commercial activities are managed under the provisions of the *Nature Conservation Regulation 1994*.

At present there are management inconsistencies between Fraser Island which is managed under the *Recreation Areas Management Act 1988* and the Cooloola Section of the Great Sandy National Park which is managed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. However, the recent gazettal of the southern half of Fraser Island as national park could lead to some management changes. Although both areas are part of the Great Sandy Region each has different permit and regulatory arrangements.

## 4 Great Sandy Region Management Plan

The 1994 *Great Sandy Region Management Plan* proposes guidelines and actions which directly and indirectly impact on the management of commercial activities. The management plan covers the Fraser Island Recreation Area and the Cooloola Section of the Great Sandy National Park.

The management plan identifies four broad strategy areas:

- natural and cultural resource management
- community infrastructure and development
- recreation tourism and visitor use
- sustainable resource harvesting

Within each broad strategy there are guidelines and actions to be undertaken to achieve the desired outcomes and to put the management plan into effect.

Implementation of the plan is monitored and each action has been allocated a priority and a status code. The status codes are:

- 1 Action has been completed or policy is in place and is being adhered to.
- 2 Action is making substantial progress in all areas (that is policy and/or planning stages are complete and implementation is happening in all areas; time and funds have been allocated).
- 3 Some work has commenced in all or some areas (that is policy and/or planning stages are complete; time and funds have been allocated).
- 4 Policy and/or planning stages are complete but have not been implemented.
- 5 Planning is in progress (staff time allocated, funding for planning allocated).
- 6 Work is reactive only and not to a set plan (that is no funding or staff time allocated to planning).
- 7 Action has not commenced or is no longer relevant.

A number relate to managing commercial activities and this review has advanced these actions as shown in the following table. Implementing actions from this review will see further progress toward completing these and other management plan actions.

| Issue | Heading                             | Action  | Description   | Priority | Pre-review status | Current status | Change |
|-------|-------------------------------------|---------|---|----------|-------------------|----------------|--------|
| 3.04  | Permit arrangements                 | 3.04.1  | All existing permitting systems for the Great Sandy Region will be reviewed. The investigation will identify the various shortcomings or benefits of existing systems and means by which permittees may be provided with greater security.  | high     | 6                 | 1              | 5      |
| 3.04  | Permit arrangements                 | 3.04.2  | Alternative permitting systems will be evaluated in order to develop a system which achieves the desired outcome and is consistent with statewide Department of Environment permit systems.   | high     | 6                 | 1              | 5      |
| 3.01  | Recreation, tourism and visitor use | 3.01.10 | Differences between the current standard of recreation settings and the desired standards will be identified and quantified.  | med      | 7                 | 2              | 5      |
| 3.01  | Recreation, tourism and visitor use | 3.01.7  | An inventory of recreation settings within the Great Sandy Region will be conducted to collect base-line data on biophysical, social and managerial attributes of those recreational settings. The inventory will include the use of photographs, video and other site survey techniques. | med      | 7                 | 3              | 4      |
| 3.10  | Tourism                             | 3.10.13 | The existing Fraser Island and Cooloola commercial tour operator permit arrangements will be thoroughly reviewed and a single set of permit arrangements for all commercial operations within the Region will be developed and implemented.   | high     | 6                 | 2              | 4      |
| 3.01  | Recreation, tourism and visitor use | 3.01.8  | The road and vehicle track system within the Region will be categorised and carrying capacities will be defined for each destination to establish a basis for management of tourist and recreational use in the Region.   | high     | 5                 | 2              | 3      |
| 3.10  | Tourism                             | 3.10.1  | An assessment of tourism demand focused on the Great Sandy Region will be undertaken and a program for provision of adequate visitor facilities will be developed. This will include an analysis of historic and future visitor markets.  | high     | 6                 | 3              | 3      |

| Issue | Heading                             | Action  | Description  | Priority | Pre-review status | Current status | Change |
|-------|-------------------------------------|---------|--|----------|-------------------|----------------|--------|
| 3.10  | Tourism                             | 3.10.14 | As a basis for assessing existing and proposed commercial tour operations, nature-based and culture-based destinations within the Great Sandy Region will be characterised according to the intent of their recreation zoning, site characteristics, and the type and extent of management input required to sustain a defined tourism opportunity. Site characterisation will include the physical and visitor experience dimensions and the relative availability of comparable opportunities. | high     | 6                 | 3              | 3      |
| 3.09  | Recreational driving                | 3.09.10 | Roads, tracks and beaches within the Region will be classified according to pre-determined standards reflecting driving conditions and maintenance requirements.   | high     | 5                 | 2              | 3      |
| 3.05  | Charges for access and use          | 3.05.1  | A simplified charge system which reflects the opportunities provided in the Region but allows equitable access to the Region will be investigated.   | high     | 7                 | 5              | 2      |
| 3.10  | Tourism                             | 3.10.9  | A system of accreditation for tour operators will be investigated.   | high     | 5                 | 3              | 2      |
| 2.07  | Aircraft landing facilities         | 2.07.7  | Where aircraft provide public access other than on a charter basis, negotiations will be held with private sector operators to establish licence arrangements which ensure regular and reliable transport services within safety operating guidelines, and are at a reasonable and stable cost to users.   | low      | 7                 | 5              | 2      |
| 3.01  | Recreation, tourism and visitor use | 3.01.9  | Indicators by which changes in recreation settings can be measured over time will be identified and standards to be maintained will be established to protect environmental quality and to maintain the type and quality of recreation opportunities on offer.   | med      | 7                 | 5              | 2      |
| 1.03  | Aboriginal interests                | 1.03.9  | Opportunities for Aboriginal people to be involved actively in cultural tourism in the Great Sandy Region will be encouraged.  | high     | 6                 | 5              | 1      |
| 3.07  | Public contact                      | 3.07.10 | Minimum training accreditation requirements for commercial tour operators within the Region will be established.   | med      | 6                 | 5              | 1      |
| 3.10  | Tourism                             | 3.10.10 | An accreditation/recognition scheme will be developed for use by commercial tour operators on approved promotional material where the operator's guides have undertaken a tour operator's course and the operation meets Department agreed standards.  | high     | 6                 | 5              | 1      |
| 3.10  | Tourism                             | 3.10.15 | Within the Great Sandy Region, certain areas will be developed and promoted for use by commercial operators, and other areas for primarily local and private visitors.   | high     | 6                 | 5              | 1      |
| 3.10  | Tourism                             | 3.10.12 | Opportunities to cater for the backpacker market within the region will be developed.  | high     | 6                 | 5              | 1      |
| 3.12  | Camping                             | 3.12.18 | An inventory of campsite conditions throughout the Region will be established and the condition of campsites monitored regularly.  | med      | 6                 | 5              | 1      |

## 5 Commercial tour operations

Commercial tours have been undertaken on Fraser Island for more than 25 years. In 1982 permits were introduced for tour operators under the *Forestry Act 1959*.

The aims of the permit system were to:

- prevent conflict at popular sites;
- minimise damage to the natural features and to roads;
- provide an improved standard of passenger safety; and
- provide an improved standard of information and passenger service.

The permits contained conditions relating to passenger capacity, tour routes and vehicle types. These permits have been refined over the years in consultation with the commercial tour operators and with other Government agencies.

The *Fraser Island Public Access Act 1985* established the basis of the current commercial tour operators policy and management practices and introduced fees for commercial tours and for other commercial activities.

The Queensland Recreation Areas Management Board (QRAMB) took over responsibility for recreation management in the Fraser Island Recreation Area from 1 July 1989 following the introduction of the *Recreation Areas Management Act 1988*. The Board reviewed the policies on commercial tours and made minor changes which included a requirement for an annual policy review.

Subsequent reviews were deferred pending the outcome of the *Commission of Inquiry into the conservation, management and use of Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region*, and the preparation of the *Great Sandy Region Management Plan*.

Commercial operations are currently managed in accordance with the relevant legislation, the Department's corporate plan and QRAMB policies.

### 5.1 Legislative definitions

Commercial activities are conducted under the authority of the *Recreation Areas Management Act 1988* and the *Nature Conservation Regulation 1994*. The relevant sections are listed below.

#### 5.1.1 Recreation Areas Management Act 1988

Part 1—Preliminary  
Interpretation

**Section 5.** In this Act:

'commercial activity' includes selling, offering or exposing for sale any article, plying for hire any goods or services, photography for commercial purposes, the conduct of a tour and the conduct for payment or other consideration of any activity utilising the recreation, education, conservation, commercial and production values of a recreation area.

'commercial tour operator' means a person who in return for payment of moneys or for any other reward or consideration, conducts or causes to be conducted or who holds himself out as available to conduct any member of the public on a tour.

'tour' includes any safari, excursion, visit, outing or journey.

Part 8—Prohibitions and permits in recreation areas  
Prohibition of commercial activity

**Section 26.** A person shall not within a recreation area conduct, or cause to be conducted, or advertise or hold himself out as available to conduct any commercial activity except under the authority of and in compliance in every respect with a current permit or other authority issued or given under this act for those purposes in respect of that recreation area.

#### 5.1.2 Nature Conservation Regulation 1994

Part 7—Other Permits  
Permit needed to conduct commercial activities

**63.(1)** A person must not conduct a commercial activity in a protected area unless—  
(a) the person holds a commercial activity permit for the area; or  
(b) the activity is conducted in the area under an agreement.

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#### Schedule 13

- 1.(1) A 'commercial activity' is an activity conducted for gain.  
(2) A 'commercial activity' may involve any of the following-  
(a) selling an article, material or thing;  
(b) supplying a facility or service;  
(c) commercial photography;  
(d) conducting a tour, safari, scenic flight, cruise or excursion;  
(e) advertising or promoting the use of a protected area as part of a tour, safari, scenic flight, cruise or excursion;  
(f) advertising or promoting the use of a protected area as a feature associated with a resort or tourist facility on land adjoining the area.

#### 5.2 Department of Environment Corporate Plan 1998–2000

The Department's mission is:

Promoting protection and wise use of the environment to support the economic and social well-being of Queensland.

The goals are:

- a clean and safe environment;
- maintenance of biological diversity;
- sustainable use of wildlife resources;
- sustainable economic and community development;
- maintenance of cultural heritage.

Relevant strategies are:

- promote adoption of ecologically sustainable management policies through a whole-of-government approach;
- improve community awareness, appreciation and understanding of the environment;
- implement a world-class system of protected areas including national parks, marine parks and nature based recreation areas and cultural heritage places;
- support nature-based and cultural heritage tourism.

## 6 Visitor statistics

### 6.1 Commercial tours

#### 6.1.1 Fraser Island

In the year November 1996–October 1997, commercial tour operators carried 138 000 passengers to Fraser Island. The majority of these (71 percent) stayed on the island for one day. Sixty-four percent of these day tour passengers arrived from Hervey Bay and the remainder arrived from Rainbow Beach and the Sunshine Coast. The peak months for day tours were July to October and January, with more than 10 000 passengers visiting the island each month. Most passengers on commercial day tours travel to Lake McKenzie and other lakes in the south-west of Fraser Island, and Central Station. The number of passengers on the island on any one day varied from less than 200 to more than 700. During the year there were fewer than 200 passengers on the island on 11 days and more than 700 on 13 days. On most days there are between 300 and 500 passengers on the island.

#### 6.1.2 Cooloola

At Cooloola, commercial tour operators carried 20 082 people in 1996–97. The peak use period is between July and October with as many as 2500 passengers a month. This drops to fewer than 1500 visitors a month between November and December and February to June.

### 6.2 Private visits

Independent visitors to Fraser Island are required to obtain vehicle service permits. Permits are not required for travel to Cooloola.

Over the last five financial years, the number of permits issued has been steadily increasing, except for 1996–97. It is assumed this general increase in the number of permits issued has been influenced heavily by the increasing number of backpackers visiting Fraser Island. September, December, January and April are typically peak periods for private permits.

### 6.3 Camping

The Department issues camping permits to people who camp at Cooloola and on Fraser Island. Over the last five years camping permits have been issued for between 80 000 and 90 000 people a year.



## 7 Tourism outlook

The World Heritage listing of Fraser Island in 1992 increased the international recognition of the Region and led to higher expectations by some visitors, particularly those visitors seeking nature-based tourism and ecotourism experiences appropriate to a World Heritage area. Local, Queensland and Australian visitors' use of the Region for traditional leisure activities does not appear to have changed with the listing of Fraser Island as a World Heritage area. Some visitors to the Region are merely seeking to get away from it all, to relax and enjoy themselves.

Some visitors to the Region do not respect its World Heritage and national park values and their conduct can be a source of complaint by other visitors. These visitors may be aware that the resources available for visitor supervision and law enforcement are finite.

The Region provides tourism and recreation opportunities for a number of market segments. South-east Queensland residents have visited the Region traditionally to get away from it all and go fishing, four-wheel-driving and camping. There are the visitors who, having previously decided to holiday in the Region for a number of days, are looking for a day's outing and decide to go on a commercial day tour. Another group travels to the Region with the main intention of visiting Fraser Island for a couple of days and spending little other time in the Region. Some visitors arrange their travel to the Region to coincide with the Hervey Bay whale watching season from August to October each year.

Each group has different aspirations and seeks different opportunities. Their economic significance to the local and regional economies also differs. Significant tourism businesses have now been established in the Noosa, Rainbow Beach and Hervey Bay areas to serve the visitors to the Region's protected areas.

South-east Queensland is expected to continue to grow and considerable future urban growth is predicted for Hervey Bay and for the Rainbow Beach-Tin Can Bay-Cooloolo area. This will lead to increased demand for recreation and tourism opportunities.

The number of visitors seeking use of the Region for nature-based and traditional leisure activities will continue to increase. Inevitably, limits on visitor numbers will be required at some time as has happened in other protected areas in Australia and around the world.

The *Great Sandy Region Management Plan* divides the Region into six recreation opportunity classes which allow for different management regimes and visitor experiences in the different parts of the Region. In the future, access to some areas might need to be more tightly controlled and managed. Other areas may be developed and managed to accommodate large numbers of visitors and intense use.

## 8 Tourism impacts assessment

(This section is from the EDAW report.)

### 8.1 Consultancy brief

The Department of Environment commissioned EDAW to assess current tourism activities and the impacts of these activities as a basis for recommending future levels of visitor use and policies for visitor management.

The specific objectives of this component of the review were to:

- assess the impacts of the current level of visitor use;
- assess the opportunities for increased visitor use;
- recommend levels of visitor use which provide quality visitor experiences, and
- recommend changes to existing policies and practices.

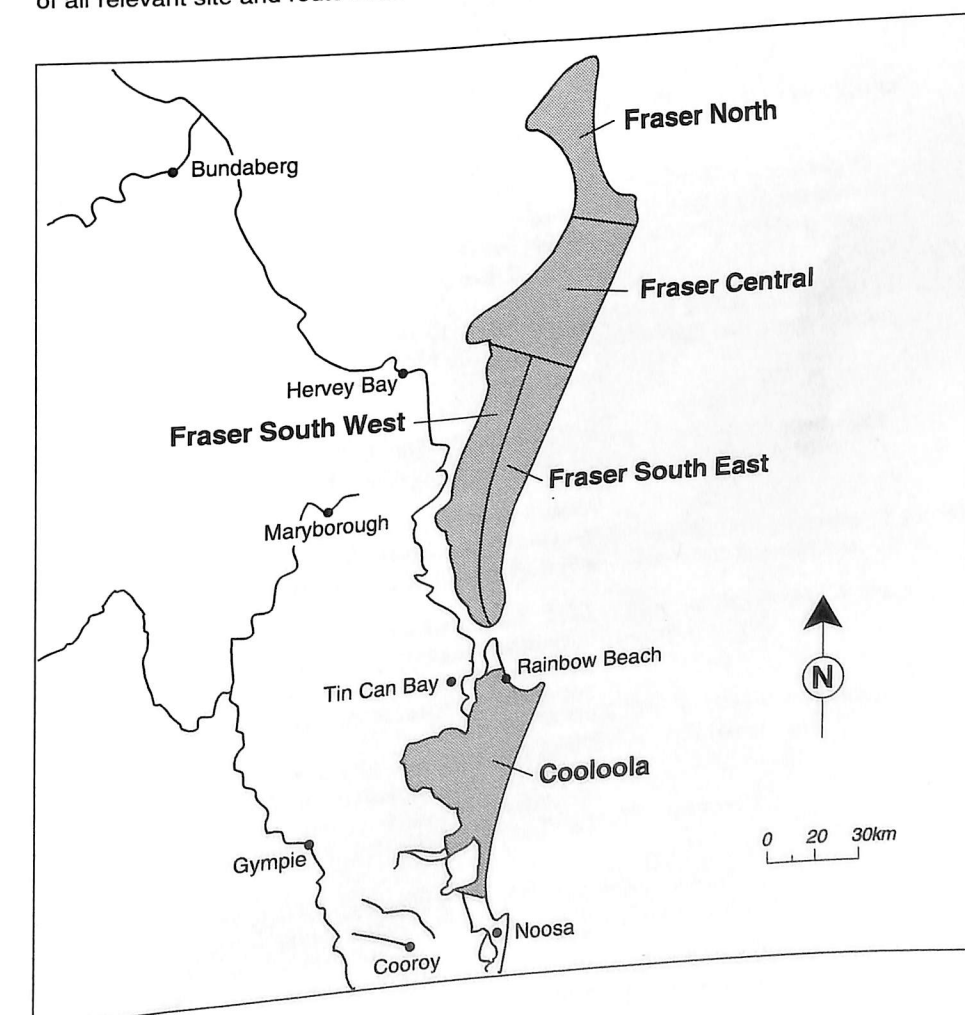
Because of the limited study budget, it was agreed that the focus of the study was to be on major visitor use areas and travel routes, and that the assessment of visitor impacts would be limited to physical impacts only. The August 1997 field assessment represents a sample which may differ from other times of the year.

### 8.2 Methodology

The study methodology included input from an expert panel and Department of Environment staff, and the outputs from each stage of the study were reviewed before the next stage was commenced.

The information review involved the collection of all readily available literature relating to impacts associated with recreation and tourism activities. This search revealed that while there is much written about detailed methods for assessing the site impacts of various activities, there is very little information regarding the comparative assessment of impacts within a large area for a wide range of activities.

The *Great Sandy Region Management Plan* adopted a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) and Route Classification which specified the desired management conditions to be achieved. It was decided to use this information as the benchmark against which the existing condition of routes and sites would be assessed. In order to do this, a field recording sheet was developed to enable the systematic recording of all relevant site and route information for later comparison and analysis.





The field assessment involved inspection of all major sites and routes using the recording sheet. Between Fraser Island and Cooloola, 78 sites (58 and 20, respectively) and 26 routes (19 and 7 respectively) were assessed. In addition, numerous photographs were taken as a record of the current condition of each site or route in August 1997.

### **8.3 Findings**

#### **8.3.1 Values and facilities**

EDAW found 30 of the 78 sites and six of the 26 routes have known significant environmental or cultural values which may impose a constraint on visitor use and/or further facility development. However it should be noted that in the absence of full information, further site/route investigations could reveal significant environmental and/or cultural values which may impose constraints on future use.

On the other hand, 70 of 78 sites and 12 of 26 routes possess visual values which add considerably to the visitor experience. Yet in most instances these values appear to be taken for granted with little or no management or facility provision designed to enhance the visual experience of visitors.

About half of all sites inspected contain some level of visitor facilities, however many sites are undeveloped with no visitor facilities.

#### **8.3.2 ROS and route assessment**

The desired ROS Classification was compared with actual site conditions to access the degree of divergence (+/-).

##### **Sites**

EDAW found that 20 of 78 sites are being managed consistent with the Plan, with some 13 being managed above that indicated in the plan, with 40 being managed at a lesser level. The other five are being managed in a way which is inconsistent with the Plan but which is above the intended level on some indicators and below on others.

The patterns observed above are fairly consistent between management areas, with Fraser Southeast and Fraser Southwest having fewer sites managed above their ROS classification.

This suggests that the Department is having difficulty supplying the necessary resources (staff and money) to provide the management, infrastructure and maintenance to cope with the levels of visitor use currently being experienced and with that expected from the ROS classification.

##### **Routes**

The desired Route Classification was compared with actual route conditions and the degree of divergence was measured.

Approximately 12 of 26 routes are being managed as designated in the management plan, with three being managed above that indicated, and 11 being managed at a lesser level.

The patterns observed above are fairly consistent between management areas with the least variation shown in Fraser Southwest.

As with sites above, this suggests that the Department is having difficulty providing the resources necessary to manage and maintain routes at a level to sustain the levels of vehicle use currently being experienced.

#### **8.3.3 Levels of peak use**

Information regarding peak levels of use was collected from Rangers responsible for the management of each locality. It was felt that this information could help explain some of the impact problems evident throughout the study area.

##### **Peak tour operator site use**

Of the 57 sites assessed, 28 receive high peak use by tour operators, with Fraser Southwest, Fraser Southeast and Cooloola receiving most use, and Fraser North receiving least use. This is consistent with the terms of their respective permits.

Tour operators are visiting those sites which are most accessible from their point of origin (Sunshine Coast, Rainbow Beach, Hervey Bay, Fraser Island resorts). Those sites which are more difficult to reach receive lesser use, while very remote sites receive little or no use by tour operators. This is consistent with the management plan and permit conditions.

##### **Peak tour operator route use**

Of the 24 routes assessed, eight receive high peak use by tour operators, with Fraser Southwest, Fraser Southeast and Cooloola receiving greatest use, and with Fraser North receiving low or no use.

The use of routes by tour operators is consistent with their permits, as would be expected.

##### **Peak 4WD hire site use**

Of the 65 sites assessed, 31 receive high peak use by 4WD hire vehicles, with Fraser Southeast and Fraser Southwest receiving most use, and Fraser North receiving least use.

Again, the most accessible sites are those most frequently visited by 4WD hire vehicle users. The patterns of use may be a function of the point of hire (for example island resorts), length of stay, and the cost per kilometre travelled, that is more inaccessible regions such as Fraser North require greater time and involve higher costs to visit.

##### **Peak 4WD hire route use**

Of the 24 routes assessed, 10 receive high peak use by 4WD hire vehicles, with Fraser Southwest and Cooloola receiving most use, and Fraser North receiving least use.

The use of routes by 4WD hire users is consistent with their patterns of site use, except for Cooloola, which is used more as a through route to Fraser Island by some visitors, including those people hiring 4WD vehicles at Noosa.

##### **Peak free and independent travellers (FITS) site use**

Of the 77 sites assessed, 50 receive high peak use by FITS, with Cooloola, Fraser North and Fraser Central receiving most use.

FITS tend to use a much higher proportion of sites than other types of users. This is probably a reflection of the greater range of user types covered by this category, a longer length of stay, greater local knowledge and a possible decision to avoid heavily used sites.

The patterns of use suggest that FITs try to avoid those areas mostly frequented by tour operators and 4WD hire users.

##### **Peak FITS route use**

Of the 24 routes assessed, 17 receive high peak use by FITS, with Cooloola and Fraser North receiving most use.

The use of routes by FITS users shows two distinct patterns. The popularity of Cooloola probably reflects a group of FITS users who are seeking more convenient and accessible sites to meet their needs without the added cost and time required to travel to Fraser Island.

The higher use of Fraser North by FITS users may reflect a deliberate choice to seek out more natural and remote settings away from the high use areas located in Fraser Southeast and Fraser Southwest.

#### **8.3.4 Site change assessment**

The purpose of this assessment was to determine Ranger perceptions regarding changes in sites and routes since adoption of the management plan in 1994.

##### **Site change**

Of the 65 sites assessed, it was the opinion of Rangers that 32 have deteriorated since inception of the Plan with only 15 showing signs of improvement. The rest are stable.

Cooloola has eight sites which have improved, while Fraser North, Fraser Central and Fraser Southeast each have eight sites which have deteriorated.

##### **Route change**

Of the 24 routes assessed, it is the opinion of Rangers that 15 have deteriorated since inception of the Plan with only one showing signs of improvement.

The other nine are stable.

All management areas would appear to have many routes deteriorating.

#### **8.3.5 Levels of impact**

The purpose of this assessment was to obtain a 'snapshot' of the level of site and route impacts evident throughout the study area in August 1997.

##### **Site impacts (EDAW assessment)**

Of the 78 sites assessed, EDAW found that 40 show signs of impacts above acceptable limits with 11 percent showing signs of high impact.

The higher proportion of site impacts above acceptable limits suggests that the current levels of visitor use are not sustainable with existing levels of resources (staff, funds, management, maintenance and site infrastructure provision).

The patterns of site impact are similar for all management areas.

#### **Site impacts (Ranger assessment)**

Of the 77 sites assessed, Rangers indicated that 53 show signs of impacts above acceptable limits with 28 showing signs of high impact.

The difference between the EDAW and Ranger assessment of impact is probably due to differences in perception regarding what might be considered 'acceptable' for a given desired ROS classification for a site. Regardless of this difference, both assessments agree that a majority of sites are showing signs of unacceptable impact which are not sustainable without direct management intervention.

#### **Route impacts (EDAW assessment)**

Of the 26 routes assessed, EDAW found that 12 show signs of impacts above acceptable levels with five showing signs of high impact.

The proportion of routes with impacts above acceptable levels suggests that the current levels of vehicle use are not sustainable with existing levels of resources (staff, funds, management, maintenance and site infrastructure provision).

Some routes showing high levels of impact may be exacerbated by the level of large tour bus activity.

#### **Route impacts (Ranger assessment)**

Of the 25 sites assessed, Rangers indicated that 19 show signs of impacts above acceptable levels with eight showing signs of high impact.

The difference between the EDAW and Ranger assessment of impact is probably due to differences in perception regarding what might be considered 'acceptable' for a given desired ROS classification for a route. Regardless of this difference, both assessments agree that a majority of routes are showing signs of unacceptable impact which are not sustainable without direct management intervention.

### **8.3.6 Site capacity**

#### **Sites**

Of the 77 sites assessed only 24 are considered to have additional capacity, with 10 having an ability to increase capacity more than 50 percent. On the other hand 35 sites are considered to be over capacity with 12 more than 50 percent above capacity. That is they are showing severe signs of overuse for existing levels of management and infrastructure provision.

Management areas with greatest capacity for increase are Fraser Southeast and Fraser Central.

Many of the sites with additional capacity are resort or camping areas which have been heavily modified by past landuse practices. However it would be a mistake to increase capacity at these sites without ensuring that other sites visited and routes used have the capacity to absorb increased levels of visitor use, which they do not have at current levels of management, maintenance and infrastructure provision.

#### **Routes**

Of the 26 routes assessed, only eight are considered to have additional capacity, with one having an ability to increase capacity by more than 50 percent. On the other hand, 10 are considered to be over capacity. These routes are showing severe signs of overuse.

These findings are a little deceiving because most of the routes with additional capacity are located in the less frequented areas in Fraser Southwest and Fraser Central.

A very high proportion of routes along the main tourist circuits are showing signs of overuse which may be exacerbated by tour bus use.

### **8.3.7 Opportunities and constraints**

Three major opportunities present themselves for increased visitation:

- to improve infrastructure within existing sites and features to handle anticipated visitation levels;
- to increase the ability of the route network to handle increased levels of vehicle use; and
- to increase the range and style of formalised accommodation so as to ease the pressure for camping at heavily impacted sites.

The greatest immediate need is to address the inability of numerous sites to handle existing levels of visitation. It is felt that any actions which could potentially increase visitation, before appropriate infrastructure is in place, will exacerbate the existing situation.

## **8.4 Conclusions**

### **8.4.1 Cooloola**

#### **Transport networks**

- The Cooloola area appears to function fairly well at low tide, with access to Rainbow Beach via the Leisha Track. The Freshwater Track is not being maintained to an adequate standard to sustain current levels of use, such as are evident at high tide, without unacceptable environmental impacts.
- Some sections of the Noosa River and associated lakes are showing signs of severe bank erosion along narrow river sections due to wave wash.
- The Kings Bore track network is currently coping with current levels of use but will not cope with increased levels of use without increased maintenance.
- Signposting on most tracks needs to be improved.
- Cooloola Way is in reasonable condition except for intermittent washouts.
- Most beach access cuttings can handle existing levels of use. However, if significant increases in vehicle numbers occur, they may need additional hardening.
- The three entries to Kings Bore Road from Rainbow Beach Road should be reduced to one and signposted appropriately.
- Walking tracks need to be promoted as they appear to be underutilised.

#### **Accommodation (formal styles)**

- The Cooloola area is well serviced by accommodation nodes at Noosa, Noosa North Shore and Rainbow Beach.
- There is no need for additional resort or motel style accommodation within the park.
- There is an opportunity for some style of commercial development at the Double Island Point Lighthouse.

#### **Camping**

- Freshwater has capacity for 25 percent expansion into former campground areas. This could provide opportunities for a commercial venture such as safari-style accommodation.
- Beach camping is causing severe localised impacts on the foreshores and needs more effective control and management.
- The Inskip Point area was severely impacted by uncontrolled vehicle access and camping. However, redesign and more effective management have demonstrated that projected levels of use will be able to be accommodated much more effectively.
- There are opportunities to expand canoe-based camping along the Noosa River as demand and resources dictate.
- Elanda Point Campground has potential to increased capacity and the range of opportunities provided.

#### **Information and signs**

There is a great need for improved interpretation at most sites, particularly along the coast and Cooloola Way.

#### **Visitor impacts**

Most key sites have been designed and managed to sustain existing levels of visitor impacts with the exception of Red Canyon and Poona Lake.

#### **Site capacities**

Some sites such as the Freshwater campground/day use area, Carlo Point and Double Island Point have capacity for increased use and/or development. Quality infrastructure should be in place before increased visitation is encouraged.

Some sites such as Poona Lake and Bullock Point are above capacity for existing levels of management and infrastructure.

Harry's Hut is currently at capacity at peak times with user group conflicts. This will require redesign of the area and greater separation between day and tour operator use, and campers.

#### **Major opportunities**

- Commercialisation of the redeveloped Inskip Point area.
- Redevelopment and possible commercialisation of Double Island Point.
- Redevelopment and possibly commercialisation of the Freshwater campground and inclusion of a tour operator and/or safari camp facility.
- Development of lookouts/trails off the Cooloola Way.
- Elanda Point campground could be expanded.
- Upgrading and development of a more extensive track network.



### Major constraints

The Freshwater road is a major constraint at high tides because of its poor condition and level of maintenance. Through traffic may need to make more use of alternative inland routes.

### 8.4.2 Fraser Island

#### Transport network

- The eastern beach functions well as the main north/south access route at low tide, but with constraints at high tide north of Dilli Village.
- The Wanggoolba to Eurong east/west link appears to function well because of the separation of vehicle flows.
- The major scenic routes are all showing signs of high impact due possibly to the volume of use, the size and loads of some vehicles, and coaches operating with high tyre pressures.
- All beach access points appear to be reasonably managed.
- Most beach rock bypasses have been hardened to manage existing levels of use. The Indian Head bypass needs hardening and the volume of traffic on the Ngkala Rocks bypass needs to be controlled if track hardening is not an option.
- The walking track system is quite extensive but use appears to be relatively low.

#### Accommodation (formal styles)

- The area is well serviced by accommodation at existing resort and camping nodes. In addition, most of these facilities have considerable capacity for expansion. For this reason it is felt that no new areas should be allocated for this purpose in the foreseeable future, unless determined otherwise by the camping management plan.
- There is an opportunity for some style of low key commercial development of safari style camps at various locations to cater for a variety of visitor groups seeking such an upmarket camping experience. These camps should be located strategically to service 4WD hire users and backpackers.

#### Camping

- Most of the off-beach camping areas are managed well, the exception being at Indian Head, which the management plan proposed should be closed.
- Beach camping causes intensive physical impact to the foredune area. While opinion varies as to long-term effects of this activity it is felt that more effective management and control is required. This should include rotation and resting of areas, plus the phased reduction in available areas as the capacity of behind dune camping areas is increased.
- Some off-beach camping areas have capacity to expand. It is an option to investigate transfer of the campgrounds to commercial operators with development options included. This could relieve the pressure for beach camping and allow phased reduction of the activity.
- Opportunities exist for boat based camping at a number of locations along the west coast. However, Ranger opinion is that this activity needs to be managed carefully to ensure that litter management is effective.
- There is a considerable opportunity to develop a natural style motorised camping area in the vicinity of Coolooloi Creek near Hook Point. It is felt that this area could meet the needs of those displaced by the Inskip Point redevelopment.
- Biting insects may be a major deterrent to camping activities in many of the western beaches and passage areas.

#### Information

- There is a need for improved interpretation at most sites, particularly interpretive messages regarding the values of the area, although much has been achieved in the last 12 months.
- The route network is very well signposted.
- Perhaps information brochures could be altered to provide visitors with better information regarding the choices available to them to better meet their recreational needs. This might include enhanced pre-visit information about peak visitation periods and areas best suited to provide particular types of experiences.

#### Visitor impacts

- Most of the major tourist sites and routes are showing evidence of visitor impacts which are not sustainable, the main exception being Central Station.
- Immediate consideration should be given to redressing impacts at all beach camping areas, Indian Head camping area and Lakes McKenzie, Boomanjin and Birrabeen.

#### Site capacities

Some sites such as Dundubara campground, Cathedral Beach Resort, Thoorgine, Eurong, Dilli Village, Kingfisher Bay Resort and Village and Coolooloi Creek have significant capacity for increased use and/or development.

However, increased capacity will depend on quality infrastructure being in place before increased visitation is encouraged.

Other sites such as all beach camping areas, Indian Head and camping area, Lake Garawongera, Rainbow Gorge, Lake Boomanjin, and Lake McKenzie are considerably above capacity for existing levels of management and infrastructure.

#### Major opportunities

- Redevelopment and commercialisation of the existing campgrounds run by the Department at Waddy Point and Dundubara.
- Redevelopment of the Thoorgine area and a new commercial camping facility at Coolooloi Creek at Hook Point.
- Inclusion of a tour operator and/or safari camp facilities at appropriate locations.
- Walking trails upgrading and development of a more extensive network linked to proposed safari camps.

#### Major constraints

- Significant cultural and environmental values associated with many sites, particularly along the coast, around lakes, in the rainforest and heath areas.
- Condition and level of maintenance of the major tourist route network.
- The sensitivity of lake foreshores to visitor impacts.
- The sensitivity of coastal foredune areas to intensive levels of sustained camping.

### 8.4.3 Summary

Commercial tour operators carry approximately 30 percent of the total capacity allowed by their tour permits. The number of passengers carried annually has increased slightly over the last three years.

Due to an apparent lack of resources, only 20 of 78 sites and 12 of 26 routes assessed are being managed in a fashion consistent with the desired conditions as set out in the management plan.

Visitor use of the Region is adversely impacting many sites and routes. Evidence from Ranger staff indicates that 32 of 65 sites and 15 of 24 routes have deteriorated since adoption of the management plan.

Approximately 40 of 78 sites and 12 of 26 of routes assessed are considered to be showing evidence of physical impacts beyond acceptable limits. Of these impacted sites and routes, the following are considered to be of most concern because of the severity and extent of the impacts.

| Management Area  | Sites  | Routes                                    |
|------------------|--|---|
| Coolooloa        | Inskip Point<br>Coolooloa Beach camping areas              | Freshwater Road                           |
| Fraser North     | Ocean Lake Beach camping areas<br>Indian Head camping area | Ngkala Rocks Bypass<br>Indian Head Bypass |
| Fraser Central   | Central Beach camping areas                                |   |
| Fraser Southeast | Southern Beach camping areas<br>Lake Boomanjin             | The Red Scenic Route                      |
| Fraser Southwest | Lake McKenzie<br>Lake Birrabeen                            | Cornwells Road                            |

While it was not possible to assign physical impacts to the different visitor types, namely tour operators, 4WD hire and free and independent travellers (FITS), it was evident that those sites that receive high peak use by all visitor types are those most likely to be impacted severely, unless appropriate levels of management and infrastructure are already in place.

In addition, observation suggests that those routes impacted most severely are those used by large 4WD coaches.

A large number of sites and routes are considered to be above a level of use which can be sustained at current levels of management and infrastructure provision. While there are opportunities to increase visitor capacity at some sites, to do this before adequate management and infrastructure provision is in place would be to put at risk the very values on which tourism in the Great Sandy Region depends.

## 9 Submissions

Forty-seven submissions were received on the issues paper and there were thirty-two submissions on the progress report. They were from people as individuals and representing organisations. A number were from commercial tour operators in the region and related tourism industry groups. Others were from Commonwealth and Queensland Government departments, agencies and related program groups and local governments. Several were from conservation organisations and universities. One was from the Gurang Land Council. Most had addresses in the region or other areas in south-east Queensland, although some were from New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory.

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