

NERP Tropical Ecosystems Hub – Project 12.3

Relative social & economic values of residents & tourists in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WTWHA)

Michelle Esparon^{1,2}, Silva Larson^{1,2} and Natalie Stoeckl^{1,2},

¹ James Cook University School of Business; ² Cairns Institute;

Key messages

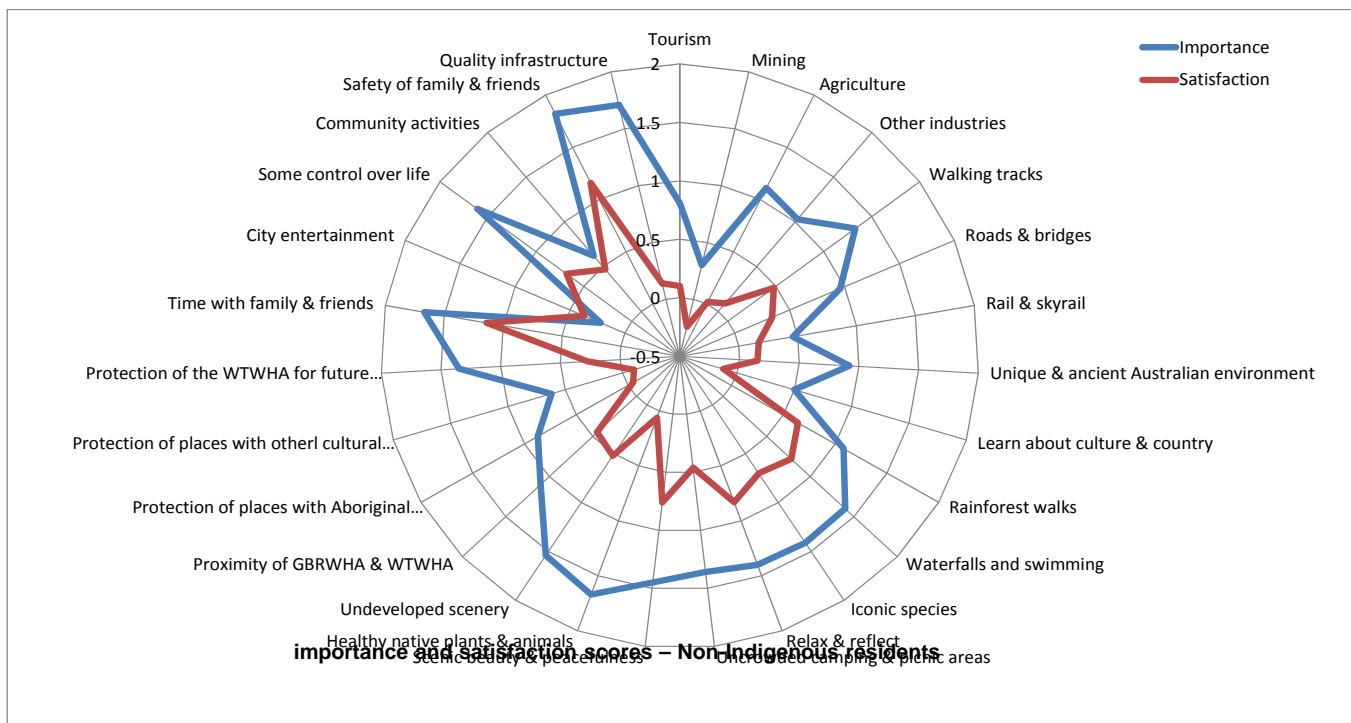
Aim: Although the WTWHA is renowned for its wildlife, biodiversity and natural beauty, none of these important assets are bought or sold in the market place, so none have a price. Absence of price does not mean absence of value, and this project seeks to learn more about those values.

Methods We have collected data from 81 Indigenous residents, 384 Non-Indigenous residents and 238 tourists (tourist data collection will continue until June 2014 to ensure the sample includes visitors from all seasons).

Preliminary findings to date

- The most frequently enjoyed rainforest activity involves “enjoying the scenic beauty and peacefulness of the rainforest”
- Keeping family and friends safe, is top priority for residents. After that, Indigenous residents prioritise: spending time with friends and family, protecting culture and country. Non-indigenous residents prioritise: infrastructure, having healthy native plants and animals, then spending time with friends and family.
- Top priorities for tourists include (in order): seeing the GBRWHA, safety of self and that of travelling companions, and enjoyment of undeveloped scenery.
- Having twice as much rubbish, having murky rivers, having fewer native plants and animals, or having the scenic beauty and peacefulness of the region disturbed are viewed by both residents and tourists as being worse than a 20% increase in prices.

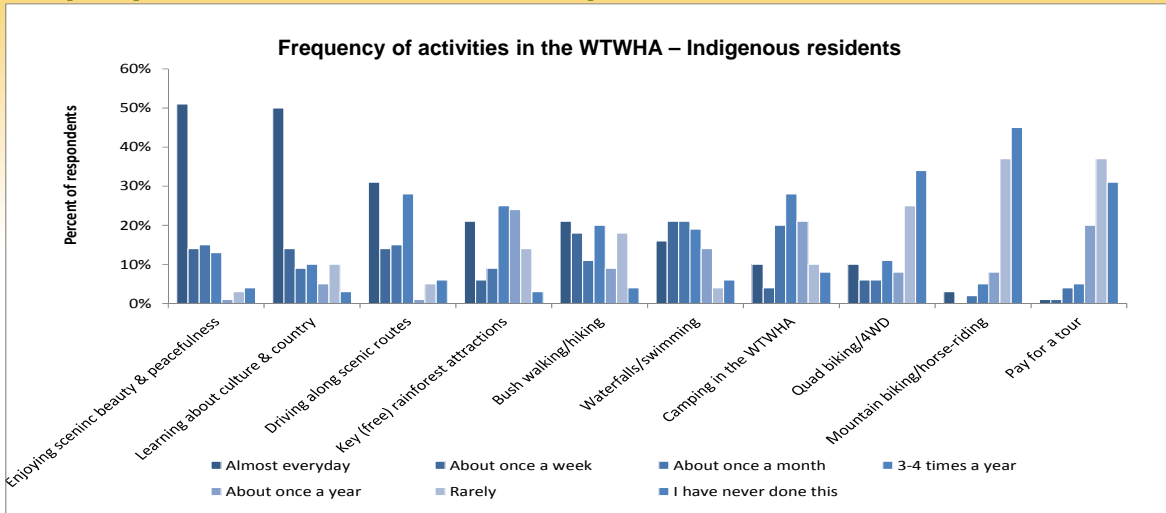
What is most important to overall quality of life, or as a regional drawcard?



- Safety of family & friends was the most important factor to overall quality of life for our non-Indigenous respondents. This was also true for Indigenous respondents; after that, they rated spending time with family, and protecting cultural values and country.
- The most important drawcards for tourists were: seeing the Great Barrier Reef, followed by their personal safety and that of their travelling companion. Having undeveloped scenery to look at was ranked third most important factor.

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What do people do while in the wet tropics rainforest?



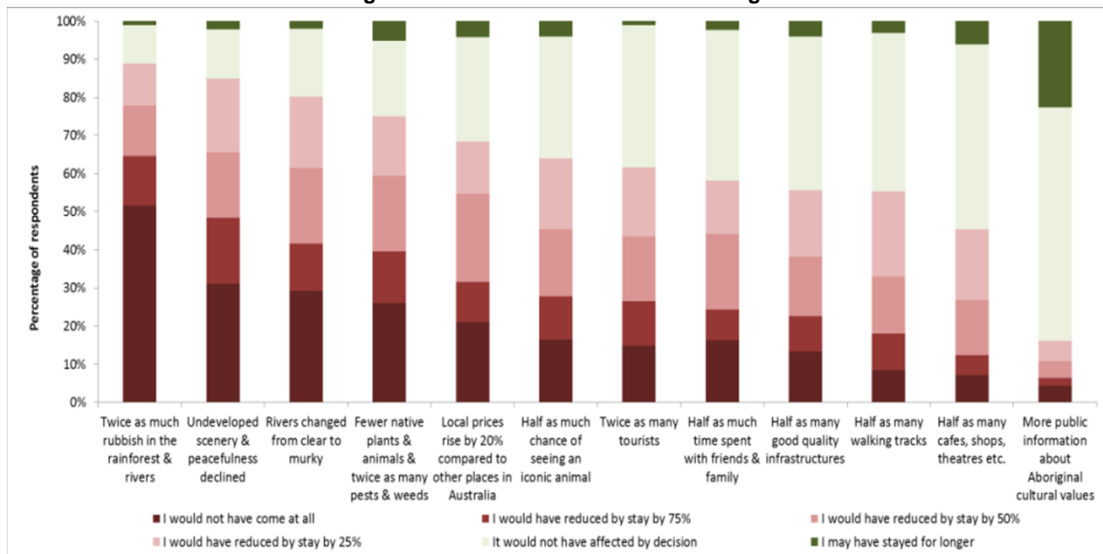
- Non-Indigenous residents also spend most of their time enjoying scenic beauty and driving along scenic routes. Going to waterfalls/swimming and bushwalking are also relatively popular activities. Overall, residents rarely pay to go on a tour.
- Visitors spent most of their time enjoying the scenic beauty and peacefulness of the rainforest or driving along scenic routes (15% and 14% respectively, having done so more than five times during this trip).

Do people think the region should be protected and how much are they willing to pay to do so?

- Most respondents felt that the WTWHA should be protected, but were not prepared to pay unless all users of the WTWHA (tourists) or all users throughout Australia (residents) paid too.
- Indigenous residents were, on average, willing to pay more to help solve problems within the WTWHA or to protect its values than were Non-Indigenous residents, moreover.
- Indigenous residents are willing to pay as much as \$127 per household per annum to protect Aboriginal cultural values – a significant amount given their relatively low incomes.
- People are generally willing to pay most to improve water quality (\$79, \$48 and \$45 for Indigenous residents, Non-Indigenous residents and tourists respectively) – although mean willingness to pay to protect native plants and animals, was still high as was willingness to pay to maintain undeveloped scenery and peacefulness .

How would people be affected by various ‘changes’ to the WTWHA?

The effect of various ‘changes’ on the decision to come to the region - Tourists



- All groups (including Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents felt that environmental changes would be more detrimental to their overall quality of life than a 20% price increases.