

# NERP Tropical Ecosystems Hub – Project 10.2 Factsheet

## Activities and Preferences of Visitors to Townsville and Airlie Beach

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### Key messages

- The most popular and frequent activity is spending time at the beach and going to the islands – the reef is also important.
- The average visitor spends more than \$1,000 in the region.
- The most important regional 'draw-cards' relate to the marine environment – clean beaches, healthy reefs and healthy fish, and clear ocean.
- The strongest potential deterrents (things which would make visitors shorten their visits or not come at all) were twice as many oil spills, ship groundings and waste spills, rubbish, and murky ocean water.
- On average, visitors were willing to contribute from \$10 to \$15 per person per visit to a fund aiming to reduce various threats to the GBRWHA (improving water quality; protecting top predators; and/or reducing risk of shipping accidents).

### Who comes to the region?

A survey of 1,121 visitors to the Townsville and Airlie Beach region was conducted between June 2012 and June 2013. Just over half of these respondents (56%) were women, and 50% of those responding were 20-40 years of age. Most of the visitors (40%) were couples, followed by singles (21%) and groups of friends (18%). Some 28% were employed by government (including health and education) while 19% came from retail (including accommodation and tourism) and 13% from manufacturing (including mining and ports). 45% of respondents had completed university or were currently attending. Visitors were of varying annual household incomes with no specific trend.

The majority of respondents (62%) came from Australia. Second most numerous were visitors from Europe (26%), followed by North Americans (5%). Half of the domestic visitors were from Queensland, 21% from NSW and 17% from Victoria.

For 46% of respondents, this was the first visit to the region; 12% had already visited once, 18% had visited 2-4 times previously; while 13% had been to the region more than 10 times before.

### Where do people go, what do they do and how much do they spend?

Airlie Beach and Townsville were reported as their favorite places in the GBRWHA (Figure 1), and they were looking forward to visiting Cairns, Cooktown and the Whitsundays region. Most respondents, 78%, spent some time on the mainland beaches, on average visiting them 2.8 times (Figure 2). About two-thirds went to an island (71%), or went on a paid boat (66%). Only a fifth went fishing (19%) and/or spent time on a private boat (12%). (Figure 2).

The average amount of money each person spent in the region was A\$ 1,060. Almost half of it was spent on accommodation, followed by food items and boat trips (Figure 3).

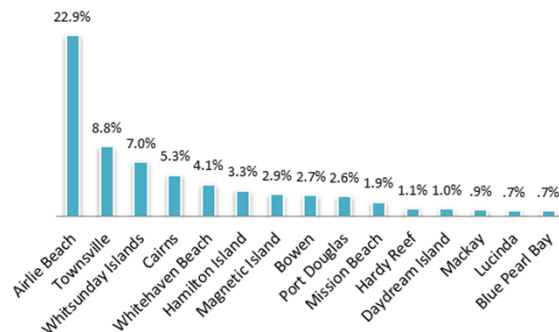


Figure 1. Favorite places in the GBR WHA visited

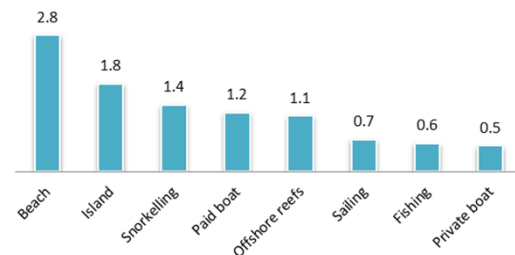


Figure 2. On average, number of times respondents went...

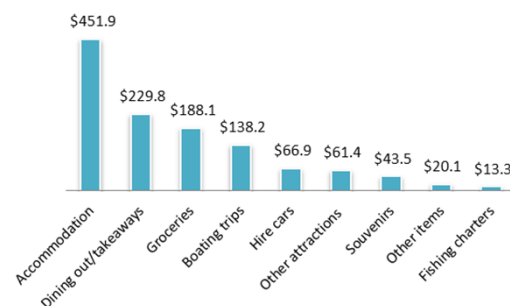


Figure 3. Expenditure per person per visit, on average

### What are the most important 'draw-cards' to the region?

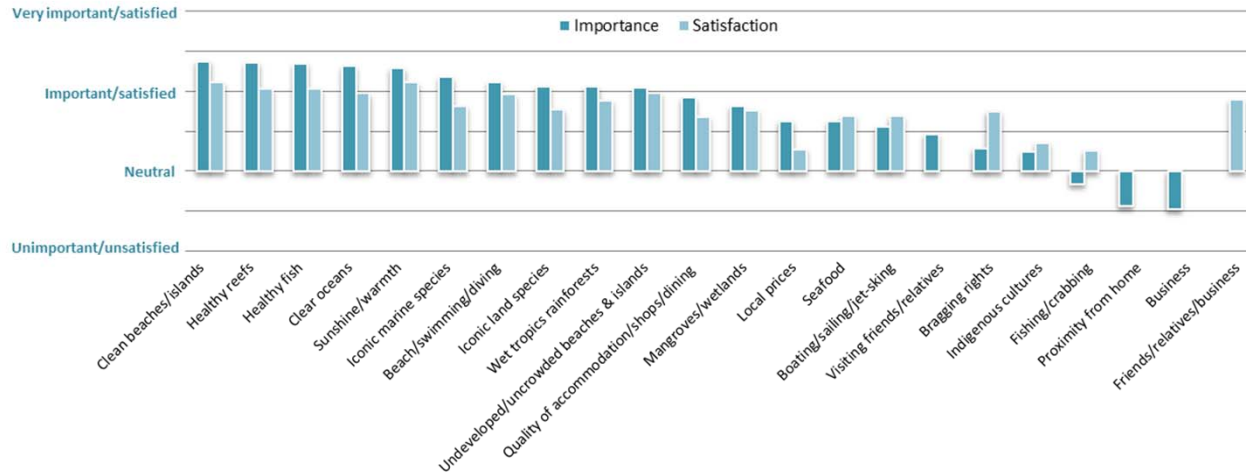


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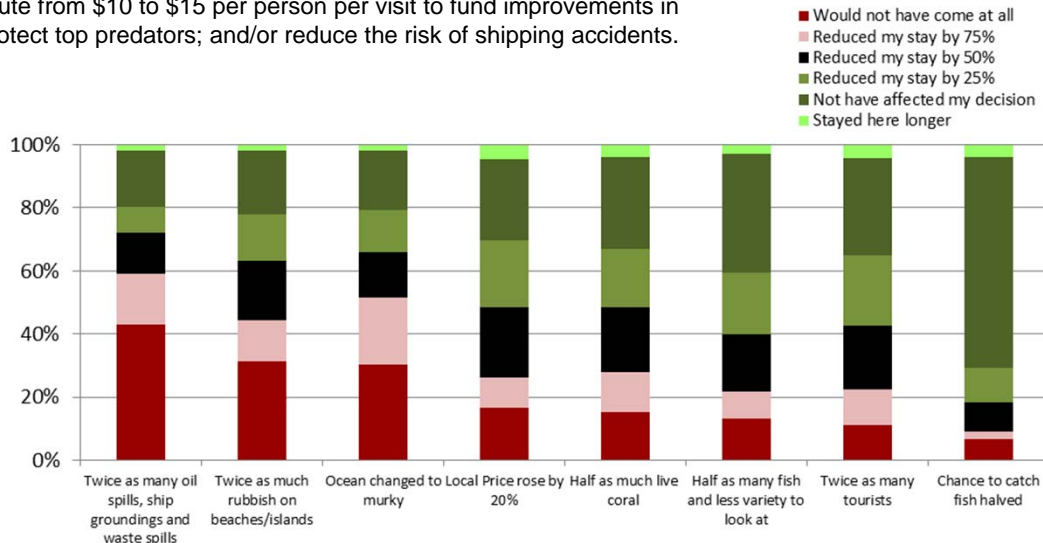
Clean beaches and islands, healthy reefs and healthy fish, and clear ocean water were the most important factors that encouraged respondents to visit the region (**Figure 4**). Respondents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with these important factors. The least important factors affecting decisions to visit the area were business, proximity from home and fishing/crabbing.



**Figure 4.** Most and least important ‘draw-cards’ in deciding to visit the region, and satisfaction with those

### How would potential changes to the GBRWHA impact their visitation?

**Figure 5** below shows the reaction of respondents to hypothetical changes to the GBRWHA. Respondents appeared to be most sensitive to ideas of seeing more oil spills, ship groundings and waste spills, increases in visible rubbish and lower ocean water clarity. Over 40% of our respondents indicated that they would not have visited the region at all if there were twice as many oil spills, ship groundings and waste spills. Few people were bothered by the idea of having less chance to catch fish, with 71% indicating that it would not affect their decision to visit or the length of stay. On average, visitors were willing to contribute from \$10 to \$15 per person per visit to fund improvements in water quality; protect top predators; and/or reduce the risk of shipping accidents.



**Figure 5.** Respondents’ reaction to hypothetical changes in the GBRWHA

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 Theme 3: Managing for resilient tropical ecosystems  
 Program 10: Socio-economic value of GBR goods and services  
 Project: 10.2 Socio-economic systems and reef resilience

For more information, copies of this fact-sheet or a Technical Report with more details, please contact:  
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