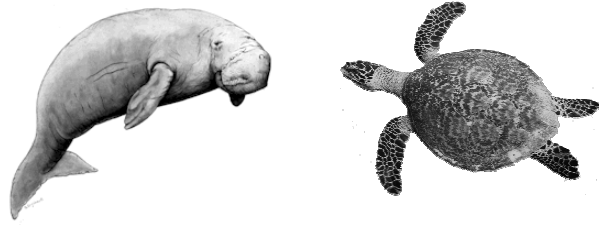


Towards Sustainable Management of Dugong and Turtle Tourism



PROJECT SUMMARY

Australian populations of dugong and several sea turtle species are under pressure from various anthropogenic sources. They are also becoming increasingly important resources for tourism operators catering for both domestic and international wildlife enthusiasts. Such use must be managed in an ecologically sustainable manner and should contribute to the overall conservation of the species involved. A research project funded by the Natural Heritage Trust through the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage entitled “Towards Sustainable Management of Dugong and Turtle Tourism” commenced in January 2004 with the aim to minimise negative impacts of existing and potential tourism activities on dugongs and marine turtles and to establish World’s Best Practice management of Australian dugong and turtle tourism.

This multidisciplinary research project is exploring the biology and behaviour of the species relevant to tourism activities, the characteristics of the tourists and operators who view them, and the nature of their interactions. Current and potential threats are being identified and issues associated with their sustainability will be examined. Working with a broad group of stakeholders, the project will develop National Codes of Conduct for tourism with these species and plan for possible testing of these Codes in field trials later in 2004/05. Draft Codes will be developed with input from participants selected from a range of organisations, including the tourism industry, Commonwealth and state management agencies, Indigenous organisations including some Traditional Owners, researchers and relevant conservation and wildlife NGOs, at a Planning Workshop to be held on 20th – 21st May 2004. Due to the scope of the Project and limited scale of the Workshop (approx max of 40 participants), we have invited participants from as good a cross-section of interest groups as possible, stratified across the three northern states/territories. We do not expect participants to attend so much as representatives of their organisations, but as experts in their field with experience and knowledge of the issues surrounding the species and tourism based on them.

Members of the research team are presently compiling information for a Draft Issues Paper, which will be circulated to Workshop participants for feedback in advance of the Planning Workshop and as preparation for Workshop activities. The Workshop will also include some short presentations to provide a background to the issues with some examples of tourism involving dugong and marine turtles and of key management issues in different regions of Australia.

Chief Investigators in the research team include Prof. Helene Marsh (James Cook University), Dr Colin Limpus (Queensland Environmental Protection Agency), Dr Dermot Smyth (Smyth & Bahrtd Consultants), Dr Kirstin Dobbs (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority), Dr Peter Arnold (Museum of Tropical Queensland), Assoc. Prof. Peter Valentine (JCU) and Dr Alastair Birtles (Team Leader, JCU).

Dugong image courtesy of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Turtle image courtesy of Undersea Explorer

