



Community Attitudes, Knowledge, Perceptions and Use of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area in 2007

Summary of Results

Thank you for completing and returning the *Community Resident Survey in the North Queensland Region* in 2007. When returning your survey you requested a summary of the results on an attached information postcard. I am pleased to provide this to you. The aim of the survey was to provide detailed knowledge of the community's use and perceptions of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (WTQWHA). This information will assist in ensuring the long term sustainable management of the WTQWHA. Data from a similar survey undertaken in 2002, combined with the results of the 2007 survey, has provided the Wet Tropics Management Agency (WTMA) with an understanding of changes that may have occurred over the five year period.

The research was funded by the Australian Government's Marine & Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTSRF) and conducted by tourism researchers from James Cook University.

Method

A total of 4,142 surveys were distributed throughout the Wet Tropics bioregion between May and October 2007. A total of 2,001 surveys were randomly distributed to residents via a door-to-door survey of residents in Cairns, Gordonvale, Mission Beach, Innisfail, Babinda and Miriwinni. Another 2,141 surveys were posted to private post box holders in Atherton, Belgian Gardens, Cardwell, Deeragun, Halifax, Herberton, Ingham, Kuranda, Millaa Millaa, Port Douglas, Ravenshoe and Rollingstone. A total of 853 surveys were returned giving an overall response rate of 20.6%, a level which is considered to be appropriate and representative for this type of research.

Profile of Respondents

- More females (52.9%) than males (47.1%) completed the survey.
- 75% of respondents live in suburban or semi-urban residences.
- The average period of residence was 24 years.
- 54.1% of respondents reported having a university, trade or technical qualification.
- The average age of respondents was 49 years.
- The largest group of respondents were pensioners, retired or unemployed (22.8%) followed by professionals/ associate professionals (17.7%).

Actual Knowledge of the WTQWHA

This aspect of the research was designed to identify the general level of knowledge that the community had about the WTQWHA.

- Approximately one-fifth (21.3%) of respondents were able to identify the northern boundary of the World Heritage Area while 22.7% of respondents were able to identify the southern boundary.
- Respondents understood that the WTQWHA was World Heritage listed for its protection, conservation and preservation (45.8%), & natural, ecological and geological significance (37.9%).

Community Support

This section of the survey was designed to identify the level of community support for World Heritage listing of the WTQWHA.

- 62% of respondents indicated they 'strongly support' the World Heritage listing.
- 92.6% of respondents supported the general level of protection that operates in the WTQWHA.
- Support for the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural heritage in a future World Heritage listing was high (71.8%).
- 66.9% of respondents supported some form of Aboriginal co-management of the WTQWHA.

Learning about the Wet Tropics

In this section the research focused on the information respondents required about the WTQWHA and how they accessed that information.

- Signage at WTQWHA sites was considered the best information source provided by the management agency.
- Newspapers, word-of-mouth and television were the most commonly used general sources of information about the WTQWHA.
- Access to any WTQWHA information by respondents was considered to be only moderately available.
- There was an increase in use of the Wet Tropics website from 8% of respondents in 2002 to 21% in 2007.
- 73% of respondents did not require any more information or access to information.

Advantages & Disadvantages of the World Heritage Area

The Wet Tropics Management Authority is interested in residents' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of living adjacent to the WTQWHA.

- The most important personal benefits of the WTQWHA were – 'good to know it exists' and it contributes to 'quality of life'.
- From a community perspective, 'enhancing environmental awareness and knowledge' and the 'protection of rainforest plants and animals' were considered to be the most important benefits.
- Personal disadvantages were mostly related to 'environmental issues' (rain, cyclone, heat, humidity) and 'rules, regulations and restrictions'.
- From a community viewpoint, 'feral plants and animals' and 'rules, regulations and restrictions' were considered the main disadvantages.

Management of the World Heritage Area

This section of the research was designed to gather respondent's views on aspects of the management of the WTQWHA. The agency responsible for managing the WTQWHA is the Wet Tropics Management Agency. Day to day maintenance of parks and other facilities in the area is undertaken by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

- 27.5% of respondents thought the Environmental Protection Agency was the management agency responsible for the WTQWHA and 21% of respondents indicated the Wet Tropics Management Authority.
- Respondents' expectations of the management agency were to 'protect, conserve and preserve' the WTQWHA.
- Logos identifying an area as part of the WTQWHA are mostly noticed on signs, television, posters, stickers, uniforms and vehicles.

Protection and Conservation Management

The protection of the World Heritage area is an important part of the role of the WTMA. This section of the survey was designed to identify respondents' views on aspects of protection. The scale used in this section is based on 1 = Not at all protected or managed to 6 = Protected or managed to the full extent.

- Respondents considered that the World Heritage area's natural attributes were being moderately managed and protected (for example, biodiversity protected - mean=4.16; scenic landscape protected - mean=4.19; waterways and wetlands protected - mean=3.98)
- Non-Aboriginal historic sites (mean=3.63) of the WTQWHA were considered to be moderately protected and managed.
- Aboriginal cultural sites were believed to be moderately protected and managed (mean=4.06).

- Feral plants and animals were considered to be the largest threat to the WTQWHA followed by human activity outside the WTQWHA.

Resident use of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area

This part of the research was designed to identify respondent's patterns of use of the World Heritage area.

- 89% of respondents have visited the WTQWHA at least once.
- Half (50%) visit between 1 – 4 times per year.
- Almost three-quarters (72.1%) of respondent's reported that they had visited within the past six months.
- Sites in the northern region of the WTQWHA (e.g. Mossman Gorge, Daintree and Cape Tribulation) were very popular
- Recreational activity was the main reason for visiting the WTQWHA.
- Mission Beach and the Daintree are considered to be the most favourite places for their beauty and ease of access.
- Changes noticed at sites within the WTQWHA relate mostly to management issues and these were mainly positive changes.
- A lack of time or opportunity was the main reason given for not visiting the WTQWHA.

Previous community surveys were conducted in 1992, 1993, 1996, 1999 and 2002. The 2007 survey adds to this body of knowledge and allows the WTMA to monitor changes in the community's perceptions, attitudes and use of the WTQWHA. Thank you for your participation.

Regards,

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