

# Living with World Heritage

Community survey results



*Millions of years in the making. Protected forever.*

## Background and Highlights 2002/2003

### Understanding community and visitor attitudes

The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area covers an area of 900,000 hectares from Townsville to Cooktown in north Queensland. About 350,000 people live within 50km of the World Heritage boundary, and an additional two million people visit the region each year.

The Australian Government's listing of the World Heritage Area in 1988 was met with hostility from the Queensland Government and many regional communities, which lost access to timber and other forest resources. In 1992, the Wet Tropics Management Authority was formed to oversee management of the World Heritage Area.

The Authority's role is to set policy and coordinate management of the World Heritage Area. It does not directly manage land. About 80% is managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, while another 300 landholders manage the remaining 800 sq.km. One of the Authority's goals is to foster community understanding and support for the World Heritage Area. In particular, it is charged with giving the World Heritage Area "a function in the life of the community".

In order to understand and assess community attitudes, the Authority commissioned community surveys in 1992, 1993 and 1996 (AGB McNair). Neighbouring landholders were surveyed in 1999 (AC Nielsen). From 2001 to 2003, the Authority expanded these studies to ensure community views would feed into management of the World Heritage Area. The latest research was undertaken by Dr Joan Bentrupperbäumer and Dr Joseph Reser from the Rainforest CRC and James Cook University. Their findings are based on two surveys:

- ▲ **A visitor survey** of over 2,500 visitors at 10 key visitor sites in 2001 and 2002.
- ▲ **A community survey** of 788 residents living in 70 regional towns and suburbs in 2002 and 2003.

### Survey highlights

#### 1. Support for the World Heritage Area is steadily increasing.

1992	51% strong support	17% oppose
2003	58% strong support	12.4% oppose

#### 2. There is strong recognition of the quality of life benefits from the World Heritage Area.

The most important advantages related to general quality of life issues, rather than actual visits or economic benefits.

#### 3. Perceived disadvantages are declining.

Less than 20% of respondents identified disadvantages associated with living near the World Heritage Area.

#### 4. The community is concerned about on-ground management and consultation.

The community is not satisfied with the current standard of on-ground management. Feral pests and human activities are their greatest concerns.

The majority of residents felt consultation and communication between management agencies and the community could be improved.

### Issues for managers

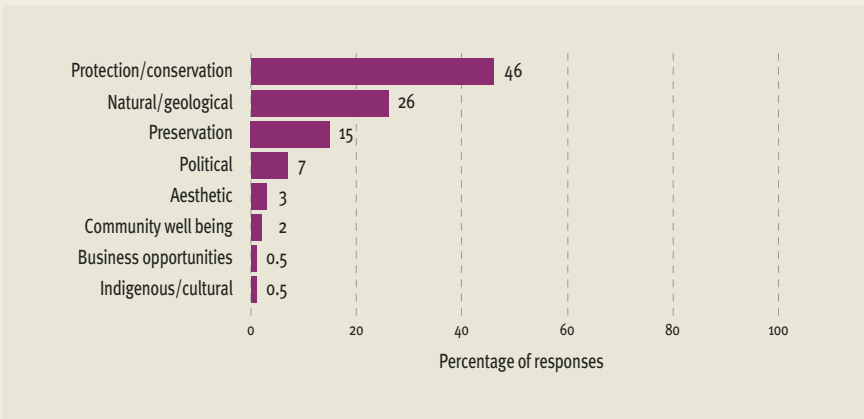
The surveys also highlighted the following issues that require greater focus from the Authority and the land management agencies:

- ▲ The majority of residents believed they were knowledgeable about the World Heritage Area, but many are unaware of its boundaries and how it is managed.
- ▲ The differing roles of the Authority and other land management agencies is poorly understood.
- ▲ The community gave a mixed response to the issue of Aboriginal co-management of the World Heritage Area. While 58% of residents were supportive, 42% were opposed.



## Awareness and Support

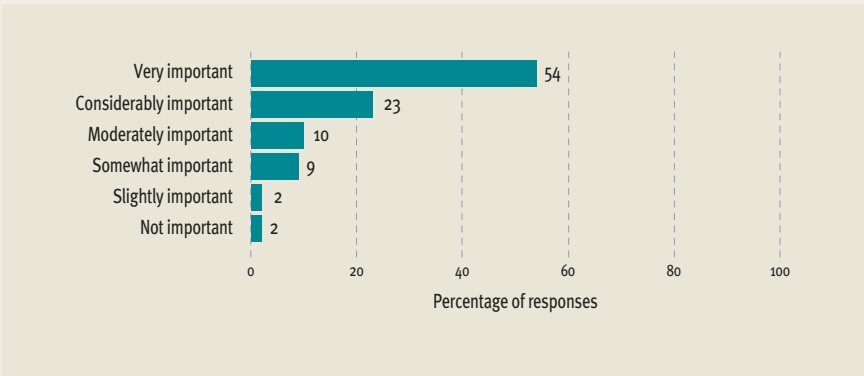
### Why were the rainforests made a World Heritage Area?



#### Further findings

- ▲ 93% of residents are aware that most of the rainforests in this region of north Queensland are part of a World Heritage Area.
- ▲ Over 82% indicated they are slightly / moderately knowledgeable about the World Heritage Area.

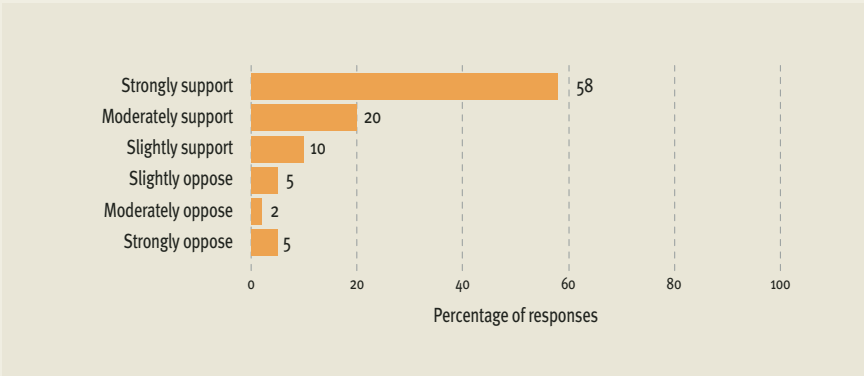
### Importance of the World Heritage Area



#### Further findings

- ▲ Participants from the southern Wet Tropics region (Cardwell to Townsville) felt the World Heritage Area was less important than northern participants.

### Support for World Heritage listing



The community is very aware of the existence of the World Heritage Area and strongly supports its protection. Residents view the World Heritage Area as an integral part of their landscape, lifestyle and community. Responses suggest a strong sense of collective ownership and responsibility.



- ▲ **There are regional differences in community attitudes.** eg. Residents from the southern Wet Tropics region (Cardwell to Townsville) recorded the lowest support for World Heritage listing.
- ▲ **There are age and gender differences.** eg. The 12% of residents who still oppose the World Heritage Area are likely to be 50 to 60 year-old males who have lived in the region for over 30 years and live in rural or rural residential areas.

## Advantages & Disadvantages

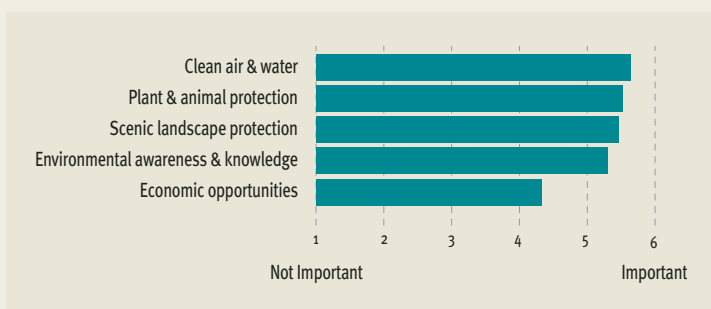
### Personal advantages



### Further findings

- ▲ The two most important personal advantages were related to quality of life, rather than actual visits or use.
- ▲ 75% felt these benefits were **considerably/very important**.
- ▲ The two lowest rated personal advantages were indirect economic opportunities (eg. food outlets, accommodation) and direct economic opportunities (eg. tour operator, ranger).

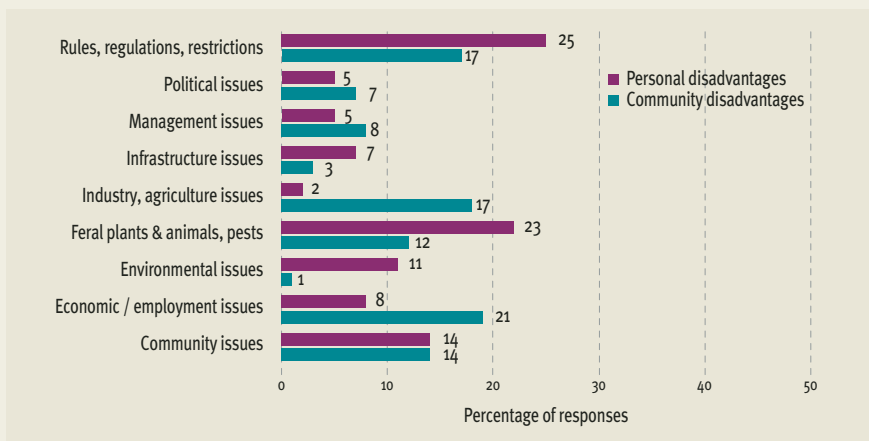
### Community advantages



### Further findings

- ▲ The most important community advantages relate to environmental protection and associated benefits of the World Heritage Area.
- ▲ Once again, economic benefits were seen as less important, but nevertheless they were still rated **moderately/considerably important**.

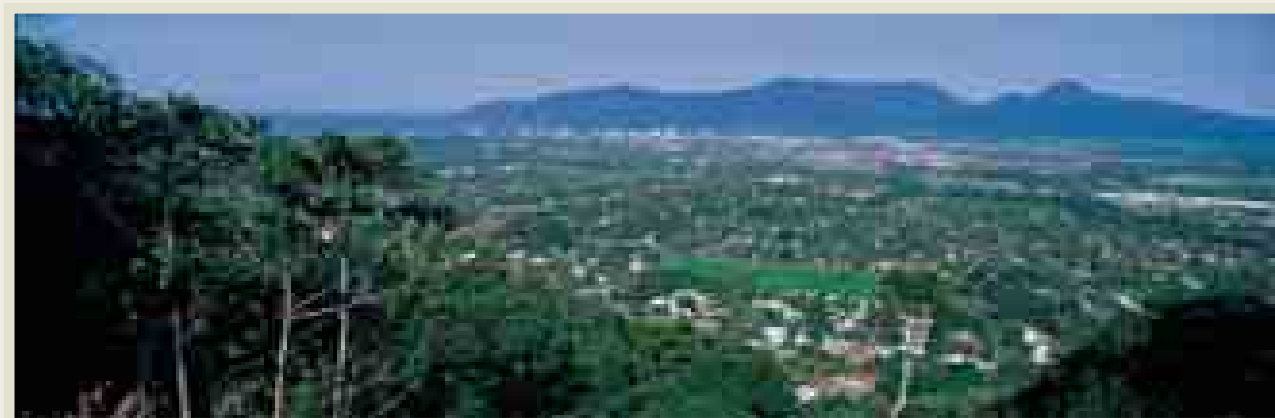
### Over 80% felt there were no disadvantages. For the remainder the disadvantages were:



### Further findings

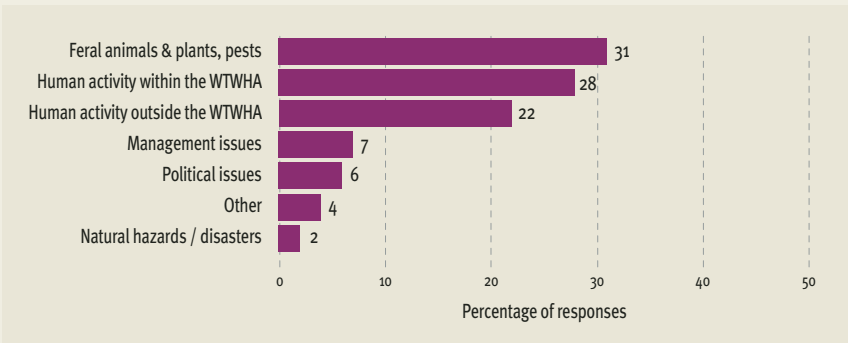
- ▲ The main disadvantage in 1996 was the loss of jobs and damage to local economies (36%).

*“A wonderful connection with nature, flora and fauna, sight and sound.”*



## Threats

### What are the three most serious threats to the World Heritage Area?

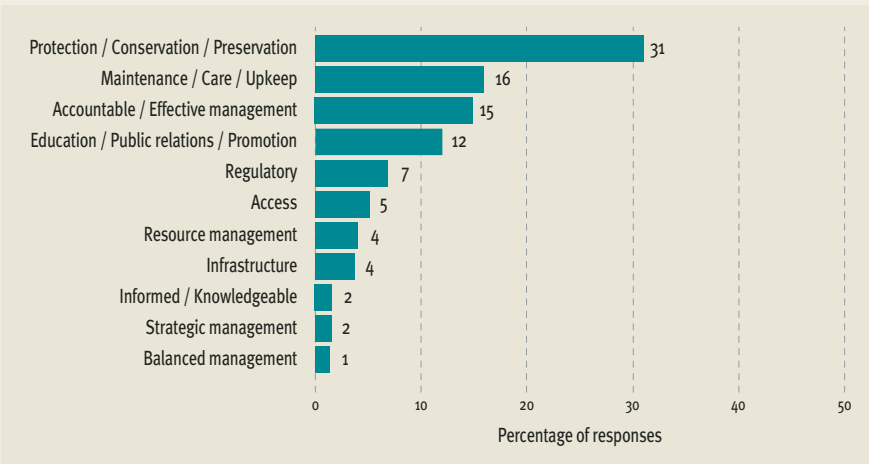


#### Further findings

- ▲ The most frequently reported **environmental threat** was “**feral animals and plants**” followed by “**human activity within the World Heritage Area**”.
- ▲ **Over 50% of responses related to human activities.**
- ▲ The community perception is that the majority of threats are only being **addressed to a slight extent.**



### What do you expect from the agencies responsible for World Heritage management?

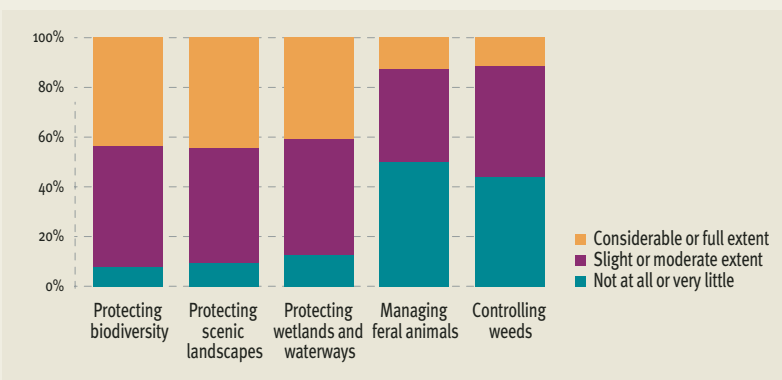


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**There is strong concern for the well being of the World Heritage Area. Human impacts of development, rural industries and feral species are matters of serious concern.**

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### Are World Heritage attributes being adequately protected or managed?

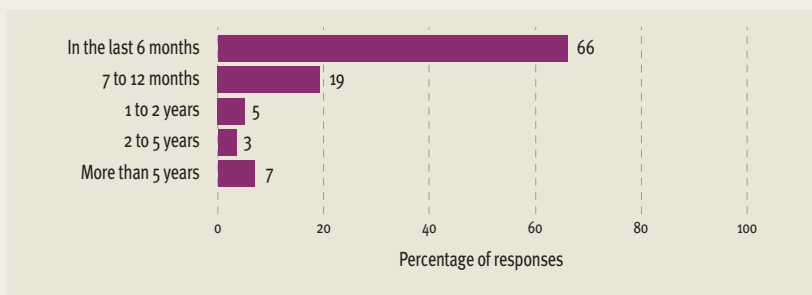


#### Further findings

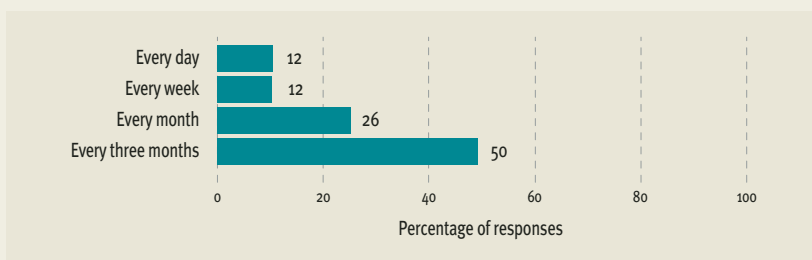
- ▲ Very few respondents believe World Heritage attributes are being fully protected or managed.
- ▲ Feral animals and weeds were perceived to be the least well managed.
- ▲ The community is not satisfied with the current standard of on-ground management.

## Visits by residents

### When did you last visit the World Heritage Area?



### How often do you visit?



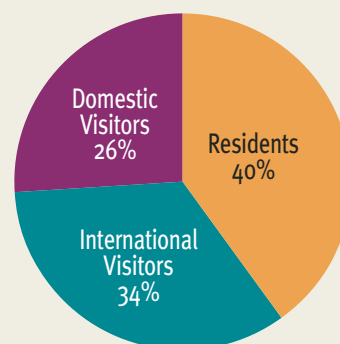
### Further findings

- ▲ 85% have visited the World Heritage Area.
- ▲ More than 65% visited within the past six months.
- ▲ 50% of the local community visit 1-4 times per year.



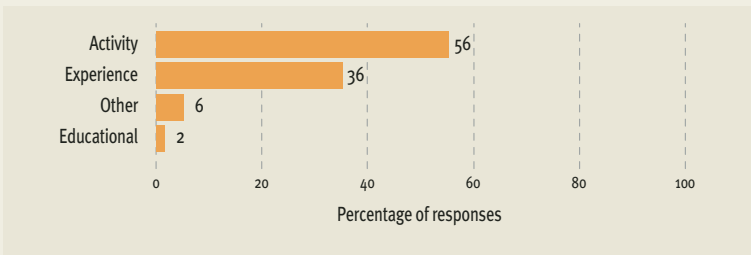
### Who are the visitors?

- ▲ There are estimated to be 4.65 million visits each year to 100 of the World Heritage Area’s visitor sites. Many are repeat visits by local residents.
- ▲ Regional residents were the main visitors making up 40% of the total numbers at most visitor sites.
- ▲ The average visitor age was 36 years. Overseas visitors are significantly younger than local and domestic visitors.
- ▲ The majority of visitors are travelling as families or small groups.
- ▲ The busiest months are October, January and from May to a peak in August.

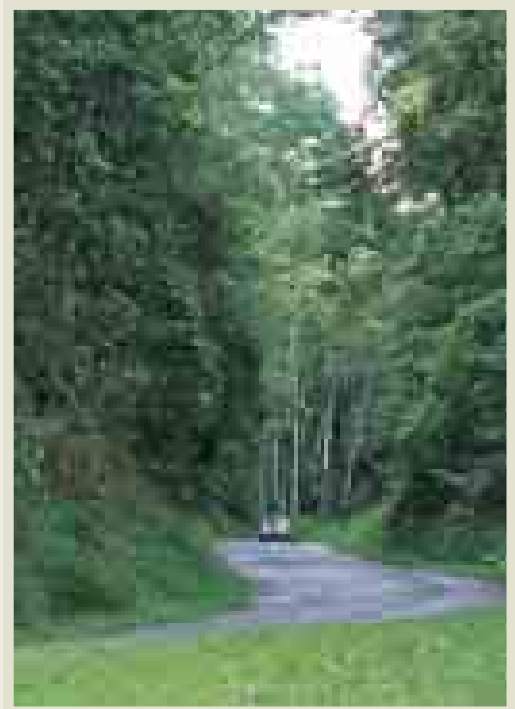


**Visits by residents**

**What was the main reason for your visit?**



- ▲ **Activity:** Recreation, sightseeing, camping, bush walking, swimming.
- ▲ **Experience:** To have a break, rest and relax, admire, appreciate, enjoy the environment, to experience tranquility.
- ▲ **Other:** Access my property, local / live nearby, general interest.
- ▲ **Educational:** Research, study animals and plants, showing and educating children.



**Favourite places**

- ▲ The most favourite World Heritage region was the Central Coast (between Cairns and Cardwell). Favourite places within the regions were:

**Northern region: The Daintree.**

**Tablelands: Lake Eacham.**

**Central Coast: Mission Beach.**

**Southern region: Hinchinbrook Island.**

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**The local community regularly visits the World Heritage Area, using it as a recreational venue and an escape.**

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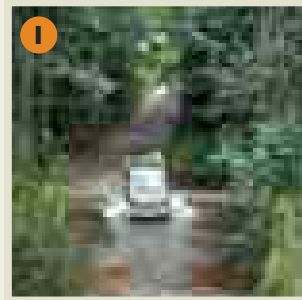


# Visits by residents

## Where do residents go?

▲ Residents visit icon sites such as the Daintree Coast and Barron Gorge. Some of these sites are experiencing serious overcrowding. (eg. Mossman Gorge receives up to 2,500 visitors in 24 hours and

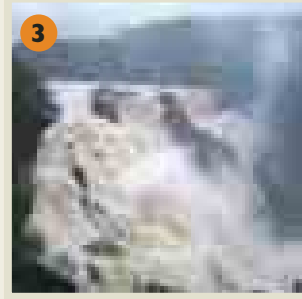
105 vehicles at one time. The current parking capacity is 25 vehicles.) Residents also seek out low-key, natural sites which are not heavily used by tourists (eg. Crystal Cascades, Alligator’s Nest).



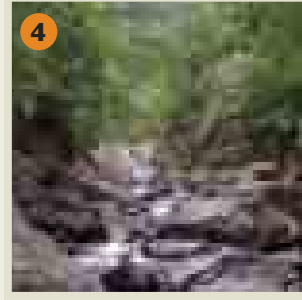
Daintree Coast



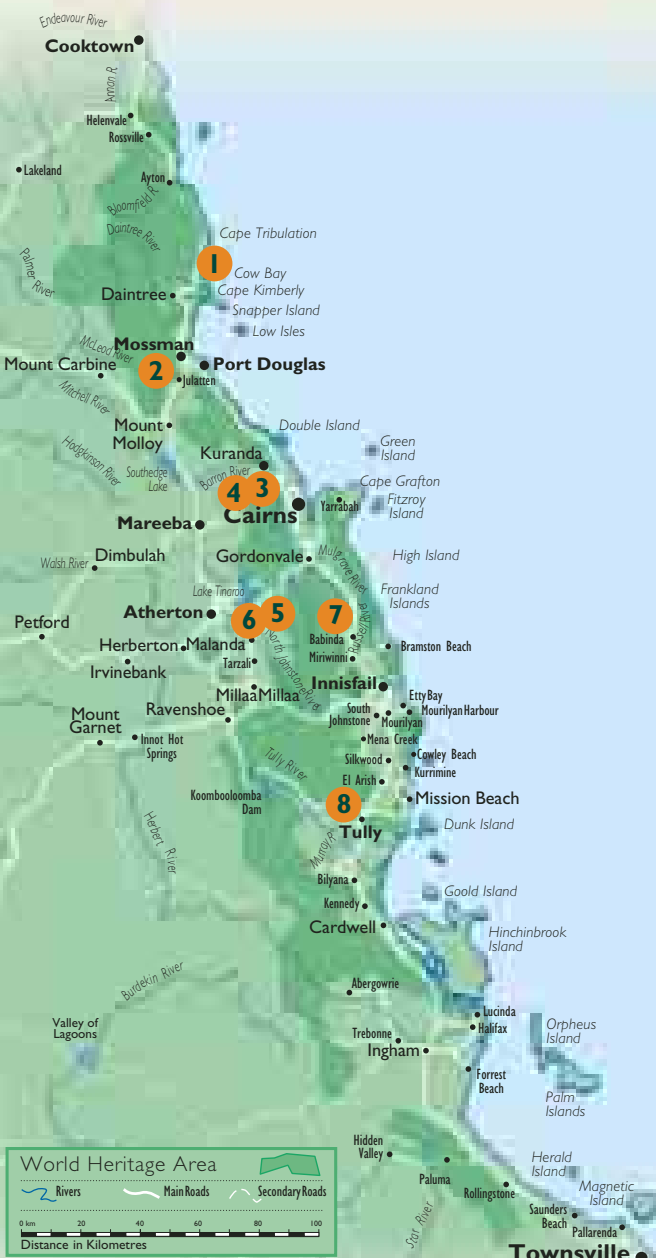
Mossman Gorge



Barron Gorge



Crystal Cascades



▲ These figures are based on traffic counters and estimates from environmental agency and tourism industry personnel.



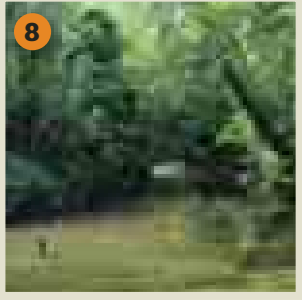
Lake Barrine, Lake Eacham



Cathedral Fig, Curtain Fig



Babinda Boulders



Alligator's Nest

## For more information

Bentrupperbäumer, J.M & Reser, J.P (2002). *Measuring and monitoring impacts of visitation and use in the WetTropics World Heritage Area 2001/2002: A site based bioregional perspective*. Rainforest Cooperative Research Centre, Cairns.

Bentrupperbäumer, J.M & Reser, J.P (2003). *The role of the Wet Tropics in the life of the community: A Wet Tropics World Heritage Area community survey*. Rainforest Cooperative Research Centre, Cairns.

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