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Dear Diana

**Submission by Ecotourism Australia on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
Authority Review**

Over the past five years the GBRMPA has been extremely proactive and engaging with the ecotourism industry. Of particular note is the level of co-operative that has developed between GBRMPA and Ecotourism Australia (EA).

The relationship commenced initially with positive interaction between EA and GBRMPA at the annual National Ecotourism Conference. The interaction has now developed into a symbiotic relationship where there are mutually beneficial outcomes for industry and the Great Barrier Reef.

The National Conference has a very strong representation of operators and is an excellent forum for bringing together the key stakeholders involved in delivering a sustainable tourism industry.

Clearly the GBR is a key ecotourism asset in Australia and probably contains the greatest concentration of eco-operations anywhere in Australia – and arguably the World.

Over the past two years EA and GBRMPA have forged an excellent working relationship as both have a commitment to sustainability and wise use of the GBR.

EA strongly supported the Representative Areas Plan approach by GBRMPA and believes without question that the economic value of tourism far exceeds the benefits that can be derived from activities such as commercial fishing. Indeed EA views with some considerable concern media conjecture that aspects of the RAP will be “wound back” due to pressures from commercial fishing interests.

EA has very strong links with international conservation and tourism bodies such as National Geographic, Conservation International, UNESCO, UNEP, World Tourism Organisation and the International Ecotourism Society. The awareness of these bodies of the GBR and the excellent management record of the GBRMPA cannot be underestimated. EA is frequently contacted by these bodies when case studies of best practice are sought.

Without question the best practices of industry are closely aligned with the fact that the GBRMPA has worked closely with us to encourage sustainable management approaches. For example two years ago the GBRMPA launched a comprehensive approach to providing significant commercial benefits (through, for example, greatly increased terms on commercial permits) to operators who adopt best practice certification schemes. EA, as the manager of the internationally respected ECO Certification scheme, entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with GBRMPA to deliver the certification program to operators on the GBR.

Similarly GBRMPA has been an active participant in Queensland's Tourism in Protected Areas initiative which aims to establish contemporary approaches to managing commercial tourism operations on high use protected areas.

These examples underline the fact that the GBRMPA has been very proactive and positive in dealing with the ecotourism industry.

World Heritage Areas in Australia have varying levels of government funding (from both the Commonwealth and state governments). The GBR is without question one of the Australian tourism industries key icons. EA views as essential the ongoing strong and direct funding, planning, policy and management input into the GBR by the Commonwealth Government, along with the Queensland Government. Additionally EA believes the delivery of Commonwealth functions should be conducted by a specialised Authority (ie the GBRMPA) and not through the more generic services of the Department of Environment and Heritage, or through Queensland Government protected area management agencies. Too often the proactive management of World Heritage Sites has lost momentum when the autonomy of the managing authority has been eroded. I commend this information and recommendations to you.

With Kind Regards



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