

MANAGING THE TOURISM PRODUCT: A Case Study on the Management of Tourism in the Cairns Region, Far North Queensland

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Brian H Roberts¹

Abstract

Cairns Region in Far North Queensland is one of Australia's most visited tourism destinations. Located adjacent to the northern reaches of the Great Barrier Reef and including the Daintree Wet Tropics Rainforest, one of the most ancient tropical rainforests of earth, the area is facing significant population growth and development pressures, increasing demand for agriculture land and the need for protection of areas of high ecological and cultural significance, which underpin a billion dollar tourism industry. This paper examines some of the challenges of managing the tourism product of the region against many competing demands. It provides the framework for the implementation of a sustainable tourism development and management strategy for the region and a action plan for its implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is Australia's largest export industry. In 1992 it generated an estimated \$7.2 billion in foreign exchange earnings and contributed over 6 percent to Gross National Product. For many regions in Australia, tourism has helped bring about new wealth and employment opportunities. Cairns Region, in Far North Queensland, is one region that has benefited significantly from the growth of tourism. It has the fastest tourism growth rate in Australia.

Tourism dominates the economy of Far North Queensland. The industry contributed over \$894 million, or 24.9 percent, to the Gross Regional Product in 1992.⁽¹⁾ In 1993, the Region attracted almost two million visitors. Visitor numbers have grown by an average of eight percent per annum over during the past ten years. However, by 1990 the ability of the Region to sustain high visitor growth rates began to be challenged. Public agencies were struggling to keep pace with the demand for new infrastructure.⁽²⁾ Parts of the natural environment began to show signs of deteriorating through excessive visitor use. Community and political concerns were voiced about the urban environment becoming another Gold Coast or Hawaii.

In response to these concerns, the Queensland Government announced the preparation of the Cairns Regional Tourism Strategy (CRTS). The strategy was intended to provide a framework for the management and development of tourism in the Region for the next 20 years. Work on CRTS commenced in April 1992 and was completed in April 1994. The Strategy is in the first phase of implementation.

This paper presents a case study on the development of the Strategy and the management framework adopted for its implementation. The Strategy incorporates a multi-sectoral approach to tourism management and its implementation involves participation by over 85 organisations from Federal agencies to community interest groups. The first sections of the paper provide an overview of the tourism product, the growth of the tourism industry, and key issues affecting the management of tourism

¹ The author is a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane

in the Region. The paper then examines the steps taken to formulate the strategy, highlighting some key initiatives, and finally, the mechanisms adopted for its implementation.

BACKGROUND TO THE REGION

The Cairns Region of Far North Queensland covers an area of approximately 50,000 km², stretching from Cape Tribulation to the Hinchinbrook Channel and inland to the edge of the Savanna Gulf country beyond the Atherton Tablelands (Figure 1). The Region is comprised of eight local authority districts. It has two very distinct climatic zones. The coastal lowlands and ranges zone experience some of the highest rainfall in Australia, the Atherton Tablelands and interior have some of the hottest temperatures. These two climatic zones contribute to regional contrasts in the landscape, vegetation and wildlife.

There has been continuous settlement by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Region for over 30,000 thousands years. In 1770, Captain Cook first mapped the coastline of the Region and named several prominent geographic features. European settlement started in the 1870s and grew rapidly during the 1920s. A major influx of visitors was experienced in 1942 when Cairns was used as a staging post for the Pacific War campaign. In the 1950s, Cairns became a popular holiday destination for farmers and visitors from the southern states of Australia who endured long and arduous rail or road journeys to reach the Region.

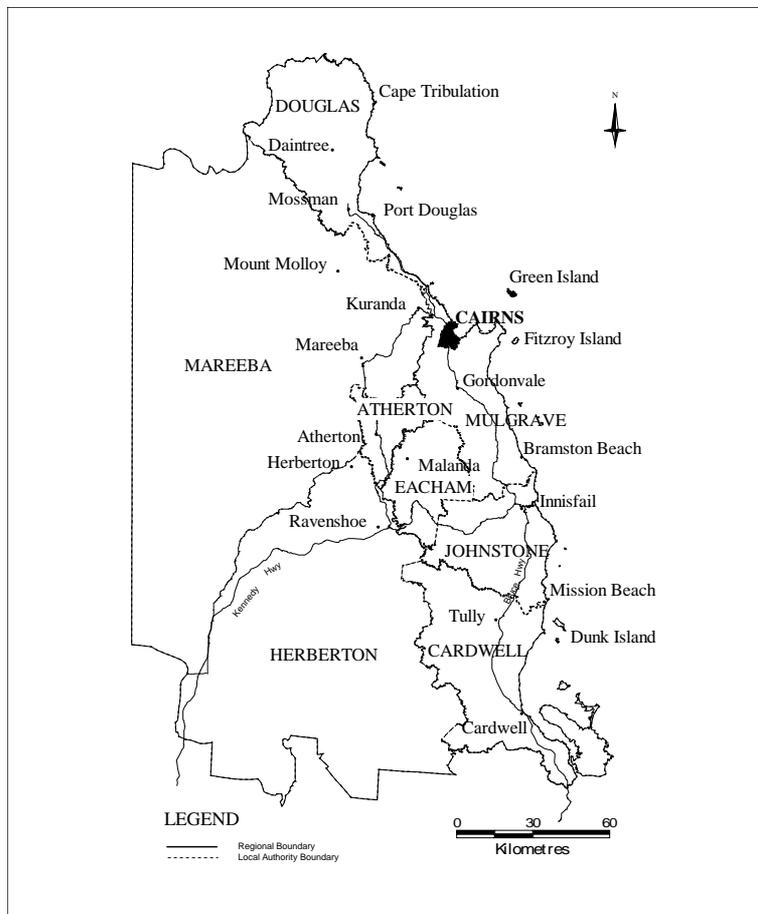


Figure 1 Map of The Cairns Region

In 1984, the Cairns International Airport was opened. A very rapid period of tourism development ensued with over \$1 billion invested in new accommodation and tourism facilities between 1986 and 1992. The controversy surrounding development in the Daintree and World Heritage listed areas

ironically gave the Region national and international publicity. This subsequently lended support to the development of the Region so that it is now one of Australia’s leading tourist destinations.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TOURISM PRODUCT

Cairns Region is a unique tourism destination with its collage of landscapes, coastline and island attractions within the three World Heritage listed areas of the Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics rainforest and Undarra fossil beds. Most people travelling to Far North Queensland come primarily for the purpose of seeing and experiencing the reef and rainforests. However, the farms, stations, rural towns, Cairns City, and other resort destinations are attractions offered to visitors that add diversity and give contrast to the tourism product.

The tourism product, however, comprises more than the physical attributes of its natural and man-made attractions. It also includes a recognition of the quality of experiences that people have with places visited in the Region. That quality of experience (for example - the sense of isolation and tactile contact with unspoiled surroundings, the excitement of meeting and sharing experiences with other people from different parts of Australia and the World) is a highly valued attribute of the region’s tourism product.

The tourism product of the Region is well documented in supporting reports used to prepare the tourism strategy, the Wet Tropics Management Plan, local Government Strategic Plans and other regional plans.⁽³⁾
⁽⁴⁾ ⁽⁵⁾ Key features of the product of interest to visitors are:

Landscape Attractions

The Region’s landscape attractions comprise its pristine natural environment as well as its developed rural areas. The natural attractions have been divided into 12 biophysical units that differ in characteristics, values and capacity to accommodate visitors and tourism development.⁽⁶⁾ The 12 biophysical units comprise:

upland rainforest	major rivers	coral reefs
lowland rainforest	natural lakes	beaches
eucalyptus forests	continental islands	dams and reservoirs
coastal wetlands	sand or coral cays	gorges, escarpments and waterfalls

The natural attractions of the Region are the most significant element of the tourism product as they play a number of roles for visitors by providing opportunities for:

- aquatic activities such as swimming, diving, fishing, viewing on the reef
- photography and sketching
- picnicking
- river rafting, canoeing, boating and water-skiing
- scenic driving, motorcycling, cycling, horse riding and walking in different landscapes
- obtaining a sense of isolation, smell and touch of the Region's fauna
- seeing wildlife in its natural environment
- sharing the experience of the natural environment with other people.

There is a diverse range of rural landscapes of scenic historic and educational interest to visitors. These include the coastal sugar and banana growing areas, the Atherton Tableland dairy, sugar and tobacco cropping areas, and the western grazing lands. Many of these areas contribute significantly to the cultural tourism product and heritage values of the Region.

Cultural and Heritage Interests

The cultural tourism product comprises aspects of indigenous, early settlement and contemporary culture. The Region has one of the richest mixtures of indigenous cultures in Australia, involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, dance, song, storytelling, ritual and ceremony. Tourism has created opportunities to present to Australian and overseas visitors an experience of that culture and way of life. The Tjapukai Dance Theatre in the township of Kuranda near Cairns is one of the most successful Aboriginal tourism ventures in Australia.

The Region is fortunate to have retained much of its pioneer and early settlement history and architecture. Many of the stories, traditions, myths, struggles and intrigues that were the life of pioneers and early settlers are being rekindled in the growing number of enterprises seeking to recreate the experience of past times.

In the last 20 years, the Region has begun to develop its own regional contemporary culture, especially the visual arts and crafts. Much of this has developed out of the alternate lifestyle communities in places like Kuranda Village. Kuranda has over 600,000 visitors annually to its contemporary art, craft and clothing markets.

Leisure, Shopping and Travel Services

Over the last decade, the basic range of tourism services and facilities available in the Region have expanded and diversified significantly as a consequence of increasing residents and visitors. The Region has a surprisingly large range of leisure, shopping and travel services. Most visitor retail services are located in Cairns where there is a strong emphasis on duty-free and specialised shopping. The development of the Cairns Casino and Convention Centre will significantly boost the choice of leisure and business facilities for visitors.

Photo of the Cairns City Centre



Source: FNQ Tourism Association

People and Places

The restaurants, cafes, clubs, bars and sidewalk venues that service visitors and the local community are important elements of the tourism product. These facilities are the meeting places for visitors to enjoy a

meal or drink together, chat, reminisce on the experiences of the day, and exchange information. The Cairns streetscape, sidewalk cafes, restaurants, evening market and seafront promenade attract large numbers of visitors into the city centre. These activity centres and the people in them add to the sense of excitement of Cairns as a tourism destination. Visitor surveys indicate high levels of visitor satisfaction with the tourism product.⁽⁷⁾

GROWTH OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Visitor Numbers and Nights

From 1986 to 1992 visitor numbers to the Region have increased from 850,000 to 1.85 million,⁽⁸⁾ a growth rate over 11.5 percent/annum (See Table 1). In 1985 fewer than 13 percent of total visitors to the Region were international. By 1993, the proportion of international visitors had increased to 29 percent. Figures obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Domestic Tourism Monitor (DTM) and Queensland Visitor Survey (QVS) show a steady 5 percent annual growth in the domestic visitors since 1988. During the same period, international visitor numbers grew by 24 percent/annum. By the year 2001, the number of visitors to the Region is expected to exceed 3 million per annum.

Table 1: Domestic Visitors and Visitor Nights

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Domestic Travel									
Visitors, 000s		731	820	915	979	1 163	931	1 344	1235
Visitor Nights, 000s		4 552	5 445	5 615	5 189	5 486	4 535	6 482	6076
International Travel									
Visitors, 000s	108	136	-(a)	320	304	368	393	508	508
Visitor Nights, 000s	1 019	1 147	-(a)	2 288	2 702	3 404	3 283	3 312	3326

Source: CRTS Position Paper No.1, Visitor Forecasts, National Centre for Studies in Travel and Tourism, 1992; Visitor Forecast Update, National Centre for Studies in Travel and Tourism, 1993 (a) No survey IVS in 1987.

There was a 15.8 percent/annum growth in international visitor night stays in the Cairns Region between 1986 and 1992. Domestic visitor night growth rates have fluctuated over the same period and have generally increased by 5.2 percent/annum. However, the average length of stay in the Region by domestic and international visitors has declined slightly. While the reasons for this decline are not well understood, destination prices and a shortage of attractions that would encourage visitors to stay longer may have been contributing factors.

Population Growth

The permanent resident population of the Cairns Region increased from 124,800 to 169,900 between 1981 and 1991, a growth rate of 2.8% per annum. The population of the Region is projected to reach 217,000 by the year 2001 and will continue to be driven by rapid tourism and urban development.⁽⁹⁾ The Region's non-resident population (mainly visitors) increased from 21,500 in 1986 to 34,000 in 1991. It is expected to exceed 56,000 by the year 2001.

Accommodation Stock

Commercial hotel and motel accommodation in the Region increased from 7,690 beds in 1983 to 22,460 beds in 1992, a growth rate of 11% per annum (see Table 2). Hostel bed space numbers have experienced very similar growth rates, with many of the older dwelling houses in inner-city Cairns being converted into budget-priced backpacker accommodation. The most significant growth in the past five years has been in the flat and unit accommodation market, many of which are self-catering. The demand for caravan sites and cabins has remained unchanged.

Table 2: Increase in Accommodation Stock 1984 to 1993

Accommodation	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Hotels and Motels											
Establishments	112	113	109	114	127	140	146	148	142	136	143
Rooms	2 661	2 713	2 699	3 426	4 586	5 459	6 909	7 346	7 214	7 224	8058
Beds	7 693	8 029	7 994	10	13	16	21352	22312	22956	23109	24511
				157	567	918					
Hostels											
Establishments	23	16	15	18	24	29	41	42	42	36	38
Beds	412	618	596	940	1 632	2 072	3 393	3 332	3 406	3 099	3052
Units/Flats											
Number of Units	586	750	816	1 097	1 203	1 345	2 006	1 987	1 873	2 000	NA
Caravan Parks											
Establishments	85	84	81	92	93	94	89	94	94	95	93
Sites(Short Term)	6 045	5 995	6 052	5 470	5 538	5 504	5 244	5 850	5 872	5 978	NA

Source: ABS & Cairns Region Tourism Strategy, Position Paper No. 1, Visitor Forecasts, National Centre for Studies in Travel and Tourism, 1993.

CURRENT ISSUES AFFECTING THE MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM

The preparation of the CRTS began following the appointment of a five-member steering committee representing government and industry interests. A reference group of over 40 organisations was established to act as an advisory group to the steering committee. The reference group provided a forum for comment on reports and consultation during all the preparation stages of the Strategy. The first phase of the Strategy involved an analysis of issues affecting the management of the tourism industry in the Region. These issues were extensively documented in various Position Papers. Some key issues raised by the papers include:

Planning and Management of Tourism Development

There are over 85 organisations involved in decision-making affecting the management and development of tourism in the Region. There is no mechanism for coordinating the activities of these organisations, nor has there been a plan that provides a commonly agreed set of objectives and strategies for the management and development of the industry.⁽¹⁰⁾ Much of the decision-making affecting the tourism industry has been undertaken in an ad hoc manner. Many organisations work to their agenda and priorities with limited funds and resources and little knowledge of what other organisations are doing. The result is an unnecessary duplication of work, studies and planning at all levels of Government.

This style of decision-making will continue to occur until a framework is developed which incorporates better coordination, planning and information sharing. This situation is further exacerbated by the plethora of planning processes at national, state, regional and local authority levels that have impacts on the Region's tourism industry. There are no less than 30 different planning processes operating at six levels in the Region that have some impact on the tourism industry. These processes are shown in Figure 2.

One of the most difficult tasks in the preparation of the Strategy was how to address and integrate the broad range of policies included in these processes, especially matters of contradiction and conflict. The Department of Housing Local Government and Planning (DHLGP) established a regional planning process Far North Queensland Region (FNQ 2010) in 1992 to overcome some of these problems. Its powers, however, are very limited, especially in addressing state and national policy matters.

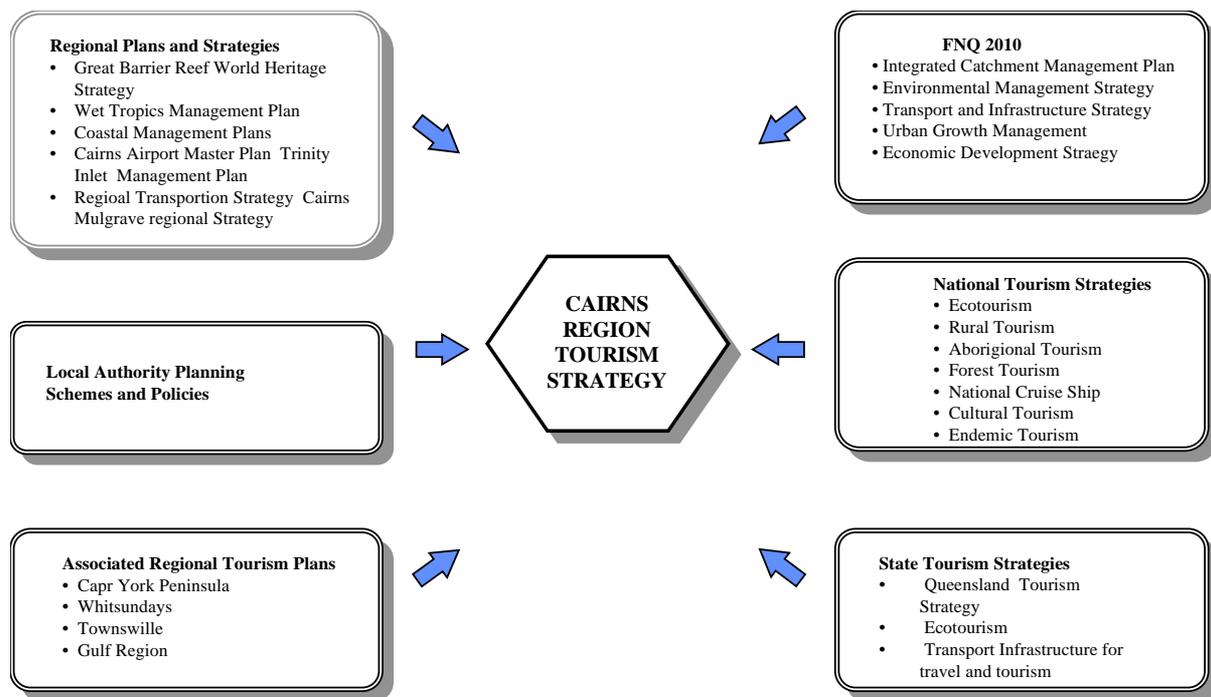


Figure 2 Other Planning Processes impacting on Tourism in the Cairns Region

Economics of Tourism

Tourism was estimated to contribute \$895 million to the Regional economy in 1992, equivalent to 24.7 percent of the Gross Regional Product. ⁽¹¹⁾ It provided 25 percent of the employment in the Region, the equivalent of 24,000 jobs across a wide range of supporting industries. The level of dependency on tourism is one of the highest in Australia. The regional economy is, therefore, very vulnerable to shifts in visitor market preferences or disruptions in the air transport industry such as those experienced during the national pilot's strike in 1990.

Conservation of the Natural Resource Product

The World Heritage listed areas, coastline, Tablelands and Outback were the natural attractions that are used extensively by the tourism industry. As these attractions are finite, fragile, unique resources, the industry can ill afford to modify substantially or over-exploit them. Everyday, over 35,000 visitors enjoy the Region's natural environment. Several parts of the World Heritage listed areas are reaching the limits of visitor carrying capacity and are showing signs of environmental degradation.

The dilemma facing the tourism industry is how to maximise the benefits from tourism while at the same time minimise the visitor impacts upon the natural environment. The continuing growth of the tourism industry is dependent on acquiring secure access to the Region's natural attractions. This will only be possible if there are better understanding and cooperation between resource management agencies and tour operators on the sustainable use of World Heritage areas and other areas of high conservation value.

Improvements to Transport Infrastructure

Cairns International Airport is the gateway to Far North Queensland. The Airport handled over 2.5 million passengers movements in 1992.⁽¹²⁾ International passenger numbers have grown by 43% per annum since the airport was first opened. Cairns is Australia's fifth largest airport and it is expected to move into fourth position before the end of the decade. While much of the railway, road and harbour

transport infrastructure in the Region is well developed, an estimated \$790 million will be required by the year 2001 for new infrastructure, of which \$180 million will be needed to support the development of the tourism industry⁽¹³⁾ If the relative levels of public sector funding remain consistent with the levels of the past five years, there is unlikely to be sufficient capital available to fund new, or replace existing, transport infrastructure. Other means of funding and/or the provision of essential transport infrastructure must be identified and developed.

Provision of Municipal Services

The demand for municipal services has been primarily driven by rapid population and tourism growth and subsequent demand for serviced land. An estimated \$866 million will be required to support the development of engineering services by the year 2001, of which \$214 million will be required to support tourism-related investment.⁽¹⁴⁾ As is the case for transport infrastructure, there is unlikely to be sufficient public sector capital available to develop all the services required by the year 2001. Local Government's capacity to continue the funding and maintenance of an expanding network of municipal services from the existing rate base is limited. Other direct user means of funding municipal services must be adopted if the demand for new services is to be satisfied.

Impact of Tourism on Community Attitudes and Culture

Community attitudes towards the development of tourism in the Region have been good. However, rising incidents of crime involving visitors, seasonal unemployment, limited career prospects for the industry, public concerns about foreign investment, and increasing foreign visitor numbers may induce stronger negative community attitudes towards tourism.⁽¹⁵⁾ The future of the industry is very dependent on maintaining positive community attitudes to tourism, and on public agencies taking appropriate corrective measures to mitigate some of the adverse impacts that are often associated with the industry. The fostering of a more tourism-oriented culture by the industry through greater consultation with business, community and special interest groups is recognised as being important to the sustainable development of the Region's tourism industry.

Forecasting

There is a plethora of data, reports, projections and forecasts produced by tourism for the Region. Much of the statistical and survey information available at a regional level cannot be analysed meaningfully at a local authority level.⁽¹⁶⁾ In the absence of reliable forecasts, many public and private sector organisations have prepared projections, all of which have proved unreliable. The finance and investment industry has little confidence in forecasts produced for the Region. There is an urgent need to establish a regional tourism information system that will provide consistent and credible data and forecasts.

New Investment in Accommodation

An estimated \$1.1 to \$1.4 billion of new investment in accommodation will be required by the year 2001 to provide sufficient bed and room spaces for the anticipated growth in visitors.⁽¹⁷⁾ In the past, the supply of tourism accommodation has been driven by expectations of quick returns and high capital gains, much of it created by 'hyped-up' marketing reports based on unrealistic visitor forecasts. In reality, few hotels and resorts built in the Region have realised satisfactory returns on investment from operational revenues, with several operating under receivers. The recession of 1990/92 saw investors move away from the hotel/resort market, and only recently have yields shown any sign of improvement. The current lack of investor confidence in new hotel construction is likely to result in short-term room shortages in the four and five star accommodation market.

FORMULATION OF THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE TOURISM STRATEGY

The completion of the various Position Papers marked the end of the research stage of the Strategy. The next stage involved the formulation of a framework for the management and development of tourism. A prerequisite to the process was the determination of a strategy for visitor growth. The need for continued visitor growth in the Region is generally accepted by the community as being desirable. However, there are divergent community opinions about the desirable type and rate of growth in visitors to the Region.

Selection of a Growth Strategy

There are two growth management strategies that the Cairns Region could have adopted for the future development of its tourism industry. The first involved a focus on increasing visitor numbers. The alternative was to focus primarily on increasing yields. To date, the development of tourism in the Region has been led by a growth volume strategy. This strategy was underwritten by substantial public and private sector investment in infrastructure and tourism facilities. It has worked well until now, but substantial new capital investment in infrastructure, facilities and destinations is required to support any increase in the visitor growth rate. Since 1991, investment in major tourism facilities by foreign investors has all but disappeared.

There is growing evidence that, despite higher visitor volumes, profit margins are declining. Hotel promotion costs had increased from 2 percent of turnover in 1984 to over 6.3 percent in 1992.⁽¹⁸⁾ Public sector revenues and borrowing capacity for new infrastructure are constrained by the narrow tax base, and there are growing concerns about the impact that large numbers of visitors are having on highly valued parts of the natural environment. Consequently, a strategy to increase growth rates above current levels is not achievable or sustainable.

Many people in the Region favour a strategy which aims to limit the visitor growth rate and initiates actions that will facilitate an increase in visitor yields. A small minority favour a ceiling on visitor numbers. Such an option has the potential to undermine investor confidence further and would result in economic stagnation if implemented too quickly. A strategy aimed at increasing yields, however, will require the development of more specialised tourism products and services, a change in marketing emphasis, and improved management and presentation of regional tourism assets.

The desired growth strategy agreed upon for the Region was to try and stabilise the growth rate around 8 percent or less. Concerted effort would be given to improving yields through encouraging more specialised services involving nature and business tourism, and the development of more diversified tourism products and services in keeping with the culture and lifestyle of the Region. Current growth rates can be sustained for the foreseeable future, provided there is better management of visitors using the natural attractions of the Region. This strategy will need to be coupled with initiatives to facilitate private sector development and operation of infrastructure, and initiatives to encourage investment to increase the level of accommodation. The provision of privately developed and funded infrastructure and new accommodation will require policy support at both national and state government levels.

Strategy Planning Options

The issues and problems confronting the Cairns Region necessitated the development of a broad-based tourism strategy. Most tourism strategies prepared in Australia to date comprise three general types - development, economic and marketing strategies. Development strategies focus primarily land use, infrastructure and tourism facilities planning. Economic strategies tend to address investment, product mix and capital funding issues. Marketing strategies identify opportunities and develop new markets and products. In recent times, tourism marketing strategies have begun to focus on the eco- and cultural tourism market.

The framework for the CRTS called for a much wider agenda than a development, economic or marketing strategy. Two previous regional plans, the Cairns Area Development Plan⁽¹⁹⁾ and the Cairns-Mulgrave Tourism Research Study⁽²⁰⁾ emphasised development and economic planning but failed to address other management issues involved with rapid tourism development. A more holistic approach to the management and development of tourism in the Region was required. This led to a multi-sector industry approach being formulated as the framework for the development of the tourism strategy.

To develop a multi-sector strategy, it was necessary to examine the structure and linkages between different activities comprising the tourism industry. The tourism industry is divided into two principle activity areas. The 'core' business activities are the transportation, accommodation, travel, entertainment, restaurant and marketing services. These businesses primarily provide services to people who travel. The other area is the 'non-core' businesses that serve tourism and many other sectors of the economy. Such businesses or organisations do not rely heavily upon tourism as a main business activity. Non core activities include education and training; public utilities and transport infrastructure; visitor health and emergency services; recreation and environmental management agencies, and the information industry. Without these services, however, the Region's tourism industry could not operate or develop to its full potential. Figure 3 shows a range of activities that fall into the core and non-core components of the tourism industry. Often, there is not always a clear delineation between the two components.



Figure 3 Core and Non-Core Functions of the Tourism Industry

The framework for the tourism strategy is primarily concerned with developing linkages and networks between the core and non-core business activities to ensure better cooperation and coordination on the development and management of tourism in the Region. There is a strong emphasis on the resolution of conflicts and problems that constrain the management and development of tourism. Many of the

problems confronting the industry are complex and can only be solved by cooperation that brings together interested and affected parties to work in network groups. For example, an agency like Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service is unlikely to be successful in reducing visitor numbers in heavily used sites without the cooperation of tour operators, permitting agencies, traffic authorities, and the relevant local authorities.

Objectives of the Tourism Strategy

Extensive consultation with the reference group was undertaken to formulate the primary objectives of the strategy. The Strategy has only four primary objectives. These are to:

- DEVELOP A DIVERSIFIED TOURISM PRODUCT TO SUPPORT THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF THE REGION
- PROVIDE FOR THE COORDINATED DELIVERY OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES TO SUPPORT TOURISM
- ENSURE SUSTAINABLE USE OF THE REGION'S NATURAL AND CULTURAL ASSETS, AND
- ESTABLISH APPROPRIATE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES TO MANAGE AND DEVELOP THE TOURISM INDUSTRY.

Key Strategy Initiatives

The tourism strategy comprises a series of initiatives that support these four objectives. Actions have been formulated for each initiative with 96 actions in total being included in the CRTS. Some of these actions are broad-ranging and involve monitoring trends and impacts. Others tackle more complex issues such as a tourism disaster management plan in the event that the area is struck by a major cyclone. Some of the key actions that support the first three objectives are summarised below:

Development of a diversified Tourism Product

To reduce the dependence upon nature-based tourism in the Region, product diversification is essential. While the development of nature tourism product will continue and become more specialised, greater emphasis will be placed upon the realisation of new cultural and business tourism opportunities. Specific initiatives will be introduced to link tourism with education, training, and medical services. Other initiatives will use tourism to present regional products with export potential to visitors. These products include tropical fruits, export quality furniture made from plantation rainforest timber, and miniature Australian bonsai and orchids.

In recognition of the increasing numbers of overseas and Australian visitors seeking to experience aspects of indigenous and contemporary culture, actions will be taken to develop and improve the presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural attractions. A management training scheme will be established with the support of Government and industry to support fledgling pioneer mining, forestry, fishing, sugar, art and craft enterprises that recreate an authentic cultural experience of the Region's history

Greater product diversification will be achieved by expanding inter-regional destination package holidays originating from Cairns. This initiative involves linking other regional destinations into the Region's tourism industry so that visitors spend two or three nights away in areas such as the Whitsundays, Cape York, and Townsville regions, and the Northern Territory. Visitors would then return to Cairns before flying out of the country or to Southern State capitals. The linking of other regional destinations into the Cairns tourism product has the advantage of increasing the length of visitor stay and yields while benefiting other regional tourism industries.

Coordinated Delivery of Infrastructure and Support Services

The poor coordination between organisations associated with the industry has resulted in uncertainty over investment, product development and planning for tourism. To redress this situation, several actions will be taken to streamline the delivery of services and information to the industry. The establishment of an organisation structure to improve coordination within the industry has a high priority. The proposed organisation structure for the management of tourism development is outlined in the next section of the paper.

The strategy does not include a land use plan for tourism development. This is the domain of local governments and the FNQ 2010 regional planning process that was alluded to earlier in the paper. Specific initiatives contained in the Strategy encourage private sector construction of infrastructure, uniform standards of waste management treatment for tourism facilities, and protect sites for the ongoing development of major transport facilities.

The uncertainty created by poor visitor forecasts will be rectified by the establishment of a regional information system and forecasting model. The model, controlled by the State Treasury, is expected to provide one and five-year visitor forecasts, economic data and other statistics for the entire industry. The release of an annual official set of forecasts, and stricter quality control on the release of statistics and survey data will ensure all organisations involved with the industry work from a common source of information. This should improve the quality of decision-making across the industry.

Other industry initiatives focus on: education and training services; industry management programmes; the monitoring of visitor attitudes, experiences and perceived deficiencies in the tourism product; the introduction of community awareness programmes to maintain support for the industry; and the preparation of a disaster management strategy in the event that the Region is devastated by a major cyclone.

Conservation of Natural And Cultural Assets

Most visitors to the Cairns Region seek to visit the reef and rainforest. However, there is growing recognition that the northern reef system and rainforest destinations are nearing visitor capacity limits under current management practices. The CRTS, therefore, provides actions to redirect visitors to other destinations in World Heritage areas which offer a similar range of natural experiences. This will be achieved through a combination of marketing, permit constraints, and on-site management techniques.

Other initiatives to ensure more sustainable use of the Region's natural assets by the tourism industry include support for volunteer programmes to rehabilitate high-quality scenic areas damaged by previous land use practices. Education programmes are advocated for visitors and residents to create an improved awareness of protecting high-value tourism destinations from excessive use.

Many of the conservation actions support the conservation measures of the World Heritage Management and Wet Tropics Tourism Strategy. The maintenance of the Region's cultural heritage values and the presentation of a genuine cultural experience have strong support from the tourism industry and the wider community. Several actions address the retention of the Region's tropical architecture heritage and lifestyle.

MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

There are over 85 organisations involved in the implementation of the CRTS. These organisations represent the interests of the three levels of government, business and the community. The management structure established ensures the interests of these organisations are:

- Incorporated in the Strategy
- Included in the formulation of new policies and initiatives for tourism in the Region
- Considered when proposed actions have multi-sector impacts.

There is a need to ensure that the actions addressed by the CRTS are properly coordinated and monitored. A governance structure was developed for this and to oversee the implementation and management of the Strategy. The structure involves a collaborative partnership between Government, the tourism industry, and community interest groups. The organisation structure comprises a:

Regional Tourism Consultative Forum (Forum) that comprises all agencies and organisations associated with tourism in the Region. The Forum is a body that will raise, discuss and debate regional tourism issues, and recommend policies and initiatives to be considered by a small management body, the Regional Tourism Council, described below.

Regional Tourism Council (RTC) that handles overseeing the implementation of the Strategy. The RTC coordinates regional tourism policies, development and management and represents the key tourism industry interests of State, local and Federal Governments, national and local businesses.

Tourism Development Unit (TDU) that coordinates the day-to-day activities and actions of the Strategy and also focuses on the development of tourism product in the Region. The services provided by the TDU include the dissemination and coordination of tourism information; organisation of seminars, work shops and training programmes; coordination of research programmes and studies on regional tourism; and the publication of material of interest to the tourism industry. The TDU provides administrative support to the RTC and the Forum.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

Management Structure

The execution of the actions in the CRTS is the responsibility of many small working or network groups comprised of representatives from government agencies, the tourism industry and the community. Other groups comprise established organisation structures, special committees, multi-agency and business working groups. Every effort was made to avoid establishing further committee structures. Figure 4 conceptualises the management structure and the implementation of Strategy actions, inputs and outputs. The TDU has a central role in coordinating information and monitoring the progress on the completion of all actions. The Unit is required to provide a regular report to the RTC on the overall performance of Strategy implementation.

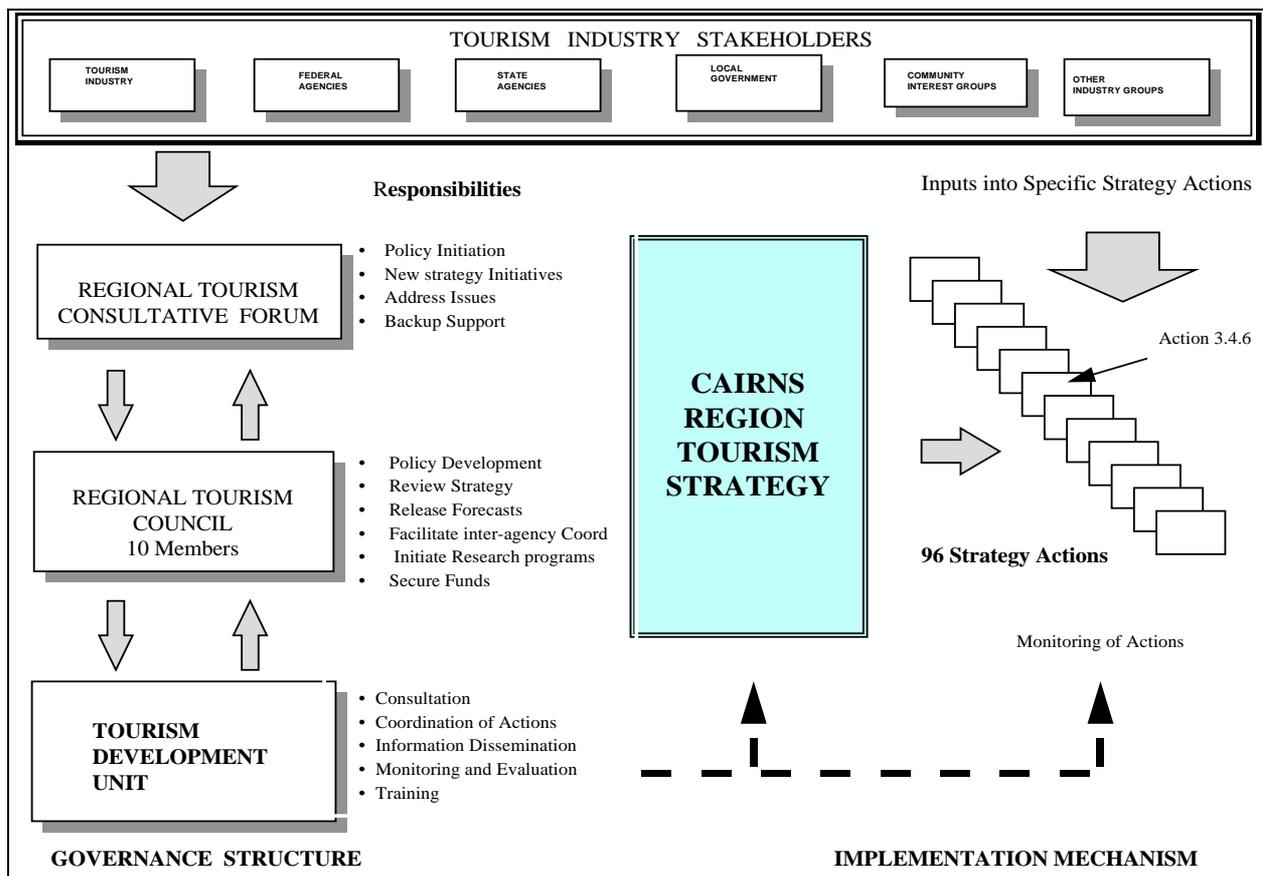


Figure 4 Implementation of the Cairns Region Tourism Strategy

Action Plan

The Action Plan describes specific actions or tasks that support various initiatives contained in the Strategy. The Plan lists every action, the agencies and organisations responsible for the execution of the actions, resource requirements, the anticipated timeframe (in weeks) to complete the action, as well as start and completion dates. Table 3 is an example of the format of actions in the Plan. Extensive use was made of critical path project management techniques to coordinate agency inputs and to ensure proper control and monitoring on the progress of actions as they are implemented.

Table 3 Format of Action Plan defining tasks, agencies, duration, and resources

No	Action	Work (Wk's)	Start	Finish	Responsible Agencies
2.1.1	Wet Tropics Visitor Site Destination Development Program	30 wk	July 94	Jan 95	WTMA*, FNQPB, DEH
3.4.6	Market Intelligence Report	26 wk	July 94	Dec 98	FNQPB, QTTC, ATC

WTMA Wet Tropics Management Authority
 FNQPB Far North Queensland Promotion Bureau
 ATC Australian Tourism Commission

DEH Department of Environment and Heritage
 QTCC Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation
 * Lead Agency

The CRTS also includes an action schedule for each agency. This schedule enables an agency to identify easily the actions it is involved with or responsible for, and the resources and times necessary for implementing specific actions. The schedule is essentially a check list of things to be done. It is also a useful long-term budgeting tool, especially for government agencies. Table 4 is an example of an agency action sheet for the Cairns Port Authority.

Table 4 Action Plan Schedule for Cairns Port Authority

Cairns Port Authority		Total Resources	60 person weeks	
Ref No.	Action	Time	Start	End
2.1.6	Cruise Ship Destination	10w	1/5/94	1/1/04
3.1.1	Regional Tourism Council	10w	3/3/94	1/1/04
3.1.3	Cairns Primary Service Centre Policy	2w	1/5/94	30/12/94
3.2.1	Strategy for Marine Facilities	6w	1/6/95	1/6/96
3.2.2	Key Port Facilities	5w	1/5/94	1/1/04
3.2.3.1	Strategy for Regional Aviation	6w	1/6/95	1/1/96
3.2.3.2	Cairns Airport Development	15w	1/5/94	1/1/04
3.3.3	Infrastructure Economics	1w	3/3/94	1/1/04
3.3.5	Infrastructure Forecasts	5w	1/6/95	1/1/04

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy

Review and performance criteria were formulated for all actions in the CRTS. The review and performance criteria focus on the attainment of specific, measurable outcomes which relate to either:

- **Products** such as a tourism database, a visitor forecasting model, and a regional visitor-trip-travel model.
- **Programmes** to develop aviation and marine facilities that service the tourism industry, enhancement exports through tourism, and training initiatives.
- **Items of infrastructure** such as airport expansion, walking trails and four-wheel drive tracks.
- **Impact assessment** such as level of visitor satisfaction with the tourism product, and community reaction to foreign investment and development proposals.

The review criteria are fundamental for evaluating the overall performance of the Strategy.

CONCLUSION

The CRTS is one of the most comprehensive strategies prepared for tourism in Australia. The Strategy aims to provide a framework for the sustainable development of the Region's tourism industry over the next 20 years. Its preparation involved extensive consultations over two years with the community, government, and business organisations. The organisation structure and the mechanisms adopted to implement the Strategy involved a move away from traditional public sector dominated decision-making planning process, to the development of a regional partnership involving, government, industry and the community interests.

The Strategy will hopefully lead to improved inter-agency coordination, management, information sharing and decision-making for tourism in the Region. The Action Plan provides every organisation involved in the implementation of the Strategy with a simple list of tasks for which it is responsible. Some agencies commenced the implementation of actions well before the Strategy was endorsed by the Queensland Government in April 1994. In this respect, there was no need to have the management structure in place to facilitate the implementation process. The Strategy was always intended to be used as a self-managed planning tool and has attracted considerable support from agencies for its clarity.

The Strategy is expected to help facilitate new investment in a more diversified tourism product, and to provide support in securing better services and infrastructure for the tourism industry. More importantly, improved management practices should ensure that the tourism industry uses the natural attractions of the

Region in a more sustainable manner, thereby ensuring that the natural resource base is not further degraded.

While accommodation facilities, high-quality services and unique visitor attractions are important elements of a tourism industry and tourism planning, without visitors the tourism industry would not exist. As a people-oriented industry visitors are encouraged to travel vast distances to experience the places and spaces that other people call home. Community attitudes towards visitors, the friendliness, hospitality and willingness to let visitors experience local assets (which local communities are largely responsible for maintaining), has a marked impact on visitor perceptions about the places they visit, the people they meet, and the experiences they take home to family and friends. Making visitors feel comfortable and at home is what makes Cairns one of the most successful tourism destinations in Australia. The Tourism Strategy reinforces this ideal.

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