



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

### Summary of Community Survey Results

#### Introduction

A community survey carried out in the North Queensland region in 2007 provides detailed knowledge of the community's use and perceptions of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (WTQWHA).

This information will provide a basis for 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 Authority (WTMA) with an understanding of changes in community attitude that may have occurred over the five-year period.

Research to support the 2007 survey was funded by the Australian Government's Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility and carried out by James Cook University tourism researchers.

#### Survey 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 door-to-door survey in Cairns, Gordonvale, Mission Beach, Innisfail, Babinda and Mirriwinni.

Another 2,141 surveys were posted to random private post box holders in Atherton, Cardwell, Halifax, Herberton, Ingham, Kuranda, Millaa Millaa, Port Douglas, Ravenshoe, Rollingstone and the Townsville suburbs of Belgian Gardens and Deeragun.

A total of 853 completed surveys were returned, giving an overall response rate of 20.6%, a level considered to be appropriate and representative for this type of community research.

#### Profiles of survey respondents

- ♦ More females (52.9%) than males (47.1%) completed the community survey.
- ♦ Seventy-five percent of survey respondents live in suburban or semi-urban dwellings.
- ♦ The average period of residency was 24 years.
- ♦ Just over half (54.1%) of survey respondents reported having a university, trade or technical qualification.
- ♦ The average age of survey respondents was 49 years.
- ♦ The largest group of survey respondents was pensioners, retired or unemployed (22.8%), followed by professionals and associate professionals (17.7%).

#### Actual knowledge of the World Heritage Area

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 survey 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.
- ♦ Survey respondents understood that the WTQWHA was World Heritage listed for its protection, conservation and preservation (45.8%) and is natural, ecological and geological significance (37.9%).

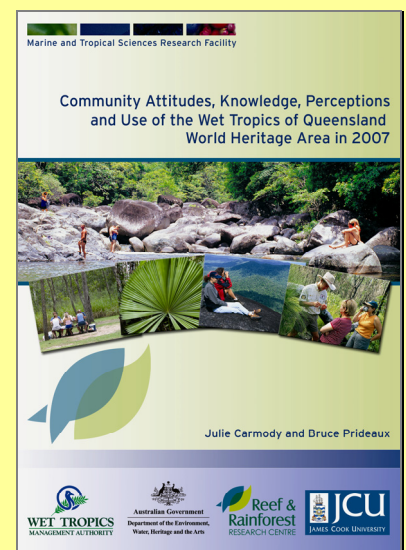
#### Community support

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

- ♦ Sixty-two percent of survey respondents indicated they 'strongly supported' the World Heritage listing.
- ♦ Just over ninety percent (92.6%) of respondents supported the general level of protection that operates within the WTQWHA.
- ♦ Support for the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural heritage in a future World Heritage listing was high (71.8%).
- ♦ Two-thirds (66.9%) of survey respondents supported some form of Aboriginal co-management of the WTQWHA.

Results of the 2007 Community Survey are available for download:

[http://www.rrrc.org.au/publications/  
community\\_attitudes.html](http://www.rrrc.org.au/publications/community_attitudes.html)



## Learning about the Wet Tropics

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

- ♦ Signage at sites within the WTQWHA was considered to be the best source of information provided by the management agency.
- ♦ Newspapers, word-of-mouth and television were the most commonly used sources of general information about the WTQWHA.
- ♦ Access to any WTQWHA information by survey respondents was considered to be only moderately available.
- ♦ There was an increase in use of the Wet Tropics website (<http://www.wettropics.gov.au/>) from eight percent of respondents to the 2002 survey, to 21% of respondents to the 2007 survey.
- ♦ Seventy-three percent of survey respondents did not require any further information or access to information about the WTQWHA.

## World Heritage listing: Advantages and disadvantages

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

- ♦ The most important personal benefits were that it is 'good to know that it [the WTQWHA] exists' and that 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' (for example, rain, cyclones, 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 to living adjacent to a World Heritage Area.

## Management of the World Heritage Area

This section was designed to gather community views on aspects of the management of the WTQWHA.

The agency responsible for managing the World Heritage Area is the Wet Tropics Management Authority. Day-to-day maintenance of parks and other facilities within the area is undertaken by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

- ♦ Just over a quarter (27.5%) of survey respondents thought the Environmental Protection Agency of Queensland was the agency responsible for the management of the WTQWHA, while 21% of respondents indicated the Wet Tropics Management Authority as the management agency.
- ♦ Survey respondents' expectations of the management agency were to 'protect, conserve and preserve' the WTQWHA.
- ♦ Logos identifying an area as being part of the WTQWHA are mostly noticed on signs and on television, posters, stickers, uniforms and vehicles.

## Protection and conservation management

The protection of the WTQWHA is an important component of the role of the Wet Tropics Management Authority.

This section of the survey was designed to identify respondents' views on aspects of protection. A response scale of 1 to 6 was provided, with 1 being *Not at all protected or managed* and 6 being *Protected or managed to the full extent*.

- ♦ Respondents considered the natural attributes of the World Heritage Area were being moderately managed and protected. For example, protection of biodiversity had a mean rating of 4.16; protection of the scenic landscapes mean rating 4.19; protection of waterways and wetlands mean rating 3.98.

- ♦ Non-Aboriginal historic sites (mean rating 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 rating 4.06).
- ♦ Feral plants and animals were considered to be the largest threat to the WTQWHA, followed by human activities outside the World Heritage Area.

## Residents' use of the World Heritage Area

Here, the aim of the survey was to identify survey respondents' patterns of use of the World Heritage Area.

- ♦ Eighty-nine percent of survey respondents had visited the WTQWHA at least once.
- ♦ Half of all respondents visit between one and four times per year.
- ♦ Almost three-quarters (72.1%) of respondents reported they had visited the WTQWHA within the preceding six months.
- ♦ Sites in the northern region of the World Heritage Area (for example, Mossman Gorge, Daintree and Cape Tribulation) were very popular with survey respondents.
- ♦ Mission Beach and the Daintree area are considered to be respondents' most favoured places for their beauty and ease of access.
- ♦ Changes noticed at sites within the World Heritage Area relate mostly to management issues, and these were mainly positive changes.
- ♦ A lack of time or opportunity was the key reason provided for not visiting the WTQWHA.

More information about the 2007 survey of North Queensland residents can be obtained by contacting the lead researcher:

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