

**Keep Australia Beautiful
Australian Clean Beaches Awards 2009**

**Whitehaven Beach QLD
Winner: Resource Recovery category award**

Introduction

Whitehaven Beach is located east of Airlie Beach and is on the Coral Sea. Airlie Beach is a 40 minute drive from Proserpine Airport and it is a fifteen minute helicopter flight out to the Island, as I was extremely fortunate to find out! The area forms part of the World Heritage listed Whitsunday Islands chain.

While Whitsunday Island is virtually pristine and uninhabited, it is host to over a quarter of a million visitors every year, who come in charter boats, bare boats and an assortment of air craft to take advantage of the white silica sands, wonderful natural environment and clear seas.

The Island has three camping grounds, limited walking trails (with the new Whitsunday Ngaro Sea Trail opening soon) and new ablutions block going in soon as well. Visitors must bring in all their water and food, and are required to leave nothing behind.

Whitehaven Beach is well served by the Mackay Islands Visitor Management Strategy, along with a number of statutes relating the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and commercial use of the area. There are also plans to introduce the Tourism in Protected Areas initiative as well. All activities on the Island and relating to the Island are undertaken using sound ESD principles.

Community Partnerships

- Recognises achievement in community beautification, presentation and pride.
- Recognises communities which proudly preserve and value cultural history.
- Recognises partnership achievements by government and/or business with local communities.

Agencies and organisations who have an interest in maintaining Whitehaven's wonderful natural assets have joined together and meet every four months. Representatives from Community groups, the 5 directly associated Tourism Operators (e.g. Fantasea), Council and DERM discuss visitation issues in forums designed to create achievable outcomes for coastal Natural Resource Management.

Along with these regular meetings, partnerships have been established with the Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association, and the positive outcomes from this communication is the minimisation of impact from visiting charter vessels and greater education being made available through the provision of useful information via brochures and protocols.

In addition to these meetings, local conservation and volunteer groups travel to the Island at least once a month to undertake NRM activities and to carry out auditing and visitor surveys. These surveys prove an invaluable tool in assessing the needs and habits of the Islands many tourist visitors.

Overall, DERM and the Regional Council have established a broad network of interested parties, including the traditional Landowners, who all share the common goal of environmentally sustainable eco tourism.

Environmental Innovation

-Recognises achievement through innovation by community, government and business under the principles and practical actions associated with environment protection and sustainability.

The most outstanding aspect of the environmental innovation is the fact that so many stakeholders work together to enhance all aspects of Whitehaven Beach. While it would be easy to say this is a National Park and could be governed as such, there are many examples across Australia where conflict between interested parties is the norm. At Whitehaven I got the feeling that, while there may certainly be disagreements, satisfactory resolutions are achieved and once again, all done with the welfare of the Islands fragile environment at heart.

Additionally, the Whitsunday Marine Stinger Management Committee, made up of a broad representation of health, environmental and commercial interests, has achieved a great deal to encourage visitors to wear protective clothing during the stinger season. The success at attitudinal change has resulted in a significant drop in the number of stings in the region.

Resource Recovery

-Recognises achievement in community litter management and reduction including the undertaking of litter audits, and litter education programs.

-Recognises achievement in resource recovery and waste management including initiatives which conserve resources, water or energy minimisation practices; the recovery and reuse of materials including packaging, and the appropriate disposal of non-recyclable materials.

Strong community education undertaken by the Regional Council and DERM ensure a minimal impact in the area. In addition, it is clear that the commercial operators carrying out their day to day business on the Island work hard to ensure compliance with the Licence requirements.

The idea is to reduce the amount of litter available before one leaves the mainland, with 'Say No to Plastic Bags' campaigns, butt litter bins and an overall appreciation for a litter free coastal environment at the forefront of environmental activity.

Regular clean ups are undertaken by stakeholders and volunteers, and commercial operators have to comply with their licence requirements, and compliance checks are routinely carried out by DERM rangers.

Protection of the Environment

-Recognises achievement in the protection of the natural environment and, specifically, the preservation of native flora and fauna.

National Parks (EPA/DERM) and the Whitsunday Regional Council and have established collaborations with local community groups such as the near decade old Order of Underwater Coral heroes (OUCH) and the Whitsunday Volunteers which sees monthly works programs being undertaken at the beach. These works include eradication of weeds, revegetation around camp grounds and general wildlife protection.

Parks, in conjunction with Council, local Tourism operator, boat hire companies and local accommodation providers, supply a broad range of informational materials freely available at all exit points along the Whitsunday coast.

Water Conservation

-Recognises sustainable water management within communities which has combined innovative water conservation and water re-use initiatives at the private, industrial and municipal levels, benefiting society and nature.

There are no water services currently available on the Island – the only water used is in the RotaLoos - there are plans for water storage to be installed this year.

Energy Conservation

-Recognise sustainable energy management within communities which has combined innovative energy conservation initiatives at the private, industrial and municipal levels, benefiting society and nature.

There are no energy services available on the Island – natural lighting is used in the existing ablutions area.

Young Legends

-Recognises environmental achievement through youth initiative and/or by a community, which encourages and promotes youth initiative and environmental education.

There are excellent educative projects to local primary and secondary schools 'off-island' encouraging students (and hopefully their parents) to respect the natural environment of the region and to undertake appropriate behaviours and practise while visiting the area to undertake recreational activities etc. These programs include school based events during NAIDOC Week, school activities during Threatened Species Week and a range of initiatives offered by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, e.g. the Reef Guardian program. Park Rangers often visit schools and provide presentations to students on the value of stewardship and caring for the coast.

Special Thanks

My thanks and appreciation to Whitsunday Regional Council, and especially Lisa Reynolds, for organising my visit via my first ever helicopter flight, and for a wonderful morning tea. Nah Turnbull (nee Judd) and Damien Head from DERM for escorting me around the inspirational Whitehaven Beach. Their obvious passion, enthusiasm and commitment for their environment was evident throughout my visit.

http://maps.google.com.au/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=whitehaven+Beach+q&sl=-12.360701,130.867971&ssp=0.004664,0.004849&ie=UTF8&ll=-20.267833,149.042244&spn=0.07166,0.077591&t=k&z=13