

MEDIA RELEASE

NEW MONITORING SYSTEM FOR VISITOR SITES IN THE WORLD HERITAGE AREA

A new system has been developed to monitor the environmental and social impacts of visitors to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is one of Australia's premier destinations for tourism and recreation. Tourism sites in the Area receive about five million visits each year by international and domestic tourists and local residents.

The Rainforest CRC, the Wet Tropics Management Authority and Tourism Queensland have developed the new Visitor Monitoring System so that land managers and the tourism industry can work together to rapidly assess the health of visitor sites and detect any impacts as soon as they begin to occur.

The Hon Warren Entsch MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources and Member for Leichhardt, launched the Visitor Monitoring System at the Rainforest Dome today (November 14). Its three volumes include a manual which outlines the new rapid assessment monitoring program.

“Tourism and recreation provide enormous economic and social benefits for the Wet Tropics community. The manual is a useful and important tool to make sure that visitors continue to enjoy their rainforest experiences and look after the environment. The manual offers the tourism industry and visitors an opportunity to lend a hand to monitor visitor sites”, said Mr Entsch.

“The new monitoring system will help to make sure that visitor sites and walks are maintained to a high standard and continue to allow people to enjoy a close-up natural experience. The manual will improve monitoring of problems such as erosion near walking tracks, weed invasions and poor visitor behaviour”, he added.

The research for this three volume Best Practice Manual was carried out by a team of James Cook University researchers, Dr Joan Bentrupperbäumer, Dr Robyn Wilson, Prof Steve Turton, Dr Joseph Reser and Ms Sue-Ellen O'Farrell.

Professor Steve Turton, co-author of the Visitor Monitoring System, said the new monitoring system will complement the extensive visitor surveys already undertaken in the Wet Tropics. The system will gather more information about how best to manage over 180 visitor sites in the Wet Tropics which are used by about 200 commercial tour operators.

“This manual was researched and written for practical use in the field. We encourage all those with an interest in tourism and conservation of the World Heritage Area to use it” Prof Turton added.

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David Morgans of Tourism Queensland said: “Tour operators are willing and able to support land management agencies by carrying out rapid assessments of the condition of visitor sites and infrastructure. In many instances these assessments will be incorporated into regular tourist programs, giving tourists the opportunity to play an active role in protecting the Wet Tropics attractions they have come to enjoy.”

Wet Tropics Management Authority Board Chair, John Grey, said that cooperative management is the key to effective use of resources. The Authority will work with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the tourism industry to trial the new monitoring system at three pilot sites. Improved monitoring will help the Authority to better meet its international responsibilities for the World Heritage Area.

“In some of the more highly visited areas such as the Daintree, resources are stretched. The help of private operators who conduct daily site tours will greatly assist rangers in the region”, Mr Grey said.

Copies of the manual can be obtained from the Rainforest CRC by phoning (07) 4042 1246 or by ordering from their website at www.rainforest-crc.jcu.edu.au.

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