

## Tourism operators reignite water quality monitoring program

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Easing of COVID-19 restrictions has sparked a return to action for Whitsunday tour boat operators involved in a citizen science water quality project.

The excellent partnership built early in the year to kickstart a tourism-led water quality monitoring project in the Whitsundays has been on hold, but now some of the tourism day operators are using their time to re-start the water quality monitoring project.

Ocean Rafting undertook water sample collection in early May for the first time since the tourism industry shut down in March due to COVID-19. Red Cat Adventures will undertake another trip this week. While still observing all the guidelines, this means the water sampling and data logger maintenance is back on track thanks to the commitment of the tourism operators.

Earlier this year, tourism operators, James Cook University and Reef Catchments kicked off the Whitsunday Blueprint for Tourism Operators water quality monitoring program by deploying loggers and holding training sessions on how to take samples. Data from the program will help to shed light on water quality and reef health in the Whitsundays.

The tourism community has a vested interest in the long-term health and functionality of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), and they are well positioned and willing to lead solution-based monitoring, and effectively communicate water quality results.

Data will align with other monitoring in the region undertaken by the Queensland Government-owned North Queensland Bulk Ports Corporation (NQBP) and James Cook University (JCU). NQBP is responsible for four ports (Mackay, Abbot Point, Hay Point and Weipa), three of which are on the doorstep to the Great Barrier Reef. These ports facilitate \$40bn of trade movements worldwide, supporting approximately 27,000 Queensland jobs.

NQBP CEO Nicolas Fertin congratulated the tourism operators and other stakeholder partners on this resumption of their citizenship science journey.

“NQBP is delighted to see the resumption of this scientific partnership. We have a long association with James Cook University with our own extensive network of water quality monitoring in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area,” Mr Fertin said.

“We’re supportive of this monitoring practice being extended to the Whitsundays through tourism operators; bringing both our regional industries and education together in the name of science.

“We look forward to further collaborative work with the Whitsunday tourism sector in the future.”

Executive Secretary of the Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association, Sharon Smallwood, said: “We were devastated that the project had to be put on hold in March not long after JCU had delivered training in water quality monitoring techniques to 10 tourism staff, with crews from True Blue Sailing, Red Cat Adventures and Ocean Rafting, successfully having undertaken the first solo monitoring trips.



“We are very grateful to the partners in this enterprise, and particularly Reef Catchments and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, for working with us to find a way to get the project back up and running despite COVID-19.

“The keenness of our operators to get back in the field, shows their dedication to this, and other stewardship programs, through which we strive to protect and preserve our iconic Great Barrier Reef.”

This project is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government’s Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, and North Queensland Bulk Ports, with support from Reef Catchments, Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association, James Cook University, Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership, Whitsunday Bareboat Operators Association. Participating tourism operators are Ocean Rafting, Red Cat Adventures, Southern Cross Sailing Adventures, Tallship Adventures and True Blue Sailing.

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