Public art and reef recovery to improve Whitsundays tourism

5 October 2018

Public Art Selection and Artists Workshop
The public call to artists as part of the Whitsundays Public Art and Research Project was a huge success. The response was fantastic with 73 separate submissions of public artworks for consideration. An independent selection panel considered all the applications and agreed on six sculptures to be commissioned.

On the 6th and 7th of September Reef Ecologic convened a workshop with the successful artists in Airlie Beach and Bowen. A site visit to several prospective sites for artwork allowed the group to meet stakeholders, discuss proposals and share knowledge. The artists appreciated the opportunity to collaborate at the beginning of a project. The outcome was that this workshop enabled a cooperative, complimentary developmental process for the public art.

The names of the individual artists and a team of three for the design of six public artworks were publicly announced by Tourism Whitsundays with the support of local, state and federal governments on 2 October (Media release HERE) and more details are below.

About the artists
Brian Robinson is an indigenous artist known for his printmaking and public sculptures in which he uses a variety of techniques to produce bold, innovative and distinctive works such as the Citizens of the GBR Gateway on Cairns Esplanade. Adriaan Vanderlugt has been creating sculptures since 1969 and was one of three artists involved in the Whitsunday Sculpture Symposium at Airlie Beach. Col Henry has extensive art and education related degrees, diplomas and certificates and has been sculpting full-time since 1995. Caitlin Reilly, Jessa Lloyd and Kate Ford of the ‘Arts Based Collective’ have extensive experience across a wide range of arts mediums including public sculpture where they draw their inspiration from the natural environment.

Marine themed sculptures
The subjects of the sculptures include Turtle, Manta rays, Maori wrasse, Coral polyp and an indigenous sculpture ‘Bwya’ containing 12 local species of fish and sharks. The largest sculpture is 6m. The sculptures are made from a variety of materials including concrete, stainless steel and aluminium. The plan is to locate the sculptures underwater where they can be viewed by snorkellers and SCUBA divers. There is ongoing discussion with GBRMPA, QPWS and stakeholders about the preferred location(s) of the artworks in the Whitsunday’s region. One of the objectives of the public art project is to provide new or enhanced tourism experiences at sites damaged by Cyclone Debbie. With the art pieces having a marine wildlife theme, we believe they will provoke conversation, education and deeper consideration of the marine environment.

STRONG LOCAL SUPPORT

“This project will provide direct economic benefits for the Whitsundays and Council looks forward to continuing our strong collaboration with the various stakeholder groups to ensure the Whitsunday Reef Recovery and Public Art Project is a success,” Mayor Andrew Willcox
Purpose of Art research and surveys

Between August and October we received a GBRMPA Research permit to install and testing the social and environmental benefits and impacts of public art at Langford Reef in the Whitsundays. The reason we initiated this research project is to test the concept and assist the future location and implementation of the public art project above. We are particularly interested in the public’s views of benefit, cost and risk of underwater art and how it can assist tourism and the reef. A short video of the installation and establishment of the Public Art Research project can be found [HERE].

Figure 1: Four marine sculptures by Adriaan Vanderlugt installed on Langford Reef to undertake social and environmental research.

Reef Restoration

Proposed reef restoration activities have been progressing well. We have prepared materials and are ready for a rapid deployment once approvals are received from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Stakeholder consultation revealed some remote sites, such as Macona Inlet where coral has survived well through recent bleaching and cyclonic disturbances. In September we explored additional sites in the Whitsundays as potential source locations for diverse coral species. We will appreciate assistance from volunteers and citizen scientists both in Airlie Beach prior to deployment and in the water when establishing the coral nurseries.

Figure 2: Model of coral nursery methods to be implemented in the Whitsundays.

How you can help the reef

1. Complete the online social surveys on public art in the Whitsundays ([LINK])
2. Volunteer with Reef Ecologic to assist with reef restoration ([nathan.cook@reefecoogic.org](mailto:nathan.cook@reefecoogic.org) or phone 0437 318802)
3. Share this communiqué with your social media and business networks
4. Take a friend snorkelling on the reef
5. Reduce your environmental footprint and take a specific action such as buy local food produce

Upcoming activities

**Proposed activities and milestones in August**

8 October – Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association AGM
8 October – Social research at Langford Island and moving art from intertidal to underwater.
9 October – Active Reef Restoration Phase 1 to commence (pending approvals)
18 October - Proserpine Indigenous Reference Group Meeting
13 November – Local Marine Advisory Committee Meeting (Airlie Beach)
Figure 3: Indicative project timeline.

Thank you for your support
Tourism Whitsundays
Explore Whitsundays
Whitsunday Reef Festival
Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority