



2020 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Low Isles the Seaside Paradise

Destination Name:

Low Isles, Douglas Shire

Country: Australia

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Position: Sustainability Officer

Nomination Category:

- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Islands & Seaside
- Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID -19
- Post COVID -19 recovery
- One of the 17 SDGs* (*if yes, which one*) Click or tap to choose

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: <http://tourism4sdgs.org/>

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices [here](#)



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Issues faced

*Low Isles consist of two islands located within the world renowned Great Barrier Reef, 13 kilometres northeast from Port Douglas, Queensland. One of the islands is known as Low Island and the other as Woody Island. Low Island consists of a small sandy cay with vegetation and a Commonwealth Heritage listed lighthouse. Woody Island is an uninhabited island with coral and mangroves which offers an important nesting site for number of bird species. It has been estimated that over 25,000 pied imperial pigeons (*Ducula bicolor*) fly down from Papua New Guinea to nest at this site every year. These unique tropical islands are part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and are surrounded by coral reefs with over 150 different coral species. Living amongst the coral is an enormous variety of fish and other marine fauna, such as turtles and dugongs. Also dolphins, sharks and whales are commonly seen near the islands.*

Low Isles and the surrounding Great Barrier Reef have been described as one of the most spectacular, complex, but fragile eco systems in the world. Operating in such a sensitive location can cause severe damage to the environmental quality, biodiversity and cultural heritage, if not controlled appropriately. Additionally, sea level rise, increased air and water temperatures and frequency of extreme weather events have all become recent concerns to the island in the face of climate change.

Methods, steps and tools applied

Environmental reasons have given the area an opportunity to trial some innovative solutions promoting the wellbeing of the area. The protection of this biodiverse habitat is organised by different groups and industries, while supporting a sustainable use of the area for tourism, recreation and research. Demonstrated commitment to ecological wellbeing is shown through innovative environmental measures by implementing team work and sustainable practices to business operations to minimise impacts on the reef, ocean, species biodiversity and climate change.

Key success factors

Successful implementation of operations in this sensitive environment has come together through partnering and information sharing by different organisations. Australian aboriginal people have been the Traditional Owners who have cared for the waters surrounding Wungkun (Low Isles) for thousands of years. Low Isles is an important Indigenous cultural site for both the KuKu Yalanji and Yirraganydji aboriginal tribe's Dreaming. In Indigenous history Low Isles is considered to have formed part of united landmass that was separated during the Dreamtime. The Sea Country of both groups overlaps at Low Isles and both traditional and spiritual wisdoms continue to be practiced in this area. To protect the tradition and historic heritage, Low Isles is registered on the Commonwealth Heritage List in recognition of its cultural and Indigenous heritage.

While the first lighthouse on the island was built in 1878, the site has been an important asset for navigation for mariners and fishermen. The property is managed by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, a Commonwealth Government agency, while the lighthouse is owned by Australian Maritime Safety Authority. Caretakers of the site live on the Low Island and make sure the Marine National Park rules are obeyed all year round by educating the visitors. The caretakers maintain all infrastructure, including a sewage treatment plant and remote area power system on site. Additionally, an important part to the mix are non-governmental organisations including Low Isles Preservation Society, Great Barrier Reef Legacy, Douglas Shire Sustainability Group and the tourism industry, who are dedicated to the protection and preservation of the reef, waters, biodiversity, lighthouse and the surrounding environment.

Lessons learned

When it comes to the protection of this magnificent environment and biodiversity, Low Isles and the surrounding area have proved how important stewardships with community, researchers and governmental organisations can be. To establish innovative approaches, different stakeholders have been working together for decades. Initially, traditional knowledge has been utilised to share stories and knowledge. More recent research findings have been able to demonstrate how special the environment is and what type of species richness the area holds. Tourism operators contribute to reef monitoring, coral restoration, adhere to responsible reef practices and deliver interpretive information to thousands of tourists. Additionally, several locals have joined citizen science programs, such as bird counting days and beach cleanups. When the information is shared with the governmental organisations and community, a great amount of team work has created ways of protecting and saving this seaside paradise with tangible achievements and stories.

Results, achievements and recognitions

In 1928 the world's first comprehensive year-long coral reef study was carried out at Low Isles. The data from this study has been used as a baseline for any information that is gathered now and will be gathered in the future. This data provides the researchers unique information to analyse the changes in the reef, marine fauna and the surrounding habitat. Additionally, Low Isles is an important data collection site for the Bureau of Meteorology. First weather observations were recorded at Low Isles in 1887 and nowadays the locals are able to receive real-time data from the islands, including weather statistics, which helps with weather predictions.

One special historical moment in 1996 was when a local youth sea scout member of Low Isles Preservation Society Alicia Stevens introduced the importance of the area and President Clinton to the world in Port Douglas. During his speech, President Clinton called together nations to legally agree to binding commitments to fight climate change. To reduce impacts to climate change, energy management strategies have been applied at Low Isles to improve energy efficiency. Using solar power and biodiesel, Low Isles are almost completely powered by renewable energy. Additionally, the site has made changes to its electricity usage, including changes to sewerage system, resulting to halving of its energy usage in wastewater treatment. After these changes, emissions of the island have been calculated as low as 0.374 tonnes CO₂e equivalent. Utilising innovative sustainable energy and by reducing its energy consumption, Low Isles energy strategy has been showcased as a best practice island management.

Low Isles and the surrounding area have been recognised with a high conservation value Marine National Park (Green) Zone. This prohibits fishing in the area and only allows tourism for permit holders. The number of tourism permits on site is limited to five daily permits (365 days/year) and two limited permits (50 days/year). Limitation of permits is important for improving long-term resilience and best sustainable practices.

*To assist the local protected bird species, eastern ospreys (*Pandion cristatus*), custom-made platform was built within the lighthouse to provide a nesting site for the birds without impacting the navigational aid of the lighthouse. Eastern Ospreys have recently nested on the platform, which provided a safe nest for the young meanwhile keeping the lighthouse dome clear and clean. To support healthy coral communities, Low Isles site has been granted with permits to trial coral planting. In the future this type of transplanting can create new coral colonies in damaged parts of the reef.*

With team work and persistence, different groups have been able to find innovative ways to take care of the spectacular Low Isles and help protect the area for future generations.

Additional references

[Australian Maritime Safety Authority, 2018, AMSA Heritage strategy 2018-2021, Australian Government.](#)

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