



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

January 14, 2019

BIG BOOST FOR REEF FESTIVAL AND RACE WEEK EVENTS

The Whitsundays have welcomed news from Tourism and Events Queensland that renowned local events Airlie Beach Race Week and The Whitsunday Reef Festival are set for a big boost in 2019.

The funding comes as part of the Queensland Destination Events Program (QDEP), which can be applied for through the Tourism and Events Queensland website. The QDEP's aim is to build the crucial link between events and the destinations in which they are staged, extending the flow of the economic, marketing and social benefits of events throughout metropolitan and regional Queensland. Funding from the QDEP is applied for and can be used for marketing costs, strategic plan development, engagement of short-term specialised personnel and hire of temporary infrastructure.

Tourism Whitsundays CEO Tash Wheeler said "Destination events play a key role in fostering regional tourism and economic growth. Events not only target new markets for visitation, but add to increased length of stay, dispersal and visitor expenditure within the region. Currently the tourism industry in the Whitsunday region is the largest employer, accounting for approximately 40% of jobs and is the second-largest contributor to the region's industry – which events play a key role helping to achieve these figures. We are very pleased with the results of this funding and hope to see more events be successful with the QDEP program throughout the year".

"Tourism Whitsundays is a major supporter of all Whitsunday region events, we believe supporting and lending our expertise through marketing and publicity to local community events helps drive visitation to the area. Events and attendance through events account for a substantial economic injection and a large amount of tourism visitation".

Kicking off the festivities in August is The Whitsunday Reef Festival, now in its 19th year. The festival celebrates the Great Barrier Reef and what it means to live in the Whitsundays - the "Heart of the Reef"; this year the event received \$15,000 in funding. The region's popular festival is a delicious combination of family fun, celebrations, local food and fashion. The Whitsunday Reef Festival last year welcomed over 9,000 attendees across the four-day festival.

Following The Whitsunday Reef Festival is the iconic Airlie Beach Race Week (ABRW), which received a whopping \$150,000 in funding, the highest funding amount ever received by ABRW. Airlie Beach Race Week, now in its 31st year is one of the largest yacht racing regattas in Australia and last year accounted for over \$2 million to the local economy. It is a seven-day event that attracts entrants from all over Australia as well as international entrants. Offshore the Regatta offers classes from IRC competitive racing through to cruising divisions attracting

around 1450 competitors, officials and volunteers. Onshore the Festival of Sailing, is the Whitsunday Coasts' most significant public event, presenting seven days and nights of high profile, entertainment and social activities.

Adrian Bram Airlie Beach Race Week's Marketing Director said, "The 2018 Airlie Beach Race Week Festival of Sailing attracted over \$2 million in direct expenditure and made an overall contribution of around \$6 million to the Whitsunday economy. This confirms Airlie Beach Race Week's position as the most significant community festival event for the Whitsunday region. In 2019 we plan to make it even bigger and better with an increased number of entries and an expanded program of Festival activities for the local community and visitors to the Whitsundays".

Tourism Whitsundays CEO Tash Wheeler adds "We are thrilled with this generous financial boost from the State Government for The Whitsunday Reef Festival and Airlie Beach Race Week, this is the most significant funding boost either of these events have seen. This is money will afford us the ability to significantly boost attendance figures for 2019, driving more people to our beautiful region, which will greatly increase expenditure throughout".

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About Tourism Whitsundays: *Tourism Whitsundays (TW) is the organisation responsible for destination marketing and visitor attraction for the Whitsunday region. It is the lead agency recognised by Tourism and Events Queensland and the Whitsunday Regional Council to lead the promotion of the region as a tourism destination. Tourism Whitsundays markets all aspects of the region including the Great Barrier Reef, Whitsunday Islands and Coast, accommodation, boating and sailing, fishing, touring, recreational activities, adventure, dining, shopping, weddings and honeymoons, conferencing and business events.*

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