Impact on livelihoods and incomes

5. D*escribe how the proposed Whale Heritage Site is having a positive impact on the livelihoods and incomes of communities associated with cetaceans?*

A: The humpback whales within the Hervey Bay region provide a positive impact on the livelihoods and incomes to the Fraser Coast community in several ways, including through events, commercial whale watching, research and publicity surrounding their significance.

Relationships between the region and research organisations such as **The Oceania Project** and **Pacific Whale Foundation**, plus the continuous opportunities for universities and schools conducting their own research aboard commercial vessels contributes greatly to the reputation and economy of the area. Research projects are highly regulated, with permits required from QPWS and only vessels commercially registered with Maritime Safety Australia able to participate.

The University of the Sunshine Coast set up a campus on the Fraser Coast in 2016 and now offers tourism and ecology focused degrees. The university also has a research centre at Dilli Village on Fraser Island.

Tourism on the Fraser Coast is a significant industry, with more than 900,000 overnight visitors in 2018, injecting a total of $485 million into the area. With the region positioned as one with 'big nature' experiences, unique outdoor activities are high yielding. **(See appendix 4.)**

Research undertaken into the economic value of whale watching to the Fraser Coast region, commissioned by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) in 2011, estimated that the value of each humpback whale to Hervey Bay was AUD$97,000. This figure will have increased in the eight years since the report, with the number of passengers interacting with whales on commercial sight-seeing vessels in 2018 reaching a 10-year high. The IFFAW report also noted the number of humpback whales visiting the area has been on the rise, adding to the economic benefit. In 2016, it was estimated more than 8,000 whales would make their way into Hervey Bay waters.

Tourism is a key growth industry within the Fraser Coast with annual visitation dominated by domestic tourists who live within a four-hour drive of the region. These visitors are mostly independent travellers staying overnight and spending money in the region. While not all visitors participate in whale watching, they are likely to be aware that Hervey Bay is one of the world's best whale watching destinations through the annual promotional work performed by the Regional Tourism Organisation (Fraser Coast Tourism & Events). The large domestic visitation is a positive for the region in that there is little "economic leakage" through commissions paid to the wholesale operations of large tour agents.

Total visitor expenditure in 2018 across the Fraser Coast region in the year to December was estimated at A$566.2m (Tourism Research Australia) which is the combined spend of day-tripper and overnight visitors who stay, eat, shop, visit relatives and engage with tourism product within the region. The most significant portion of this spend, the $444.2m made by domestic overnight visitors, was up 18.9% in 2018 on the previous three-year trend.