

**MEDIA RELEASE**

*For immediate release*

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## **Leave no Footprints Program Leaves Lasting Impression**

*Volunteer guides for The 'Leave no Footprints', Bowen's Reef Education Program lead the way for visitors and the community at this year's 'Walk to the Lighthouse' event in Bowen, Whitsundays.*

Bowen Tourism & Business (BTB), partnering with the Bowen Burdekin Local Marine Advisory Committee (BBLMAC) have developed and are delivering a community education program on reef interactions aimed at engaging visitors and locals to care about local reef and marine life without 'leaving any footprints behind'.

Funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, the program incorporates a number of approaches to share knowledge, including recruiting community volunteers to provide guiding at Bowen's popular Walk to the Lighthouse event.

The event takes place annually in line with the lowest tides of winter and sees thousands of people walk the narrow strait to North Head Island and the historic lighthouse. This year's event is on Saturday the 31<sup>st</sup> August from 3pm.

BTB Chair Jenn Honnery said both BTB and BBLMAC recognized the need to provide guidance to help attendees understand more about what they are seeing on the day and their role in looking after the reef.

"The walk is a key engagement opportunity with locals and visitors. The experience of walking to the lighthouse is in every sense immersive and provides people with the chance to see marine wildlife up close."

Volunteers are set to gain the skills needed to engage with the public at a training workshop held in Bowen prior to the event.

The workshop will be supported by input from local State Emergency Services, Visitor Information Centre support and marine biology experts to fully skill volunteers with the tools to provide practical education opportunities at the walk.

BBLMAC chair Anne Smith said "Our organization is excited to work with BTB and all key stakeholders participating and supporting the program to provide education experiences to locals and visitors. I'm particularly excited that the program was able to work with the local Reef Guardian School here in Bowen."

The 'Leave no Footprints' program also empowers emerging Reef educators through local Reef Guardian schools. Practical research conducted by Year 9 Bowen State High School science students provided invaluable information for the education program and has been used to develop brochures and interpretive signage.

Collaboration from local and regional experts in the marine and conservation field as well as the traditional owners of the region have been instrumental in supporting the program. Their input has provided research notes and knowledge, as well as attendance at volunteer training and the walk.

The 'Leave no Footprints', Bowen's Reef Education Program is part of the community Reef protection program funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and is supported by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

The Bowen Burdekin Local Marine Advisory Committee is one of 12 local community advisory groups run by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

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**FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES, CONTACT:**

Mary Gallagher

Sales & Marketing Coordinator

Bowen Tourism & Business

PH: 07 4786 4222

Email: [communications@tourismbowen.com.au](mailto:communications@tourismbowen.com.au)

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*Bowen Tourism & Business is a not-for-profit organisation driven by a team of passionate staff, volunteers and local business committee representation. Our mission is to provide excellence in visitor experience and business member support through exceptional customer service, fostering business advancement & relationships and community involvement. Working with and supported by local & regional businesses, Whitsunday Regional Council & Tourism Whitsundays we proudly provide destination marketing, business support, local engagement, networking & growth opportunities for our members, visitors & Bowen community.*