



COMMUNITY CHAMPION

ZigZag on Finding Business Efficiencies

Interviewee: Nicole Rosser (Owner)

Interviewer: Lee Hawkins (Climate Change Resilience Officer- WRC)

Date: 10 Jan 2024

What's your background?!

I am originally from Perth, my family are nature lovers, my mum is a marine biologist and I have been in and around the water all of my life. I feel like I was snorkelling before I could walk, and SCUBA diving since I was 13.

In 2009 I came here for a holiday and ended up staying! Originally working on overnight yacht charters, I fell in love with the area, the people, and the tourism industry. I decided to go on to do more than being a deckie. I studied marine biology at James Cook University in Townsville and after completing my Honours year, I moved back to the Whitsundays permanently. In 2017, immediately following Cyclone Debbie, my partner and I started operating ZigZag- a brand new tourism business.

Our previous experience working with other companies was a great training ground for what worked well and what we felt could be improved. We believed we could deliver an exceptional and different experience. We believed there was room in the market for a product that was a rich environmental and educational experience. An informative and transformative experience rather than just a sea tour, that people could come away from it inspired, more informed and more caring of the environment.

Can you give a brief description of your business?

We are a full day charter boat, that takes people snorkelling, visit Whitehaven Beach and do a couple of bushwalks. We currently have seven full-time staff, and love to be involved with different projects, including reef health surveys for the Great Barrier Reef Park Authority, Boats4Corals Coral IVF project, and CQ University's seagrass nursery project.

Our vessel is a "limousine" style RIB, it's a NAIAD. It's very comfortable, we take 30 passengers, manned by a skipper and 2 deckhands and is powered by four 300HP outboards.

We have amazing, motivated staff and high staff retention, and all of our staff are strongly encouraged to become Eye of the Reef surveyors. This is a great way for them to build reef knowledge and deliver a higher level of in-water interpretive experience to our customers.

Why did you join the Whitsunday Healthy Heart Project?

I am a big believer in sustainability and environmental protection, and I will always try to get involved in any projects of that ilk.

What trends in your industry drove the need to join the project?

Tourism, particularly on the GBR, is moving towards improved sustainable best practice and being environmental reef ambassadors and it would be hypocritical if we were to stand in front of our passengers and talk about climate change and environmental issues facing the reef if we weren't taking actions to improve our own environmental footprint.

Occasionally, we do get customers that express concern about the impact of tourism on the reef, however once we educate them on how low impact their visit is, and they receive that immersive experience, they are blown away with what is possible when the impact is handled responsibly. And it is important to remember that the memories and knowledge that they have gained is shared with others and that this also has a positive flow through for increasing reef awareness and the perception of ecotourism in our region.

Were you experiencing any challenges/problems that necessitated a change to how you were doing business?

One of our key drivers with the vessel was to make it as sustainable as possible. We do this by having minimal amounts of waste and eliminating single use products, however we are always looking at ways to improve our performance. The project allows us to really look at what we are doing and where we can target improvements.

How were these problems/challenges affecting you?

Fuel usage is our largest challenge, so identifying what our emissions actually are is a crucial first step, followed by considering how those emissions could be reduced.

Financially, fuel is our largest cost, and any way that we can improve fuel efficiency is at the forefront of our minds.

Running our vessel on four outboards means that the motors are running at lower RPM and not working as hard, therefore not using as much fuel. My partner Ben is a highly experienced marine engineer, and his specialist knowledge was crucial when researching and testing different set-ups. This

allowed us to select a vessel, engines & a prop ratio that were not only fuel efficient but also ideally suited for the tours. It is essential that you get good advice!

Had you considered/implemented any other solutions to your challenges?

We have looked at solar and electric technologies in the marine setting, however the technology is not there yet.

We have been able to make positive changes with replacing chemicals that we use on the boat. For example, we use a sustainable hydraulic oil that does not harm the environment if it should accidentally spill in the marine environment.

Our tour routes were modified in 2023 to reduce the on-water drive time by one hour. I look forward to measuring our most recent annual carbon footprint to see what impact that has had on fuel consumption and emissions. This itinerary change has been a positive one for customer satisfaction, as they now have more quality time at each stop and the tour is less rushed.

We also haven't had single use plastics since day one, which has had a big impact on our low waste output. Our cleaning products are also low impact and locally sourced and they have turned out to be more effective and cost effective, saving us money.

Biofouling on the vessel's hull has a big impact on fuel consumption, so we have increased the frequency of anti-fouling application. Just a small amount of growth on the hull can increase our fuel use by 25%, so that is a huge difference in both emissions and cost.

Purchasing quality products when replacing snorkelling equipment and suits has also been adopted to reduce turn-over, subsequent waste and enhance guest comfort,

What would have happened if you had not joined the project?

The carbon calculator has definitely assisted us to focus on what areas can be improved and allows me to review our status each year. Without this measurement, it would be difficult to assess where you stand and reset your emission reduction actions.

Being a part of the project has also been a fabulous marketing opportunity and good news story. It is wonderful to be able to share what the wider destination is up to with our customers- transformative tourism!

Did you consider any risks when you joined the project?

Initially I was concerned that once we identified the high emissions "culprits", the cost of the solution would be cost-prohibitive, preventing us from doing anything and somehow feeling that we had failed. I believe that once you become aware of an issue you should fix it! However, in reflection, I now know

that this process is not about being judged or made to feel bad, but about doing what is in our capacity to improve.

Did you have any reservations in becoming a project partner?

Absolutely not!

What was the beginning of the engagement with the project like?

It was exciting to join the project and be a part of the Welcome Event back in 2021, and to see other business operators that had joined the project. It made me feel positive about our partnership and that there were other like-minded operators. All meetings were positive and engaging and I found the information session on data collection and challenges facing our industry invaluable.

Did you need any help using the portal?

The portal is self-explanatory and user friendly, and I only need minimal assistance.

It takes a little time to set up your processes and calculations, but once you have your spreadsheets created it's simple moving forward. Initially it took me a couple of days work to set it up, and now it takes around 1-2 hrs per month.

What are some of the main benefits of using our product/solutions?

The Emissions Report is a great tool to share with our crew- they love to see that we are regional leaders across the board, and it is very motivating to know that their job is giving back to the environment and that they can confidently share our emissions reduction activities with the customers.

It has also assisted us to build and monitor achievable sustainability goals.

What measurable benefits have you seen?

Reduction in fuel usage is definitely a measurable benefit, as well as the financial savings from switching to the environmentally safe cleaning products.

The cleaning products come in a concentrate, which also reduces emissions through transport.

What would you say to other tourism businesses that are considering joining the project?

Why haven't you done it yet?! Go for it, you don't have anything to lose.