

# City's ecotourism win

By MALCOLM WEATHERUP

TOWNSVILLE has yet another conference feather in its cap, with the announcement yesterday that the city will host the 2006 International Ecotourism Conference next November.

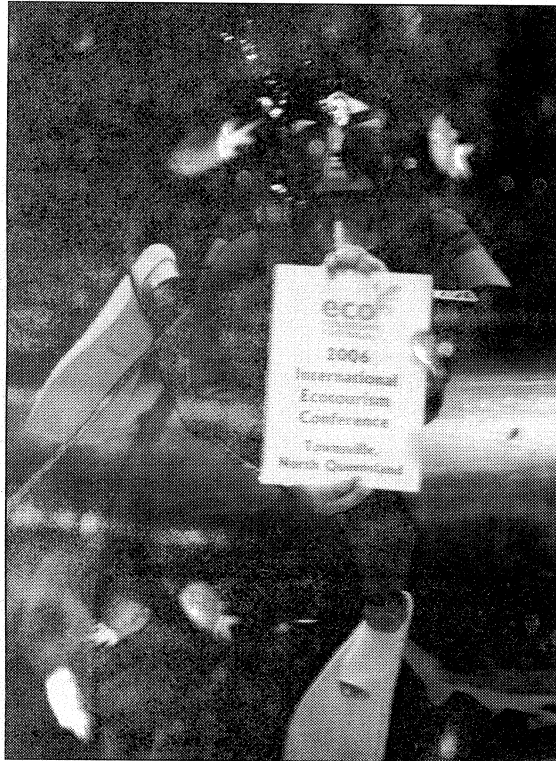
More than 500 delegates from Australia and overseas are expected to attend.

Ecotourism Australia chairwoman Clare McFarlane made the venue announcement at the close of the 2005 national conference in Hobart yesterday.

She told the audience, including Townsville Deputy Mayor Ann Bunnell, that the unselfishness of Townsville's winning bid played a major role in awarding the international conference to the capital of North Queensland.

"One of the 2005 highlights for our Australian conference here has been taking delegates out to the surrounding regions in Tasmania to immerse themselves in the environment and sites relevant to conference topics," Ms McFarlane said.

"Townsville in their bid showed their commitment and capacity to include a similar format in 2006 with



**IT'S OFFICIAL ... a diver suitably announces the 2006 conference venue**

many options for engaging surrounding areas."

Ms McFarlane said this would provide a significant boost to local communities and regions.

One of the main lobbyists for the conference, Townsville Enterprise CEO Glenys Schuntner, said Ecotourism Australia's

CEO Stephen Pahl would visit Townsville this month to look at venue operations and discuss the conference program.

Talking to the *Townsville Bulletin* after the announcement, Ms Schuntner opened up on the subject of Townsville's growing reputation as a conference venue, both

nationally and internationally.

"I expect great advances in 2006 in this area," she said.

"We are already talking to the developers of the Ocean Terminal precinct about the possibility of expanding the current facilities and the convention and entertainment centre."

"This is an important strategy, because almost all successful conference venues are centrally-located near hotels and CBDs. With that in mind, it would not be easy in the present booming property climate to create venue sites that would be immediately viable," Ms Schuntner said.

She said the time was not far off when new facilities would be urgently needed, but the key word was flexibility in those places attracting all sorts and sizes of visiting groups.

She emphasised that she did not at any time in the future see various conference venues in direct constant competition, with a possible threat to viability of one or another operation.

"I see the growth of the venues for this industry as complementing and enhancing one another to the overall benefit of the twin cities and the region," she said.