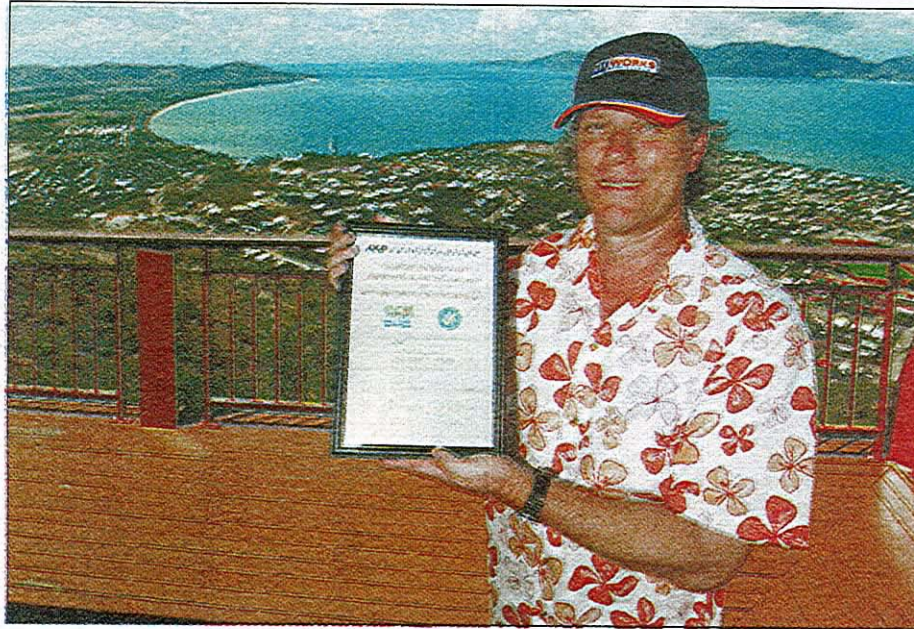


Townsville City Council first to be awarded ecotourism status

On top of the world

TRIUMPH ...
Greg Bruce holds an eco award for his eco tours around Townsville

Photo: TROY RODGERS
HKY01033



By EMMA CHADWICK

GREG Bruce is on top of his world after Townsville City Council became the first in the world to become a certified ecotourism operator.

It all began on Castle Hill five years ago when Mr Bruce began to recognise the importance of showing Townsville residents and students around their own back yard.

The manager for Environmental Management Services said he had been showing people around Castle Hill on a non-profit tour to help people understand and care for their surroundings.

That has grown into themed interpretation eco-tours of the Townsville water catchment.

The 'Creek to Coral' tours range from two hours to one full day starting atop Castle Hill or Mt Stuart and down to the wetlands.

Mr Bruce said the tours had even attracted expert tour guides.

"Just last week 60 trainee Savannah guides undertook a two-day council-run Eco

Catchment tour across the city," Mr Bruce said.

"We start up at Castle Hill and point out the wetlands on the Town Common and the water catchment out to Magnetic Island.

"Then we go down through the catchment and take people close up to the water cycle and the wildlife.

"We show school students and residents how we are connected to the water cycle, not disconnected like most people think.

"We find people come off the bus and say 'wow, now I know where I live'," Mr Bruce said.

"We are pretty sure we are the first local government in the world to have achieved this eco-tourism certification so it is a big deal for us."

Townsville City Council's eco-accreditation came at the close of a national ecotourism conference held in the city last week.

Ingham's Noorla Heritage Resort also received accreditation during the final day of International Ecotourism Australia Conference in Townsville last

Thursday. The conference showcased North Queensland's ecotourism potential.

More than 400 delegates visited the region's unique natural assets including the Great Barrier Reef. Outback and world heritage listed rainforest during the conference. Townsville City Council and Townsville Enterprise were major sponsors of the event.

The stately Noorla Heritage Resort and 2006 North Queensland Tourism award winner in Ingham also received the internationally recognised accreditation at the conference.

Noorla Heritage Resort owner Joe Sproats said achieving certification was a rewarding and rigorous process.