



GBRMPA Marine Tourism Contingency Plan Application :

OCEAN FREEDOM – operated by Cairns Premier Reef & Island Tours:

INFORMATION PACK:

This package is available to anyone on request

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1. Our Application :

We run a reef tour, which incorporates Upolu Cay and the Reef as our 2 destinations . Since cyclone Yasi, Upolu Cay has been rendered unusable except for very low tide and calm weather days .

As the Cay is integral to our business we applied to GBRMPA under the Marine Tourism Contingency Plan (MTCP) to request a temporary relocation (up to a maximum of 12 months) to be able to continue our long running business and use an alternative Coral Cay and surrounding reef on days when Upolu Cay is inaccessible.

In the Cairns area the only suitable Cay locations are Vlasoff Cay and Michaelmas Cay.



2. Our history and importance of the Cay

We are a small family run business with a passion for giving guests a memorable personal reef day. We have been operating a Coral Cay and GBR reef trip since the early 1990's. Every tourism operator has their niche market in order to survive and in order to offer our visiting tourists varied options to experience the reef – this ensures that all visitors can be given the reef experience best suited to them and allows tour operators their points of difference.

We have marketed Upolu Cay and the GBR as our destination domestically since 1992 and internationally since 1995 and have injected significant dollars encouraging domestic and international travel to Cairns. Unfortunately following cyclone Yasi, Upolu Cay on many days is now longer viable – being just under water on even low tide days. This has lead us to seek consideration for relocation of our permitted operation from GBRMPA under the Marine Tourism Contingency Plan for temporary relocation of up to a maximum of 12 months of a tour product severely affected by a severe event not controllable by the operator – in this case Cyclone Yasi. The Cay is an integral part of our tour.

Each reef tour operator has over many years developed their own unique reef tour each with their own points of difference that enables them to have a certain portion of the market. This consistent product marketing is essential in order to have inbound agent / wholesale agent and retail agent confidence in your product. It takes many years of advertising to secure relationships with overseas and domestic agents who rely on a consistent product.

To have a change of product itinerary would remove any buyer confidence of our product. A loss of buyer confidence due to a change in our product would be suicidal to our business.

As everyone knows it has been a constant struggle over the last few years with many small operators losing their tourism businesses. Cairns local reef operators in particular hit with persistent bad weather the last few years and then recently hit with the QLD floods – which though not directly impacting the Cairns area had a profound effect on Cairns Tourism due to the media coverage of the floods reported to be affecting most of QLD sent all around the world. To be then followed by Yasi. We have managed to survive only through sheer hard work and a strong commitment to offer the best service possible on a reef tour.



We have now been operating reef tours in the first instance as managers (1990) and then as owners (1995) and have proved ourselves to be good operators over the years. We are surviving in a highly competitive area with reduced visitor numbers – to change our product by not having a coral cay as part of the day would not only be suicidal to the business but also be detrimental to our fellow reef operators as our points of difference would be less and we would therefore be competing for the same market.

Our passion is to :

- To be able to follow our tour of Coral Cay and GBR – which we have been running (under different boat names) since early 1990's – thereby allowing a tourism business that has stood many setbacks as all tourism operators have particularly in the last few years to continue .
- To be able to continue our business thereby maintaining ongoing employment for our dedicated local staff – some of whom have been with us for 10 years – with most a minimum of 2-3 years.

3. Our contribution to Cairns economy:

- employ 22 Australians
- 3 trainees (TAFE college Coxswain)
- our staff are longstanding staff with 4 married
- spend \$100,000 annually on promoting the region to overseas
- spend \$50,000 annually on promoting region to domestic market

Many of Cairns' businesses depend on tourism – even if not directly involved in tourism

We donate numerous prizes worth thousands a year to various local charities / schools / local fund raising activities and offer discounted reef tours to Cairns' locals

4. Our contribution to the care of the Reef and environment :

- recently attained Advanced Eco Certification
- starting the process to work on our Carbon footprint with aim of becoming



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carbon neutral

- follow all Marine Park Regulations and teach good environmental practice for snorkelling and diving
- educate our passengers via Glass Bottom Boat tours and Snorkel tours on the reef and marine environment
- every November – collect money for local turtle rehabilitation
- sell toy turtles on both vessels – 100% of which goes to the Australian Rainforest Foundation to protect the reef and rainforest

4. Present Operations “Ocean Freedom” under permit G06/16726.1

OCEAN FREEDOM is a local family owned and operated small business. The company has been running reef tours since the early 1990’s.

The day offers guests a Coral Cay and GBR experience – using Upolu Cay as the cay destination and Upolu Reef as the reef destination .

The boat allows up to 6hrs divided into Reef and Cay activities.

The timing of each destination may vary depending on conditions on the day and type of clientele but a typical day consists of:

Depart dock at 8.00am

Arrive Upolu Reef at 9.15am :

Activities at Upolu Reef : 9.30- 12.00pm

Snorkel / SCUBA dive / Glass Bottom Boat Tours / Adventure drift snorkel tour - **this is part of our normal day at Upolu Reef and unaffected by this application**

12.00pm – 1.00 pm : Lunch (during lunch cruise to Upolu Cay)

Fish feed at Upolu Reef

Activities at Upolu Cay : 1.00 pm – 3.00pm

Land on Cay / swim / snorkel tours around reef

Please see brochure

During any day the order of the destinations can be changed – this is normally done due to conditions on the day – so the Cay site is sometimes the first destination and then Upolu Reef the 2nd.



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Depart 3.00pm

Arrive Cairns 4.15pm

5. Proposed Operations Change from use of Upolu Cay to Vlasoff cay on days where (due to cyclone Yasi) Upolu Cay is inaccessible - under the MTCP

The day itinerary would be the same as for the normal run day but just using Vlasoff Cay instead of Upolu Cay on days Upolu is inaccessible

Daily maximum pax capacity : 30-75 pax daily + 6-10 crew

Proposed VLASOFF CAY activities:

- Relaxing on Cay - normally never more than half the guests on Cay at any one time and usually no longer than 30 minutes actual Cay time
- Swimming off Cay

Proposed VLASOFF REEF activities :

- Snorkelling - directly off boat
- SCUBA Diving - off boat
- Tender secured on side of main vessel for transfers to and from Cay

At present we have minimal access to Vlasoff Cay through an existing permit for certain number of days of the year leased off another Tour operator who has an existing permit allowing only limited access to Vlasoff Cay.

Operational Parameters

- No vessels to be left at Vlasoff
- No mooring needed at Vlasoff unless requested by GBRMPA – original Upolu Cay mooring to remain at Upolu Cay
- Crew are well trained in safe and environmentally aware anchoring practices
- Cay destination time i.e. am / pm can be changed on a daily basis to fit in with helicopter / local / other users / no snorkelling off the Cay (should a helicopter be on the Cay at our arrival time – radio contact would be made to liaise with safe and appropriate times for pax to land and leave Cay as advised by Helicopter crew)
- No fish feeding done here (this is done on other reef site)



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- Maximum 3 hrs / mostly 2hrs but even 1 hr on days where locals may be using area – this is very flexible and we are happy to be flexible on a daily basis .

6. Proposed Change For use of Michaelmas :

This is our 2nd option due to respect of other Tour operators who use this area . Tourism has taken a copping for many years now but particularly the last 4 years and as stated points of difference for tour operators are very important in a highly competitive field.

Our proposed use of this area would be as for Vlasoff.

Our niche market is the Cay + Reef experience with small pax numbers using a high power luxury motor vessel. Other reef operators offer pontoon and reef , others - Sail Cay and reef and others are more dedicated dive boats offering 2-3 reef sites. The ability to continue to operate in our niche market is not only beneficial to ourselves and to our international and domestic travelers but also to our fellow reef operators.

7. Our commitment and mutual respect for other Cay users ;

As we stated we are a small family run business and very approachable should anyone have any concerns.

Our commitment to you for our use of Vlasoff:

1. Never more than a maximum 2-3 hrs on any day – whether go in morning or afternoon can be decided daily with any other users to fit in with perhaps helicopter schedules etc
2. Intend open communication between all users – any time potential users on a day can contact us. We already have a good relationship with Helicopter use as we have had mutual charters – this will continue by having direct phone /radio access to owners / skippers on any day so as we can all fit in. Time spent on Cay can vary between 1-3 hrs maximum and can be am or pm to fit with any other use on the day.



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3. We will endeavour to not go out on weekends / public holidays when weather appears suitable for local users. On the odd days when due to our pax type we have to go on weekends when weather appears suitable for locals we can organise that we make the Cay our first destination . We are a fast vessel and can arrive at the Cay at 9.15am and be gone by latest 12.00pm leaving the Cay for local use all afternoon and evening . Or as stated above on those days limit our Cay use to 1-2hrs maximum.

Our max pax number is 75 pax – however these numbers are generally only run at peak times of the year – so the number will most often be less. Also not all pax are landed on the Cay at the same time as some may be snorkelling. So it would be very rare to have this number land on the Cay at any one time . Most days there is no more than half pax load on at any time . Also there is no shade provided on the cay so most of our guests have a little walk / take photos and after ½ hr many return to the boat for shade or in water activities.

8. Finally A plea from a small family run operation;

Unfortunately in this day and age of everything becoming automated and machine - like the human factor appears commonly forgotten. We understand that legislation needs to be followed and there are procedures in place that must be adhered to but we ask that not only the facts above are taken into account but that the 18 years of a business purely run on passion for the reef and ocean and one like many other small businesses struggling to survive in a very volatile industry that has endured a multitude of setbacks beyond the control of anyone also be taken into account. We are a very hard working company and try to be always positive but just need some assistance. We have endured many setbacks in tourism beyond our control and managed to get back –however the demise of our beautiful site due to a cyclonic event is something we cannot change with any amount of hard work or positive drive. We therefore hope that anyone who has any reservations take this into account but also have our strong commitment to them that we are very much a team that is flexible and will always endeavour to work in with any other users of the area .

In the Marine Contingency Plan it states that “GBRMPA understands the extreme economic hardship that may result from such an incident and will make every reasonable attempt to facilitate temporary relocations for affected tourism operations.” We hope that other Cay users also truly understand the economic implications to a small family business as this decision not only affects us directly but also the 22 locals we employ.



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