

UPOLU CAY REEF OPERATORS CODE OF CONDUCT

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PREFACE

This Code of Conduct includes a list of guidelines designed to assist tour operators accessing Upolu Cay in the wise use and conservation of one of the most photographed and popular sand cays within the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The Code was written by Alan Wallish, Managing Director, Passions of Paradise and acknowledges the assistance of Robin Aiello, Ecotourism Consultant Marine Biologist and Ian Grant, Queensland Department of Environment.

Upolu Cay is a very popular destination for both locals and tourists and it is therefore recognised that the long term economic viability of reef operators depends very much on promoting and safeguarding the long term ecological sustainability of the Cay and surrounding reef.

INTRODUCTION

Upolu Cay is a national park comprising a small coral cay located on Upolu Reef, 24 km northeast of Cairns.

The reef surrounding the Cay is shallow and has a number of small coral bommies. The deeper corals themselves are generally healthy and colourful, but show some damage caused by COTS and wave damage.

The Reef Tourism Industry acknowledges the need to minimise human interference while conducting environmentally sensitive tourism at Upolu Cay and reef.

This Code of Conduct ensures that operators operate in accordance with Best Environmental Practices to present the unique values of Upolu Cay to visitors in the least intrusive manner. The Code complements Government regulations controlling access to the Cay. Whilst developed by the operators at Upolu Cay, the Code is endorsed by the Queensland Department of Environment and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

INDUSTRY CODE OF CONDUCT

Things we voluntarily do

The Upolu Cay Tourist Operators' Code of Conduct comprises a list of guidelines and voluntary practices that complement Government regulations.

INDUCTION:

All new staff should be required to read this Code of Conduct as part of their job induction.

PASSENGER BRIEFING: All passengers must be given a briefing prior to arrival that clearly outlines the outstanding fauna and flora on the cay and in the water and appropriate behaviour. This interpretive and safety briefing for visitors is essential to provide an understanding and appreciation of the values and sensitivity of Upolu Cay and the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

STAGGERED VISITATION: Where possible, all commercial vessels are to stagger activities throughout their stay, to limit the number of passengers on the Cay at one time. This could include scuba diving, snorkel tours and other in-water activities. In addition, operators to provide a ferry service from their vessel, so that new arrivals on the cay replace returning passengers.

'LOW IMPACT' VESSELS: Vessels used to ferry visitors to and from the cay should be 'low impact' - minimising noise, wake, and sediment disturbance. Vessels must be leak free.

RESEARCH & MONITORING: Operators and their staff should seek to encourage and participate in reef monitoring programs, including self-monitoring programs (i.e. COTS watch, Eye on the Reef, Bleach watch, Reef Check).

BEST ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES: Upolu Cay Operators will adopt the GBRMPA Best Environmental Practices for land and water activities. These Practices have been developed jointly by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency and representatives from the Marine Tourism Industry.

SELF-MANAGEMENT: Upolu Cay operators will work together to ensure that everyone operates in accordance with this Code of Conduct. Breaches of the regulations governing access to the Cay will be reported to the Upolu Cay Reef Operators Association or the relevant government organisation.

VESSEL MOORINGS: Operators are restricted to using their own approved moorings only, unless written permission is obtained from another operator allowing shared access. Moorings are to be maintained and well presented. Relocation of moorings or upgrades are to be undertaken in accordance with permit conditions and in consultation with QPWS.

ANNUAL REVIEW: Upolu Cay operators and Management Agencies will collectively review the success of the Code of Conduct if new issues arise or it is requested by any of the signatories. Adjustment will be made if necessary to ensure that the natural values of the Cay are conserved.

BEST ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES (BEPs)

SNORKELLING

- Where possible practice snorkelling techniques away from live coral.
- Be aware of where your fins are at all times and control fin kicks, especially in shallow water.
- Avoid touching anything with fins, and be aware of stirring up sediment.
- Do not rest or stand on coral. If you must stand up make sure its on sand.
- Where available, use rest stations. There is one located between Passions of Paradise and Falla adjacent to Coral.
- Observe animals rather than touch them. Handling some animals can be dangerous.
- Do not chase or attempt to ride or grab free-swimming animals. Avoid blocking their path.
- Do not poke or prod any plants or animals.
- Do not pick up anything underwater, living or dead. Upolu Cay is a green zone – no take zone. The definition of take includes handling – no touch.
- Take the time to learn about the underwater environment.
- Keep snorkellers or swimmers in the area of water between the boats and the cay.

ANCHORING

- Carry the right gear - enough chain or chain and line to anchor in the appropriate depth.
- Always check the area before anchoring.
- Anchor in sand or mud away from live coral and be sure your chain is clear of coral
- Motor towards the anchor when hauling the anchor in.
- Where installed, use appropriate mooring.
- If anchor gets stuck, do not yank it. Snorkel or dive to release.

SCUBA DIVING

- Ensure the proper weighting before entering the water and practice buoyancy control on entry away from coral (preferably over sand).
- Have beginners remain over sand until they have mastered buoyancy control
- Do not rest or stand on coral. If you must stand up make sure its on sand.
- Avoid touching anything with fins, and be aware of stirring up sediment.
- Secure dragging equipment to BCD, such as gauges that can catch on coral.
- Observe animals rather than touch them. Handling some animals can be dangerous.
- Do not chase or attempt to ride or grab free-swimming animals. Avoid blocking their path.
- Do not poke or prod any plants or animals.
- Do not pick up anything underwater, living or dead.
- Do not lean on coral for support when taking underwater photographs and avoid hovering over fragile coral stands.
- Take the time to learn about the underwater environment.
- All Instructors are recommended to tow a dive flag to identify scuba divers.
- All skippers and dive staff to familiarise themselves where other scuba diving activities take place.

WASTE DISPOSAL

- If a vessel contains a holding tank, do not pump out tank while at anchor. Discharge sewage in open water well away from reefs, no less than 1 nautical mile from the reef (e.g. in a shipping channel). These rules may change due to Queensland Government and MARPOL regulations for sewerage disposal, so all operators to stay abreast of changes and comply with any changes in legislation.
- If a vessel does not contain a holding tank, visitors should use toilets before reaching and after leaving the reef, not at the reef.
- Use biodegradable toilet paper and phosphate-free cleaning products and minimise their entry into the marine environment wherever possible.
- Do not wash dishes at anchor.
- Encourage visitors not to urinate in the water at the reef.
- Petroleum products in the bilge should be broken down with biodegradable detergents and pumped into vessel storage containers on board and disposed of at a recycling depot on shore.

FISH FEEDING

- Fish feeding requires special permission from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency and is a condition of individual operators permit.
- The fish feeding guidelines should be followed at all times.
- If you are feeding as part of a commercial tourism operation, fish feeding should be well supervised and conducted only by staff.
- Fish should not be fed directly by hand, but by broadcasting food into the water.
- Snorkellers and divers should not be in the vicinity at the time of fish feeding.
- Feed fish only raw marine products (prawns or pilchards are preferred) or approved fish pellets.
- Feed fish no more than 1 kilogram per day or where fish feeding is carried out at more than one site per day, a total of 2 kg. per day is allowed.
- Do not let passengers throw any lunch food over side of boat.

MANAGING ACTIVITIES IN THE VICINITY OF THE CAY

- Activities in the vicinity of Upolu Cay should be generally undertaken in accordance with the Activities Plan.
- When transporting passengers to the cay, dinghies should be operated either to the left or right of the commercial vessels. Any dinghy activity in the diving/snorkelling area is extremely dangerous for divers due to the shallow water. Always proceed slowly and look for signs of diving activities before starting engines.
- Dinghies which are doing surface watch may use this area, but must proceed very slowly and the driver must wear polarised sunglasses to assist in identifying divers underwater.
- It is recommended that all dinghies should have prop guards fitted.
- No dinghy should travel at high speed between vessels and the cay unless outside the arc of diving.

OTHER VESSELS

- Upolu Cay is a popular destination for locals on nice days, weekends and holidays. Operators should be courteous to non-commercial passengers both on the cay and in the water.
- Where diving activity is taking place, if a local boat enters the same area, the surface watch of the closest boat should attempt to signal (voice, arm waving, holding or pointing to a dive flag), to let them know divers are in the water.

LITTER

- Always use covered bins.
- Regularly pick up any litter on the deck
- Pick up any litter seen in or on the water .
- Advise passengers not to throw any cigarette butts into the water or onto the land.
- Have free recycled film canisters available for passengers to use if needed.

LEGISLATION OR VOLUNTARY CODE OF CONDUCT RESTRICTIONS

The applicable legislation applying to Upolu Cay and Reef is:

- *Nature Conservation Act 1992, Nature Conservation Regulation 1994*
- *Queensland Marine Parks Act 1982, Queensland Marine Parks Regulations 1990*
- *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983*
- *Cairns Area Plan of Management (as in force October 1999)*
- *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan (2003)*
- *Michaelmas and Upolu Cays National Park Management Plan*

TENURE

- The *beach*, between high water mark and low water mark, is within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park governed under the Queensland Marine Parks Act 1982. (State).
- The area above high water mark is within the Michaelmas and Upolu Cays National Park.
- The area below low water mark is within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Cmwlth).

BEACH STRUCTURES

Large objects and structures (e.g. beach umbrellas) are not supported on the beach (via voluntary code).

VESSEL SPEEDS

Vessels must not exceed 4 knots in the boating access channel (Code) and refer Map 1.

FISHING

Fishing is prohibited in the green zone surrounding the cay (Zoning Plan).

COLLECTING

The collection and touching of marine life is prohibited in the green zone surrounding the cay (zoning plan).