



# THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

## CHAPTER ONE

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*"The Great Barrier Coral Reef of Australia, the marvellous structure and extent of which were first made known to the world through the explorations of Captain Cook, is one of the wonders of the universe."*

W. Saville-Kent 1893

Biologist, businessman and pioneer fisheries manager

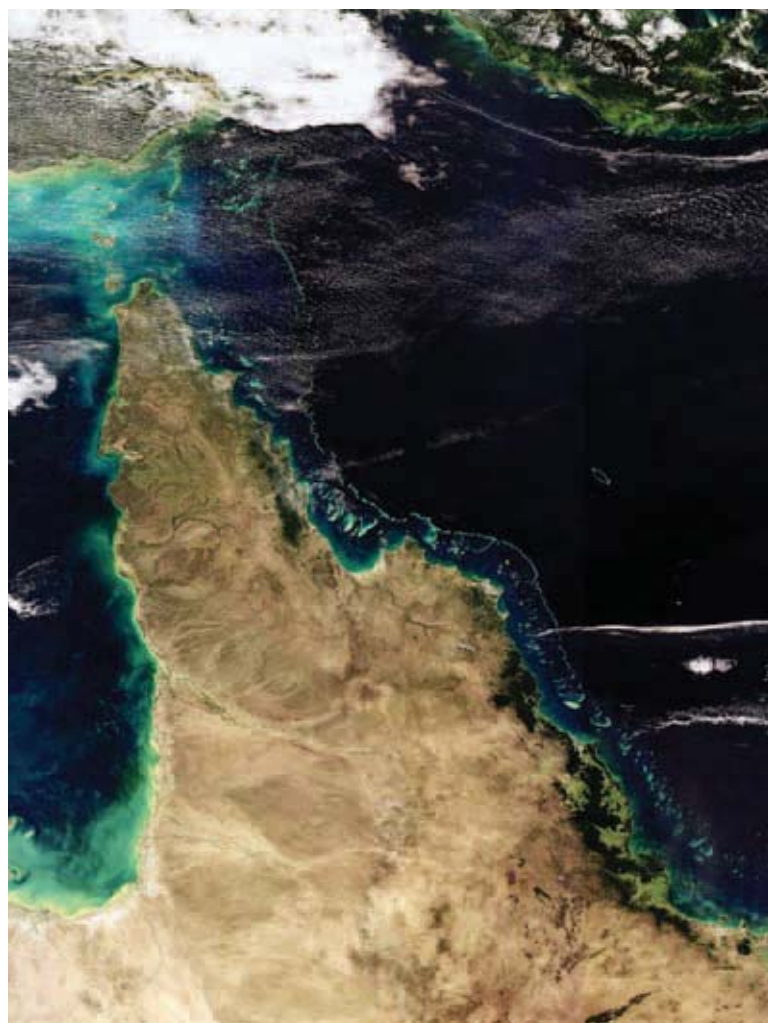
# 1

## THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

*The Great Barrier Reef is a Queensland and Australian icon and part of the country's identity.*

The Great Barrier Reef is the largest and best known coral reef ecosystem in the world, spanning a length of 2300 km along two-thirds of the east coast of Queensland. The reefs of the Great Barrier Reef - almost 3000 in total - represent about 10 per cent of all the coral reef areas in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Virtually all groups of marine plants and animals are abundantly represented in the Great Barrier Reef, with thousands of different species living there.



### **The Great Barrier Reef from space**

*The Great Barrier Reef hugs the east coast of Queensland, Australia. Its variety of reefs is substantially greater than in any other place on Earth. (Photo courtesy of the European Space Agency)*

### 1.1 A great Australian icon

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's premier natural resources and is a national and international icon, famous for its beauty and vast scale. By universal acclaim, it is a place of grandeur to be cherished by people of all nations and protected from threats.

Not surprisingly, the Great Barrier Reef has attracted immense national and international interest resulting in many hundreds of popular books, articles, guides and television documentaries about it and the life it contains. The number of scientific articles on aspects of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem now numbers in the tens of thousands.

The Great Barrier Reef is an integral part of the Australian national identity. Around half of the residents of Great Barrier Reef coastal communities and about 10 per cent of residents in southern capital cities visited the Great Barrier Reef in 2007.<sup>2</sup> It attracts expressions of national pride in the visual arts, literature and education, plus during national events.



*The Great Barrier Reef was part of the Torch Relay for the 2000 Olympic Games held in Sydney, Australia. (Photo courtesy of the Quicksilver Group)*

When under threat, the Great Barrier Reef also attracts widespread public concern for its conservation.



This interest is not confined to Australia. Like the Amazon rainforest, the Great Barrier Reef is known throughout the world as one of the greatest natural ecosystems of our planet. When so many of the world's most valued places of natural wilderness have been degraded within the space of a few generations, the intangible value the Great Barrier Reef continues to increase.

Throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s, under the slogan *Save the Barrier Reef*, the Great Barrier Reef became the subject of the biggest conservation campaign in Australian history.<sup>3 4 5</sup> In 1974 a Royal Commission into oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef highlighted the scarcity of scientific knowledge about the ecosystem, as well as the lack of a dedicated regulatory authority to manage it. This activity culminated in 1975 with the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act* establishing the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

## 1.2 Protected as a marine park

Areas of the Great Barrier Reef Region have been progressively included in the Commonwealth Great Barrier Reef Marine Park since the late 1970s. Today almost all of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem is included within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park which extends over 2300km along the coast of Queensland and covers approximately 344 400 km<sup>2</sup> (see Map 1). This Commonwealth Marine Park is complemented by the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park in adjacent Queensland waters.

### 1.2.1 A multiple use area

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is a multiple use marine park, supporting a wide range of uses, including commercial marine tourism, fishing, ports and shipping, recreation, scientific research and Indigenous traditional use. It brings billions of dollars into Australia's economy each year, and supports more than 50 000 jobs.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.2.2 Marine Park management

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is responsible for the care and development of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Field management is a partnership between the Authority and the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management, complemented by other

Australian and Queensland Government agencies. Management is enhanced through partnerships with stakeholders, scientists and members of the Great Barrier Reef coastal community.

Within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, a number of activities are strictly prohibited (such as mining and oil drilling) and there is careful management of all other activities (such as fishing, commercial marine tourism and shipping operations). A range of measures are employed to manage the various uses of the Marine Park and to protect its values. For example, a Zoning Plan defines what activities can occur in which locations (figure 1.1), both to protect the marine environment and to separate potentially conflicting activities.

**The Great Barrier Reef ecosystem benefits many industries and the community.**

GBRMPA Zoning (see relevant Zoning Plans and Regulations for details)							
	General Use Zone	Habitat Protection Zone	Conservation Park Zone	Buffer Zone	Scientific Research Zone	Marine National Park Zone	Preservation Zone
Aquaculture	Permit	Permit	Permit*	X	X	X	X
Bait netting	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X
Boating, diving, photography	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*	✓	X
Crabbing (trapping)	✓	✓	✓*	X	X	X	X
Harvest fishing for aquarium fish, coral and beachworm	Permit	Permit	Permit*	X	X	X	X
Harvest fishing for sea cucumber, trochus, tropical rock lobster	Permit	Permit	X	X	X	X	X
Limited collecting	✓*	✓*	✓*	X	X	X	X
Limited spearfishing (snorkel only)	✓	✓	✓*	X	X	X	X
Line fishing	✓*	✓*	✓*	X	X	X	X
Netting (other than bait netting)	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X
Research (other than limited impact research)	Permit	Permit	Permit	Permit	Permit	Permit	Permit
Shipping (other than in a designated shipping area)	✓	Permit	Permit	Permit	Permit	Permit	X
Tourism programme	Permit	Permit	Permit	Permit	Permit	Permit	X
Traditional use of marine resources	✓*	✓*	✓*	✓*	✓*	✓*	X
Trawling	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X
Trolling	✓*	✓*	✓*	✓*	X	X	X

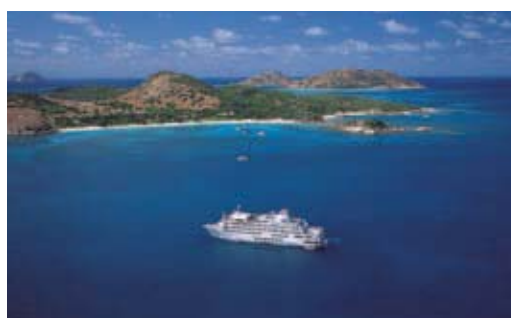
**PLEASE NOTE:** This guide provides an introduction to Zoning in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Relevant Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plans should be consulted for confirmation of use or entry requirements.

\* Additional restrictions / conditions apply.

**ACCESS TO ALL ZONES IS PERMITTED IN AN EMERGENCY.**

**Figure 1.1** | Activities allowed under the Zoning Plan

Zones delineate where particular activities are permitted under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003*.



Cruise ship at Lizard Island.

**The Great Barrier Reef is a vast, multiple use, Marine Park.**



*Mangroves*

## 1.3 Heritage values

### 1.3.1 Significance to Traditional Owners

For the Great Barrier Reef, there are about 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owner clan groups that hold a range of past and present heritage values for their land and sea country, and for surrounding sea countries. These values may be cultural, spiritual, economic, social or physical, and demonstrate continuing connections with the Great Barrier Reef Region and its natural resources.



*Spinner dolphins*

### 1.3.2 World Heritage

The Great Barrier Reef was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1981, the first coral reef ecosystem in the world to have this distinction and the only such coral reef region that has ever qualified on all four natural criteria, namely:

- be outstanding examples representing the major stages of Earth's history or significant geomorphic or physiographic features
- be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes
- contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance
- contain important and significant habitats for *in situ* conservation of biodiversity, including threatened species.



*Nudibranch*



*Red reef lobster*

***The Great Barrier Reef is a World Heritage Area, recognised for its great diversity of species and habitats.***



This recognition continues to highlight the international significance of the Great Barrier Reef; it also carries an obligation and responsibility to protect and conserve its values for all future generations and to present its values to the world.





Whale shark



Red-footed booby



Humphead Maori wrasse



*The historical significance of Lady Elliot Island Lighthouse has been recognised through its inclusion on the Commonwealth Heritage List.*

### 1.3.3 National heritage

In May 2007, existing Australian World Heritage properties (such as the Great Barrier Reef) were transferred on to the National Heritage List for their World Heritage values. In addition, five Commonwealth Heritage places within the Great Barrier Reef Region and many places of historical significance including lighthouses and shipwrecks are managed to protect heritage values. There are also many places of particular historical importance, such as Endeavour Reef where Captain Cook ran aground and was obliged to discard his ship's cannons.

### References

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