

1. INTRODUCTION

Established under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park ('the Marine Park') covers an area of approximately 340,000 km², and includes one of the most complex and biologically diverse ecosystems on earth.

The Marine Park comprises nearly 98% of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1981 on the basis of its outstanding natural universal values and its ecological integrity.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act also established the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority ('the Authority'). The Authority's Goal is:

'To provide for the protection, wise use, understanding and enjoyment of the Great Barrier Reef in perpetuity through the care and development of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park'.

The stated Aims of the Authority include protecting the natural qualities of the Great Barrier Reef while providing for reasonable use of the Reef Region, and minimising regulation of, and interference in, human activities, consistent with meeting the Goal and other Aims of the Authority. Consistent with these obligations, the Authority is responsible for conserving turtles in the Marine Park. This is achieved through managing human activities that impact on turtles occurring in the Marine Park, including both current activities and predicted future activities. To the extent that it is consistent with protecting the natural values of the Great Barrier Reef, including marine turtles, the Authority provides for ecologically sustainable use of the Marine Park. There is a need to address impacts on marine turtles, because three of the six species inhabiting in the World Heritage Area show evidence of a population decline.

The Authority also seeks to ensure that the interests of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders are reflected in the management of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. The particular relationship between Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and marine turtles within the Area is well documented (Cook 1994, Hunter and Williams 1998, Ponte et al. 1994).

To conserve turtles and the other natural values of the World Heritage Area over the long term, management should seek to be proactive. Current problems must be addressed, but possible future problems should be anticipated to the extent possible. Further, management within the World Heritage Area cannot occur in isolation, but must operate effectively in the context of other Commonwealth, Queensland, and, to some extent, international initiatives.

In harmony with the Draft *National Recovery Plan for Marine Turtles in Australia* (Environment Australia 1998), the goal for marine turtle conservation in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area is '*to reduce impacts on Australian stocks of marine turtles and hence promote their recovery in the wild*'.