

MILLN REEF SITE PLAN (Prepared August 2001)

Note 1: On 1 July 2004, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003 came into effect. It changed the zoning and activities allowed in zones for the Marine Park. Milln Reef is now zoned Marine National Park Zone, for more information please refer to the Zoning Plan and maps.

Note 2: Pursuant to paragraph 4.11(1)(b) of the Zoning Plan 2003, the following Special Management Area has been designated over Milln Reef:

- Milln Reef No Dorries Detached (Marine National Park Zone) Special Management Area.

1. Background

Site planning is an integral part of the Cairns Area Plan of Management. Site planning was required at a number of Locations in the Cairns Area to provide for a balance of recreational and commercial access consistent with the protection of conservation, scientific and cultural values.

Site plans were prepared for the following Locations: Lizard Island Localities 2 and 3; Opal Reef; Tongue Reef; Agincourt Reefs; Hastings Locality 1; Briggs Reef; Norman Reef; Michaelmas Cay Locality; Upolu Cay Reef; Green Island Reef Locality 1; Flynn Reef; Milln Reef; Moore Reef Locality 2; Normanby Island Reef; Russell and Round Island Reefs.

Site planning occurred progressively and draft plans were presented for comment to all the interested parties. Site plans for Lizard Island Localities 2 and 3 were finalised in August 1999, while the remaining draft plans were discussed at site planning meetings held in Cairns and Port Douglas from 11 to 14 December 2000. All comments received were considered in the preparation of the final plans.

2. Site planning objectives

The following summarises the objectives of site planning in the Cairns Area:

- Provide an appropriate balance of private and public access opportunities
- Provide for Reef Anchorages where reasonable access will not be inhibited by moorings.
- Minimise damage to fish spawning aggregation sites and disturbance of fish spawning aggregations when determining the location of Reef Anchorages, moorings and pontoons.
- Minimise the impact on significant dugong habitat when determining the location of Reef Anchorages, moorings and pontoons.
- Minimise disturbance to significant cultural and heritage values when determining the location of Reef Anchorages, moorings and pontoons.
- Ensure that Reef Anchorages, moorings or pontoons are not located within an existing research or monitoring site if the project design would be adversely effected by anchoring.
- Minimise damage to coral from anchoring when determining the location of Reef Anchorages, moorings and pontoons.
- Determine a maximum number of moorings and pontoons for Locations with no limit (refer to Schedules 6 and 7 of the Cairns Area Plan of Management).

Note: Approval for new private moorings and pontoons will remain subject to detailed impact assessment.

3. Site description and map

Milln Reef (16-067) is a planar type reef within the Cairns Section of the Marine Park at latitude 16°47.5 longitude 146°16 (Figure 1). The area of the reef is 370 ha.

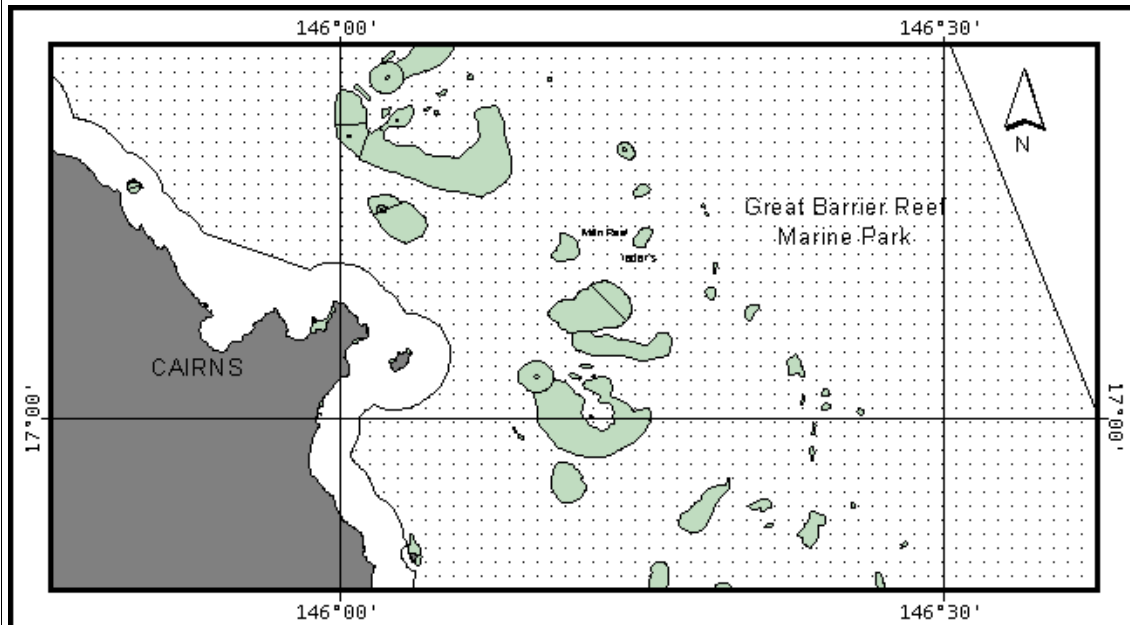


Figure 1: Location of Milln Reef in the South Offshore Cairns Sector

4. Values

4.1 Coral

Ayling (1983) surveyed Milln Reef and recorded 20-50% hard coral cover and 5-10% soft coral cover. It was noted that the reef contained many large Porites bommies. The good aesthetic quality of the coral cover contributed to a high demand of this reef by commercial operators.

4.2 Seagrass

There have been no official seagrass surveys conducted at Milln Reef. No seagrass was found during QPWS site surveys.

4.3 Fish spawning

Fish spawning aggregation sites have been identified at Milln Reef. Further surveys will be undertaken to establish the significance of these sites.

4.4 Commercial

All fishing and collecting of marine biota is prohibited at Milln Reef.

4.5 Recreation

The reef is popular with divers because of good visibility, reef structure and deep water. However, the reef is also at the practical limit of day-trip access from Cairns and access by recreational users is therefore limited to good weather days.

4.6 Tourism

There are currently four tourist operators who hold permits to visit Milln Reef daily by anchoring, 25 operators hold roving permits, and 80 operators hold daily permits which do not permit anchoring. The Cairns Professional Game Fishing Association holds 79 permits. There are 11 moorings on Milln Reef. During the year 1998/99 19,067 tourists visited Milln Reef.

4.7 Cultural

Milln Reef is of special significance to the indigenous Gungandji People.

4.8 Research and monitoring

QPWS research officers are conducting a High Use Monitoring Project on a number of reefs in the GBRMP including Milln Reef. The project uses video monitoring to assess the impact of high levels of use on the reef. The project commenced in June 1999 and surveys will be annual and sporadic depending on conditions.

5. Summary of submissions received – Cairns Area Plan of Management

The draft Cairns Area Plan of Management was released for public comment in August 1997. A total of 160 submissions were received on the Plan. Of the 160 submissions received 2 referred to Milln Reef.

The first submission stated that “*Milln Reef (is) ...a necessary part of our growth and expansion plans*” (submission no 1119). The second submission expressed a concern about the exclusion of the public due to the large numbers of commercial moorings inhibiting access to the location (submission no 1137).

6. Issues

6.1 Appropriate balance of use (mooring and anchoring)

There are eleven permitted moorings at Milln Reef. Public access will need to be considered for this site.

6.2 Protection of conservation values

Anchoring or inappropriate mooring placement and design can damage fragile coral communities. The designation of reef anchorages and pre-selection of potential mooring sites required an assessment of the bio-physical characteristics of identified areas to ensure that conservation values are upheld. Broad surveys of all potential sites were conducted and their suitability as mooring sites or reef anchorages was assessed.

Fish spawning aggregation sites (FSASs) have been identified at the Location. There is potential for disturbance of spawning activity by tourism activity during spawning episodes. FSASs will need to be considered in the selection of new mooring, pontoon or reef anchorage sites.

7. Current management strategies

7.1 Cairns Section Zoning Plan (Zoning Map: BRA Q156)

The reefs and waters surrounding Milln Reef are within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The reef is zoned as National Park under the Zoning Plan. Activities allowed include diving, boating, anchoring and photography. Activities which are prohibited in this zone include line fishing, trolling, bait gathering and netting, commercial fishing, spearfishing and collection of coral or shells. The waters surrounding the reef are zoned as Buffer Zone. Prohibited activities in Buffer Zones are the same as for the National Park Zone, with the exception of trolling and bait netting for pelagic species. The reefs and waters surrounding Milln Reef are also within the no structures sub zone.

7.2 Cairns Area Plan of Management

The Cairns Area Plan of Management was released by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority in June 1998 to provide strategies for protecting values of the offshore areas from Cairns and Port Douglas, the Ribbon Reefs, Lizard Island and the Frankland Islands. The following is a summary of the major strategies in the Cairns Area Plan relevant to Milln Reef

- Milln Reef has been identified as a moderate use location. Group size limits of 60 people apply.
- No designated Reef Anchorages have been identified on Milln Reef.
- The Plan allows 11 permitted moorings at Milln Reef.

8. Site planning strategies (refer to figure 2)

8.1 Reef Anchorages

Anchoring access is vital for many reef users operating in the Offshore Cairns area. A designated Reef Anchorage was proposed as shown in figure 2. Further discussions among interested parties during the Site Plan meeting supported the proposed Reef Anchorage at that site. Therefore, Site 1 will be designated as a Reef Anchorage. Schedule 8 of the CAPOM will be amended to reflect this change.

8.2 Private Moorings

All private moorings allowed by the CAPOM at Milln Reef have been permitted.

8.3 Public Moorings

At this time, no public moorings are proposed at this Location.

9. References

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 1998, *Cairns Area Plan of Management*, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Townsville

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 1997, *Submissions to the Cairns Area Plan of Management*, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville (unpublished).

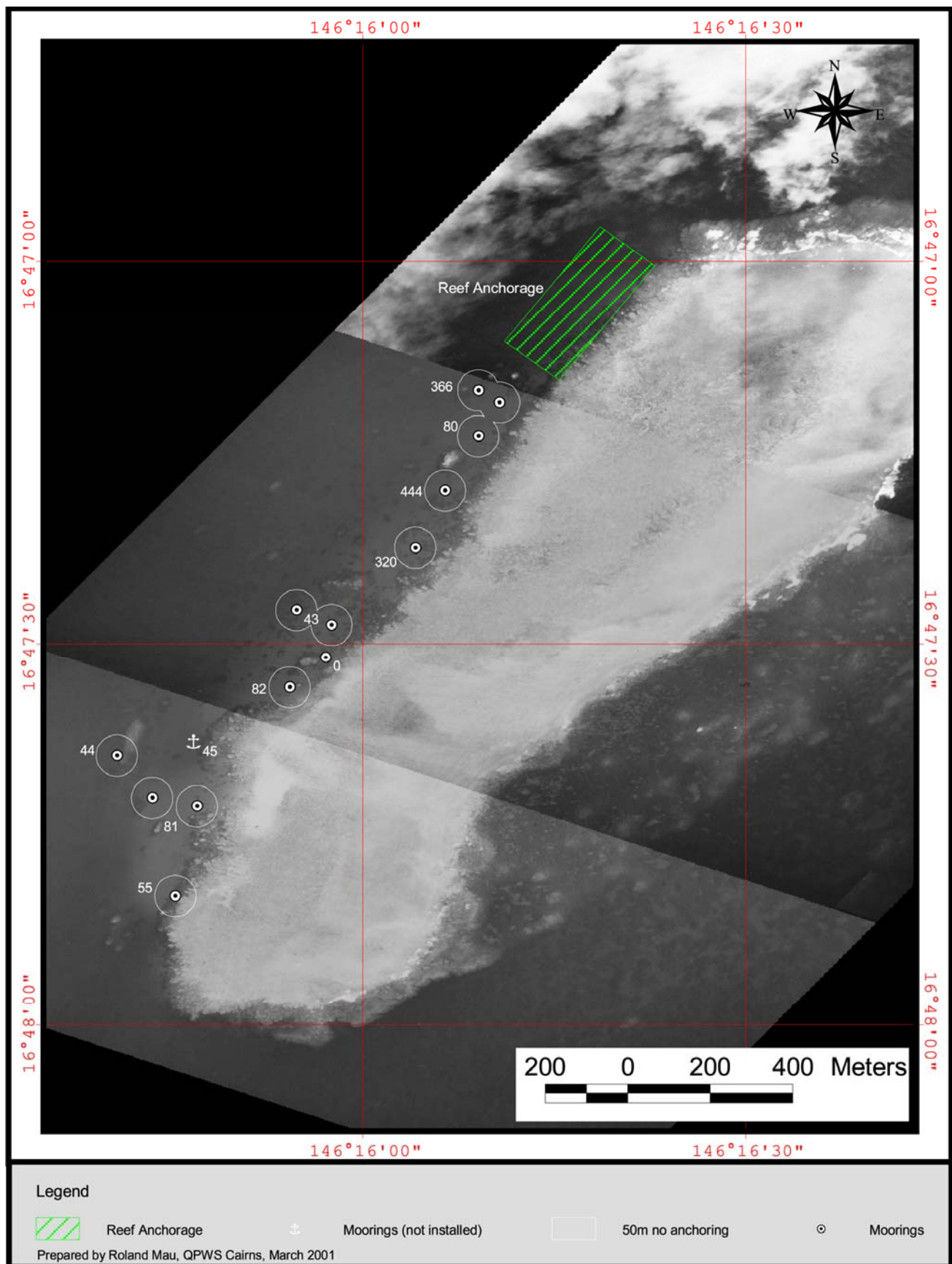


Figure 2: Milln Reef Site Plan