

MILLN REEF SITE PLAN

(Updated February 2006)

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 identified 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 initially occurred between 1999 and 2000, and the draft Milln Reef Site Plan was presented to all the interested parties at meetings held in Cairns and Port Douglas from 11 to 14 December 2000. It was then finalised in August 2001.

In 2005, a request was made to move two moorings, and the proposal was publicly advertised in August 2005. No submissions were received. A decision was made in September 2005 and the Milln Reef Site Plan was subsequently amended.

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 with an area of 24.9km². It is located within the Cairns/Cooktown Management Area at latitude 16°47.5 longitude 146°16 (Figure 1).

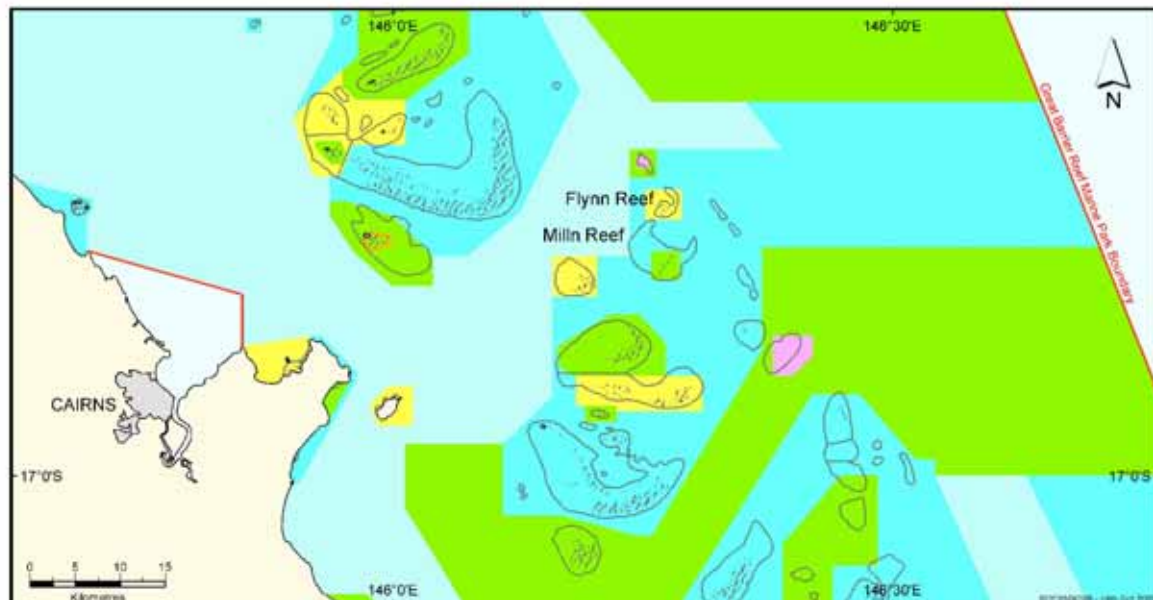


Figure 1: Location of Milln Reef in the South Offshore Cairns Sector

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. For more information visit the Australian Institute of Marine Science website (www.aims.gov.au).

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

Milln Reef is a Marine National Park (green) Zone, and fishing and other forms of take are not allowed.

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

Milln Reef is a popular destination for tourist operations based in the Cairns region. A number of day trip operations utilise the reef and it is also a popular location with extended liveaboard dive trips. There are eleven permitted moorings at Milln Reef, and tourist operators take approximately 30,000 people to Milln Reef per year.

4.7 Cultural

Milln Reef is part of the traditional sea country of the Gungandji Traditional Owners.

4.8 Research and monitoring

Milln Reef is not part of any site dedicated research.

5. Summary of submissions received

During the consultation process for the Cairns Area Plan of Management in 1997 only two submissions received referred to Milln Reef. One of these submissions expressed concern about the number of moorings, while the other indicated the importance of Milln Reef for their operation.

No submissions were received during the consultation processes held during August 2005 regarding the change to mooring locations.

6. Issues

6.1 Appropriate balance of use (mooring and anchoring)

There are currently eleven permitted private moorings at Milln Reef. The available anchoring space at Milln Reef is limited due to the size of the reef itself, prevailing weather conditions and the number of existing moorings. However, to provide for greater access to the site, a Reef Anchorage has been designated on the north western end of the reef and a public 'C' class mooring is installed on the western side.

6.2 Protection of conservation values

Inappropriate mooring placement and design can damage fragile coral communities. However, permits are required for the installation of moorings in the Marine Park and are managed through a joint permitting process between the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Permit conditions control the siting, design and associated impacts of moorings through assessment criteria as specified in the legislation.

Inappropriate anchoring can also damage coral communities, however the designation of a reef anchorage required an assessment of the bio-physical characteristics of the identified area to ensure that conservation values are upheld. The installation of a public mooring helps to reduce anchor damage by removing the requirement to anchor.

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 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003

Milln Reef is a Marine National Park (green) Zone with a No Dorries Detached (Marine National Park Zone) Special Management Area designated over it. The Special Management Area regulates the number of dories that may be detached from a commercial fishing vessel.

Activities allowed at Milln Reef include diving, boating, anchoring and photography. Activities excluded from the area include line fishing, trolling, bait gathering and netting, commercial fishing, spearfishing and collection of coral or shells. Please refer to the Zoning Plan and maps for details.

7.2 Cairns Area Plan of Management

The Cairns Area Plan of Management (CAPOM) was released by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority in June 1998, and amended in 1999, 2002, 2004 and 2005. The CAPOM provides 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 motorised water sports.
- No anchoring within 50 metres of a permitted mooring.
- The Plan allows 11 permitted private moorings at Milln Reef.

8. Site planning strategies

8.1 Reef Anchorages

Anchoring access is vital for many reef users operating in the Offshore Cairns area. A Reef Anchorage was designated as shown in Figure 2. At discussions held among interested parties during the Site Planning meeting in 2000, the Reef Anchorage was supported. For geographic coordinates of the Reef Anchorage, please refer to Schedule 8 of the CAPOM.

(Note: As designated Reef Anchorages are effectively ‘no mooring zones’, vessels may still anchor in suitable areas subject to the provisions of the CAPOM).

8.2 Private Moorings

All private moorings allowed by the CAPOM at Milln Reef have been permitted (see Figure 2). Refer to the GBRMPA Moorings Register for more detail.
(http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/tourism/moorings_register.cfm)

8.3 Public Moorings

A public ‘C’ class mooring has been installed on the western side of Milln Reef (see Figure 2).

9. References

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 1998, *Cairns Area Plan of Management* (including Amendment No 1, 2005), 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).

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Moorings Register
(http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/tourism/moorings_register.cfm)

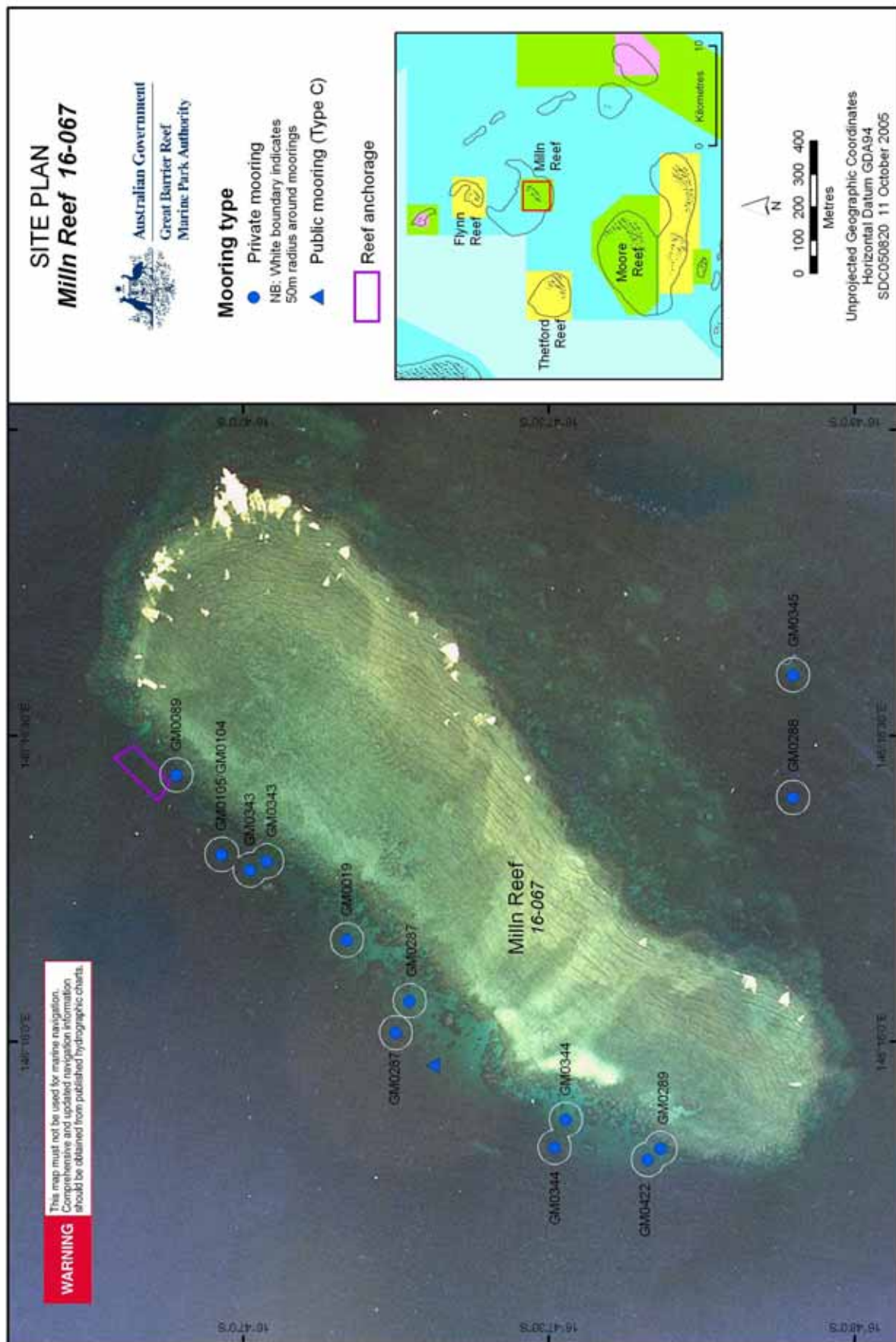


Figure 2: Milln Reef Site Plan