

#### 4.0 CONCLUSIONS

The surveys described in this report collectively provide a scientific and systematic user-based evaluation of the Capricornia Section Zoning Plan and day-to-day management. The results of the surveys are based on the viewpoints of more than 1,700 Capricornia Section users from a wide variety of user groups.

The overall response to the Zoning Plan and day-to-day management is one that is very positive. There is a common belief amongst all user groups that the marine park is playing a worthwhile role in helping to protect the Great Barrier Reef. While most user groups expressed some reservations about some aspects of the Zoning Plan and day-to-day management, many users expressed a view that the levels of inconvenience they are suffering are acceptable if it means that this Section of the Great Barrier Reef will be protected for future generations.

Commercial fishermen feel that they have been more disadvantaged by the Zoning Plan than other groups of users. They cite loss of traditional fishing grounds and a lack of equivalent restrictions on recreational fishermen as evidence that they are disadvantaged. On the other hand there appears to be a consistent point of view from other user groups that opportunities for commercial fishing within the Section should be reduced when the Zoning Plan is reviewed.

There is evidence to suggest that many users perceive the Capricornia Section as a 'national park' rather than in its true role as a multiple-use park. The message that 'reasonable use' and 'limited extraction' are part of the marine park philosophy has so far eluded a wide cross-section of users.

The level of knowledge and understanding of the technical aspects of the Zoning Plan are generally quite low - even amongst users who spend a large amount of their working or leisure time in the Section. This does not necessarily mean that there is widespread ignorance of the zoning provisions. Even though users may not be aware of the zone names for example, there is a general awareness amongst regular users of where and when activities are permitted. There is a tendency amongst less experienced users to assume that use restrictions are more severe than in fact they are.

Strong preferences were expressed by a number of groups that opportunities for extractive activities such as line-fishing, trawling and shell collecting should be reduced when the Zoning Plan is reviewed. The notion of bag limits on recreational line and spearfishing received strong support from almost all user groups.

The image of marine park rangers was favourable amongst most user groups although there appears to be little contact between rangers and a number of significant user groups, particularly those who visit the southern part of the Section. Confusion exists amongst many users as to the relative roles of the Authority and the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the Capricornia Section. This confusion is even apparent amongst some users who have had close contact with both agencies.

There is a widespread feeling amongst users that the legal provisions of the Zoning Plan are not being adequately enforced. Many respondents feel that surveillance is inadequate and there is a general reluctance on the part of responsible agencies to seek prosecution of known offenders.

Overall the survey highlights a general public acceptance of the Capricornia Section Zoning Plan and the day-to-day management. An overwhelming majority of respondents from all user groups agree that the Zoning Plan has helped to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

At the same time the survey has raised a number of issues which should be addressed during the review of the Capricornia Section Zoning Plan. One of the most pressing of these issues concerns public perceptions of what are and are not acceptable levels of resource extraction from the Section, and how these perceptions might best be incorporated into the Zoning Plan. The survey has also identified some specific areas that warrant the attention of day-to-day managers in the Capricornia Section. Most of these are concerned with education, extension and enforcement activities.

As a final comment, it is worthwhile to note that this evaluation project has been something of a pioneering exercise for the planning profession in Australia. It is unusual for government planning agencies to seek public judgement on their performance. The Authority has done this and has been rewarded by both a favourable judgement and valuable information on how its performance could be even further improved. At the same time credit should also be given to the Capricornia Section users. Without exception, all user groups reacted positively to the project and showed a genuine interest in trying to improve the Zoning Plan and day-to-day management.