

BRIGGS 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. Briggs Reef is now zoned Marine National Park Zone, for more information please refer to the Zoning Plan and maps.

Note 2: Pursuant to paragraph 4.2.1(1)(b) of the Zoning Plan 2003, the following Special Management Area has been designated over Briggs Reef:

- Briggs 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

Briggs Reef (16-074) is a planar type reef with an area of 90 hectares. It is situated within the Cairns Section of the Marine Park at latitude 16 56.5 longitude 146 12.5 (Figure 1).

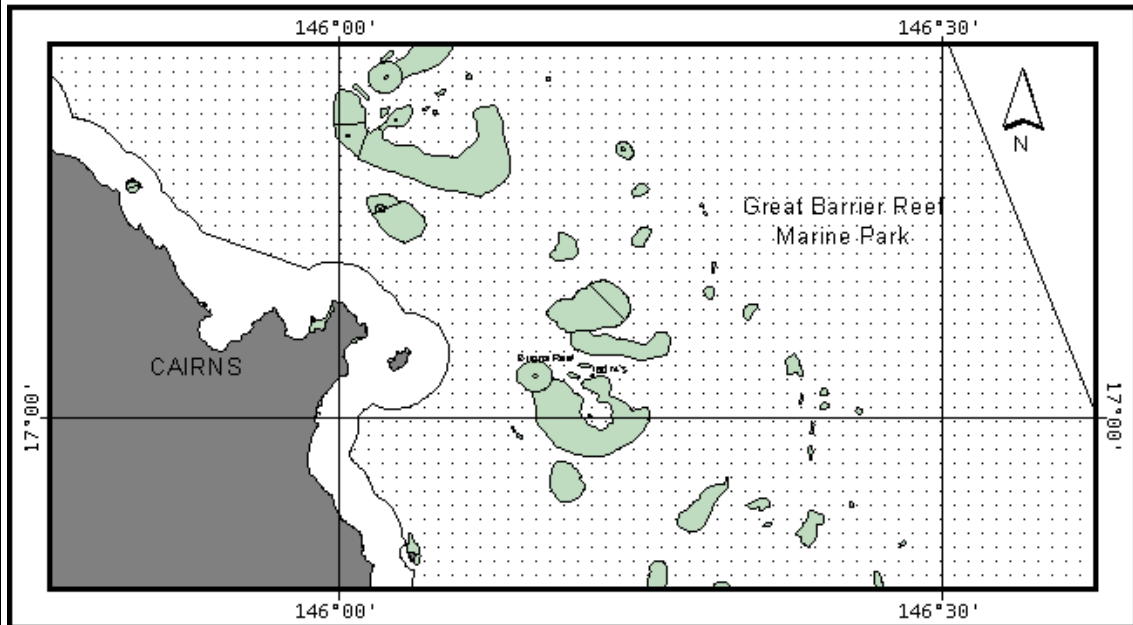


Figure 1: Location of Briggs Reef in the South Offshore Cairns Sector

4. Values

4.1 Coral

Briggs Reef has good coral coverage on the sheltered north-western end of the reef. The biota is diverse although the site has suffered from recent crown-of-thorn starfish outbreaks. The reef has interesting features attracting considerable fish life.

4.2 Seagrass

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

4.3 Fish spawning

No fish spawning aggregation sites have been identified at the Briggs Reef.

4.4 Commercial

All collecting and fishing, except trawling is permitted at Briggs Reef. There is currently one coral lease at Briggs Reef. Overall, there are: 19 permits for collection of beche-de-mer, six permits for trochus shell collection, 32 permits for collection of marine aquarium fish and four coral collecting permits with access to Briggs Reef.

4.5 Recreation

Although day-trippers can reach Briggs Reef from Cairns, the access direction is unfavourable to the predominant weather pattern. On calmer days, Briggs Reef is visited mainly by small half-cabin boats for opportunistic fishing.

4.6 Tourism

Two tourism operators hold permits to visit daily and each operator has access to their own permitted mooring. There are an additional 380 tourism operators who hold 'roving' permits.

4.7 Cultural

Briggs Reef is part of the traditional sea country of the indigenous Gungandji people.

4.8 Research and monitoring

There are no research permits issued for access to Briggs Reef.

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, two referred to Briggs Reef.

One submission expressed a concern over the impact of the low use setting of Briggs Reef restricting access to larger operations even though the location was not perceived as over used.

The second submission was concerned about the exclusion of the public due to the large numbers of commercial moorings inhibiting access to the location.

6. Issues

6.1 Appropriate balance of use (mooring and anchoring)

There are currently three permitted moorings registered for Briggs Reef.

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.

The designated Reef Anchorage at Briggs Reef overlaps an area of coral substrate and anchoring in this area is likely to lead to coral damage. An alternate Reef Anchorage needs to be investigated.

7. Current management strategies

7.1 Cairns Section Zoning Plan (Zoning Map: BRA Q 156)

The reefs and waters surrounding Briggs Reef are within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and are zoned as Habitat Protection Zone under the Zoning Plan. The reefs and waters of Briggs Reef are also within the no structures sub-zone. Activities which are permitted within the Habitat Protection Zone include diving, line fishing, trolling, commercial netting and trawling. Limited collecting of no more than five of any species of fish, shell or invertebrate is allowed, collecting over this amount requires a permit.

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 Briggs Reef:

- Briggs Reef is identified as a Low Use Location. Group size limits of 15 people apply.
- One Reef Anchorage has been defined. Reef Anchorages have been defined to encourage the use of places that are least likely to cause damage to coral and to provide some places where access will not be restricted by the presence of moorings.
- No anchoring is allowed within a 50 metre radius of a permitted mooring.
- Three permitted moorings are allowed at Briggs Reef.

8. Site planning strategies (refer to figure 2)

8.1 Reef Anchorage

While the current designated Reef Anchorage at Briggs Reef may provide good shelter from prevailing swell, anchoring in this area near the reef is likely to result in considerable damage to the coral substrate. As a designated Reef Anchorage it is intended to demarcate preferred anchorage areas where coral damage is minimised, therefore the designated Reef Anchorage is not suitable as such. The issue was raised at the site plan public meeting and it was agreed that no Reef Anchorage should be designated at Briggs Reef. Boaters can still anchor subject to provisions of the CAPOM. Schedule 8 of the CAPOM will need to be amended to reflect this change.

8.2 Private moorings

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

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).

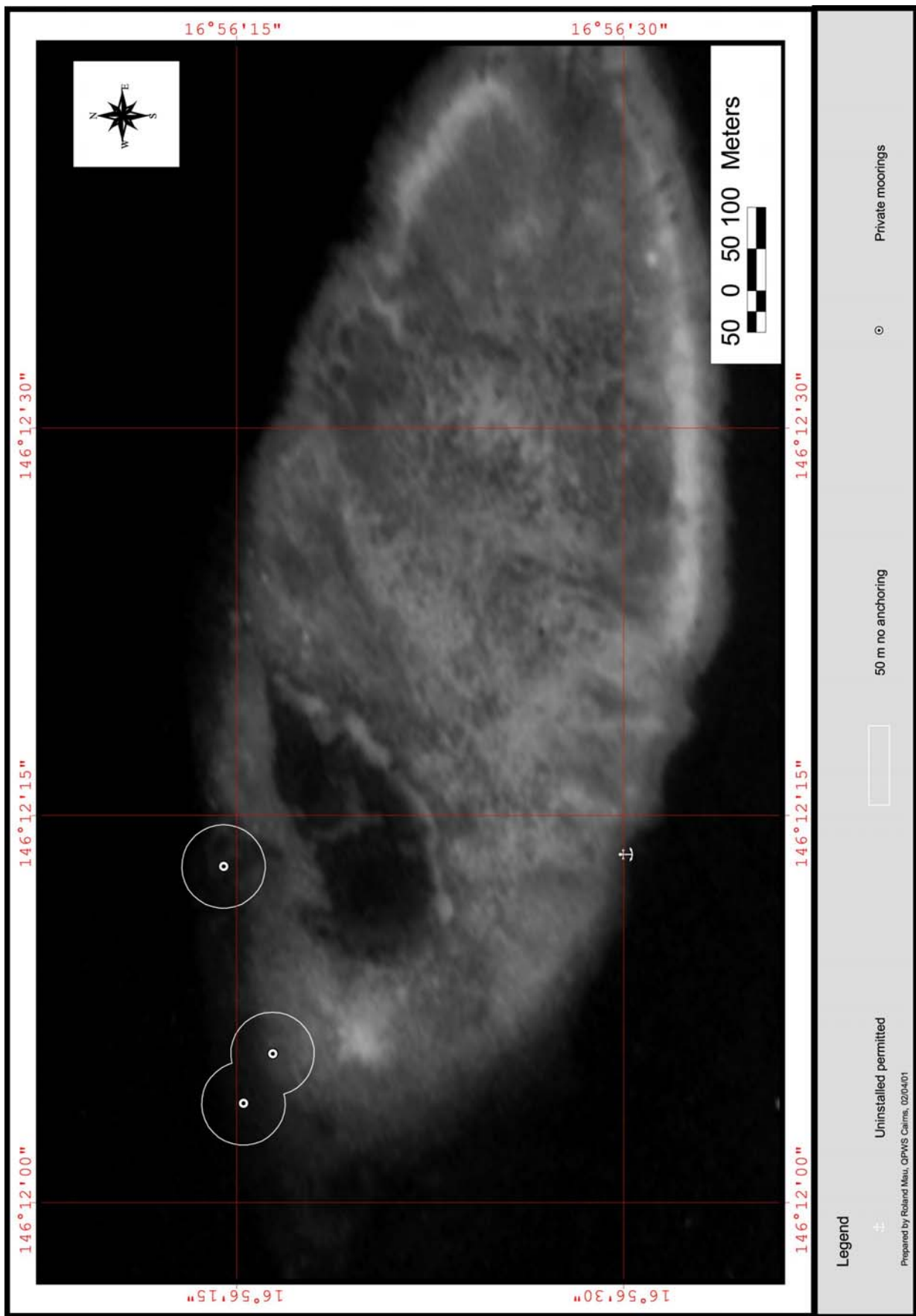


Figure 2: Briggs Reef Site Plan