

GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AUTHORITY  
TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM GBRMPA-TM-17

SOCIAL CARRYING CAPACITY IN RECREATIONAL SETTINGS:  
A LITERATURE REVIEW

MEREEN WATSON  
October 1988

SUMMARY

More than twenty years of research on the concept of social carrying capacity has yielded specific points about which there is general agreement and which GBRMPA should take into consideration in its attempt to manage increasing visitor use of the Marine Park.

- The establishment of visitor limits, alone, has proven to be an ineffective strategy for recreation management concerned with carrying capacity.
- Perceptions of crowding have more to do with the nature of visitor interactions, the settings and visitor attributes and expectations than they do with visitor density.
- A recreation management program using carrying capacity concepts will involve (1) research on visitor experiences, norms, goals and their perceptions of social impacts, (2) the establishment of clear and specific management objectives about desired conditions and (3) setting standards by which to measure conditions over time.
- Social carrying capacity research should: have clear objective measures, be longitudinal, study whole recreational regions and not be based on reported visitor satisfaction.

KEYWORDS: social carrying capacity, crowding, recreation management

Technical memoranda are of a preliminary nature, and represent the views of the author, not necessarily those of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

---

Please address all comments and requests for copies to:

The Executive Officer  
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority  
PO Box 1379 TOWNSVILLE Qld. 4810 AUSTRALIA

---

© Commonwealth of Australia, 1988

ISSN 0817 6094  
ISBN 0 642 12001 3

October, 1988



**Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority**

P.O. Box 1379, Townsville, Queensland 4810