

I N T R O D U C T I O N

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Currently the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is examining two well known and extensively used areas of the Great Barrier Reef with access from Gladstone and Cairns respectively. These areas have priority for inclusion in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. However, it was considered that the relatively little-used reefs east of Cape York Peninsula north of Lizard Island, also warranted attention. This Workshop was arranged to identify and consolidate the apparently meagre and scattered knowledge of these reefs, and to establish the action required to fill the perceived gaps. To ensure that these "wilderness areas" are retained, some of the northern reefs may have to be considered in the Marine Park, in view of the increasing use and exploitation of resources throughout the Great Barrier Reef Region.

Participants involved in the Workshop represented the interests of aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders, fishermen, tourists, miners, armed services, scientists, Federal and State Government Departments and others. The Workshop sought first to identify the level of knowledge and utilization of the physical and biological resources of this region which is believed to be the area least affected by human exploitation of the entire Great Barrier Reef. Subsequently the Workshop sought to identify priorities for research which would aid the Authority in developing a sound management plan for the region.

The objectives of the Authority were also kept in mind to provide the framework for discussion:

- (1) "The conservation of the Great Barrier Reef.
- (2) "The regulation of the use of the Marine Park so as to protect the Great Barrier Reef while allowing the reasonable use of the Great Barrier Reef Region.
- (3) "The regulation of activities that exploit the resources of the Great Barrier Reef Region so as to minimise the effects of those activities on the Great Barrier Reef.
- (4) "The reservation of some areas of the Great Barrier Reef for its appreciation and enjoyment by the public.
- (5) "The preservation of some areas of the Great Barrier Reef in their natural state undisturbed by man except for the purpose of scientific research."

In the far northern area where there is a distinctive pattern of reefs within close proximity to the Queensland coast, many of the waters remain uncharted, not all reef types have been described, and the influence of the nearby coastal mangroves and river systems on the reefs are little understood.

Queensland National Parks on the adjacent Cape York Peninsula provide safeguards against extensive human modification of the

coastal areas in this region and the distance from major cities was seen as a deterrent to heavy tourist involvement with the current methods of sea transport readily available in Australia. Any future introduction of hovercrafts could expose the area to much heavier tourist pressure.

Information presented on current utilization indicated that at this time the area is not under pressure from mining interests except for a small region at the far northern boundary, and that the Defense Department maintains predominately routine surveillance activities over this vast and isolated area. Discussions were held on the uses of lasers and of satellites to assist in mapping the region.

Many of the coastal areas and islands were identified as being of importance to aboriginal anthropology, but current use of the reef by aborigines was indicated as being slight.

Scientific studies on the reef and its communities have been hampered by the very isolation of the area, and the relatively frequent exposure of the reefs to rough seas and strong south east winds. Little information is available on natural reef populations of most species, including fish, mammals, turtles, and crustaceans. Studies on marine macro and micro-algae, reef- and sand-dwelling organisms and marine bacteria have barely been initiated, if at all.

Despite these facts, there has recently been a significant move to study the region closely, through studies by staff of Queensland Fisheries, A.I.M.S., James Cook University of North Queensland as well as scientists from other Australian Universities using the Lizard Island Research Station.

The Authority is particularly grateful that the Australian Institute of Marine Science Council arranged to hold its Council meeting in Townsville in this period, so that their Members could share in the discussions. The Authority was also grateful for the presence and contribution of the Secretary of the Department of Science.

The Workshop achieved several aims. Sessions I to IV assessed and consolidated information about the area, and discussions followed the presentation of papers. Participants met in five discussion groups to identify gaps in knowledge of the area and establish a priority programme for research (Session V). Criteria and categories for zoning and their regulation (Session VI) were then discussed and the groups subsequently re-assembled to present their opinions. During Session VII, a plenary discussion, guidelines were formulated to assist the Authority in its declaration and the zoning of northern reefs as part of the Marine Park.

Australia's inexperience in management of Marine Parks was highlighted. Specifically, a paper on Park Management Principles attracted attention to the differing challenges of management of marine versus terrestrial parks.

The Authority wishes to thank the contributors for fulfilling the aims of the Workshop. The papers and discussions enhanced both our awareness and knowledge of the relatively isolated northern area of the Great Barrier Reef.