



Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority

# ***Whitsundays Plan of Management***

*A guide to the  
Whitsundays Plan of Management  
November 2005*



our great barrier reef  
let's keep it great



This guide provides a summary of the important rules for the Whitsunday Planning Area as described in the Whitsundays Plan of Management. **Some of these apply to all users of the area, while others apply only to commercial tourism operators.** It is important that Marine Park users read and understand the information contained in this guide before visiting the Whitsundays area of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Please use this information in conjunction with the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983* and the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003* (the Zoning Plan).

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# THE WHITSUNDAYS AREA

The Whitsundays are well known for their spectacular island scenery, and fringing and offshore reefs. The reefs and islands support a range of wildlife including threatened species such as humpback whales, dugongs, loggerhead turtles and beach stone-curlews. The Whitsundays Area is one of the most highly-visited regions of the Great Barrier Reef receiving approximately 40%\* of total tourism visitation in about 1% of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (the Marine Park).

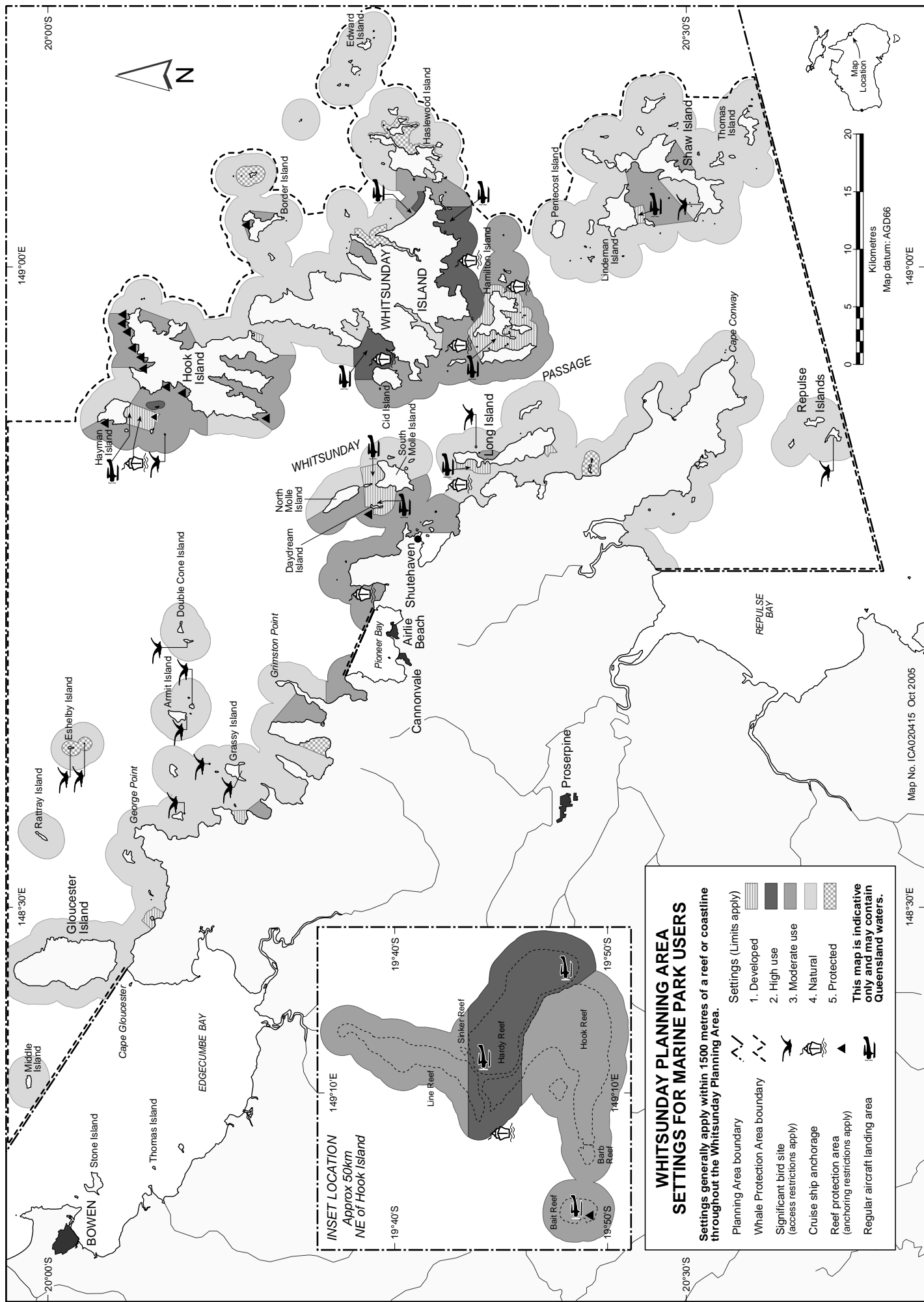
The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) originally released the Whitsundays Plan of Management (the Plan) in June 1998. The Plan aims to protect and conserve the values of the Whitsundays Area while allowing a range of visitor experiences and tourism opportunities. Amendments were made to the Plan in 1999, 2002 and 2005 to better manage the use of this popular area.

In 2004, a new Zoning Plan came into effect. Zoning protects the many unique habitats in the Marine Park through managing access and activities that may be undertaken. Each zone described in the Zoning Plan has a specific level of protection and is mapped in a different colour. What you can and can't do in each zone is described in the Activities Guide found on each zoning map.

In the Whitsundays, there are also other areas with special provisions, such as Public Appreciation Special Management Areas, which exclude spearfishing and commercial harvest fishing for coral, aquarium fish and beachworms. For more information on zoning in the Whitsunday Area, please refer to the Whitsunday Zoning Map, the Zoning Plan, or the GBRMPA website.



*\* This figure is based on 2004 Environmental Management Charge (EMC) data.*





# SETTINGS

## Recreation opportunities for everyone

To help maintain a range of opportunities for visitors to the area, each reef, bay and coastal area within the Whitsunday Planning Area has been assigned a 'setting'. Settings can also help protect areas of outstanding conservation, cultural or scientific value.

There are five settings, ranging from low use (protected setting) to high use (developed setting). The main factor is the group size that your vessel is carrying, but there are also some requirements about vessel length (see Table 1). The settings usually apply to the area within the 1500 metre line of the reef edge (refer to map).

Setting limits apply to all users of the Planning Area, including recreational users and tourism operators (unless stated otherwise on their permit). The GBRMPA is working with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Whitsundays Local Marine Advisory Committee and the community on developing appropriate site plans for Setting 5 areas. Until these site plans are finalised, Marine Parks permits will guide tourist operators on access to these areas.

**Table 1. Vessel length and group size allowed in each setting**

Setting	Vessel Length	Group Size
1. Developed	max. 70 metres	no limit
2. High Use	max. 35 metres	no limit
3. Moderate Use	max. 35 metres	max. 40 people
4. Natural	max. 35 metres	max. 15 people
5. Protected	refer to site plans	refer to site plans

Setting limits do not apply to anchored cruise ships and their service vessels or to large vessels (>35 m) anchored at cruise ship anchorages, or to vessels in transit. Other management tools are used to ensure environmental sustainability.

## HELP PROTECT THE REEF

### Protecting coral

The Whitsunday reefs, particularly around the northern islands, are outstanding in their coral cover and diversity. Anchor damage can be a serious threat to this very attraction that visitors come to see.

As a general rule, you must not damage coral. Take care to avoid damage to coral and adhere to the following guidelines:

- Examine the nearby area before anchoring to find the best location to minimise reef damage;
- Anchor in sand or mud whenever possible, never anchor directly on coral;
- Use the correct anchor for your situation and environment – use a lightweight reef pick when anchoring near coral;
- Use only as much chain as you need to hold the vessel, without compromising safety (remember that you will need to use more chain and line to anchor in deep water); and
- Motor towards the anchor when hauling it in.



*Refer to Best Environmental Practices on the GBRMPA website for more information on boating, anchoring and mooring in the Marine Park.*

## What are Reef Protection Markers?

Some reef areas that are particularly vulnerable to anchor damage have been designated No Anchoring Areas (refer Table 2). These areas are marked by reef protection markers, which are white, pyramid-shaped buoys with a blue Marine Parks label. When visiting a reef or a bay that has a No Anchoring Area:

- You may enter No Anchoring Areas when approaching or leaving moorings or beaches, but you cannot anchor inside a No Anchoring Area or inshore of the line of buoys; and
- You cannot attach your vessel or aircraft to a reef protection marker.



**Table 2: Reef protection marker locations**

Island	Bay/Cove
Border Island	Cateran Bay
Daydream Island	Sunlovers Bay
Hayman Island	Blue Pearl Bay
Hook Island	East and West Butterfly Bay Maureen's Cove Luncheon Bay Pinnacle Bay False Nara Inlet North and South Stonehaven Bay
Langford Island	Langford Island Reef

Manta Ray Bay (Hook Island) and parts of Bait Reef are also closed to anchoring, but no reef protection markers are present. Refer to map and Schedule 5 of the Plan for more details.



## Public moorings


Public moorings have been installed at a number of sites to provide access to popular bays while protecting the fragile reefs. Public moorings are blue coloured buoys with a colour-coded band that signifies the 'class' of the mooring. There are five classes of mooring (refer Table 3) and the relevant vessel length and wind conditions are displayed on the colour-coded band and an engraved tag attached to the pick-up line.

**Table 3: Mooring class information**

Mooring Class	Colour Band	Max. Vessel Length (less than or equal to the limits specified below)	
		Monohull	Multihull
Tender (T)	Brown	6 metre	6 metre
Class A	Yellow	10 metre	9 metre
Class B	Green	20 metre	18 metre
Class C	Blue	25 metre	22 metre
Class D	Red	35 metre	30 metre

Before using a public mooring check:

- Your vessel fits the requirement of the mooring;
- The wind speed is below the maximum of 24 knots for tender and class A moorings, and 34 knots for mooring classes B, C and D; and
- You are within the time period - generally public moorings have a 2-hour access limit between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. with unlimited overnight access.



Public moorings have been installed at the following sites in the Whitsundays:

- Bait Reef - the lagoon and Manta Ray drop-off;
- Black Island Reef;
- Border Island - Cateran Bay and North West Point;
- Daydream Island - Sunlovers Bay;
- Dumbell Island;
- Esk Island;
- Hayman Island - Blue Pearl Bay;
- Henning Island;
- Hook Island - East and West Butterfly Bay, Maureen's Cove, Luncheon Bay, Manta Ray Bay, Pinnacle Bay, False Nara Inlet, Caves Cove and North and South Stonehaven Bay;
- Langford Island Reef; and
- Whitsunday Island - Tongue Bay.

For more information on public moorings, refer to the Marine Parks brochure "Protecting Coral in the Whitsundays", available on the GBRMPA website.

*Refer to Best Environmental Practices on the GBRMPA website for more information on boating, anchoring and mooring in the Marine Park.*

## HELP PROTECT THE WILDLIFE

### Protecting dugongs and turtles

Dugong populations in the southern Marine Park are severely depleted and under pressure from habitat loss, gill netting, illegal hunting and boat strikes. To help protect dugongs, a Dugong Protection Area is located in northern Repulse Bay, and restrictions apply on the use of mesh nets in this area. Loggerhead turtles, which pass through the Whitsundays on their way to southern nesting sites, are listed as 'endangered'.

To help protect dugongs and turtles:

- Be on the look out for dugongs and turtles when you are in areas where they are known to inhabit or feed (for example, shallow seagrass beds);
- Slow down your vessel to a no-wake speed (less than 10 knots) in these areas; and
- Do not feed, touch, grab, chase or harass dugongs or turtles.

*Refer to Best Environmental Practices on the GBRMPA website for more information on dugong and turtle watching in the Marine Park.*

### Protecting whales

The Whitsundays is an important calving ground for humpback whales between May and September each year. Most of the waters around the islands are part of a 'Whale Protection Area' (refer to map) designed to minimise disturbance to whales:

- Inside the Whale Protection Area, boats must not approach within 300 metres of a whale;
- Outside the Whale Protection Area, boats must not approach within 100 metres of a whale;

- Tourism operators with a permit to conduct whale watching may only do so outside the Whale Protection Area;
- The total number of whale-watching vessels and aircraft permitted in the Whitsunday Planning Area (excluding the Whale Protection Area) is 34. No additional whale-watching permits will be issued for the Whitsundays;
- No tourism operation permissions that include swimming-with-whale activities will be issued in the Planning Area;
- Fixed-wing aircraft must remain laterally at least 300 metres (and vertically above 1000 feet) from a whale at all times in the Planning Area;
- Helicopters must remain laterally at least 1000 metres (and vertically above 2000 feet) from a whale at all times in the Planning Area; and
- Helicopters must not be used for whale spotting.

*Refer to Best Environmental Practices on the GBRMPA website for more information on whale and dolphin watching in the Marine Park.*



## Protecting birds

A number of islands and rocks in the Whitsundays are important for seabirds, shorebirds, and several migratory species. Because roosting and nesting birds are very vulnerable to disturbance, several sites have been identified as requiring special management (refer to map). There are some times of the year when you will not be able to visit 'Significant Bird Sites' (refer Table 4). There are also five important islands that you must never visit. Where nesting species are most easily disturbed by noise, a 'boat-free zone' applies during the stated period.

**Table 4: Significant bird sites**

Closed All Year	Closed between 1 October and 31 March (inclusive)
<p>No beach access, 6-knot speed limit within 200m of the high water mark.</p> <p>No aircraft are allowed below 1500 feet (above ground or water), or to approach within 1000m.</p> <p>Bird Island East Rock* Edwin Rock* Eshelby Island Little Eshelby Island</p>	<p>No beach access, 6-knot speed limit within 200m of the high water mark.</p> <p>No aircraft are allowed below 1500 feet (above ground or water), or to approach within 1000m.</p> <p>Armit Island (south beach) Double Cone Island (west island) Grassy Island (south beach) Little Armit Island Olden Rock (south of Olden Island)* Shaw Island (beach east of Burning Point) South Repulse Island (west beach, excluding camp site)</p>
<p>* Boat-free zone (within 200m of high water mark) also applies between 1 October and 31 December each year.</p>	

*Refer to Best Environmental Practices on the GBRMPA website for more information on bird watching in the Marine Park.*



# TOURISM IN THE WHITSUNDAYS

Tourism is a significant use of the area that contributes valuable and vibrant elements to the Whitsundays. The Plan provides for a range and diversity of tourism access and further ensures sustainable tourism use by setting out some broad arrangements for the extent of tourism activities in the area (refer to map).

## Tourism operations

There are different styles of tourism operations in the Planning Area and frequency of access is dependant on the style of your operation. Refer to the Plan or your permit for more information.

Permits for daily access to the Planning Area by vessel and aircraft operations have generally been capped by the Plan. Tourism operations that may be based elsewhere in the Marine Park can have up to 50 days access to the Planning Area with a booking.

Historical operators who have an endorsement or letter of authorisation are eligible to have all-year access to the Planning Area without a booking.

### Bookings

The number of such vessels that may book to the area is set at 20 crewed vessel and aircraft operations plus three (3) cruise ships per day. For the definition of *crewed vessel operation*, *aircraft operation* and *cruise ship operation* please refer to the Plan.

Bookings to the Planning Area may be made by contacting the Airlie Beach office of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service by phone (07) 4946 7022 or fax (07) 4946 7023.

### New opportunities

The Plan allows up to 15 new additional all-year access permits. The timing of the release of these new permits will be subject to consultation with relevant communities and industry. Five of the new permissions are reserved for traditional inhabitants with traditional affiliations with the Planning Area.

### New innovations

The Plan provides the GBRMPA with the flexibility to consider new innovations within the Planning Area. Approval of such operations will remain subject to the normal permit assessment process.

### Bareboats


All bareboat permit opportunities have been taken up by industry. Existing permits are tradeable, but the transfer must be approved by the GBRMPA. All currently permitted bareboat operations are required to obtain appropriate accreditation under the Whitsunday Bareboat Accreditation Programme. This includes ensuring clients are properly briefed by appropriately registered staff who have participated in the Bareboat Staff Training Course.

### Large vessels

#### Anchoring

If you have a large vessel (over 35 metres and up to 70 metres), you can anchor outside the setting areas and in Setting 1 areas. You may also anchor within other setting areas if:

- You hold an individual exemption from any limits through your permit; or
- You are anchored at a cruise ship anchorage (booking required).



*Access to other setting areas:*

Large vessels may access other setting areas if:

- You are providing passenger transport; or
- Your vessel is in transit through the setting area by the most direct route.

### **Cruise ships**

Cruise ship anchorages have been nominated to enable cruise ships (vessels greater than 70 metres) to visit the Whitsunday Planning Area by providing an environmentally-safe area for cruise ships to anchor. Cruise ships may only access an anchorage with a booking, and only one (1) cruise ship may access an anchorage at any one time. For the approximate location of the cruise ship anchorage please see the map, or for more details, refer to the Onboard Tourism Operator's Handbook or the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983*.

Cruise ship operations in the Planning Area:

- Are able to anchor in the General Use Zone and Shipping Areas identified in the Zoning Plan and are able to transit other zones when accessing a cruise ship anchorage;
- Must carry a Reef Pilot when operating in the Whitsundays; and
- May only use their tenders to transfer passengers to resorts or reef pontoons.

### **Motorised water sports, beach hire and retail operations**

Activities such as motorised water sports and associated tours, aerobatics, beach hire and retail operations can disturb other users in the vicinity. Within the Whitsunday Planning Area:

- Motorised water sports, associated tours, aerobatics, beach hire and retail operations can only be undertaken in Setting 1 areas and outside setting areas (generally 1500 metres from the reef edge); and
- Personal watercraft may be used within the boundaries of all setting areas for transportation by the most direct reasonable route between two places.

### **Fishing and collecting**

In addition to the provisions of the Zoning Plan, no additional fishing charter permits will be issued for the Conservation Park (yellow) Zone within the Whitsunday Planning Area.

*Refer to the Activities Guide and zoning maps for information on fishing and collecting in each zone. In addition, other Queensland fishing legislations may apply.*

Please refer to the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries website, [www.dpi.qld.gov.au/fishweb/](http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/fishweb/) or contact their call centre on 13 25 23 for further information.

### **Aircraft access and activities**

Special management arrangements are in place for aircraft activities. Aircraft operations:

- Are able to visit a location twice a week, more if landing or taking off from a 'regular aircraft landing area' (refer to map);
- Are able to conduct scenic flights and whale-spotting activities above 1000 feet (from ground or water); and
- Must observe restrictions near whales and significant bird sites.

Please also refer to the Protecting Whales section.



### Private moorings and facilities

Privately-owned moorings have been installed by regular users of an area, including commercial tourism operators and local residents. The GBRMPA Moorings Register will help you identify privately-owned, permitted moorings at a reef or particular site. You can also search by a mooring's Reference Number (which will be displayed on each buoy), its location, and the person responsible for the mooring (permit holder).

Private moorings are not generally available for public use. However, mooring operators are encouraged to develop arrangements to allow other users to share their moorings if possible.

**Please remember that the moorings are private property and you must have the owner's formal permission to use them.** In particular, you need to check with the owner that the capacity of the mooring is suitable for your vessel.

Applications to install private moorings or tourist facilities (such as pontoons) will only be considered at Hardy Reef or in Setting 1 areas. Tourist facilities may be temporarily relocated within the Planning Area in the event of a severe environmental incident, subject to certain restrictions including obtaining a relevant permission.

### Incident reporting

Although most people who spend time in the Marine Park are careful to do the right thing and do not damage what they come to enjoy, sometimes incidents do occur. If you need to report an incident please contact the Day-to-Day Management Coordination Unit of the GBRMPA on (07) 4726 0510 (b/hrs) or 1800 641 792 (24 hrs).

Because tourism operators are regularly out on the water, the tourism industry has a vital role in reporting incidents in the Marine Park. You can contribute by reporting what you see and hear by being part of the Eyes and Ears Incident Reporting Programme.



## NEED MORE INFORMATION?

For more information on the Plan, Best Environmental Practices or Tourism in the Marine Park, please either visit the GBRMPA website or contact the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

### **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority**

PO Box 1379  
Townsville Qld 4810  
Phone: (07) 4750 0700  
Fax: (07) 4772 6093  
[www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au)

### **Environmental Protection Agency - Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service**

#### **Whitsunday District Office**

PO Box 332  
Airlie Beach Qld 4802  
Phone: (07) 4946 7022  
Fax: (07) 4946 7023  
[www.epa.qld.gov.au](http://www.epa.qld.gov.au)

**Please report pollution incidents, marine animal strandings and wildlife  
issues to the Queensland Environment Protection Agency Hotline:  
1300 130 372 (1300 130 EPA).**

For more information on tourism in the Marine Park, please visit the Onboard  
Tourism Operator's Handbook on <http://www.tourismoperators.reefhq.com.au/>





**Australian Government**

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2-68 Flinders Street  
PO Box 1379  
TOWNSVILLE QLD 4810  
Phone: (07) 4750 0700  
Fax: (07) 4772 6093  
Email: [info@gbrmpa.gov.au](mailto:info@gbrmpa.gov.au)

**[www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au)**