

## Frequently Asked Questions

- Why is biodiversity in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park important?
  - What is the Representative Areas Program?
  - What is a Green Zone?
  - What are the benefits of a network of Green Zones throughout the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park?
  - What stage is the new Zoning Plan at now?
  - How much of the Marine Park is now included within Green Zones?
  - How long will the new Green Zones remain in place?
  - How have the new coastal sections been zoned?
  - How have the community been consulted and informed?
  - How were the public submissions used?
  - Will the displacement of fishing effort put other areas under more pressure?
  - Will those who are adversely impacted be compensated?
  - Why do we need Green Zones when most recreational fishers only catch a few fish?
  - What is the purpose of Yellow Zones?
  - Fish are migratory so why exclude fishing from Green Zones?
  - What about having rotational or seasonal closures?
  - How will the new Green Zones be enforced?
  - How will I know where the zone boundaries are?
  - What about the marine areas that come under State jurisdiction?
  - What about Indigenous people fishing and hunting?
  - Aren't there more important priorities than Green Zones?
  - When will the new Zoning Plan commence?
  - Where can I get more information?
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### **Why is biodiversity in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park important?**

Biodiversity (or biological diversity) is a term used to describe all the plants and animals, together with the places they live and the natural processes that keep them alive. Protecting the biodiversity within the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) is vital for maintaining the health and resilience of the GBR ecosystem and ensuring:

- the continuing existence of the unique marine animals and plants that are found only in the GBR (for example, internationally significant populations of green, hawksbill and loggerhead turtles, dugongs and Irrawaddy and Indo Pacific humpback dolphins; about half of the world's seagrass species, at least two of which may be endemic to the Great Barrier Reef).
- that industries that depend on the GBR (e.g. tourism, commercial fishing and recreational fishing) are able to continue and provide social and economic benefits;
- that a diverse range of other benefits continue (e.g. maintaining recreational, cultural, educational and scientific values); and
- that future generations are able to use and enjoy the GBR the way we do today.

### **What is the Representative Areas Program?**

The Representative Areas Program (RAP) is about better protecting examples of the entire range of habitats, plants and animals in the Marine Park to maintain the health and resilience of the ecosystem and provide benefits for present and future users. Under the old zoning plans, less than 5% of the Marine Park was protected from extractive use within 'no-take' zones. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has therefore rezoned the entire Marine Park using the 70 distinct habitat types (bioregions) as the basis, and ensuring that a minimum of 20% of each bioregion is adequately protected within a new network of Green Zones.

### **What is a Green Zone?**

A Green Zone is the locally-known term for a 'no-take' area, marine sanctuary or Marine National Park Zone (MNPZ). Anyone can enter a Green Zone and boating, swimming, sailing and snorkelling can all occur in Green Zones. However, extractive activities like fishing or collecting are not allowed unless the written permission of the Authority has been obtained. **Travelling through** a Green Zone with fish on board is also allowed (it is only an offence if the fishing occurs inside the zone). **Launching** a boat, as well as anchoring or over-nighting can also occur in Green Zones, but in some high use or sensitive areas, use of a mooring may be necessary.

## **What are the benefits of a network of Green Zones throughout the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park?**

There is scientific evidence that a comprehensive network of Green Zones will protect the different bioregions in the Marine Park, along with their component plants and animals, as well as ensure a range of benefits for now and in the future:

- ***Benefits of biodiversity***

Protecting the biodiversity within the Marine Park is vital for maintaining the health of the GBR ecosystem, ensuring the protection of critical habitats like seagrass beds, and ensuring the continuing existence of the unique marine animals and plants that are found only in the GBR. It is also an investment in natural capital that will ensure that future generations are able to use and enjoy the GBR the way we do today.

- ***Benefits for fish***

Green Zones can benefit all natural resources, including fisheries resources on which fisheries depend. The ensure protection of important fish breeding and nursery areas such as seagrass beds, mangrove communities, deepwater shoals and reefs. Scientific research in the GBR and elsewhere shows the benefits for many species when eggs, larvae and young fish develop unhindered in protected areas. Larger fish produce many times more offspring than small fish. Over time the number and size of fish within a Green Zone will increase meaning many more juvenile fish. Scientific research indicates that migration of adult animals from Green Zones, commonly known as 'spill over', may enhance fish stocks in adjacent areas that remain open for fishing. Green Zones will also play an important role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of our commercial and recreational fisheries. Protecting the Marine Park now means there will be more fish for the future.

- ***Benefits for local communities***

Green zones will provide support for the long term sustainability of fishing and tourism. The GBR is critical to the lifestyles and livelihoods of coastal communities along the length of the GBR. Overwhelming evidence tells us that increased protection of the Marine Park means a more secure future for these communities. Globally and locally, where Green Zones have been established, they have brought about social and economic benefits as well as achieving their conservation goals. A healthy GBR will also ensure that a diverse range of other benefits continue (e.g. maintaining recreational, cultural, educational and scientific values).

- ***Benefits for tourism***

The value of tourism in the GBR is worth many times all the other marine-based industries. More Green Zones will mean a growth in quality tourism opportunities, which in turn provide social and economic benefits. Green Zones hold the same attraction for visitors as national parks on land, and provide opportunities to expand marine-based tourism as locals and visitors alike experience and enjoy the abundant marine wildlife found within these areas.

**What stage is the new zoning plan at now?**

The MPA Board approved the revised Zoning Plan on 26 November 2003. The Minister for Environment and Heritage, Dr Kemp, has tabled the Zoning Plan in both Houses of Parliament where it must remain for a minimum of 15 sitting days. Once the Zoning Plan has been tabled, it becomes a public document, and information is available through the GBRMPA website ([www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au)) or from your Local Member of Parliament. If, during the 15 sitting days, the plan is not disallowed, the Minister will determine a date for the Zoning Plan to come into effect (tentatively mid 2004)

**How much of the Marine Park is now included within Green Zones?**

Around 33% of the Marine Park will be protected within a network of Green Zones under the new Zoning Plan. When RAP began, the GBRMPA did not know specifically how much would be in Green Zones until both phases of public comment had been completed. We believed it would be about 25-30% overall, but this was an estimate only based on a number of factors. Firstly, we would aim to meet a number of principles, including a minimum of 20% of Green Zones in each of the 70 bioregions. (See [http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp\\_site/key\\_issues/conservation/rep\\_areas/documents/tech\\_sheet\\_06.pdf](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/conservation/rep_areas/documents/tech_sheet_06.pdf)). Secondly, we would not reduce the level of Green Zone protection that existed previously – under the existing zoning, 13 bioregions already had more than 25% of protection, especially in the Far Northern Section, with several bioregions having greater than 40% protection and even one at 60%. Lastly, more than 20% has been protected in the offshore bioregions in deep water (>1000 m depth) where there is little current use, but where longer term threats could be expected.

**How long will the new Green Zones remain in place?**

The Marine Park Authority Board has a policy of reviewing zoning plans every five years. International experience suggests the benefits of protecting biodiversity become greater the longer the areas are closed to extractive activities such as fishing and dredging. Closures of Green Zones to collecting and fishing are therefore likely to be long-term but they will be reviewed.

**How have the new coastal sections been zoned?**

The 28 new coastal sections of the Marine Park have been zoned based on comprehensive information gathered from research and public submissions received during both phases of community consultation. Once the new plan comes in effect (sometime in 2004), the zoning in these areas will apply.

**How have the community been consulted and informed?**

Throughout the RAP process, the GBRMPA undertook an intensive community consultation program. In addition to visiting every major settlement along the GBR coast, there was widespread publicity through:

- Community Service Announcements on regional television;
- Some 50,000 submission brochures distributed;
- 38,000 hits received on the GBRMPA website;
- 4000 phone calls made to the free-call number;
- 100 newspaper articles and about 70 newspaper advertisements;
- 60 radio and 10 television spots.

**How were the public submissions used?**

The GBRMPA received over 31,000 submissions during the two phases of community consultation. All submissions were analysed and the information was used to help develop the new Zoning Plan for the Marine Park. A wide range of users, Traditional Owners, local communities, other stakeholders and the public all provided submissions.

**Will the displacement of fishing effort put other areas under more pressure?**

Effort displacement has been largely addressed by locating the new Green Zones in ways that impact as little as possible on existing patterns of use in the Marine Park. Submissions and information from other sources were used to revise the Zoning Plan to ensure that effort displacement was minimised. Recent changes in fisheries management arrangements have resulted in a reduction in trawl effort in the Marine Park of around 15%, and changes proposed by the Queensland Government are intended to reduce effort in the reef line fishery by 30%. These reductions are both far greater than the areas that will be lost to fishing under the rezoning. The GBRMPA will continue to work closely with the Queensland Fisheries Service, the State government agency with principal responsibility for fisheries management, to ensure long-term ecological sustainability of fisheries in the Marine Park.

**Will those who are adversely impacted be compensated?**

The Australian Government has agreed in principle to a structural adjustment package for commercial fishers and others adversely affected by the new Zoning Plan. The structural adjustment package will be developed by the Federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Dr Kemp, in consultation with other relevant Ministers. This process will involve the relevant Government agencies and occur in conjunction with industry and affected parties as part of implementing the new Zoning Plan.

### **Why do we need Green Zones when most recreational fishers only catch a few fish?**

It is estimated that over 170,000 people fish recreationally within the Marine Park each year and this number is increasing. In some more accessible places, recreational effort is becoming increasingly concentrated. This level of fishing can have a damaging impact on the health, biodiversity and creatures of the GBR.

### **What is the purpose of Yellow Zones?**

The Conservation Park (yellow) Zone does not, and is not intended to, create recreational only fishing areas. The yellow zone addresses biodiversity protection and conservation issues such as netting interactions with dugong. It also limits extractive activities in high use areas to address localised depletion, whilst still providing opportunities for reasonable use and enjoyment including limited extractive use. Such limitations apply to all users who wish to fish in these zones.

### **Fish are migratory so why exclude fishing from Green Zones?**

Not all fish are migratory and not all species that will be protected by Green Zones are fish. Green Zones also protect food sources, habitat and breeding areas that may all be used by migratory species at any given time.

### **What about having rotational or seasonal closures?**

RAP is about protecting the full range of plants and animals in the GBR, not just fish. Rotational or seasonal closures may be useful tools for some species in fisheries management, however they are not appropriate for many other species and biodiversity protection. A network of Green Zones will provide the necessary level of protection to ensure the long-term protection of all species over the entire Marine Park.

### **How will the new Green Zones be enforced?**

GBRMPA's enhanced Enforcement Program has led to a dramatic increase in detecting and prosecuting Marine Park offences in recent years. Maximum fines and prosecutions have substantially increased. Without effective compliance and enforcement, the Zoning Plan will not achieve successful outcomes for the GBR and its users. The boundaries of Green Zones in the new Zoning Plan have been simplified so that users can more easily identify boundaries and so that enforcement staff can more clearly identify infringements. Better coordination between enforcement agencies, as well as new technology, also means more effective enforcement activities in the Marine Park.

**How will I know where the zone boundaries are?**

All zone boundaries are now identified by latitude and longitude coordinates, which are provided in a Schedule to the Zoning Plan. However it will not be essential to have a GPS to locate zone boundaries along the coast. As far as is possible, zone boundaries along the coast use recognisable features as well as the precise coordinates; and a number of very useful suggestions proposing local features from submissions were used to locate coastal boundaries.

**What about the marine areas that come under State jurisdiction?**

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park does not extend above the mean low water mark. Hence this Zoning Plan does not affect tidal lands and tidal waters that are under State jurisdiction or the internal waters of Queensland (such as Hinchinbrook Channel). How the State of Queensland chooses to zone tidal waters or rivers or creeks (eg estuaries or parts of some major rivers) is the responsibility of the Queensland Government.

**What about Indigenous people fishing and hunting?**

The GBRMPA recognises the Great Barrier Reef's important role within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tradition and custom. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander native title holders have rights and interests in respect of the Marine Park, including the right to hunt and fish. The GBRMPA is actively engaging traditional owners (including native title holders) to develop effective cooperative management arrangements for a range of Marine Park activities.

**Aren't there more important priorities than Green Zones?**

Our priority is protecting the health of the GBR and all of the species within the Marine Park for current and future generations, and RAP is just one of the strategies we are using to achieve this. Other strategies have also been developed focussing on water quality, tourism management, sustainable fishing and indigenous issues.

**When will the new Zoning Plan commence?**

The Minister for Environment and Heritage, Dr Kemp, will determine a date for the Zoning Plan to come into effect. This is not expected to occur before mid 2004, and the date of commencement will be widely advertised.

**Where can I get more information?**

For more information visit <http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au> or email the GBRMPA on [info@gbrmpa.gov.au](mailto:info@gbrmpa.gov.au). A toll-free telephone line is also available: 1800 990 177