

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Representative Areas Program
May 2000

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's Representative Areas Program aims to develop a network of protected areas typical of all the different habitats and communities within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

This program will assist in meeting a number of national and international commitments to protect biodiversity within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and contribute to Australia's national Representative System of Marine Protected Areas.

It brings together much of the available current information on the Area — biological, physical, cultural, social and economic — to identify and protect areas which are representative (at a chosen scale) of all habitat types found in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Once determined, threats will be identified and sites selected for protection, maximising biodiversity protection whilst minimising economic and social costs to traditional owners, users and interested parties.

The objectives of the Program are to help:

- maintain biological diversity
- allow species to evolve and function undisturbed
- provide an ecological safety margin against natural and human-induced damage
- provide a solid ecological base from which threatened species or habitats can recover or repair themselves
- maintain ecological processes and systems and connections between different habitats

The process

The program is being achieved through a series of stages, some of which may overlap:

1. Classification of biological diversity (mapping bioregions)
2. Review of threats to the bioregions, and of existing and required levels of protection
3. Identification of potential 'candidate areas' for protection

4. Selection of most appropriate 'candidate areas'
5. Formal Public Participation Phase 1 (PPP1)
6. Development of draft zoning plan
7. Formal Public Participation Phase 2 (PPP2)
8. Ministerial and Parliamentary approval.

Communication with stakeholders is important throughout the process.

Definitions

Representative area – an area that is typical of its surroundings at a chosen scale (part of a bioregion). It has similar features, oceanographic processes and ecological patterns, and likely to have species and biological communities.

Candidate Area – subset of a bioregion, one of a number of possible options for future protection. Initially selected, based on its biophysical values and 'fine-tuned' by applying social, cultural and economic criteria.

Highly protected area/zone – Areas that prohibit extractive uses, and are protected as far as possible from activities that pollute or damage habitats (similar to GBRMPA 'no-take' or green zones)

Existing habitat protection in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area

Currently habitat protection and protection of special areas in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is achieved principally through zoning, in defined 'no take' (green) or 'no go' (pink) zones. Initial zoning plans for each Section of the Marine Park were developed using information available at the time, with an emphasis on protection of the coral reef areas which were then better understood than the surrounding non-reef areas. Zoning plans provide habitat protection by prohibiting extractive uses in certain areas (e.g. trawling, netting, line-fishing, collecting).

In addition to the zoning plans, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority management plans for the popular Cairns and Whitsunday areas provide additional habitat protection from impacts related to high tourism and recreation use. Important fisheries habitat is also protected through Queensland fisheries legislation which limits fishing or use of certain gear in sensitive areas. Dugongs are further protected through a series of inshore Dugong Protection Areas declared in 1997.

Where are we up to in the Representative Areas Program?

Classification Phase

The classification phase of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Representative Areas Program is now complete. All available physical and biological information throughout the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area has been analysed and mapped to show 64 bioregions (30 in reef and 34 in non-

reef bioregions) with eight additional areas not yet classified. This was achieved with advice from panels of experts on reef and non-reef environments under the guidance of the Scientific Steering Committee (SSC). The resulting maps show the huge diversity of habitats within the Marine Park and the variation between reef and non-reef, north and south, and inshore and offshore. This information will provide the basis for the next important stages in the program.

An independent review of the scientific and technical aspects of the classification phase is soon to be conducted.

Review Phase

The review phase of the Representative Areas Program has also been completed. It has included an evaluation of current threats (e.g. reduced water quality, impacts of fishing, coastal development, uncontrolled tourism and shipping accidents) to the biodiversity of the Marine Park, and a review of existing and required protection for different habitats. An overlay of the existing Marine Park zoning on the newly mapped bioregions shows that some of the bioregions have no areas of high protection whilst other bioregions currently have large areas of ‘no take’ zoning.

Of the total 64 bioregions identified, plus the eight unclassified, the level of high protection is:

% protected	Bioregion type					
		No protection	<1 - 5%	5 - 15%	15 – 25%	>25%
	Reef	2	7	9	3	9
	Non-reef	8	10	7	5	4
	Unclassified	4	2	1	0	1
	Total	14	19	17	8	14

With a clearer picture of the overall biophysical structure of the area it is timely to review the current protection of different habitats and the potential threats to the health of the habitats. An overlay of the existing Marine Park zoning on the newly mapped bioregions shows that some of the bioregions have no areas of high protection in them whilst other bioregions have large areas of ‘no take’ zoning. There have also been changes in use of the Marine Park, and in the threats over the past decades. These issues are being considered as part of the current review phase.

Guiding principles adapted from ANZECC 1998 ‘Guidelines for establishing the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas’, Canberra, Environment Australia (refer to the Overview of the GBRMPA Representative Areas Program for details).

- Regional framework
- Precautionary principle
- Comprehensiveness
- Adequacy

- Representativeness
- Consultation
- Indigenous involvement
- Clear, transparent decision making

When does the public have a chance to have their say?

Public participation is an essential part of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Representative Areas Program. The public will be encouraged to have input, to provide information on places of special value and to comment on the areas selected for future protection. In mid-1999 information on the program was mailed out to hundreds of interested parties representing all the different stakeholders, to ensure widespread awareness of the program and to advise of future opportunities for consultation. Public presentations have been made to many different interest groups and will continue throughout the process.

To help in the identification of candidate areas, coastal Indigenous peoples and community groups (including Local Marine Advisory Committees [LMACs], representative fishing groups and committees, and conservation groups) will be requested to assist developing the picture of cultural, social and economic values of each region.

The key principles to be applied in this process will aim to:

- maintain cultural values,
- minimise negative social and financial impacts on stakeholders,
- maximise the ease of compliance and public understanding,
- minimise change to existing management regimes, and
- consider equity of access.

Different uses will be mapped as overlays and considered when deciding how to rezone the Marine Park to ensure maximum protection of diversity, at minimum cost to the community.

What happens now?

Having commenced in December 1999, the identification phase will overlap to some extent with the selection phase, and involve compilation of information and advice from a wide group of users and interested parties.

Identification Phase

The identification phase of the program introduces a further panel of technical experts (the Analytical Working Group). The Analytical Working Group are currently developing a marine model to apply a set of decision rules ('selection algorithms') for identifying areas for possible protection (candidate areas) within each bioregion. This process uses national principles for establishing

representative marine protected areas, and a set of operational principles (including consideration of size and shape, and linkages between different habitat types) in the identification of candidate areas.

Selection Phase

In order to decide which candidate areas to recommend for further protection, information on the social, economic and cultural values of the area is currently being compiled through the direction of another group of experts — the Social, Economic and Cultural Steering Committee. This SEC Steering Committee, which held its first meeting in January 2000, is reviewing information on use and values of the area and will advise on how to bridge the information gaps. All the available data and use information will then be applied to the candidate areas (recommended by the Analytical Working Group and the Scientific Steering Committee) to help select suitable sites for protection. The aim is to maximise the protection of biodiversity while at the same time minimising the cost to users and local communities.

Formal Public Participation Phases (PPP)

There will be two formal phases of public participation — the Public Participation Phase 1 (PPP 1) leading up to the drafting of a new zoning plan for the whole of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, and the Public Participation Phase 2 (PPP 2) when the draft zoning plan is available for comment. Once the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has taken into account all the comments a final plan will be submitted for Ministerial and Parliamentary approval.

Where to next?

It is planned to have completed the review and identification phases by mid-2000, with the first formal public participation phases also commencing mid-year. A detailed communication strategy is being prepared to ensure that all interested parties have an opportunity for input before and after a new draft zoning plan is developed. Some people may be more affected than others by proposed amendments to existing zoning plans. It is important that all viewpoints are carefully considered.

Want more information?

Should you have any queries, comments or would like further information, contact the Representative Areas Program team at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, visit our web site, write to us, or send us an email.

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Timetable/milestones for current and future stages of the Representative Areas Program

<p>December 1999</p> <p>January 2000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Classification of GBR bioregions completed ▪ Review of existing level of protection (i.e. zoning) and threats (review phase) ▪ Analytical Working Group commences development of model to identify candidate sites (preparation for identification phase) ▪ Seek advice from experts and stakeholders on assessment of cultural, economic and social implications of candidate areas 	<p>Public presentations and consultation</p>
<p>Mid - 2000</p> <p>September 2000</p> <p>December 2000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify candidate area options to increase protection of biodiversity ▪ Establish focus groups for community consultation through LMACs ▪ Start statutory zoning review process ▪ Assess implications of candidate areas (cultural, economic, ecological, legal, practical and social). Aim to maximise benefits and minimise negative impacts. ▪ Seek public input into selection phase ▪ Select the most appropriate candidate areas for protection 	<p>1st formal Public Participation Phase (PPP 1)</p>
<p>Mid - 2001</p> <p>Late 2001</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Draft zoning plan taking into account stakeholder comments ▪ Submit new zoning plans or amendments for approval by Minister and Parliament 	<p>2nd formal Public Participation Phase (PPP 2)</p>