

# Correcting misinformation, misunderstandings and providing the facts

## Technical Information Sheet #29

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This page contains background and history of the Representative Areas Program.

### **Correcting misinformation and providing the facts – June 2003 *about GBRMPA's Representative Areas Program***

Many Queenslanders depend on the Great Barrier Reef for their livelihood and lifestyles; a healthy Reef and coastal areas means a secure future for all. Increased protection within the Marine Park will allow most users in coastal communities to retain or enhance their livelihood and lifestyles.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has introduced the Representative Areas Program (RAP) as part of the solution to help protect the Reef. We want to tell you the facts about the RAP and clear up the misconceptions so you and your friends have all the correct information.

**Fact: The new 'Green' Zones are not 'no-go' areas.** 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. Transiting 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 mandatory.

**Fact: RAP is not about closing people's favourite fishing areas.** RAP is about better protecting examples of all the plants and animals that make up the diversity of the Marine Park. In many areas, there are few options where Green Zones (or no-take areas) can be located while still protecting examples of each type of habitat. However if necessary, and to minimise impacts on users of the Marine Park, moving the boundaries of some proposed Green Zones can still be considered, provided there are sound reasons and the proposed changes do not compromise the overall principles behind the RAP.

**Fact: All fishers will not be 'squeezed' into a smaller area.** Effort is not spread evenly throughout the Marine Park. Effort displacement will be addressed by locating the new Green Zones in ways that impact as little as possible on existing patterns of use in the Marine Park. RAP is complemented by new and proposed Queensland fisheries management arrangements that are reducing catch and effort across all fisheries. The GBRMPA will continue to work closely with local communities and the Queensland Fisheries Service to ensure long-term ecological sustainability of fisheries in the Marine Park.

**Fact: The extent of Yellow zones has been increased but are still only ~ 1.4% of the Marine Park.** Over 840 submissions received in the first phase referred to Yellow Zones and consequently the Draft Zoning Plan does show more Yellow Zones where limited fishing ('one line, one hook') can occur. Commercial fishers clearly have differing views about Yellow Zones. Arrangements to deal with fishing effort and catch concerns in all fisheries are being addressed by Queensland fisheries management planning processes.

**Fact: This Draft Zoning Plan does not cover any tidal lands or tidal waters or the internal waters of Queensland** (such as Hinchinbrook Channel). The Commonwealth Marine Park does not extend above Low Water Mark. How the State of Queensland chooses to zone tidal waters or rivers or creeks (eg parts of the Haughton River or Barratta Creek) is solely the responsibility of the Queensland Government.

**Fact: 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. The boundaries of Green Zones have been simplified so that users can more easily identify boundaries and so that enforcement staff can more clearly identify infringements. Better coordination between policing bodies and new technology also means more effective enforcement activities in the Marine Park.

**Fact: RAP is about protecting examples of all the different habitats – not just coral reefs.** RAP aims to help protect the entire GBR – not just coral reefs, but protecting examples of all the different habitats. Fishers know the importance of seagrass beds and mangroves as nursery areas and breeding areas; these habitats, as well as the shoal country and deep-water areas, and all the other habitats represented by the 70 bioregions, play an important role in maintaining a healthy Great Barrier Reef.

**Fact: This is definitely a Draft Zoning Plan released for public comment.** Everyone's comments are important and your views do count. Comments are invited on any aspect including Green Zones, Dark Blue Zones, Yellow Zones, etc. All submissions made on the Draft Zoning Plan will be analyzed and considered before GBRMPA puts a revised plan to the Minister for approval.

Please make sure you state your reasons to recommend zone changes in your submission, but also say what aspects of the Draft Zoning Plan you do support – in trying to address the concerns of others, we may inadvertently impact an area that you currently support unless we know your views.

**Fact: The area of Green zones proposed in the DZP is around 32%.** When RAP material was published last year, we specifically said we did not know how much would be in Green Zones until we had been through both phases of public comment. We did say we expected it would be around 25% overall, but made a number of points very clear. Firstly, that we would aim to meet a number of principles, including a minimum of 20% Green Zones in each of the 70 bioregions. Secondly, we would not reduce the level of Green Zone protection that already exists – under the existing zoning, we have 13 bioregions >25%, especially in the Far Northern Section, with several bioregions greater than 40% and even one at 60%. Lastly, we have

proposed in the Draft Zoning Plan more than 20% in the offshore bioregions in deep water (>1000 m depth) where there is little known use. Consequently, the figure of 32% was derived considering all the above – however two important points remain:- in the inshore bioregions where considerable controversy is occurring, it is difficult to find 20% for Green Zones; and secondly, this is a DRAFT and likely to change based on submissions.

**Fact: It will not be essential to have a GPS to locate zone boundaries along the coast.**

While coordinates will be used to better identify all zone boundaries, as far as is possible, zone boundaries along the coast will use recognizable features; and a number of very useful suggestions proposing local features are already coming in submissions.

**Fact: Public submissions must be received by GBRMPA by 4 August 2003.** There have been some calls for extending the time for submissions, but over 800 submissions have already been received to date (23 June 2003). There are clearly a number of businesses that are suffering, not from the proposed DZP, but because of the uncertainty caused by people being unsure what will happen. The process to develop a zoning plan is set out in GBRMPA's legislation and unless the GBRMPA Board makes a contrary decision, there will be no extension for the submissions.

**Fact: Many Queenslanders depend on the GBR for their livelihood and lifestyles.** A healthy Great Barrier Reef and the associated marine and coastal areas mean a secure future for all coastal communities. But we cannot be complacent nor pretend there aren't pressures on the Great Barrier Reef. An effective network of no-take areas is a critical part of the solution to ensuring that the Great Barrier Reef remains healthy. If we don't all play a role in protecting what we have today, then the kids and grandkids of the future may not be able to enjoy the benefits and lifestyle we have today.

**Fact: GBRMPA's role is to protect the Great Barrier Reef and do it in way that considers the views of ALL users as well as ALL Australians.**