

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is implementing the Representative Areas Program to help ensure better protection of the Marine Park's biodiversity. This will involve a review of the existing zoning throughout the Marine Park. This information sheet is part of a package of materials that help explain various technical elements of the Representative Areas Program and the zoning review.

Frequently asked questions

Q. How will RAP affect the current zoning?

A. The entire Marine Park is being rezoned as part of the Representative Areas Program. New Green Zones (no-take areas that can still be accessed) will be created and existing Green Zones may be expanded to achieve greater protection of biodiversity. However, the existing range of multiple-use zones will remain (ranging from 'General Use Zones' where most reasonable activities are allowed, through the new Green Zones (no-take areas), to 'Preservation Zone' which are 'no-go' areas).

Q. What is a Green Zone?

A. A Green Zone is the locally-known term for a 'no-take' area which, under existing zoning plans, are shown as 'National Park Zones' (or 'Marine National Park 'B' Zones in the older zoning plans). Currently less than 5% of the Marine Park is in Green Zones.

The term 'marine sanctuary' may sometimes be used to explain the concept to those who know nothing about the Marine Park, but no matter which term is used in the Representative Areas Program, they all mean 'no-take' areas which people can access, and where non-extractive activities like boating, swimming and snorkelling are allowed. All types of fishing, including trawling, and all collecting and extractive activities are prohibited in Green Zones.

Q. Where will the new Green Zones be located?

A. The location of the new Green Zones will be determined after consultation with community groups and stakeholders. There is no pre-determined network of proposed Green Zones. Following the first Community Participation phase, a number of options for new zoning plans will be developed incorporating your suggestions. After further discussions, the best option will become a Draft Zoning Plan that will be released for formal public comment.

Q. How much of the Marine Park will become Green?

A. The area of the Green Zones will increase significantly from the current level (~4.6% of the marine park). The exact area and location of new Green Zones in the Marine Park will not be known until both phases of the community consultation are complete. In developing a new network of Green Zones, the GBRMPA will consider a number of factors, including:

- the advice of local community experts;
- advice from scientists and Traditional Owners; and
- the need to ensure the existing levels of protection per bioregion will not be reduced.

An independent Scientific Steering Committee has developed a package of 11 biophysical principles. If all the principles are implemented in full, then it is likely that around 25% of the Marine Park will be Green Zones.

Q. Will all stakeholders' concerns be given equal attention and importance?

A. Yes. All users, Traditional Owners, local communities, other stakeholders and the public are being asked to participate and their submissions will be formally considered, together with the latest scientific information and GBRMPA's management objectives. The best submissions are those that provide reasons and justifications for specific comments. There will always be contentious issues. That's why two formal Community Participation phases and ongoing liaison are included in the rezoning process, in order to help determine the best possible management outcomes.

Q. How will GBRMPA deal with issues of displacement of effort (relevant to commercial and recreational fishers) once the new Green Zones are introduced?

A. Effort displacement will be partially addressed by locating the new Green Zones in ways that impact as little as possible on existing patterns of use in the Marine Park. The GBRMPA will continue to work closely with local communities to minimise any impacts, and with the Queensland Fisheries Service (QFS), the state government agency with principal responsibility for fisheries management, to ensure long-term ecological sustainability of fisheries in the Marine Park.

Q. Will existing Green Zones be retained?

A. The existing levels of Green Zones per bioregion will not be reduced.

Q. How long will the Green Zones be closed?

A. Closures to collecting and fishing will be long-term. The benefits become greater the longer the areas are closed to extractive activities. Ongoing monitoring of long-term trends in the Marine Park, including new Green Zones, will document the changes in biodiversity.

Q. What about parts of the Marine Park that come under State jurisdiction ... does the Representative Areas Program cover them?

A. The Representative Areas Program applies only to areas within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. However, Queensland has its own program of rezoning that applies to state waters and information is being shared between the GBRMPA and state agencies. Implementation of the Representative Areas Program will be done in consultation with the State of Queensland. The Queensland Government has also stated it 'will support the GBR Marine Park Representative Areas Program to increase protection of biodiversity by increasing the number of habitats included in the no-take zones' (*Valuing the Environment, State Budget 2001-02, June 2001*).

Q. How will the GBRMPA enforce protection of the new Green Zones?

A. The GBRMPA, in conjunction with other government agencies, has a high priority on enforcement and compliance in the Marine Park. As a result, we have seen an increase in successful prosecutions in recent years. New initiatives, such as bigger fines, access to innovative technologies and simpler zone boundaries will help to increase the effectiveness of the Marine Park's compliance program.

Q. Can I make a submission on other zoning matters during the RAP planning process?

A. Yes. In the process of rezoning to better protecting biodiversity, the GBRMPA is required to consider all submissions made regarding any aspect of Marine Park zoning and welcomes such submissions.

Q. What else is the GBRMPA doing to protect the reef?

A. Water quality and coastal development. The GBRMPA is currently working closely with state and local governments on catchment issues that impact on the Great Barrier Reef, such as downstream effects of agriculture and grazing and the impacts of sediments, heavy metals and pesticides on the marine environment. It is developing new shipping legislation to minimise environmental harm caused by ships.

Tourism and recreation industry. A range of tourism management tools have been implemented cooperatively with the Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service, including zoning plans, Plans of Management for high-use areas (offshore Cairns and the Whitsundays) and site-specific plans. Industry best practice is encouraged through education and training programs.

Protecting threatened species. Specific policies and initiatives for management of threatened species, including dugong, whales, dolphins, turtles and seabirds, have been implemented or are being developed.

Fishing industry. The GBRMPA is working with the Queensland Government and the fishing industry to ensure fishing within the Marine Park is conducted in an ecologically sustainable manner. Over the past few years, the fishing industry has adopted several positive management initiatives following negotiation with the GBRMPA and fisheries management agencies.

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