

RAP Goes Through The Senate . .

Using the “*Save The Barrier Reef For Our Kids*” mantra, the management team at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) walked all over the recreational and commercial fishing groups - and actually secured an ever higher ‘green grab’ than they set out to achieve. Worse, as the “*Green movement*” has now confirmed the recreational and commercial fishing groups are unco-ordinated, ineffective, and easily rolled, there is no doubt this 2003-2004 program is just the thin end of a very green wedge.

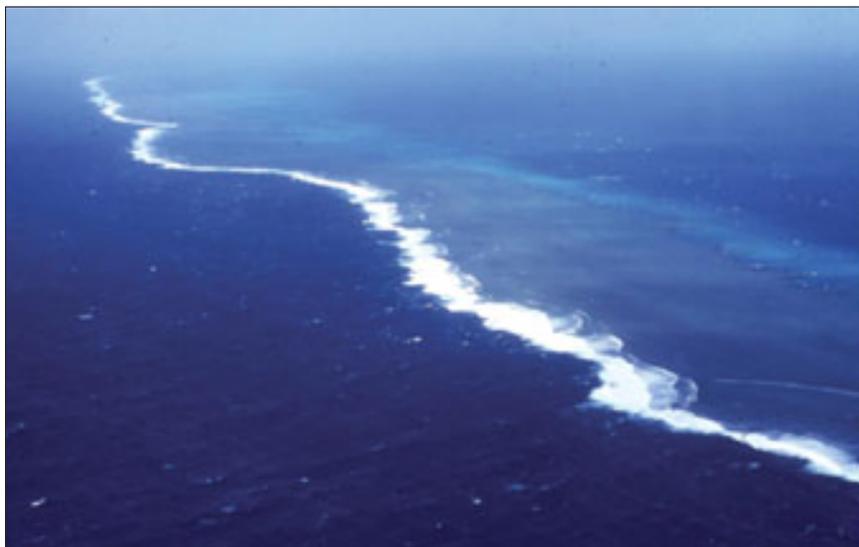
But How Did It All Work Out ?

In this special report commissioned for F&B, Dr David Hopley reviews what has actually happened, and how it impacts on fishermen along the Great Barrier Reef.

Satirical illustrations by Greggo; pictures by David Hopley

The long awaited revised zoning plan for the Great Barrier Reef, having passed through both Houses of Parliament, comes into effect on 1st July this year. F&B has followed the process closely (F&B # 77, 87, 88) and although it is now too late to do anything but accept the inevitable, it is worthwhile looking at the process and its outcomes from the viewpoint of boating and fishing enthusiasts.

Many things have changed since the GBR Marine Park first came into existence in 1975 and the first zoning plan introduced in 1979 (Capricornia). There has been a great increase in the population of the adjacent coastal zone (to over 700,000 in 2001) and the range and intensities of uses have increased enormously and are continuing to grow. For example, Queensland Transport indicate that registrations for boats up to 8m in the area adjacent to the GBR increased from 51,603 in December 2001 to 56,759 by January 2004. Simultaneously, increased scientific understanding has helped to recognise that there were many pressures on the Reef and, from more than 20 years of



monitoring, that there were some detrimental effects on parts of the Reef ecosystems. Some of these pressures come from outside the area of the Park (global warming, mainland run-off) but others results from excessive use. Zoning is seen as just one of many tools which can be used to maintain the environmental quality of the world's largest coral reef system.

Whilst the Park was initiated as a multi-use system only 4.5% of it was

The whole of Ribbon 10 is now green and the waters to seaward designated as a Buffer Zone, but this will allow the continuation of a regulated tag and release trolling industry in the deep waters outside the reef.

fully protected under the original zoning plans a fact which many people found hard to believe given the high profile of both the Great Barrier Reef and its management authority.

Moreover, most of what was protected consisted only of coral reefs, whilst the Park itself has a great mosaic of environments. Hence in May 2002 the GBRMPA published a notice of intent to prepare a new zoning plan using the concept of protecting representative areas (RAP or Representative Area Program). The intention was to give high level protection through more extensive areas of “green zones” in which extractive activities including fishing were totally banned. They were to be representative in that parts of all environments, or bioregions, were to be given this high level protection, with latitudinal and cross-shelf gradients recognised. As a basis for re-zoning 30 reefal and 40 non-reefal bioregions were identified. Of these, 14 had no “green zone” protection whatsoever and 24 less than 5% protection. The initial aim was to declare green zones over 25% of the GBR representing all bioregions with a minimum of 20% for each individual bioregion.

The first formal public participation phase took place between 7th May and 7th August 2002 when 10,190 submissions from the public were received. This was nothing to the reaction when the draft zoning plan was released on 2nd June 2003. During the next formal community participation phase (2nd June to 4th August 2003) a further 21,300 submissions came from individuals and organisations. These submissions and further information were used to revise the draft zoning plan, which was completed by the end of November 2003 and tabled in Parliament on December 3rd. During this process the green zones increased to 32.4% in the draft plan and 33.3% in the final format.

Public Participation – What Did Recreational Fishers Have to Say?

Nobody can complain that they did not have an opportunity to have their say in the process. In the second public participation phase alone, over 10,000 packages of information were handed out together with more than 50,000 submission forms, 29,000 explanatory brochures and 76,000 draft zoning maps. GBRMPA staff attended 360 meetings and their web site had 35,000 hits. 88 newspaper advertisements were taken out and

there were 500 media reports. But did GBRMPA listen and respond?

It would be difficult to satisfy everybody and it is clear from the Regulatory Impact Statement published on GBRMPA’s web page (see below) that a very wide range of views were put forward. A very high proportion recognised that increased protection of the Reef was needed. This included many recreational fishers whose views GBRMPA has summarized as follows:

- **Need to maintain access to areas for extractive activities, particularly beaches and inshore coastal areas within small boat range and adjacent to populated coastal areas.**
- **Concern about effort displacement, especially in coastal areas.**

- **Concern regarding perceived inequities between commercial and recreational fishing effort and impacts, including a need for various types of commercial fishing to be reduced or banned.**

- **Need for more Conservation Park Zones especially in inshore areas and closest reefs to mainland and consideration of locating green zones offshore, away from the coast.**

- **Suggested alternatives such as greater use of fisheries input controls including bag and size limits, seasonal and spawning closures, recreational fishing licences and increased, more effective enforcement.**

- **Need for fairer access to the Conservation Park Zone for limited extractive uses, including**





limited line fishing, limited spear fishing and limited collecting due to the proposed large increase in Marine National Park Zones.

- Zone boundaries need to be clearly defined by natural features, floating markers, fixed posts or GPS co-ordinates shown on the GBRMPA charts.

- Need for consistent reef-wide definitions and use and entry provisions for all recreational fishing activities and greater consistency with Qld fisheries legislation

- Need for greater protection of fish species of conservation importance.

Concern regarding consequences of closures to communities including social and economic impacts of closures on recreational fishing and fishing-based tourism, associated industries and suppliers, property and boat values, families and lifestyle.

Need to address impacts including land-based impacts, impacts of tourism, anchor damage and marine pollution, shipping impacts, coastal development and crown-of-thorns starfish and coral bleaching.

GBRMPA also collected their own data on recreational fishing based on Queensland Fisheries Service

Recreational Fishing Diaries, 1997 and 1999, SUNTAG catch and release records and from the distribution of boat ramps. Their data surprisingly suggests that very few recreational fishers use what will be after 1st July, prohibited areas. The Diaries show only 8 to 10% of fishing days are actually within the Marine Park at all, with only 1-2% in what will be closed areas and of 36,600 Sunfish tagger days (1995-2000) only about 1% were in the closed areas. They used a very conservative 5km distance from boat ramps to come up with a figure of 4% of the area within this distance being in the new green zones. Regular readers may remember that in Issue 88 of F&B I used a distance of 30n.m. (c.60km) for calculations from 6 major coastal centres for the draft zoning. GBRMPA themselves admit that "anecdotal information suggests that these data are slight underestimates"!!

They conclude that the revised zoning "will have minimal impact on recreational fishers" and "the frequency and/or cost of fishing trips are unlikely to be affected".

Certainly the bulk of the green zones lie considerable distance off-shore, too far for the average guy with a 5 to 6m tinny or centre console and a 50 to 125hp motor. Well known North

Queensland angler Keith Harveyson agrees and was recently quoted in Eddie Riddle's Townsville Bulletin column

"The reality is that much of the new green zones is out of reach of the majority of anglers and I know from experience that this protective increase will be appreciated by generations of anglers to come. I only wish similar measures were taken in my youth when all species of fish were plentiful".

This reasoned comment contrasts with the attitude of the North Queensland chairman of Sunfish, Brian Pickup, who was also quoted in the Townsville Bulletin (March 25th) saying the zoning exercise was a "snow job" and that Sunfish North Queensland were considering a legal challenge.

Charter Fishing Operations Recognised

In the initial stages of the RAP exercise, many were concerned that recreational and tourist fishing from charter vessels was not sufficiently recognised.

In their final wash-up GBRMPA put a value of \$50 million on this industry and took on board the concerns of the operators. They estimate that 13% of fishing days from charter vessels is in

what will be the green zones but expect that the industry will be highly adaptable with the ability to move over wider areas than the recreational sector in their own boats.

GBRMPA's response to the tag and release concerns (as summarized by Damon Olsen in F & B Issue 88) has been to ensure that at least in the Lizard Island to Cairns area much of the important game fishing area is zoned as Buffer Zones in which trolling for pelagic species is allowed but other fishing activities banned. Other inshore areas were also left open specifically to satisfy charter boat operators. The degree to which these operators concur with GBRMPA is yet to be seen but Game Fishing Association of Australia Research and Development Foundation president Ian Bladin is reported to have said the association was confident the multi million dollar industry would be able to continue its North Queensland operation.

What Were the Changes Between the Draft and Final Zoning Plans?

At first glance the final zoning maps

look very like the drafts but closer examination indicates quite a number of significant changes which suggests that the Marine Park Authority did take account of submissions made to them.

Not surprisingly, therefore, fewest changes appear in the lightly populated far north and, with one or two notable exceptions in the South Central Great Barrier Reef located more than 100km offshore. In contrast, the highest number of small "tweaking" changes have occurred in the well used areas such as the Whitsundays, including moving some boundaries based only on co-ordinates to more easily located landmarks.

The proportion of areas for each bioregion within each category of zoning has remained approximately the same though in response to submissions some changes were significant. For example, approximately 38 outer or mid-shelf reefs or reef complexes which were drafted as green have been converted to yellow Conservation Park Zones or Habitat Protection Zones in which fishing is permitted.

However, before we get excited

about this, close examination shows that c.47 reefs or complexes which in the draft were open to fishing, are now green Marine National Park Zones. Overall it is a small increase in protected areas with about 515km² of coral reef being opened to fishing compared to an additional c.620km² being closed. Only GBRMPA knows the exact reasons for the changes but many would appear to be response to the recreational fishers submissions as well as the conservation and scientific lobby and, in the Swain Reefs, possibly to the commercial line fishery. Some specific changes were certainly a response to requests from recreational fishers.

The changes in each major section of the Park can be summarized as follows:

Far Northern Management Area

Fewest modifications have been made to the draft in this area. Davie, Tydeman, Morris, Blanchard and Reef 13-063 have had their green status revoked, but reefs around Wreck Bay and massive Hedges Reef in Princess

Most of eastern Bowling Green Bay remains green though with some changes compared to the draft zoning. The green zone has been taken away from the mouth of the Barrattas Creek (mid distance) and a yellow zone located outside the recreationally important Morrissey Creek and Haughton River in the western part of the Bay.





Charlotte Bay have been added. Yellow zones especially around Port Stewart have been enlarged but the ecologically sensitive Princess Charlotte Bay Special Management Area has been modified though still retaining special management provisions. The area of unique Halimeda beds behind Tijou Reef appears to have been swapped for a similar area of Halimeda behind the reefs between Bligh and Quoin Island Entrances.

Cairns-Cooktown Management Area

Quite a lot of tweaking has occurred in this area. Changes to both green and buffer zones outside the Reef have probably made things easier for the tag and release game fishers and whilst a few reefs have been added to the green Marine National Park Zone (notably most of Ribbon 10 and Hedley Reefs) and Day Reef has been added to the Scientific Research Zone. Many other reefs, including ones accessible from the mainland by recreational fishers have been opened (some as yellow restricted fishing zones) including Evening, Morning, Spitfire, Mackay, Elford, Flora and Maori Reefs. Others in the Howick Group in the far north of this area have also been opened to fishing. The result is a more “patchwork” zoning map but one which should allow multiple use.

Townsville-Whitsunday Management Area

As with the Cairns area, changes

have been made off the outer shelf which should accommodate some of the requirements of tag and release game fishers. The area around Myrmidon Reef has been opened up and, although open water Marine National Park Zones have been enlarged, an almost continuous stretch of water exists just outside the Reef as General Use, Habitat Protection or Buffer Zone along the entire section. A significant number of reefs (18) has been added to the green zone in this area including ones which had traditionally been used by charter boats from Townsville. They include Kelso, Knife, Fork, Spoon, Cup, Saucer, Helix, Saville Kent, Judith Wright, Lion, Jaguar and Tiger Reefs. In compensation fewer reefs have had their draft green zoning reverted but their area is greater than those added.

They include Pith, Needle, Thread, Urchin, Davies, Darley and Square Reefs. Davies Reef (which is now yellow) and Darley are particularly important for activities from Townsville, the Burdekin and Bowen. Other smaller changes also seem to reflect submissions from the recreational fishing community (see below). However, some inshore areas, such as Upstart Bay have been added to the Green Zones probably because of their seagrass beds and dugong habitats.

Mackay-Capricorn Management Area

Fifteen reefs which were shown as green in the draft including Goble,

(previously Gable) Reef, a small group in the eastern Swains, Karamea Bank and Masthead have been swapped over for new ones which include Tern, and Pompey Reefs and a small group just inside the Pompey Hardline, a group in the northern Swains and Irving and Polmaise in the Bunker-Capricorn Group.

It is difficult to explain the swap over in the remote Swains though these reefs are areas targeted by the commercial line fishery. There has been a considerable amount of modification especially to yellow zones along well used areas of the mainland, and in the Keppel Islands. Part of Repulse Bay has changed from Conservation Park Zone, with restricted fishing activities, to open General Use Zone, a rather surprising change for an ecologically sensitive area already designated a Dugong Protection Area.

So Who Did GBRMPA Listen To - and Who Got Their Way?

In fairness to the Marine Park Authority it must be remembered that pressures, often contradictory, came from many organisations. Reading the press over the last few weeks suggests that nobody is totally happy, which probably indicates a fairly reasonable compromise in the final zoning plan. Conservationists seem to be generally satisfied for the moment. The World Wide Fund for Nature GBR campaign manager, Imogen Zethoven is quoted as saying “the new network of marine sanctuaries will result in very real and tangible benefits for the health of the reef and its stunning wildlife”. In contrast, the Australian Conservation authority has said that “due to political compromise some of the 53 areas identified as special and unique had been given inadequate protection”. The tourism industry seems to be well satisfied also. Not surprisingly the commercial fishing industry has been the most critical and most vocal.

All political parties have supported the increased protection given to the Reef though the Democrats have indicated they would like to see the level of green zones raised to about 50% in the next 10-15 years. The support of both Labor and the Greens was tempered by accusations of political interference which has resulted in the changes to the Princess Charlotte Bay Special Management

Most of Darley Reef 80km north of Bowen was designated green in the draft plan. This important recreational fishing reef is now open to fishing as Habitat Protection Zone.

Area and partial opening up of Repulse Bay as a General Use Zone. Both these areas have recognised environmental significance and if political influence has been misused then it has tainted what in general has been a very open exercise.

With a few exceptions the recreational fishing community seems reasonably content with the final outcome and, as recognised by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, is a very adaptable group. Personally, I thought that more yellow zones in which restricted tackle would discourage commercial fishing, would favor recreational fishers and I believe on balance, the 'tweaking' of the yellow zones in many well used areas has come out in our favor. Certainly GBRMPA listened to submissions made to them especially during the many public meetings.

For example, many of the suggestions made in the widely circulated submission by the REACT group and Sunfish N.Q. have been adopted on both a large scale (e.g. opening up of the area around Myrmidon Reef on the outer shelf off Townsville and opening up Davies Reef) and for small scale detail (e.g. moving the boundary of the green zone of Great Palm Island a few kilometres to open up the important mackerel fishing areas around Paluma, Albino and Chilcott Rocks). As indicated earlier, the needs of the tag and release fishers also seem to have been recognised and whilst the final zoning may not be ideal, it should not cause major downturn in the activity.

A well publicized concept in recent weeks within the North Queensland recreational fishing community, has been the suggestion of constructing artificial reefs in easily accessible areas, initially off Magnetic Island as a way to compensate anglers for fishing spots lost under the Representative Areas Programme. This is an interesting idea and has not been rejected out of hand by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The concept is not new but will be as controversial as the



rezoning exercise itself. There are many pros and cons which will need consideration and the issues will be discussed in a future issue of F&B.

What Is Needed Now?

These are the greatest changes ever made to what activities may or may not be carried out within the GBR Marine Park. At time of writing (mid April) the only comprehensive source of information on the zoning and regulations is on the GBRMPA web site (see below). This is regularly updated and if you have access to the web, will give you all the information you need. Electronic means of communication, (web-site or CDRom) will be given priority by GBRMPA who are negotiating with several electronic companies to have all the co-ordinates of the green zones incorporated in their GPS maps. These co-ordinates are also clearly indicated on 18 detailed 1:250,000 maps being prepared at time of writing, and thus

Wilson Island and Reef, Capricorn Group, a reef added to the green zones in the final plan.



will be easily accessible for hand held GPS's. For the average tinny owner, hard copies of the maps will become available from mid to late June at a range of outlets including bait and tackle shops. The good news is that initially (at least) these will be free of charge.

GBRMPA plans other actions to publicise the new zoning including information at boat ramps and a best practice booklet. There should be no excuse for not being aware of the regulations by July. Although the zoning is fixed, GBRMPA has indicated that they will take on board any suggestions as to how the information is displayed or passed on to the public as there will be the opportunity to streamline maps etc. in the not too distant future when Queensland finalises the zoning of its coastal waters, hopefully in a complementary way to the GBRMPA zoning.

Having put in place a complex zoning system, to maintain its credibility, the Federal Government needs to provide sufficient funding to put it in place and provide a reasonable

level of regulation and surveillance. The economic value of the Reef has been used very strongly as a justification for the introduction of greater protection. A reasonable proportion of the income from taxes and the like needs to be allocated to ensure the system works.

Over the last few months many predictions have been made by GBRMPA and Government about the environmental and ecological

Quite a few minor changes have occurred in the heavily used Whitsunday Islands including around Langford Island, south of Hayman.

health of the reef as a result of the RAP zoning. Largely positive social and economic effects have also been predicted. Environmental, social and economic monitoring programs now need to be funded so that in a few years time we have hard evidence of the benefits of giving the Reef greater protection and can determine where any extra action or modification is required. Currently, 88 programs for monitoring, survey and assessment have been devised and a number are already in place - but how many more will be realised or provide useful information to assess the RAP process?

On the whole I believe that recreational and boating activities will remain very viable pastimes, particularly if you consider that rather than 33% of the GBR waters being off limits for fishing more than 60% is still available to the recreational fishers. Hopefully in a few years time we will be looking back at 1st July 2004, as the day when sustainability of activities including recreational fishing on the Great Barrier Reef became real.

Maps of the new zoning are available on the GBRMPA website for the 4 management areas and 18 1:250,000 detailed mapsheets. The



website also contains considerable information on the zoning process, data used, regulations and other features.

Go to:
www.gbrmpa.gov.au for the

GBRMPA website, or

www.reefed.edu.au/rap/maps.html

for the maps

In June, hard copies of the maps will also be available free of charge at up to 100 points of access (bait and tackle shops etc.).

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