

# Bulletin

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TRADITIONAL HUNTING AND FISHING IN THE GREAT BARRIER REEF  
MARINE PARK: A CALL FOR COMMENT ON THE FAR NORTHERN  
SECTION ZONING PLAN



## THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Stretching for nearly 2000 kilometres in the warm waters off the Queensland coast lies the world's largest collection of coral reefs - the Great Barrier Reef.

In 1975, the Australian Parliament passed the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act. The Act set up the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority with responsibility for the conservation of the Great Barrier Reef through the establishment, control, care and development of a marine park in the Great Barrier Reef Region, an area recognised as being of 'outstanding universal value' and added to the World Heritage List in October 1981.

## ZONING

Section by section the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is being zoned to provide for different activities, to keep apart activities that might not go together well, and to protect important reef animals or plants and their natural surroundings.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is not the same as a National Park on land. Instead it is a very big planning region in which lots of different activities can take place, though some may have to be modified or restricted slightly, or only allowed in certain areas or zones. Some zones within the Marine Park are mainly for conservation and for the sort of things people do just for fun or enjoyment, like sailing and looking at coral, that do no damage. These zones are more or less the same as land-based National Parks.

Of the eight sections of the Marine Park now declared, covering some 98.5% of the Great Barrier Reef Region, three (Capricornia, Cairns and Cormorant Pass Sections) now have working zoning plans. These provide a framework for day-to-day management by the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service.

### THE FAR NORTHERN SECTION

The Far Northern Section, stretching northwards from the Cairns Section to the tip of Cape York, should soon join them. Information from many sources - including government agencies, fishermen, research scientists, conservation groups and interested individuals - has already been collected, most of it in the form of representations, written comments, made in an earlier information-gathering stage. Using this information and the Authority's own resources, a proposed zoning plan for the Far Northern Section has been prepared.

### THE PROPOSED ZONING PLAN

A second stage of public participation is going on now, using the zoning plan as the starting point. Interested people are invited to make recommendations and suggestions, and to provide information to us at the Authority on the proposed zoning plan by 29 July 1984. Representations received shortly after that date may also be taken into account in the preparation of the Zoning Plan, and of course comments received at any time will be of value in relation to management of the Marine Park.

The plan is too complicated to describe completely here (copies are available at the places listed at the end of this article) but there are some points of special importance to people living in the north which we would like to talk about here, so that you can see what we are trying to do and tell us what you think.

Drawing up a zoning plan is not straightforward and we at the Authority found it quite hard at times, especially when looking at the very different demands of traditional lifestyles, modern commercial activities and the need to preserve some areas.

### ZONES, ACTIVITIES AND PERMITS

The guide below shows what people can do in the five zones in the Far Northern Section, and shows whether or not people have to get permits first.

Far Northern Section Activities Guide  
[see Zoning Plan for details]

	GENERAL USE A	GENERAL USE C	MARINE NATIONAL PARK B	SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH	PRESERVATION
BOATING, DIVING	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
COLLECTING (e.g. shells coral, aquarium fish)	Permit	Permit	No	No	No
LINE FISHING	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
BAIT NETTING	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
TROLLING for pelagic species	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
SPEARFISHING (N.B. not with underwater breathing apparatus)*	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
POLE & LINE TUNA FISHING	Permit	Permit	No	No	No
TRAWLING	Yes	No	No	No	No
CRUISE SHIPS	Yes	Yes	Permit	No	No
GENERAL SHIPPING	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
TRADITIONAL FISHING	Yes	Yes	Permit	Permit	No
TRADITIONAL HUNTING	Permit	Permit	Permit	Permit	No

\* Spearfishing with use of hookah for crayfishing will require a permit  
 6 Except in designated shipping lanes if provided in this zone,

Most of the Far Northern Section has been zoned as either General Use 'A' or 'C', areas of relatively few restrictions on use apart from the prohibition on trawling in General Use 'C'. The Marine National Park 'B' zoning also covers a fairly large area in total but the most protective zonings - Scientific Research and Preservation Zones - have only been used in very small areas.

You will have noticed that the word "permit" is used in some columns and rows in the activity guide. You will also have seen that "traditional fishing" and "traditional hunting" are referred to. Under the proposed zoning plan traditional hunting (which is mainly for turtle and dugong) is forbidden in any zone in the Far Northern Section unless a permit has been applied for and given. It is not allowed at all in Preservation Zones. Traditional fishing can take place in all zones except the Preservation Zone, but permits are required in the Marine National Park 'B' and Scientific Research Zones, zones where other forms of fishing are forbidden.

The rest of this article outlines why permits are considered necessary and what is meant by the word "traditional inhabitant". Saying what these words mean exactly is not easy but they have to be explained because other descriptions, like traditional fishing and hunting, depend on what is decided. The meaning given to "traditional inhabitant" will also influence decision making when permits are requested for these activities.

#### TRADITIONAL WAYS OF LIFE AND THE PROPOSED ZONING PLAN

The part of the Great Barrier Reef that we now know as the Far Northern Section of the Marine Park has been used for a long time as a source of food and raw materials. Parts of it were explored and used by native fishermen and hunters many thousands of years ago. In this area, perhaps more than anywhere else on the Reef, these traditional activities still continue, though sometimes today in competition with larger scale commercial operations.

How can we make sure that these traditional and modern activities get along together? One way is through the zoning process itself, by keeping apart activities that could get in each other's way, putting them into different areas or zones, as shown in the activities guide. However this is not always possible. The best fishing grounds, for instance, are obviously known to be the best place to catch fish by all fishermen, whether they depend on the fish to feed their family directly, are commercial operators or are just out for a relaxing day's fishing and lazing in the sun.

The same sort of problem crops up with the animals the Authority has a duty to protect, for example, the dugong. The best areas for dugong to live are also naturally seen as the best places to hunt dugong, something that has traditionally gone on for thousands of years. Is it fair to suddenly and drastically change such a way of life by stopping dugong hunting altogether?

It has been decided that it is not, but at the same time the dugong, as well as all other animals and their habitats, must be carefully looked after so that future generations will be able to use them too. The answer to this problem in the proposed zoning plan, as in the already working Cairns Section Zoning Plan, is to recognize the importance of traditional ways of life but keep a careful watch and control on where, when and how traditional fishing and hunting are taking place, mainly through the permit system.

### 'TRADITIONAL INHABITANT': AN INTERPRETATION

What, then, is meant by the term 'traditional inhabitant'? The answer is unfortunately not straightforward, mainly because any formal definition is open to different interpretations.

A traditional inhabitant is defined in the Far Northern Section Zoning Plan as 'an Aboriginal or Islander who lives in an area or areas in accordance with Aboriginal tradition or Islander tradition respectively'.

What this means seems fairly easy to say when talking about permanent residents of places like Lockhart River fishing and hunting in their local area. Other cases are, however, more difficult and we need your help at reaching a reasonable interpretation. Should, for instance, someone who leaves Lockhart River to live and work in Townsville be considered a 'traditional inhabitant' of the Far Northern Section when he or she is visiting relatives back at Lockhart River? On the other hand should he or she be allowed to hunt dugong in the Townsville area?

### TRADITIONAL HUNTING AND FISHING

It is also hard to explain exactly what we mean by 'traditional hunting' and 'traditional fishing'. The formal definitions of these are long but nearly the same, so only the definition of 'traditional fishing' is given here.

Traditional fishing is:

'the taking, otherwise than for purposes of sale or trade, in any area by a traditional inhabitant or a group of traditional inhabitants of fish, crustaceans, echinoderms or molluscs in accordance with Aboriginal tradition or Islander tradition, as the case may be, governing the entry and use of that area by that traditional inhabitant or group of traditional inhabitants'.

In other words, traditional fishing is the catching of fish by a traditional inhabitant, not so the fish can be sold, but for his or her own use (including family and friends). The area where the fishing is carried out will probably be a well known area long used by the group in question. Other traditional inhabitants not necessarily from nearby, but who are recognised by the local traditional inhabitants as having the right to fish in the area, would also be accepted as taking part in traditional fishing.

Again the question is how broadly or narrowly this interpretation should be applied. For instance, as people from the Torres Strait are not known to have travelled very far south into the Far Northern Section before the 1800's, do you think that they should be excluded from traditional hunting and fishing in the Section today?

The definition of traditional fishing (and hunting) suggests that the techniques used are likely to be traditional ones. This is one of several things that will be considered when a permit has been applied for, for example, when in the future a group of traditional inhabitants request permission to hunt dugong in a Marine National Park 'B' zone. The other things to be considered will be the need to protect and look after species in danger and the number of animals to be taken.

As you can see the interpretation of 'traditional' is important, yet difficult to be very precise about. We would like to find out what sort of interpretations are reasonable. Please write and tell us what you think.

We would also like to hear from people about another activity in the Far Northern Section that we found it hard to decide on. It involves spearfishing for crayfish (spiny lobster) using underwater breathing apparatus (hookah).

Because of the importance to the regional economy of an already established crayfishing industry in the Far Northern Section which catches crayfish this way - and the fact that there is no evidence to suggest that the crayfish population or its habitat is in any danger - under the proposed zoning plan the Authority may give a permit for this activity in General Use 'A' and 'C' zones. This is a big change from existing rules in the Marine Park where all forms of spearfishing whilst using underwater breathing gear are not allowed. Do you think it is reasonable to make an exception for crayfishing in the Far Northern Section?

In this article we have talked about some of the problems that we have considered when preparing the Far Northern Section Zoning Plan. There are probably others we have not yet thought about. We are especially asking you to tell us about any problems that you can see being created by the proposed plan, and want you, the users of the Reef, to suggest any changes you would like to see made, with an explanation of the reasons for any such changes.

Remember, the zoning plan is still a proposal only, not the final word, so how people respond to it is very important. Pick up or look at a copy of the plan and the booklet that explains it, see what you think and write to us. It's your Reef, your Marine Park.

In north Queensland copies of the proposed zoning plan for the Far Northern Section and the booklet that goes with it may be inspected and/or collected from the following places:

The Office of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority:

Melton Place  
Denham Street  
Townsville  
Telephone (077) 712191

The Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service:  
Regional Office  
408 Sheridan Street  
Cairns

Municipal or Shire Libraries in: Innisfail, Cairns and Mossman.

Shire Council offices in: Cooktown and Thursday Island.

Department of Harbours and Marine offices in: Weipa, Thursday Island and Cairns.

Australia Post post offices at Thursday Island, Coen, Karumba, Bamaga and Iron Range.