

December 1997

Whitsundays

PLAN OF MANAGEMENT



Tourism Industry Information

333.784
09943
WHI
1997



GREAT BARRIER REEF
MARINE PARK AUTHORITY

© Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 1997

ISBN 0 642 23040 4

Published by the Great Harrier Reef Marine Park Authority December 1997



GREAT BARRIER REEF
MARINE PARK AUTHORITY

PO Box 1379

Townsville Qld 4810

Telephone: (077) 500 700

International: +61 77 500 700

Facsimile: (077) 726 093

International: +61 77 726 093

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Background	2
Section one	
Standard permits	3
Section two	
Booking system administration	6
Section three	
Conditions of operation	7
Section four	
Transition to new permits	8
Need more information ?	10
Table	
1. Standard permit categories	9

INTRODUCTION

NOTICE

This booklet summarises tourism use management considerations. The matters contained in the booklet are for discussion only. They reflect proposals currently being considered by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority but should not be used as the basis for investment decisions nor for business planning purposes.

The Authority:

- reserves the right to amend proposals, and in particular will consider submissions, legal advice and drafting requirements; and
- notes that not all issues associated with individual permissions are necessarily addressed in this booklet.

Following the release of the Cairns Area Plan of Management, the Whitsundays Plan of Management (the Plan) is a further step towards implementing a new approach to managing tourism use in the Marine Park. When the Plan is adopted, the Authority intends to develop, and implement, a new permitting system.

This approach to managing tourism use relies less on individually assessed permits and puts greater emphasis on simpler permits which will be subject to the location settings described in the Plan and general regulations.

This booklet explains the proposed permit structure for Marine Park tourism operations in the Whitsunday Planning Area (the Area) and the proposed transitional arrangements in changing to the new system and should be read in conjunction with the Information Summary booklet.

The proposals discussed in this booklet have been developed through debate in many forums over several years and through consultation with the tourism industry.

In considering the proposals, readers should:

- refer to the Plan for more detailed information, particularly on the proposed enforcement provisions and permitting policy in the Area; and
- note that the 'Area' generally refers to the Whitsunday Planning Area as shown in map 1 on page 2 of the Information Summary booklet.

BACKGROUND

Actual tourism use of the Area is much less than the potential level of use permitted under current Marine Park tourist program permits. The current management system has proven effective at managing impacts from larger, site-specific operations, but has been less effective in addressing the cumulative impacts of the many small operations and the increasing private use of the Area.

Impacts reported at many locations suggest that levels of use are already approaching the environmentally sustainable limits. The new management system will set a cap on certain types of activity whilst accommodating growth in tourist visitation to the Area and allowing greater flexibility for regular operators, and for transfer of permits.

The Authority believes the new approach proposed in the Plan will:

- address impacts such as anchor damage to corals, disturbance to beach vegetation, whales and bird breeding sites, impacts on cultural sites, and displacement of use;
- ensure that future levels of use are environmentally sustainable;
- cater for projected growth in visitation to the Area;
- in many situations, provide for a greater level of certainty and flexibility for tourism operations;
- provide reasonable opportunities for tourism operations based outside the Whitsundays to visit the Area; and
- ensure other reasonable uses are not inappropriately displaced by increasing tourism use.

The Authority intends to achieve this by:

- giving priority to existing operations which have historically demonstrated use of the Area, and to generally allow more flexibility in the conduct of operations;
- requiring some new operations to book access to the Area;
- specifying group and vessel size limits for the various locations (applying to all users);
- determining appropriate areas for development and infrastructure (moorings and pontoons) within the Area; and
- addressing the impacts of use at identified sensitive sites by managing the amount of use and types of activities.

SECTION ONE

Standard permits

In the absence of a more detailed planning framework Marine Park permits have historically been developed specifically for each individual tourism operation. In many cases this has resulted in over-complex permits. Many of these permits will be simplified through standardisation.

The proposed categories of permits for tourist and education programs in the Whitsundays are similar to those proposed for the Cairns Area. However, there are some differences which reflect the differences in style of marine tourism operations between Cairns and Whitsundays. Whilst most Cairns operations target reef areas and visit the same destination daily, Whitsunday operations tend to rove between a number of different island and reef locations.

The new system proposed for the Area intends to simplify most permits into the standard categories, Regular Access and Occasional Access, consistent with a complementary system proposed for the whole Marine Park. Permits will be subject to the conditions outlined in Section 3.

The proposed two standard types of tourist or education program permit are:

Regular Access permit

This permit type is intended to be available to operators who use the Area daily, or on a very regular basis, providing access to the Area for 365 days a year (daily access).

It is proposed that there be four distinct categories of Regular Access permit, namely for crewed vessel, bareboat, aircraft and service equipment (e.g. beach equipment, semi-submersibles, dinghies). Conversion between these categories will not be permitted, with the exception of bareboat permits being converted to crewed vessel permits.

Operations that would be eligible for a Regular Access permit are:

- existing tourist or education programs permitted to regularly operate in the Area (i.e. more than 42 days per year), which can demonstrate historical use of the Area (i.e. proof of more than 42 days use of the Area between 1 January 1996 and 30 June 1997, based on the Environmental Management Charge (EMC) returns).

NOTE: Where such historical use can not be demonstrated, consideration of special circumstances may be given.

- existing permitted bareboats, aircraft and service equipment; and
- new tourist or education programs involving service equipment.

This permit is intended to allow daily access to the Area subject to:

- setting limits (limits on group and vessel size, activities, facilities, craft), except in designated large vessel anchoring areas (e.g. Cid Harbour);
- site plan provisions for access to sensitive sites (e.g. setting 5 areas);
- aircraft access limits of 2 visits per location per week, except to designated regular aircraft landing areas (refer to map 6 in the Information Summary booklet).

Special access endorsement

Holders of Regular Access permits may apply for a special access endorsement to allow access to a location in excess of the setting limits:

a) Historic user:

This endorsement is intended to be available to operations which are currently permitted to carry more than the group size or use a larger vessel than set by the Plan, and have historically demonstrated such use of locations in the Area (i.e. at least once between 1 January 1996 and 30 June 1997, based on EMC returns).

This endorsement will be subject to limits on:

- vessel size;
- passenger numbers;
- frequency of visitation (frequency will be negotiated, based on historic use.)

b) Infrequent event:

This endorsement is intended to be available to operations needing access in excess of the setting limits for a unique, one-off event (e.g. specialist charters, access in certain weather conditions).

This endorsement will be subject to:

- a booking (refer to Section 2), for a maximum of ten days per vessel per year; and
- constraints that may be determined on a site by site basis.

Occasional Access permit

This permit type is intended to allow tourist programs which normally operate outside the Area to visit (e.g. for an occasional charter or while transiting through the Area as part of an extended charter).

This permit will be available to tourist operators who do not qualify for regular access, including:

- existing tourist or education programs permitted for only 42-day access to the Area per year;
- existing tourist or education programs not regularly operating in the Area (i.e. 42 days or less use of the Area between 1 January 1996 and 30 June 1997);
- new tourist or education programs involving vessels and aircraft.

This permit is intended to allow up to 50 days access to the Area per year, subject to:

- setting limits (limits on group and vessel size, activities, facilities, craft), except in designated large vessel anchoring areas (e.g. Cid Harbour);
- site plan provisions for access to sensitive sites (e.g. setting 5 areas); aircraft access limits of 2 visits per location per week, except to designated regular aircraft landing areas (refer to map 6 in the Information Summary booklet);
- booking to the Area (refer to Section 2), where the total number of occasional access craft will be limited to 20 standard craft plus one cruise ship per day.

The Occasional Access permit will also allow unlimited access to setting 1 areas and authorised use of permitted private moorings*.

* Initial consultation has indicated that there is concern about increasing use which may be generated by this provision. The Authority is seeking feedback on this issue.

SECTION TWO

Booking system administration

It is intended that the booking system will:

- be accessible to operators 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;
- be verifiable for enforcement purposes.

Administration of the booking system is to be determined, and may include:

- requirement to obtain verbal confirmation of bookings prior to access;
- limit on advanced bookings (maximum 12 months in advance);
- limit on the number of advanced bookings;
- limit on the regularity / frequency of bookings.

SECTION THREE

Conditions of operation

In addition to restrictions near coral reefs, whales and significant bird sites (refer to the Information Summary booklet), special conditions will apply to permitted tourist and education programs conducting the following activities:

Scenic flights

Scenic flights by permitted aircraft operations must not be conducted below 1000 feet (above ground or water) in the Area, other than during landing and takeoff.

Whale spotting (aircraft)

Helicopters are not to be used in whale spotting activities.

- Aircraft must not operate below 1000 feet when undertaking whale spotting activities.

Whale watching (vessels)

Commercial whale watching must not be conducted inside the whale protection area (refer map 3 in the Information Summary booklet). New tourist or education programs involving whale watching will not be permitted in the Area.

Reef walking

- New tourist or education programs involving reef walking in the Area will only be permitted at Hardy Reef and Black Island Reef.

Charter fishing

- New tourist or education programs involving fishing in the Area will only be permitted in the General Use A Zone and General Use B Zone. Charter fishing will be phased out of the Langford/Black Island complex.

NOTE: Some other activities offered by commercial operations (e.g. beach hire, motorised water sports) are subject to setting restrictions (refer to the Information Summary booklet).

Additional Authority policies, not covered in this Plan will also apply, such as:

- whale watching and fish feeding must be conducted in accordance with Authority guidelines;
- bareboat operators must demonstrate that they meet the Bareboat Industry Standards, including the employment of trained accredited staff, prior to operation.

SECTION FOUR

Transition to new permits

It is intended that all operators will be individually considered to assess their entitlements to standard permits under the new system when the Plan comes into effect. Permittees may request re-consideration if they are dissatisfied with the access provided and they believe that there is additional information or circumstances that need to be considered.

A transition period is intended to allow operations to continue while any requests for additional permissions or re-considerations are being prepared and considered.

The process and timing of changing from the old system of permits to the new standardised permits for the Area will be discussed with the tourism industry and is subject to legal advice. The main options are:

- permits will change on expiry or request from the operator; or
- all operators will be required to change from the old to new system over a period of, for example, 6 to 12 months.

Table 1. Standard permit categories

<p align="center">Regular Access permit (365 days per year)</p>	<p>a) crewed vessel c) barcboat b) aircraft d) service equipment</p>	<p align="center">Occasional Access permit (No more than 50 days per year)</p>
<p>Intended to allow Area-based programs daily access to the Area</p> <p><i>Available to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> existing tourist or education programs permitted to regularly operate in the Area (i.e. > 42 days/year) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> with demonstrated historic use of the Area (i.e. > 42 days use of the Area between 1/1/96 and 30/6/97, based on EMC returns). bareboats, aircraft or service equipment new tourist or education programs, involving service equipment <p><i>Allows:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> daily access to the Area and locations within the Area <p><i>Subject to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> operation in accordance with setting limits site plan provisions for access to setting 5 areas aircraft access limited to 2 visits per location per week, except to designated regular aircraft landing areas 	<p>Special access endorsement</p> <p><i>Available to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> existing tourist or education programs regularly operating in the Area <p>a) Historic user (for programs with historic use of a location above setting limits (i.e. more than 1 days use between 1/1/96 and 30/6/97, based on EMC returns).</p> <p><i>Allows:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> access in excess of setting limits <p><i>Subject to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited increase in vessel size, passenger numbers frequency to be negotiated (based on historic use) <p>b) Infrequent event</p> <p><i>Allows:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> access in excess of setting limits for unique, one-off events <p><i>Subject to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> booking (maximum 10 days per vessel per year) site specific restrictions 	<p>Intended to allow programs from outside the Area to visit on occasional charters or while transiting through the Area as part of an extended charter.</p> <p><i>Available to operators who do not qualify for regular access, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> existing tourist or education programs permitted for only 42-day access to the Area per year existing tourist or education programs not regularly operating to the Area (c42 days use of the Area between 1/1/96 and 30/6/97) new tourist or education programs involving vessels and aircraft <p><i>Allows:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50 days access to the Area, and locations within the Area, per year <p><i>Subject to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> booking (maximum of 20 standard craft plus one cruise ship per day) operation in accordance with setting limits site plan provisions for access to setting 5 areas aircraft access limited to 2 visits per location per week, except to designated regular aircraft landing areas



NEED MORE INFORMATION?

For additional information about the Whitsunday Plan of Management, or to clarify points from this booklet, please direct your enquiries to the following organisations:

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

PO Box 1379

Townsville QLD 4810

Phone: (077) 500 700

Fax: (077) 726 093

Attention: Chris Thomas

GBRMPA LIBRARY

Order No.

Cost

Accession

No.

Call No.

Queensland Department of Environment

Whitsunday District Office

PO Box 332

Airlie Beach QLD 4802

Phone: (079) 46 7022

Fax (079) 46 7023

Attention: Harry Usher

The closing date for receipt of submissions is 16 February 1998.