



***Marine Tourism
Contingency Plan
for the
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park***

May 2004

SUPERSEDED

Prepared by the **Tourism and Recreation Group**
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority



Australian Government
Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority



Queensland Government
Environmental Protection Agency
Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

*our great barrier reef
let's keep it great*



FOREWORD

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the GBRMPA) will give priority consideration to applications for temporary relocation if a tourism site is severely degraded by an environmental incident, such as a cyclone or oil spill.

The GBRMPA understands the extreme economic hardship that may result from such an incident and will make every reasonable attempt to facilitate temporary relocations for affected tourism operations. The GBRMPA recognises that worthwhile solutions will only emerge through the involvement of and co-operation between managing agencies, tourism industry, traditional owners and other stakeholders, and commits to working on that basis.

The GBRMPA will, however, need to be confident that any relocation does not in itself cause environmental harm or unreasonable impact on other users of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (the Marine Park).

The GBRMPA has prepared this Marine Tourism Contingency Plan in the expectation that, at some stage in the future, tourism operators will seek to temporarily relocate to an alternate site due to the level of degradation of their existing site from a severe environmental incident. The Plan was prepared with consideration of advice from the Tourism and Recreation Reef Advisory Committee.

This plan will assist operators when requesting temporary relocation and will ensure that all requests for temporary relocation are dealt with in a consistent and streamlined manner.

Operators can further assist the process by developing their own contingency plans, in anticipation of a severe environmental incident, and discussing options with the GBRMPA at an early stage.

CONTEXT

Presentation of the Marine Park and its World Heritage values is an international obligation, and this is achieved to a large extent through the activity of the marine tourism industry.

There are almost 1000 operations, involving over 1500 vessels and aircraft, permitted to undertake tourism activities in the Marine Park. The majority (approximately 1.5 million visitor days per year) of this tourism activity occurs in the Cairns, Port Douglas and Whitsundays areas.

In some cases, tourism operations have made a significant financial commitment in their destination to ensure a quality visitor experience, such as by installing tourist facilities (e.g. moorings, pontoons), conducting regular site maintenance (e.g. crown-of-thorns starfish control, video monitoring) and through direct marketing.

The experience reef visitors get is often highly dependent on the quality of the reef site. Environmental incidents, such as cyclones and oil spills, may severely degrade the quality of a site to the extent that its presentation can be potentially damaging to the reputation of the marine tourism industry. Visitor satisfaction is also important to the GBRMPA and is one of its key performance indicators.

ELEMENTS OF THIS PLAN

This plan addresses the following matters:

1. What type of temporary relocation is available?
2. Who is eligible for temporary relocation?
3. Where can you temporarily relocate?
4. When can you temporarily relocate?
5. How do you apply for temporary relocation?
6. How long will it take to assess an application for temporary relocation?
7. What costs are involved in temporarily relocating?
8. What are the conditions of temporary relocation?
9. What happens to your original site after you temporarily relocate?
10. When can you return to your original site?
11. What happens at the end of the period of temporary relocation?

GUIDELINES

1. *What type of temporary relocation is available?*

Temporary relocations under this plan will only be granted for a period of up to 12 months. Temporary relocations are to enable operations to continue while medium to longer term solutions are developed for future operation. It is expected that solutions will be developed within the 12 months. Applications for longer periods or for permanent relocation are not covered by this plan and will be assessed through the usual assessment process.

If a site (*original site*) is severely degraded by a severe environmental incident, the GBRMPA may:

- if a permitted tourist facility was, before the incident, installed at the original site – allow the facility to be temporarily relocated to a different site; or
- if a permitted tourist facility was, before the incident, installed at the original site and the facility was destroyed by the incident – allow the operator of the facility to temporarily install a new facility in a different site; or
- if a permitted tourist program normally operates at the original site – allow the program to operate temporarily at a different site.

2. *Who is eligible for temporary relocation?*

Permitted tourism operators will be eligible to apply for temporary relocation if they can substantiate that:

- An event (e.g. cyclones, ship groundings, coral bleaching, oil spills, crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks) has occurred that was beyond the reasonable control of (and does not result from any negligence on the part of) the operator and has resulted in sufficient degradation of their tourism site to render it unviable for tourism operations;

3. *Where can you temporarily relocate?*

The GBRMPA will be flexible in working with industry to consider suitable relocation sites. Until an event occurs the scope of available sites is unknown. However, some sites, such as Preservation Zones, Scientific Research Zones, or No Structures Subzones (for permanently moored facilities), will not be considered for temporary relocation. Before making any decision the GBRMPA must consider the merits of each site against its normal assessment criteria.

Tourism operators are advised to first consider relocation within the current permitted reef or location, as the process to consider such an application is likely to be simpler.

In a Plan of Management area, tourism operators going beyond their permitted location are advised to first consider relocation areas that are outside sensitive locations and have an equal or less restrictive “setting” to the original site.

Tourism operators should ensure that their proposed relocation areas would not displace or unduly impact on other existing Marine Park users. For those operations that do not offer fishing as an activity, “green zones” may, in many instances, be a suitable zone in which to relocate. Furthermore, proposed relocation areas should not include any of the following sites:

- A site of known significant conservation value;
- A known site of significant cultural and/or heritage value;
- A known fish spawning aggregation site;
- A site used regularly by another tourism operator(s), except by arrangement;
- A popular recreational use site;
- A designated anchoring site.

4. *When can you temporarily relocate?*

Tourism operators may only temporarily relocate once the GBRMPA has given written permission for them to do so. Written permission cannot be given until an application has been lodged and considered.

5. *How do you apply for temporary relocation?*

The GBRMPA will work in partnership with operators who have experienced a severe environmental incident throughout the application process. A *Temporary Relocation Application Form* is available on the GBRMPA website (www.gbrmpa.gov.au) and should be completed and submitted to the GBRMPA with the relevant supporting information. Use of this form will allow the GBRMPA assessors to instantly recognise the priority nature of the application.

In the event that there is more than one operation impacted by an event, the GBRMPA will work co-operatively with all affected operators and other relevant stakeholders.

The following information should accompany the application:

- Details of the nature, scale and cause of the degradation at the current site;
- Reasons why the tourism operation at the current site is unviable;
- Details of your commitment at the current site (e.g. tourist facilities, site maintenance, direct marketing, number of years at that site); and
- Potential relocation areas (in order of preference) for conducting temporary tourism operations.

Operators are encouraged to submit video transects, before and after photos, client satisfaction surveys or any other material that could support their application. A site visit by GBRMPA officers may be required to assess the scale of degradation.

6. *How long will it take to assess an application for temporary relocation?*

Recognising the urgency of getting back in business, the GBRMPA will process all applications for temporary relocation as a priority. The assessment time could be a minimum of a few days if as much pre-event work as possible is completed. The assessment time can also be reduced if all the relevant information is provided with

the application. More complex applications, or more broadly impacting severe environmental incidents, may take longer to process.

Tourism operators that apply to relocate at their current reef or location may only require a variation to their current permit which can be dealt with quickly. Tourism operators seeking to temporarily relocate to a different reef or location will require a new permit and normally a minimum of 31 days is required to allow for *Native Title Act 1993* notification requirements. This time may be significantly reduced by consultation between operators, notifiable parties, traditional owners and the GBRMPA.

Tourism operators should expect a delay in processing their application under the following circumstances:

- The operator proposes a relocation area that is likely to displace or unduly impact on other existing Marine Park users or includes any of the particular sites mentioned in Section 3 above; or
- The operator proposes a relocation area that is within a sensitive location, or a location of a more restrictive “setting”, in a Plan of Management area.

7. *What costs are involved in temporarily relocating?*

Operators wishing to apply for temporary relocation will be required to pay the relevant assessment fee. The fee will vary depending upon whether the changes can be implemented through a variation to the permission, or a new permission is required. A new permission assessment fee varies depending on the nature and scale of the operation, and whether an initial fee or further permit fee is appropriate. A current schedule of fees is available on the GBRMPA website.

All operational expenses associated with removing and/or reinstalling a tourist facility will be borne by the operator, including the costs of site supervision.

8. *What are the conditions of temporary relocation?*

Generally the GBRMPA anticipate that the conditions would be similar to those on the existing affected permission, only applied to a new site. However, there may be site-specific conditions that would only be identified as the new proposed site is assessed. All temporary relocations must be undertaken in accordance with the conditions of any permission granted by the GBRMPA. Temporary relocations that involve the removal and/or reinstallation of a tourist facility must also be conducted in the presence of (and under the reasonable direction of) a Marine Parks officer, unless specific direction to the contrary is given in writing by the GBRMPA.

9. *What happens to your original site after you temporarily relocate?*

The original site will not be reallocated for site-specific operations during the period of temporary relocation, unless the site is relinquished in favour of “permanent” (medium or longer term) operations at a different site. The GBRMPA will normally not exclude other operators or Marine Park users from visiting the original site during the period of temporary relocation.

During the period of temporary relocation, tourism operators may wish to voluntarily conduct monitoring and/or remedial work at their original site with a view to returning to that site. Such activities would require a permit from the GBRMPA.

10. When can you return to your original site?

Tourism operators may elect to return to their original site at any time during the temporary relocation period. If an operator considers that the original site is recovered sufficiently that they wish to return there, the GBRMPA will work with the operator to address any necessary requirements. A relevant permission will have to be current for the original site.

11. What happens at the end of the period of temporary relocation?

The GBRMPA intends that a temporary relocation permit will be granted for up to 12 months. It is expected that operator's medium to long term options will have been co-operatively resolved within that time.

A range of alternatives may be available to an operator who has temporarily relocated. These include being granted a permission for an alternative site, co-operatively sharing a site with another operator, or returning to the original site.

Reef recovery time is expected to be a major factor in deciding whether, and when, to return to the original site. Reef recovery time is dependant upon many things including the nature and scale of the severe environmental incident, the original composition and resilience of coral species, and the vagaries of coral recruitment. Operators would be wise to estimate projected recovery time early in the 12-month temporary relocation period, as this will assist in the consideration of medium to long term options.