

# AGINCOURT REEFS SITE PLAN

(Prepared August 2001)

**Note 1:** On 1 July 2004, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003 came into effect. It changed the zoning and activities allowed in zones for the Marine Park. Agincourt Reefs are now zoned Marine National Park Zone, for more information please refer to the Zoning Plan and maps.

**Note 2:** Pursuant to paragraph 4.2.1(1)(b) of the Zoning Plan 2003, the following Special Management Area has been designated over the Agincourt Reefs:

- Agincourt Reefs No Dorries Detached (Marine National Park Zone) Special Management Area.

## 1. Background

The Cairns Area Plan of Management was gazetted in 1998 after being prepared in accordance with the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*. The Cairns Planning Area comprises many places, biological communities and species of high nature conservation, scientific and cultural value. The Plan aims to protect and conserve these values, while allowing for a range of opportunities.

An important strategy of the Plan is detailed, site-specific management of an identified area. Site planning is required at a number of Locations in the Cairns Area to provide for a balance of recreational and commercial access consistent with the protection of conservation, scientific and cultural values.

Site plans were prepared for the following Locations: Lizard Island Localities 2 and 3; Opal Reef; Tongue Reef; Agincourt Reefs; Hastings Locality 1; Briggs Reef; Norman Reef; Michaelmas Cay Locality; Upolu Cay Reef; Green Island Reef Locality 1; Flynn Reef; Milln Reef; Moore Reef Locality 2; Normanby Island Reef; Russell and Round Island Reefs.

Site planning occurred progressively and draft plans were presented for comment to all the interested parties. Site plans for Lizard Island Localities 2 and 3 were finalised in August 1999, while the remaining draft plans were discussed at site planning meetings held in Cairns and Port Douglas from 11 to 14 December 2000. All comments received were considered in the preparation of the final plans.

## **2. Site planning objectives**

The following summarises the objectives of site planning in the Cairns Area:

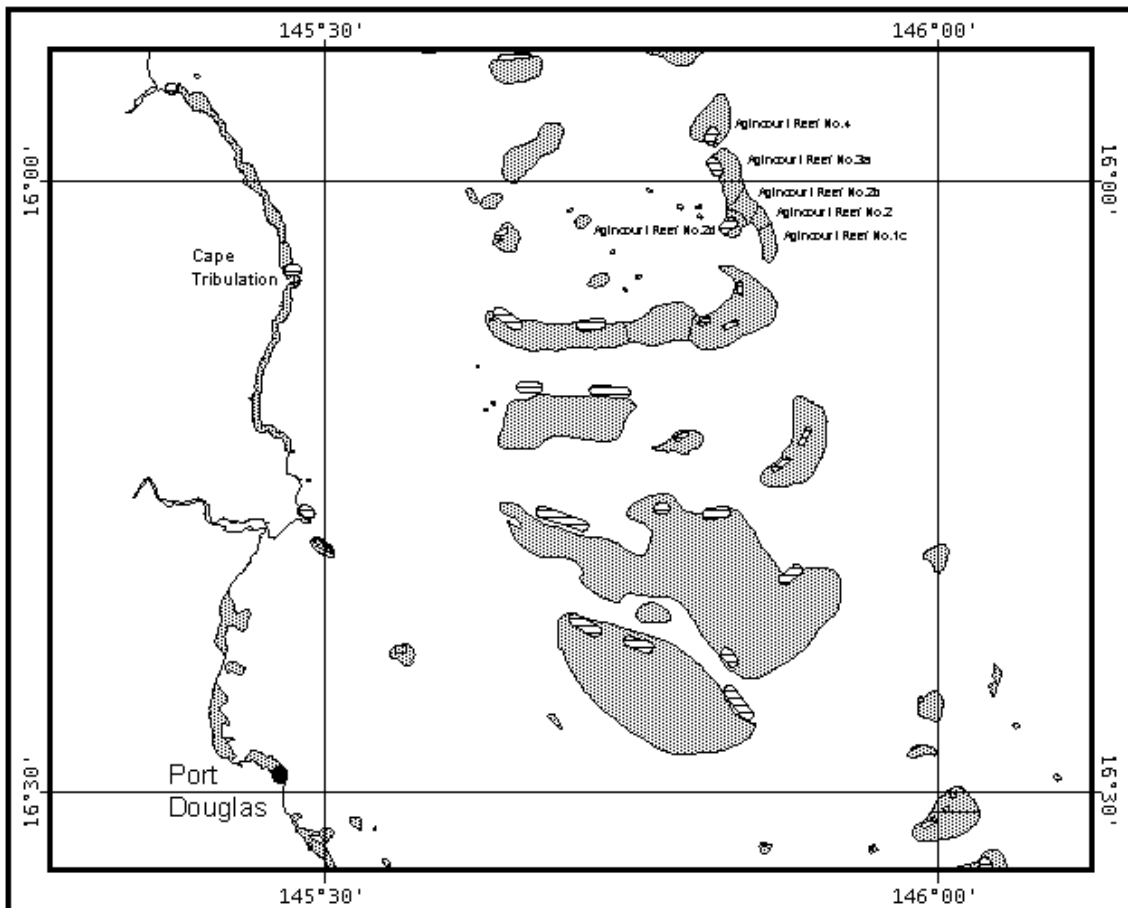
- Provide an appropriate balance of private and public access opportunities
- Provide for Reef Anchorages where reasonable access will not be inhibited by moorings.
- Minimise damage to fish spawning aggregation sites and disturbance of fish spawning aggregations when determining the location of Reef Anchorages, moorings and pontoons.
- Minimise the impact on significant dugong habitat when determining the location of Reef Anchorages, moorings and pontoons.
- Minimise disturbance to significant cultural and heritage values when determining the location of Reef Anchorages, moorings and pontoons.
- Ensure that Reef Anchorages, moorings or pontoons are not located within an existing research or monitoring site if the project design would be adversely effected by anchoring.
- Minimise damage to coral from anchoring when determining the location of Reef Anchorages, moorings and pontoons.
- Determine a maximum number of moorings and pontoons for Locations with no limit (refer to Schedules 6 and 7 of the Cairns Area Plan of Management).

*Note: Approval for new private moorings and pontoons will remain subject to detailed impact assessment.*

### 3. Site description and map

Agincourt Reefs include a cluster of five reefs within the Offshore Port Douglas Sector (Figure 1).

- Agincourt Reef No 1 (15099c) is a ribbon reef, 510 ha in area, located at latitude 16 3, longitude 145 51.5.
- Agincourt Reef No 2 (15099b) is a ribbon reef, 620 ha in area, located at latitude 16 1.5 longitude 145 51.
- Agincourt Reef No 3 (15099a) is a ribbon reef, 1250 ha in area, located at latitude 15 59.5 longitude 145 49.5
- Agincourt Reef No 4 (15096s) is a ribbon Reef, 1260 ha in area, located at latitude 15 57 longitude 145 49
- Agincourt Reef D (15099d) is a planar reef, 310 ha in area, located at 16 2.5 longitude 145 50



**Figure 1:** Location of the Agincourt Reefs in the Offshore Port Douglas Sector

## **4. Values**

### **4.1 Coral**

The Agincourt Reef group consists of a number of distinctively separate reefs. Coral diversity and abundance varies greatly within the group. Coral distribution within the group is a reflection of the reef geomorphology and is a good representation of the different habitat types associated with reefs in the general area.

The Agincourt Reef group is close to the continental shelf, this causes it to be flushed by clear oceanic waters.

### **4.2 Seagrass**

There have been no recent official seagrass surveys conducted at the Agincourt Reefs. No seagrass was found during QPWS site surveys. Seagrass experts from DPI Northern Fisheries Centre in Cairns predict limited seagrass may occur at this site.

### **4.3 Fish spawning**

Fish spawning aggregation sites have been identified at the Agincourt Reefs. Further research and monitoring will be undertaken to establish the significance of these sites.

### **4.4 Commercial**

Agincourt Reefs 3 and 4 are within the National Park Zone, Agincourt Reefs 1, 2 and D are within the Habitat Protection Zone (HPZ). Commercial collecting of coral and shells is permitted within the Habitat Protection Zone only. Overall there are 19 current permits for collecting beche-de-mer, six for collecting trochus and 32 for collecting marine aquarium fish that permit access to the HPZ at Agincourt Reefs. Some commercial operators use the reefs as overnight anchorages.

### **4.5 Recreation**

Due to its distance from the city of Cairns and Port Douglas, recreational visitation is limited to good weather periods. Some sailing yachts visit the reefs, however, due to the limited accuracy of existing navigational charts, these tend to be skippered by yachties familiar with these reefs. Recreational fishers tend to be the predominate recreational users of these reefs.

### **4.6 Tourism**

Agincourt Reefs are an extremely popular destination for tourist vessels operating out of Port Douglas. In the period 30 June 1998 to 31 March 1999 approximately 137,673 tourists visited the Agincourt group of reefs.

- Agincourt Reef No 1 - One tourist operator holds a permit to visit daily to a mooring or pontoon. There are three permits for helicopters to visit daily. Two vessels have permits to visit daily and anchor. There is also a permit for three semi-submersibles to operate in the vicinity.
- Agincourt Reef No 2 - One tourist operator holds a permit to visit daily without anchoring. There are two permits for helicopters to visit daily.
- Agincourt Reef No 3 - One tourist operator holds a permit to visit daily without anchoring. There are four permits for helicopters to visit daily.

- Agincourt Reef No 4 - One tourist operator holds a permit to visit daily without anchoring. One tourist operator holds a permit to anchor once daily. There are two permits for helicopters to visit daily.
- Agincourt Reef No 2D - One tourist operator holds a permit to visit daily without anchoring. One tourist operator holds a permit that permits anchoring daily. There are three permits for helicopters to visit daily.

#### **4.7 Cultural**

The Agincourt group of reefs are in the vicinity of the Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Community at Bloomfield. The Indigenous community uses this area for cultural and traditional hunting and gathering activities.

#### **4.8 Research and monitoring**

Agincourt Reef No's 1, 3 and 4 are surveyed annually as part of the Australian Institute of Marine Science Long-term Monitoring Program. There are a total of four research permits which are currently valid and which permit research activities on Agincourt Reefs. Sample transects are distributed throughout Agincourt 3a and 4 to monitor the impacts of tourism activity in association with the pontoon.

### **5. Summary of submissions received – Cairns Area Plan of Management**

The draft Cairns Area Plan of Management was released for public comment in August 1997. A total of 160 submissions were received on the Plan. Of the 160 submissions received 9 referred to Agincourt Reefs

Examples of comments received:

*'OED is of the view insufficient moorings have been allocated to Agincourt Reef 1c and too many foreshadowed for Agincourt 3 and 4' (submission 1100)*

*'Our main concern is to know exactly what the status of existing moorings at Agincourt No 1c is and to ensure continued access to our sites on Agincourt in the future; (submission 1100)*

*'We are now led to believe there are 2 existing moorings at Agincourt No 1c Reef according to GBRMPA records. According to Schedule 6 of the Draft Plan there are to be only 2 permitted moorings at this site. Thus we will be effectively locked out from visiting an area currently an important site in our diving program' (submission 1100)*

*'Like to see all moorings registered, those not used frequently to be surrendered for public use. Large companies like Quicksilver at Agincourt Reef have around 13 moorings which are not used all the time and prevent the general public from anchoring nearby' (submission 1055)*

*'The pontoons and moorings that are in place at (Agincourt Reef) have excluded us from accessing that site, previously the fleet used the area for an anchorage and to access close by marlin fishing areas' (submission 1124).*

*'The Agincourt Reef area is one major example of single user exclusive use, and we see more of this happening in the future' (submission 1124)*

## **6. Issues**

### **6.1 Appropriate balance of use (mooring and anchoring)**

Commercial tourism operators and other commercial reef users extensively use the Agincourt Reefs. The majority of moorings at this Location are owned by one operator. Some Reef Anchorages have been designated.

Two pontoons are in use at Agincourt 3a and 2d. A further pontoon has been proposed for reef No.4. All existing moorings and their location are shown in figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 for Agincourt 4, 3a, 2, 2b, 2d and 1c, respectively. Equity of access for users other than the dominant operator at this reef group is of essence.

### **6.2 Protection of conservation values**

Anchoring or inappropriate mooring placement and design can damage fragile coral communities. The designation of reef anchorages and pre-selection of potential mooring sites required an assessment of the bio-physical characteristics of identified areas to ensure that conservation values are upheld. Broad surveys of all potential sites were conducted and their suitability as mooring sites or reef anchorages was assessed.

Fish spawning aggregation sites (FSASs) have been identified at the Location. There is potential for disturbance of spawning activity by tourism activity during spawning events. FSASs will need to be considered in the selection of new mooring, pontoon or Reef Anchorage sites.

## **7. Current management strategies**

### **7.1 Cairns Section Zoning Plan (Zoning Map: BRA Q156)**

Agincourt Reefs and the waters surrounding them are within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Agincourt Reefs 1,2 and D and the waters surrounding them, south of latitude 16°00.7' are within the Habitat Protection Zone. Agincourt Reefs 3 and 4 are within the National Park Zone and the waters surrounding them, south to latitude 15° 00.7', are in the Buffer Zone.

### **7.2 Cairns Area Plan of Management**

The Cairns Area Plan of Management was released by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority in June 1998 to provide strategies for protecting the natural values of the offshore areas from Cairns and Port Douglas, the Ribbon Reefs, Lizard Island and the Frankland Islands. The following is a summary of the major strategies in the Cairns Area Plan relevant to Agincourt Reefs:

- Agincourt Reefs and the waters surrounding them are identified as intensive use locations and the CAPOM does not limit the group sizes. There are currently four identified reef anchorages within the Agincourt Reefs area (two Reef Anchorages have been identified at Agincourt No.4 and one each at Agincourt No.1c and No.2).
- The CAPOM identifies the need for site planning to determine the number of allowed permitted moorings and pontoons at Agincourt Reef No.3a.

## **8. Site planning strategies**

### **8.1 Reef Anchorages**

At Agincourt Reef No. 4, two Reef Anchorages have been designated. Participants at Site Planning meetings proposed that the existing southern Reef Anchorage, be moved further south to site 4.2 shown on the attached map as this site was easier to access. The proposal was unanimously supported by all present. Schedule 8 of the CAPOM will be amended to reflect this change.

At Agincourt Reef No. 3a, site 3.1 will be designated as a Reef Anchorage. Schedule 8 of the CAPOM will be amended to reflect this change.

At Agincourt Reef No. 2, the designated Reef Anchorage was found to be unsuitable as the area is exposed and subject to strong currents. The designated Reef Anchorage at Agincourt Reef No.2 will therefore be removed from records. Schedule 8 of the CAPOM will be amended to reflect this change.

At Agincourt Reef No. 2b, the proposed Reef Anchorage was agreed on with a slight reduction of its northern and southern most extent. However, it was agreed that the current Reef Anchorage would be retained.

At Agincourt Reef No. 2d, a small Reef Anchorage was proposed as it was identified by commercial and aquarium fishers as an anchoring area. Participants at site planning meetings agreed that a small Reef Anchorage should be designated off the edge of the reef to accommodate users and protect coral. Schedule 8 of the CAPOM will be amended to reflect this change. However, after field assessment it was decided that there was no room to place an adequate, safe Reef Anchorage at this reef.

At Agincourt Reef No. 1c, the designated Reef Anchorage will need to be re-positioned to the north to accommodate private moorings (site 1.1) while a second Reef Anchorage will be designated towards the southern end of the reef (site 1.2). Schedule 8 of the CAPOM will be amended to reflect this change.

### **8.2 Pontoon**

The CAPOM allows one new pontoon at Agincourt Reef No.4. Site planning at Agincourt Reef 3a indicates that the existing pontoon should be the only one installed at this Location.

### **8.3 Private Moorings**

At Agincourt Reef No. 4, all permitted moorings allowed under the CAPOM have been installed with no new additional moorings allowed at this Location. However, this limit does not include any moorings installed associated with the pontoon at this Reef.

At Agincourt Reef No.3a, the total number of private moorings was to be determined through the site planning exercise. Following discussions at the meeting it was decided that 15 moorings for this reef would be appropriate. Schedule 6 of the CAPOM will be amended to reflect this number.

At Agincourt Reef No.2 two mooring systems are allowed.

At Agincourt Reef No.2b four mooring systems are allowed.

At Agincourt Reef No.2d, there are eight existing permitted moorings exceeding the allowed total by three (see CAPOM, Schedule 6). This mismatch is likely to have occurred due to administrative inaccuracies. Schedule 6 of the CAPOM will be amended to list the total number of allowed moorings as eight.

At Agincourt Reef No.1c, four historical mooring sites were identified during Site Planning meetings. Three operators have 'eligibility' to access a mooring at this Location and other operators expressed interest to obtain a mooring at this Location. Currently, the total number of allowed moorings at this reef is two. Therefore, Schedule 6 of the CAPOM will be amended to list the total number of allowed moorings as three.

## **9. References**

Sweatman, H. Bass, D, Cheal, A, Coleman, G, Miller, I, Ninio, R, Osborne, K, Oxley, W, Ryan, D, Thompson, A, and Tomkins P. 1998, *Long-term Monitoring of the Great Barrier Reef - Status Report Number 3*. Australian Institute of Marine Science. Townsville

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