

UPOLU CAY REEF SITE PLAN

Please note: This document has been superseded and some of the information is now incorrect. It is provided for historical purposes only. The current Site Management Arrangements can be accessed at http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/management/site_management

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. Upolu Cay Reef is 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 Upolu Reef:

- Upolu Reef No Dories Detached (Marine National Park Zone) Special Management Area.

Note 3: In December 2004, the *Cairns Area Plan of Management 1998* was amended. The amendments provided greater flexibility for larger vessels and vessels with large group sizes. At Upolu Cay Reef up to 100 passengers are allowed on a vessel if it is moored at a permitted mooring.

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

Upolu Cay Reef (16-046) is a middle shelf Planar Reef within the Cairns Section at latitude 16°40.5' longitude 145°56'(Figure 1). There is a vegetated sand cay on the western side. The area of the reef is 1210 ha.

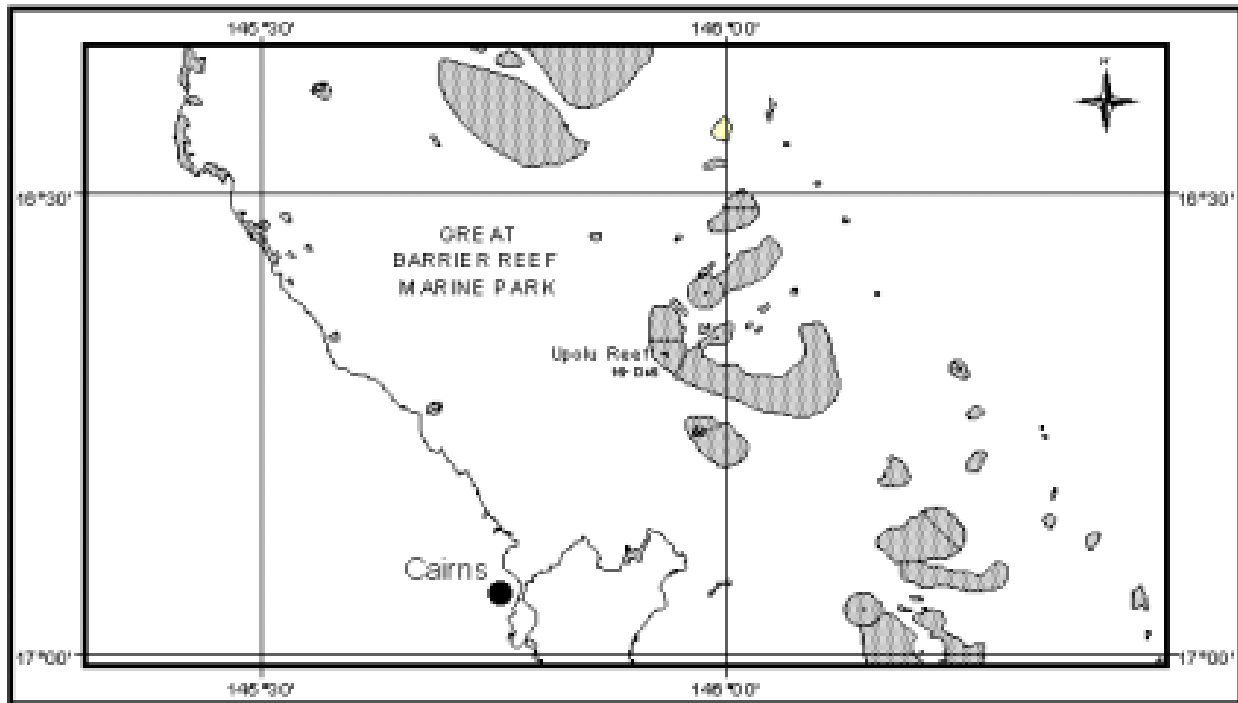


Figure 1: Location of Upolu Reef in the Offshore Cairns Sector

4. Values

4.1 Coral

Upolu Reef is typical of a midshelf Reef with generally moderate to low coral cover. Crown-of-thorn starfish has not significantly impacted this Location and coral areas away from the cay towards the north-eastern part of the reef are significant for coral viewing by commercial tourism operations.

4.2 Seagrass

There have been no official seagrass surveys conducted at Upolu Reef. No seagrass was found during QPWS site surveys.

4.3 Fish spawning

Fish spawning aggregation sites have been identified at Upolu Reef. Further surveys will be undertaken to establish the significance of these sites.

4.4 Commercial

All fishing except trawling is allowed at Upolu Reef. Commercial collecting of coral and shells is permitted within the Habitat Protection Zone. To date, 19 permits have been issued for collecting beche-de-mer, six for collecting trochus shell and 32 for collecting marine aquarium fish.

4.5 Recreation

Upolu Cay and reef are reasonably close to Cairns and therefore easily accessible to local yachts and boats, with a high number of visits on weekends.

4.6 Tourism

Upolu Cay Reef is visited extensively by operators conducting tourism programs. During the 1998/99 year, 46,592 tourists visited Upolu Cay Reef. The unique nature of the existing tourism operations is that they are largely based on motor sailing vessels.

There are currently eight daily permits held by tourist operators, 17 roving permits, nine daily no anchoring permits and 74 permits which are held by members of the Cairns Professional Game Fishing Association.

4.7 Cultural

Upolu Cay and reef are part of the traditional sea country of the Yirrandji, Mandingalbay Yidinji and Gungandji people.

Upolu Cay and Reef are named after the schooner Upolu, owned by William Pitts of Sydney, which struck the reef on Easter Sunday 25 April, in 1886. The crew salvaged stores picked up the day before in Townsville and ferried them to a sand cay three miles away, where they spent the night. The crew set sail for Port Douglas in a lifeboat on 27 March and was eventually picked up by the Bulimba off Cape Grafton on May 4.

4.8 Research and monitoring

Upolu Reef is one of the reefs surveyed every three years as part of the Australian Institute of Marine Science Long-term Monitoring Program. The reef was last surveyed in February 1998.

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 15 referred to Upolu Cay and Reef.

Examples of comments:

'Upolu Cay used to and should be accessible to the residents and visitors for their weekend recreational activities' (submission No 1096)

'Upolu Reef must be regarded as an example of a heavily used location. The current crowding of the anchorage, mooring areas and Cay along with increasing demand has led to detracting of the Reef's amenity'. (submission no 1142)

'It should be noted that there are no more existing accessible sites which provide shelter from prevailing wind and as such Upolu Reef must be viewed as full' (submission no 1142)

Commercial fishermen have elected not to use Upolu Cay as a safe anchorage to avoid conflict with tourist operators (1129)

Upolu Reef is a safe anchorage used mostly by trawl and line fishermen (submission 1093).

6. Issues

6.1 Appropriate balance of use (mooring and anchoring)

There are currently 13 private moorings permitted at Upolu Cay Reef. The majority of these moorings are clustered in two areas, one on the north-west side directly behind the sand cay, the second on the north-east side where deeper water provides for better underwater aesthetic qualities. There is ample opportunity for the Public to access the Location but may find it difficult to access the clustered private mooring areas. Public access to this Location is of essence to provide for equity of use.

6.2 Protection of conservation values

Anchoring or inappropriate mooring placement and design can damage fragile coral and seagrass 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.

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

7. Current management strategies

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

The reefs and waters surrounding Upolu Cay are within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and are zoned as Habitat Protection Zone under the Zoning Plan. The reefs and waters of Upolu Cay are also within the no structures sub-zone. Activities that are permitted within the Habitat Protection Zone include diving, line fishing, trolling, commercial netting and trawling. Limited collecting of no more than five of any species of fish, shell or invertebrate is allowed, collecting over this amount requires a permit.

7.2 Cairns Area Plan of Management

The Cairns Area Plan of Management provides for strategies for protecting 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 Upolu Reef:

- Upolu Cay Reef is identified as a moderate use location. Group size and vessel size limits of 60 persons per vessel apply. Exemptions may apply to eligible operators.
- 13 private moorings are allowed at Upolu Reef. Anchoring of vessels or aircraft is not permitted within a 50-metre radius of a permitted mooring.
- No Reef Anchorages have been identified in the Upolu Reef area (to be identified through site planning).

7.3 Michaelamas Cay and Upolu Cay National Park Management Plan

Upolu Cay National Park is dedicated under the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. The primary purpose of management of the cay is to preserve the natural values of the cay, while allowing for reasonable use. The management plan sets out the considerations, outcomes and strategies that are proposed to form the basis on which day-to-day management decisions are made. The cay and its surrounds will be managed in a co-ordinated and complementary manner.

8. Site planning strategies (refer to figure 2)

8.1 Reef Anchorage

Upolu Cay Reef has a large number of private moorings with limited opportunity for public access. Discussions at the Site planing meeting supported the designation of a Reef Anchorage to the north of the cay (as shown in figure 2) to provide for a sheltered public access area. Schedule 8 of the CAPOM will be amended to reflect the change.

8.2 Private Moorings

No new private moorings are allowed at this Location.

8.3 Public Moorings

The draft site plan proposed a public mooring at the north-eastern section of the reef to allow for reef-based activities such as fishing, snorkelling and diving at this Location without conflicting with tourism operations. The installation of a public mooring in the north-eastern section of Upolu Cay Reef will be investigated.

9. References

Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1998. *Michaelmas and Upolu Cays National Park Management Plan*.

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

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 1998, *Cairns Area Plan of Management*, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Townsville

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 1997, *Submissions to the Cairns Area Plan of Management*, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville (unpublished).

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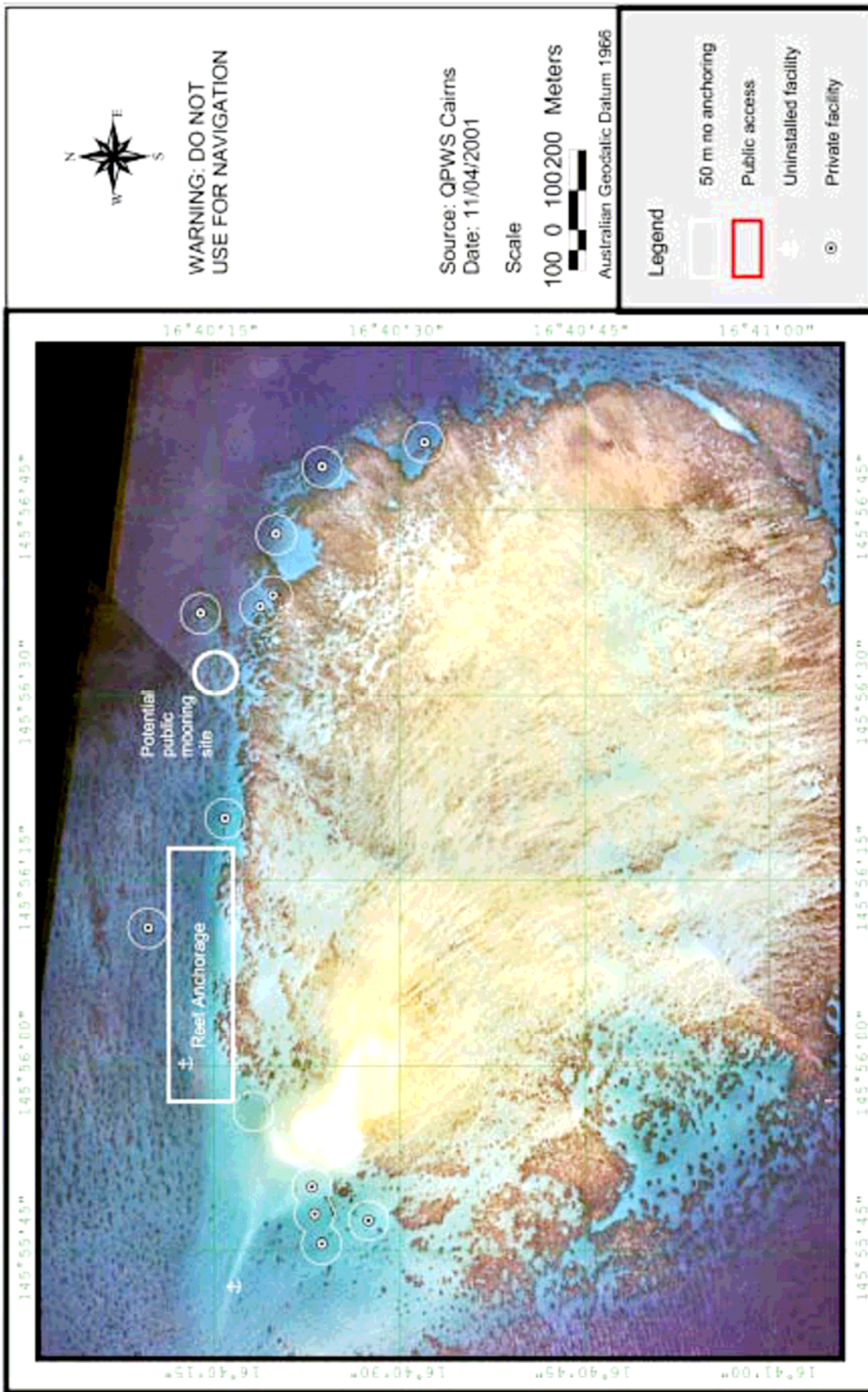


Figure 2: Upolu Cay Reef Site Plan