

FLYNN REEF SITE PLAN

(Updated February 2006)

1. Background

Site planning is an integral part of the Cairns Area Plan of Management. Site planning was 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 identified 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 initially occurred between 1999 and 2000, and the draft Flynn Reef Site Plan was presented to all the interested parties at meetings held in Cairns and Port Douglas from 11 to 14 December 2000. It was then finalised in August 2001.

In 2005, a request was made to move two moorings, and the proposal was publicly advertised in August 2005. No submissions were received. A decision was made in September 2005 and the Flynn Reef Site Plan was subsequently amended.

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 affected 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

Flynn Reef (No. 16-065) is an outer shelf planar reef with an area of 4.2 km². It is located within the Cairns/Cooktown Management Area at latitude 16°44' longitude 146°16.5 (Figure 1).

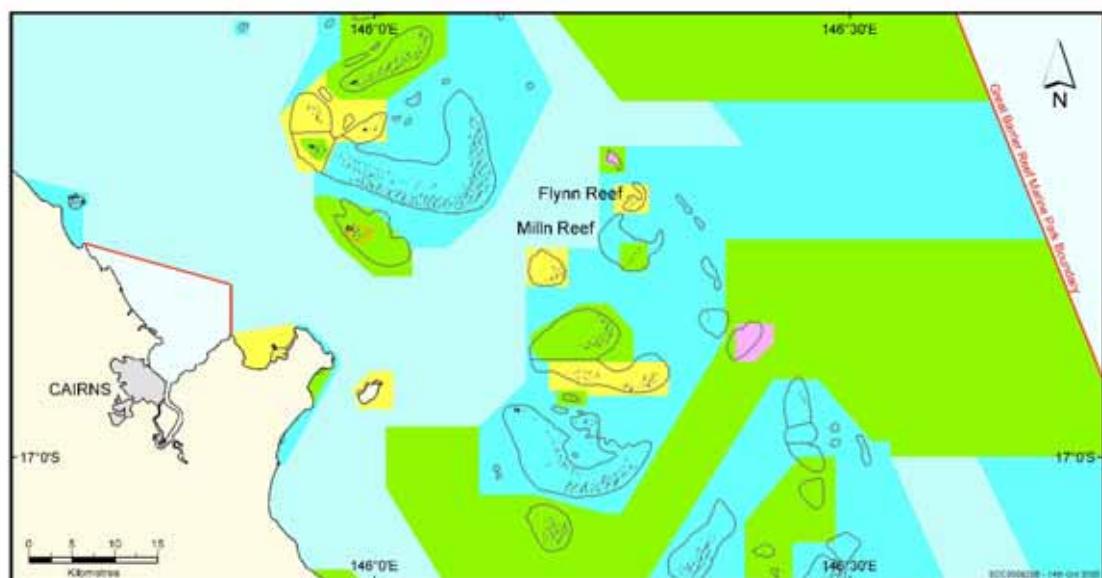


Figure 1: Location of Flynn Reef in the South Offshore Cairns Sector

4. Values

4.1 Coral

Flynn Reef is part of the Australian Institute of Marine Science's Long-term Monitoring Program, and was first surveyed in 1986. Five surveys have been completed since then. Coral cover declined from 1986 to 1995 before showing signs of recovering in 1998. The last survey at the time of writing was undertaken in January 2004 and found that hard coral cover was low to moderate, and fish life on Flynn Reef was also moderate. No crown-of-thorns starfish were present, and coral bleaching was minimal. White syndrome disease was evident on some hard corals on the flank and front of the reef. For more information visit the Australian Institute of Marine Science website (www.aims.gov.au).

4.2 Seagrass

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

4.3 Fish spawning

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

4.4 Commercial

Flynn Reef is important for commercial line and charter fishing.

4.5 Recreation

Flynn Reef has attractive coral and scenery. Due to Flynn Reef's significant distance from the mainland, visitation by recreational boaters is limited. However, in good weather, Flynn Reef is a readily accessible outer reef location.

4.6 Tourism

Flynn Reef is a destination used by tourist operations based in the Cairns region. A few day trip operations utilise the reef and it is a location used by extended liveaboard dive trips and fishing charters. There are seven permitted moorings at Flynn Reef, and tourist operators take approximately 15,000 people to Flynn Reef per year.

4.7 Cultural

Flynn Reef is part of the traditional sea country of the Gungandji Traditional Owners.

4.8 Research and monitoring

Flynn Reef has been surveyed regularly as part of the Australian Institute of Marine Science Long-term Monitoring Program. Flynn Reef was last surveyed in January 2004.

5. Summary of submissions received

During the consultation process for the Cairns Area Plan of Management in 1997 only two submissions received referred to Flynn Reef. Both of these submissions expressed concern about the number of moorings.

No submissions were received during the consultation processes held during August 2005 regarding the change to mooring locations.

6. Issues

6.1 Appropriate balance of use (mooring and anchoring)

There are currently seven permitted private moorings at Flynn Reef. Of these moorings one is owned by an Association and provides access to a large number of members. The available anchoring space at Flynn Reef is limited due to the size of the reef itself, prevailing weather conditions and the number of existing moorings. However, to provide for greater access to the site, a public 'C' class mooring is installed on the southwestern side of the reef.

6.2 Protection of conservation values

Inappropriate mooring placement and design can damage fragile coral communities. However, permits are required for the installation of moorings in the Marine Park and are managed through a joint permitting process between the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Permit conditions control the siting, design and associated impacts of moorings through assessment criteria as specified in the legislation.

Inappropriate anchoring can also damage coral communities, however the installation of a public mooring will help to reduce anchor damage by removing the requirement to anchor.

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 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003

The waters surrounding Flynn Reef are within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and are zoned Conservation Park Zone under the Zoning Plan. Activities allowed include diving, boating, anchoring, photography, limited line fishing, trolling and limited collecting.

In addition to the zoning, two Special Management Areas (SMA) also apply at this location. The Public Appreciation SMA excludes spearfishing, aquaculture and harvest fishing for aquarium fish, coral and beachworms. The One Dories Detached SMA specifies that only one commercial fishing dory may be detached from the primary vessel within the Conservation Park Zone.

7.2 Cairns Area Plan of Management

The Cairns Area Plan of Management (CAPOM) was released by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority in June 1998 and amended in 1999, 2002, 2004 and 2005. The CAPOM provides strategies for protecting the 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 CAPOM relevant to Flynn Reef:

- Flynn Reef has been identified as a moderate use location, group limits of 60 people apply.
- No motorised water sports.
- No anchoring within 50 metres of a permitted mooring.
- Seven private moorings are permitted at Flynn Reef.

8. Site planning strategies

8.1 Reef Anchorage

Site assessment of Flynn Reef found that there was limited scope for a designated Reef Anchorage. Further discussions among interested parties during the Site Planning meeting supported the view that insufficient area was available to designate a Reef Anchorage. Therefore, there will be no designated Reef Anchorage at Flynn Reef.

8.2 Private Moorings

All moorings allowed by the CAPOM at Flynn Reef have been permitted (see Figure 2). Refer to the GBRMPA Moorings Register for more detail.
(http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/tourism/moorings_register.cfm)

8.3 Public Moorings

In view of the unsuitability of the site for a Reef Anchorage, a public ‘C’ class mooring has been installed on the southwestern side of Flynn Reef (see Figure 2).

9. References

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 1998, *Cairns Area Plan of Management* (including Amendment No 1, 2005), 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).

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*.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Moorings Register
(http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/tourism/moorings_register.cfm)

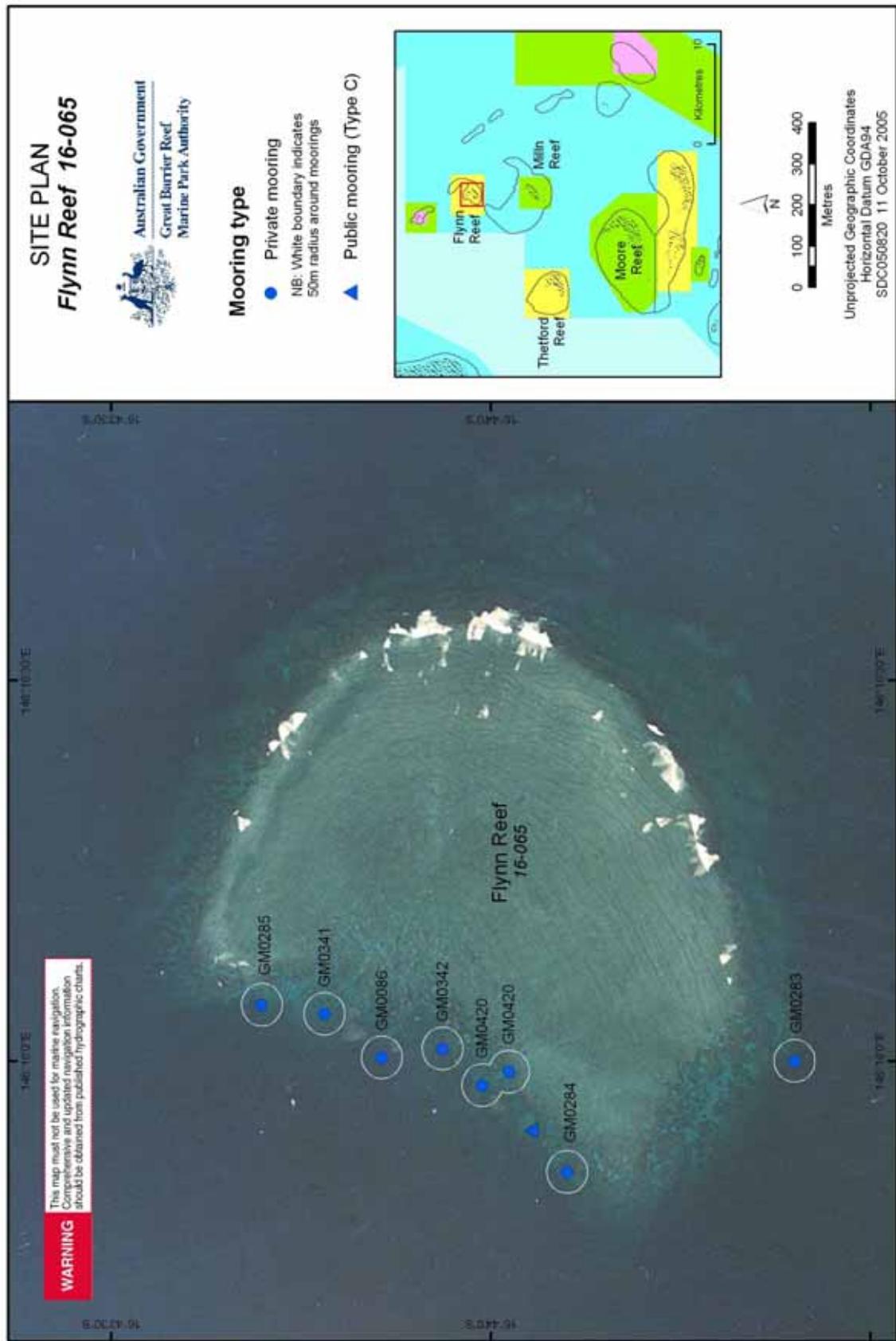


Figure 2: Flynn Reef Site Plan