

Recreation

What does the Outlook Report say about recreation activities in the Great Barrier Reef?

Both coastal residents and visitors to the area visit the Great Barrier Reef for recreation. They are consistently very happy with their visit and would recommend the experience.

Many visits are carried out on recreational vessels owned by people living in the major coastal urban centres such as Cairns, Townsville and Mackay. Most recreation activities are focussed on the natural environment with swimming, boating, fishing and snorkelling the most popular activities. The small size of most private boats means that the majority are not suited to offshore trips. As a result, recreational use is mainly concentrated in inshore areas close to urban centres and the impacts of recreation are mainly localised to these areas.

There have been few studies of the impacts of recreational use on the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem. Apart from fishing, localised but frequent anchor damage to corals and seagrass meadows are likely impacts, along with littering, boat strikes on marine mammals and turtles, and fin damage to corals when snorkelling and diving.

The severity of these impacts is much reduced through reef protection infrastructure such as moorings and markers and the adoption of best practices.

With the population of the Great Barrier Reef catchment predicted to increase from about 1 115 000 to 1 577 000 by 2026, recreational use of the Region is expected to increase. This increasing use can be expected to add to congestion at popular recreation locations and competition for preferred sites.

How effective is the management of recreation activities?

Recreational activities that do not involve fishing can be undertaken in almost all of the Great Barrier Reef Region. In the more intensively used areas (such as offshore Cairns and the Whitsundays), Plans of Management outline detailed measures for reducing the impacts of recreation, including specifying group and vessel size limits and no anchoring areas. Public moorings are provided throughout the Great Barrier Reef at some of the more popular recreational locations. There is a voluntary vessel transit lane in important dugong habitat in the Hinchinbrook area near Cardwell.

The responsibility for managing recreation is spread across a variety of Australian and Queensland Government agencies. Management of recreation is generally indirect (except for recreational fishing) and the Outlook Report recognises that there is limited coordination between management agencies on recreation and little monitoring of recreational impacts.

Threats from recreational use are generally being reduced through zoning plans, plans of management, policies and guidelines such as Responsible Reef Practices, and day-to-day field operations.

Extensive programs such as volunteer groups and Reef Guardian Schools have provided opportunities for wider involvement in management of recreation-related issues.

A survey of households conducted in 2008 estimated that 14.6 million recreational visits were made to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in the previous 12 months by residents living within the catchment.

Recreational use (including recreational fishing) contributed \$153 million to the Australian economy in 2006-07.

About 60 per cent of recreational visitors visit the Great Barrier Reef between one and 10 times in a year, but a small proportion (about 15 per cent) visit the area more than 50 times a year.