

John Brewer Reef (18-075) — Townsville/Whitsunday Management Area

Traditional Owner acknowledgement

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority acknowledges the continuing sea country management and custodianship of the Great Barrier Reef by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners whose rich cultures, heritage values, enduring connections and shared efforts protect the Great Barrier Reef for future generations. In particular we acknowledge the Manbarra Peoples who have a connection to John Brewer Reef.

Target audience: All users (or potential users) of John Brewer Reef and authorised delegates who make decisions regarding permitted use of John Brewer Reef.

Objective

1. To continue to support multiple uses and activities at John Brewer Reef and maintain the site's natural, cultural and social values.

Purpose

2. To maintain the site's current values, separate uses that may potentially conflict and provide guidance for the assessment of future permit applications at the site.

Context

3. This site plan has been developed by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the Authority) under section 7(4) of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*.
4. John Brewer Reef lies east of the Palm Island Group, approximately 70km offshore, north-northeast from Townsville and has important cultural connections to the Manbarra Peoples of Palm Island.
5. The site is used both commercially and recreationally. Uses include anchoring, fishing, tourism, research, snorkelling and diving. See the Site Use section for further information.
6. In December 2019, following public consultation, a permit was granted to the Museum of Underwater Art for the installation of public underwater artwork. The "Coral greenhouse" artwork and associated sculptures were installed in the north-east corner of the reef.
7. Following the installation of the artwork, concerns were raised with the Authority about the impact on existing use. To allow time to understand these impacts, the Marine Park Authority Board (MPA meeting 260) decided no new permissions were to be granted for facilities at John Brewer Reef until an approved site plan was in place.
8. This site plan was prepared after both targeted and public consultation.

Site boundaries

9. The boundaries for this site plan mirror the Conservation Park Zone (yellow zone) CP-18-4052 as per the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003*. Refer to Map 1.

Site Values

Natural values

10. John Brewer Reef is a large, exposed mid-shelf reef, approximately six kilometres wide. The site has moderate (10-30%) hard coral cover however, this varies throughout the site and in some areas coral cover has been estimated at 50-75%.¹ Live coral cover is dominated by bushy and plate/ table varieties (observed in 2019 Reef Health Impact Surveys).

Monitoring and management

11. For over 35 years, John Brewer Reef has been part of the Australian Institute of Marine Science Long-term Monitoring Program. The [Long-Term Monitoring Program](#) monitors coral cover, abundance of crown-of-thorns starfish and fish biodiversity.
12. The [crown-of-thorns starfish control](#) program undertakes crown-of-thorns starfish control activities and monitoring including Reef Health Impact Surveys. Historically the site has experienced a number of outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish. In 2020 there were over 100 vessel days dedicated to crown-of-thorns-starfish control.

Cultural, heritage and community values

Traditional Owner cultural heritage

13. Manbarra Peoples are the Traditional Owners of Palm Island. Manbarra Peoples refer to their sea country as the stingray dreaming story. This story area includes John Brewer Reef. Their connection to John Brewer Reef dates back before the area was covered by water (prior to sea level rise). Through dreamtime stories, connections to the area continue to be passed down from generation to generation.
14. Manbarra Peoples have been involved in the development of this site plan in recognition of their long connection to the area. Their involvement contributes to the Authority's long term strategy for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in protecting values and increasing co-management in the Marine Park.

European cultural heritage

15. John Brewer Reef was named after the *John Brewer*, a troop ship which became grounded on the reef in 1842 and was re-floated on the day of the grounding².
16. John Brewer Reef was the site of the "Four Seasons" floating hotel from 1988-89. Following its closure it was removed from the site³.

Social Values

17. The site has high aesthetic value. The natural values and biodiversity of the site contribute to the site's natural beauty and appeal to a number of user groups.
18. The proximity of the site to Townsville makes it a popular day trip for recreational fishing and snorkelling.

Unexploded Ordnance

19. The deeper water along the northern edge is known to be a site of historic munition dumping (unexploded ordnance) after World War II (refer to Map 1).
20. In 2013 a comprehensive site survey and report was commissioned by the Department of Defence to investigate the extent of the unexploded ordnance. For further information contact the [Department of Defence](#).

Site Use

21. John Brewer Reef is a known location for commercial and recreational fishing and is one of the most accessible Conservation Park Zone (yellow zone) reefs off Townsville.
22. It is also a location for snorkelling and diving. Tourism operators based in Townsville and Ayr use the site for both day trips and as an overnight anchorage.

CAUTION: Only the electronic copy of a document sourced from either GBRMPA's internal [Master Document List](#) or external [eLibrary](#) is controlled. Check the revision number of printed copies against this list to verify currency.

23. The site is an occasional overnight and day anchorage for charter operators, the commercial fishing fleet and cruising yachts.
24. Visitation by both commercial tourism operators and recreational users may increase following the installation of the underwater artwork.
25. Over the period 2010-2019 (inclusive) there has been limited use by the tourism industry with an average annual visitation of ~230 tourists.

Management Arrangements

Zoning

26. John Brewer Reef is within the Conservation Park Zone (yellow zone) (CP-18-4052), in the Townsville/Whitsunday Management Area.

Structures

Public Moorings

27. There are currently two public moorings installed at John Brewer Reef – see Table 1 below and Map 1. These moorings do not require a booking and are available for use by both recreational and commercial users on a first-come-first-served basis.

Table 1: Public moorings at John Brewer Reef

Mooring Class	Colour of band on mooring	Max. vessel length (monohull)	Max. vessel length (multihull)	Latitude (GDA94)	Longitude (GDA94)
B	Green	20m	18m	18°37.331'S	147°03.149'E
C	Blue	25m	22m	18°37.170'S	147°03.368'E

Private Moorings

28. Currently there are two permitted private moorings installed adjacent to the underwater art site (one fore and aft and one single point).
29. Permission to use a private mooring must be sought from the permit holder — the mooring buoy, tackle and point of attachment to the seabed are the permit holder's private property.
30. Permit holder information can be found on [the moorings register](#).

Underwater Art

31. The Coral Greenhouse (refer to Map 2) and associated sculptures are a public facility that can be accessed by all users. The coral greenhouse is 18 metres deep and best suited for divers and experienced snorkelers. The site can be accessed by anchoring onto sandy substrate within the lagoon or using private moorings with permission. For further information visit the [Museum of Underwater Art](#) website.

Small Structures Area

32. A 'small structures area' is in the vicinity of the underwater art site (see Map 2). This area allows access and movement for all users while allowing for the potential future installation of additional small structures. No large structures will be considered for installation in this area.
33. Examples of what would be considered 'small structures' include: snorkel trail, snorkel rest station or small fully submerged sculpture associated with existing permitted underwater art structures. These new small structures will be assessed at a case by case basis. The preference of the Authority is that any additional artwork at John Brewer Reef is placed within the small structures area and is in shallower waters to support access for snorkelers.

34. No further private moorings will be considered in this area. Public moorings may be considered.

Structure free area (northern access to lagoon)

35. A structure free area exists at a commonly used entrance on the northern side of the lagoon (see Map 1). No structures will be considered in this area.
36. This area has been identified as a key access point into the lagoon and keeping this area structure free allows for unobstructed access to be maintained.

Trigger limit on private moorings (site wide)

37. A trigger limit of five private moorings exists across the site. This includes the two currently permitted moorings near the underwater art. Moorings will be allocated on a first come first served basis. Once five permissions are granted, any additional applications for private moorings will require a public information package (including public advertising) as per the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 2019* (Part 3, Division 3, Subdivision B). This cap does not apply to public moorings.
38. Applications for a permission to install a pontoon at the site will also require a public information package (including public advertising) as per the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 2019* (Part 3, Division 3, Subdivision B) and will trigger a review of this site plan.
39. Managing private infrastructure will ensure the site remains accessible to all users.

Levels of tourism visitation (site wide)

Trigger limit on tourism visitation

40. To ensure a balance of use is maintained into the future, a trigger limit for tourism visitation exists at the site.
41. The Authority will monitor tourism visitation data annually and if use exceeds 15,000 visitors annually (~ 280 people per week) for two consecutive years, this site plan will be reviewed in collaboration with Manbarra Peoples and input from regular users. The review of the site plan will evaluate whether existing values and the balance of use has been maintained or if further management action is required.
42. The number of daily operators at the site is not capped.

Separation of uses around the underwater art site

43. The installation of the underwater artwork has the potential to conflict with the well-established fishing and anchoring at the site.
44. All users should be aware and considerate of other users and activities being conducted at the site and are reminded the Marine Park is multiple use area.
45. Users may anchor in the sandy area around the artwork with due care (refer to [responsible reef practices](#)). Note, some smaller structures can be found up to 50 metres from the greenhouse.
46. Consideration was given to the creation of a legislated Special Management Area to separate the minor conflicting uses at the site, however this option is not considered to be required at this time.

Access for larger vessels

47. All vessels less than 50 metres in overall length may anchor within the John Brewer Reef site, provided [responsible reef practices](#) for anchoring and mooring are followed.
48. Operators of larger vessels are reminded that the area around the artwork site is narrow and vessels should take care when accessing the area to ensure coral is not damaged.

CAUTION: Only the electronic copy of a document sourced from either GBRMPA's internal [Master Document List](#) or external [eLibrary](#) is controlled. Check the revision number of printed copies against this list to verify currency.

Superyachts

49. Recreational *superyachts* can access and anchor within the vicinity of John Brewer Reef, provided [responsible reef practices](#) are followed.
50. Commercial *superyachts* less than 50 metres in *overall length* are able to access and anchor at John Brewer Reef, provided permit conditions and [responsible reef practices](#) are followed.
51. Commercial *superyachts* 50 metres and above in *overall length* must remain in the General Use Zone (light blue zone) or the designated shipping area and use their tender/s to access the Conservation Park Zone (yellow zone).

Cruise ships

52. Cruise ships must remain in the General Use Zone (light blue zone) or the designated shipping area and use their tender/s to access the Conservation Park Zone (yellow zone).

Aircraft operations

53. Aircraft operations at John Brewer Reef are limited. The Authority will monitor aircraft activity at the site and if use increases, appropriate management options will be explored as required.

Related legislation

[Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975](#)

[Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 2019](#)

[Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003](#)

Definitions

Overall length as per the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 2019* is defined as 110 per cent of the length shown on the vessel's load-line certification. If the overall length of a vessel cannot be worked out using this method it is the distance between a vertical line passing through a point that is the foremost part of the stem, and the vertical line passing through a point that is the aftermost part of the stern.

Superyacht as per the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 2019* is defined as a high-value, luxury sailing or motor vessel in use for sport or pleasure (whether for private or commercial use).

Further information

Assistant Director Planning
Reef Protection Branch
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
PO Box 1379
TOWNSVILLE QLD 4810
AUSTRALIA
Telephone/phone: +61 7 4750 0700
Email: policyandplanning@gbmpa.gov.au
Web: www.gbmpa.gov.au

References/ related material

1. Australian Institute of Marine Science, 2020, John Brewer Reef, viewed 14/10/2020, <http://apps.aims.gov.au/reef-monitoring/reef/18075S>
2. Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, View Shipwreck - John Brewer, viewed 14/10/2020, <http://www.environment.gov.au/shipwreck/public/wreck/wreck.do?key=2685>
3. Harriot, V., Saenger, P. (1995) The John Brewer Reef floating hotel: a case-study in marine environmental monitoring: proceedings of a GBRMPA workshop reviewing the environmental monitoring program, held in Townsville, Australia in December 1989, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville.

Document control information

Approved by: Chief Executive Officer

Approved date: 26-Jun-2021;

Last reviewed: NA

Next review: 26-Jun-2026

Created:

Custodian: Director, Policy and Planning

Replaces: New

CAUTION: Only the electronic copy of a document sourced from either GBRMPA's internal '[Master Document List](#)' or external '[eLibrary](#)' is controlled. Check the revision number of printed copies against this list to verify currency.

SITE PLAN

GBRMPA document No: 100534

Revision: 0

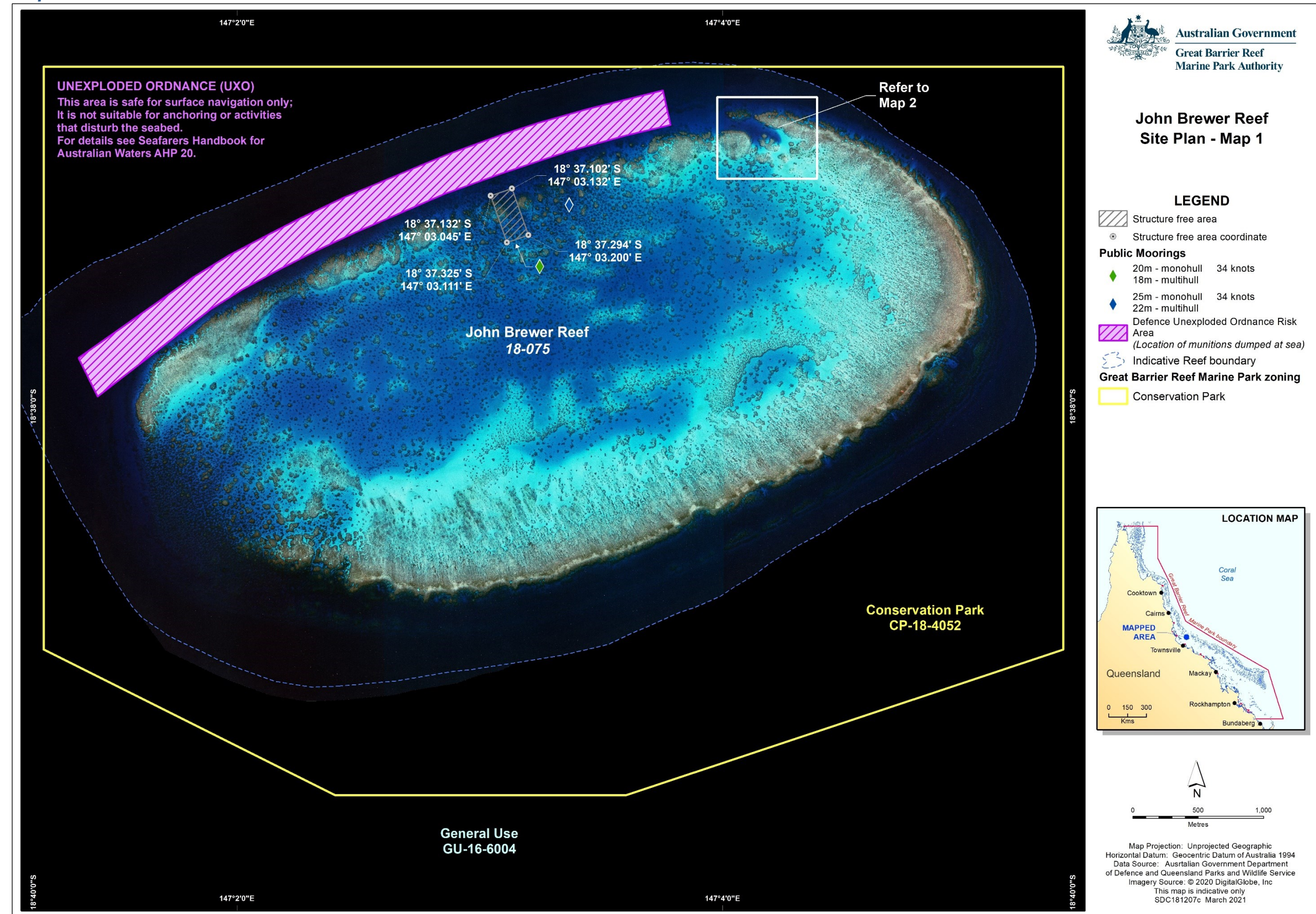
Page 6 of 8

Document originator: Director, Policy and Planning

Approved by CEO, GBRMPA: 26-Jun-2021

Next review date: 26-Jun-2026

Map 1



CAUTION: Only the electronic copy of a document sourced from either GBRMPA's internal [Master Document List](#) or external [eLibrary](#) is controlled. Check the revision number of printed copies against this list to verify currency.

Map 2

