

## Policy on Fish Aggregating Devices and Artificial Reefs

July 2023 (v.0)

The Reef 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 have and are protecting the Reef for future generations.

**Objective:** To provide a summary of information and evidence used in developing the Policy on Fish Aggregating Devices and Artificial Reefs (2023).

### 1. Statutory Framework

1. This Information Sheet is supporting information to the [Policy on Fish Aggregating Devices and Artificial Reefs \(2023\)](#)<sup>1</sup>.
2. This Information Sheet is not a policy under section 7(4) of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 (Cth)* ('*Marine Park Act (Cth)*').

### 2. Background

3. The [Environment Protection \(Sea Dumping\) Act 1981 \(Cth\)](#) regulates the placement of artificial reefs within Australian waters. In the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (the Marine Park), the management of artificial reefs has been delegated to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (Reef Authority). As such, the Reef Authority may use its capacity to prepare and publish a policy under section 7(4) of the *Marine Park Act (Cth)* to manage matters in the Marine Park, such as artificial reefs.
4. In October 2020, the Marine Park Authority Board (MPA 2020-263-07) revoked the Guidelines for the management of artificial reefs in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (2011). At the same time, the Board approved an interim policy position that no fish aggregating devices (FAD) or artificial reefs are to be deployed in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park until a more contemporary policy was developed (MPA 2020-263-07).
5. In developing a new policy, several factors and lines of evidence were used, including a [scientific literature review](#) (O2 Marine 2021). The analysis considered the benefits and risks of fish aggregating devices and artificial reefs against the main object of the *Marine Park Act (Cth)* and the outstanding universal values of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. A summary of the factors and lines of evidence used to develop the new policy is included in paragraphs 6 to 17 below.

### 3. Lines of evidence

6. The policy outcomes on FAD and artificial reefs must be commensurate with the Reef Authority's management obligations. That is, 'the main object of the Marine Park Act is to provide for the long-term protection and conservation of the environment, biodiversity and heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Region'. Other objects of the Marine Park Act apply 'so far as is consistent with the main object'. Examples of other obligations include world heritage obligations, the corporate plan and [Blueprint for Resilience](#).
7. The concept and principles of ecologically sustainable use, which includes the principle of inter-generational equity (sections 3AA and 3AB of the Marine Park Act), apply to how the Reef Authority manages threats and uses in the Marine Park.

<sup>1</sup> GBRMPA, Policy on Fish Aggregating Devices and Artificial Reefs (2023). This policy is made under section 7(4) of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 (Cth)*.

8. The precautionary principle has been applied in developing the Reef Authority's policy outcomes (section 3AB Marine Park Act).
9. There are well over 3000 natural reefs and shoals in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area which support fish and most are available for fishing, snorkelling and/or diving.
10. Resilience management prioritises management efforts that build the ecosystem resilience of the Reef (refer [Blueprint for Resilience](#)).
11. Historically, the Reef Authority has granted few permissions for facilities that may constitute a FAD or artificial reef. Contemporary proposals to do with FAD or artificial reefs often relate to the intention to enhance fishing opportunities, which may be due to declines in fish stocks. This speaks, in part, to management failures best addressed by improvements in management rather than by creating more opportunities to extract fish more easily.
12. The [Outlook Report 2019](#) outlines that many Marine Park values (for example, including some fished species and their habitats) are in poor and deteriorating condition. Fishing and illegal fishing are already identified as high and very high risks to Marine Park values and indicative of the need for improved management. The management effectiveness of fishing is generally assessed as stable, however, the outcomes achieved are poor.
13. Anecdotal evidence from marine resource managers elsewhere in Australia speaks to significant, ongoing resource burdens associated with managing FAD or artificial reefs. A risk-based approach to management requires applying the Reef Authority's limited ongoing management resources towards more efficiently addressing existing threats to Marine Park values that are within our control.
14. To harness the best available science, in 2020, the Reef Authority commissioned a [scientific literature review](#) (O2 Marine 2021) on FAD and artificial reefs. The review specifically considered the alignment of FAD and artificial reefs with the objects of the Marine Park Act. Overall, the scientific literature concludes that neither FAD nor artificial reefs will help achieve the objects of the Marine Park Act.
15. The literature points to strong dependencies between the range of potential positive and negative impacts from these facilities and adequate mitigating actions and controls. In over 550 studies reviewed, none successfully applied the required mitigating actions and controls.
16. Artificial reefs — the science identifies that artificial reefs pose many potential high- and moderate- level negative impacts on the values of Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Multiple potential high- and moderate-level benefits of artificial reefs to Marine Park values do not offset these potential risks. Many pros and cons of artificial reefs assessed against the subordinate objects of the Marine Park Act were also identified.
17. Fish aggregating devices — the science identifies that FAD pose multiple potential extreme-, high- and moderate- risks to the values of Great Barrier Reef. The few high-level potential benefits to Marine Park values do not offset these potential risks. Many pros and cons assessed against the subordinate objects of the Marine Park Act were also identified.

## 4. References

O2 Marine, 2021. [Fish Aggregating Devices and Artificial Reefs: literature review of benefits and negative impacts for the Great Barrier Reef](#). Report to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, 2017. [Great Barrier Reef Blueprint for resilience](#), GBRMPA, Townsville.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, 2019. [Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2019](#) GBRMPA, Townsville.

## 5. Further information

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