

LOW ISLES MANAGEMENT PLAN
for Low Islets (Low Island & Woody Island) and Reef

February 1993

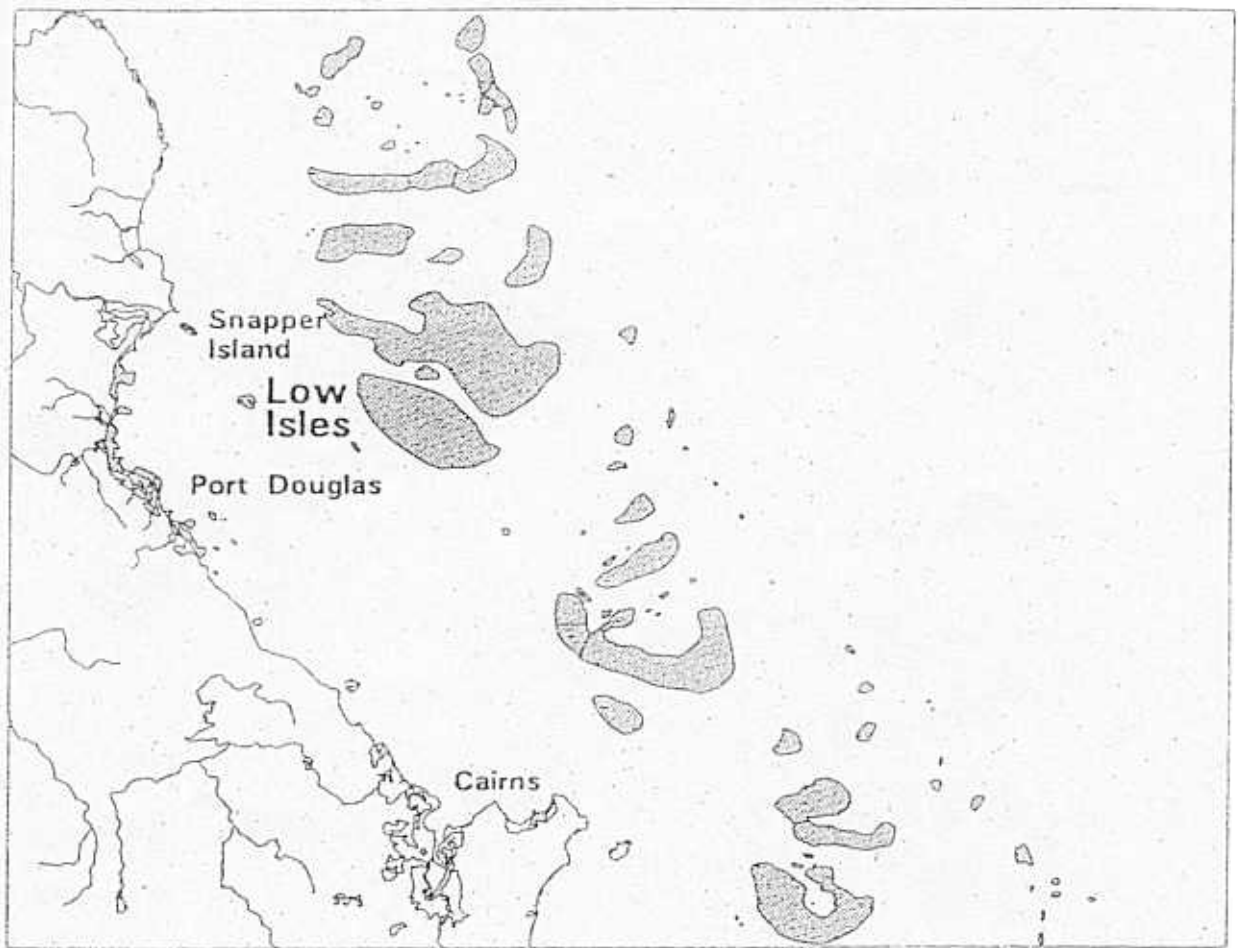


Figure 1: Low Isles Locality Map

Marine Parks



Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park
Authority



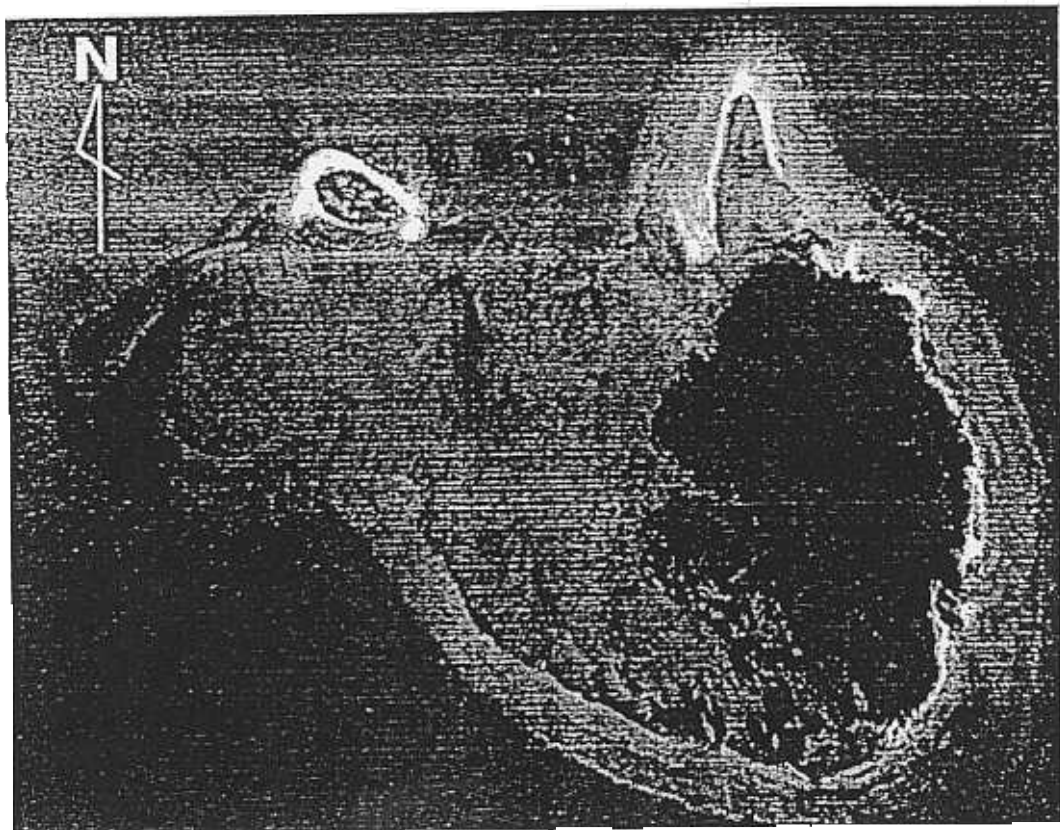
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0 500 m

Figure 2: Low Islets

Approximate scale

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GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AUTHORITY

GOAL AND AIMS

GOAL

To provide for the protection, wise use, understanding and enjoyment of the Great Barrier Reef in perpetuity through the care and development of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

AIMS

These aims are subordinate to the primary goal and must be read in conjunction with it and with each other.

- To protect the natural qualities of the Great Barrier Reef, while providing for reasonable use of the Reef Region.
- To involve the community meaningfully in the care and development of the Marine Park.
- To achieve competence and fairness in the care and development of the Marine Park through the conduct of research, and the deliberate acquisition, use and dissemination of relevant information from research and other sources.
- To provide for economic development consistent with meeting the goal and other aims of the Authority.
- To achieve management of the Marine Park primarily through the community's commitment to the protection of the Great Barrier Reef and its understanding and acceptance of the provisions of zoning, regulations and management practices.
- To minimise costs of caring for and developing the Marine Park consistent with meeting the goal and other aims of the Authority.
- To minimise regulation of, and interference in, human activities, consistent with meeting the goal and other aims of the Authority.
- To achieve its goal and other aims by employing people of high calibre, assisting them to reach their full potential, providing a rewarding, useful and caring work environment and encouraging them to pursue relevant training and development opportunities.
- To make the Authority's expertise available nationally and internationally.
- To adapt actively the Marine Park and the operations of the Authority to changing circumstances.

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INTRODUCTION

Situated 15km offshore from Port Douglas, Low Islets (see maps on and inside front cover), comprise a leeward vegetated sand cay (Low Island, 2.8 hectares) and a mangrove cay (Woody Island, 45 hectares) on a 200 hectare reef platform. It is easily accessible from Port Douglas and other mainland centres with established transport services.

The unique combination of natural, heritage and scientific features make Low Islets and Reef one of the most important sites in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. It is these unique features that attract local, national and international visitors. This demand is expected to increase as a result of population growth in the surrounding areas and through tourism growth. Increasing use of Low Isles requires management strategies to protect the area's values and prevent conflict between different groups with interests in the site.

Low Islets are managed as a protected area under complementary Commonwealth and State legislation including:

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act (1975), Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations and the Cairns Section Zoning Plans.

Marine Parks Act (1982), Marine Parks Regulations (1990) and the Marine Parks (Cairns Plan) Order 1992 (referred to here as the Cairns Marine Parks Zoning Plans).

Australian Heritage Commission Act (1975).

Under these Acts, park management agencies are obliged to:

conserve the area;

protect natural values including biological diversity and endangered or threatened species;

protect cultural and heritage values; and

provide for reasonable use by considering existing users; separating conflicting uses; and allowing a range of use opportunities.

Low Isles is within the "National Park Zone" under the *Cairns Section Zoning Plan* and *Cairns Marine Park Plan*. This zone provides protection for all species of animals and plants and provides opportunities for reasonable use. A surrounding buffer zone allows trolling for pelagic species. Under the *Cairns Section Zoning Plan*, the Authority may prepare management plans that are more detailed than the Zoning Plan for the management of particular activities and for the use of areas within the *Cairns Section*.

A Draft Low Isles Management Plan was developed in 1989 to meet these obligations, but was not formally adopted. Interest groups and members of the public generally supported the main provisions of the plan and these have been used to manage Low Islets and Reef in the intervening period. The provisions of the draft plan include:

limits on the numbers (up to a peak of about 300) people on Low Isles at any one time) and types of visitors and activities;

identification of separate areas for specific uses; and

limits to protect the environmental values of the area including recognition of the effects of different uses on one another.

As this plan is a policy document, nothing in this plan is intended to prevent the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority or the Department of Environment and Heritage, or their delegates, from allowing an activity that is consistent with the objectives of this plan.

VALUES

The outstanding values that make Low Isles unique are

Nature conservation values representative of low wooded islands. These include typical geomorphic features such as reef flat, lagoon, windward shingle cay, mangrove forest, and leeward vegetated sand cay. The area supports a diverse range of flora and fauna and several discrete habitats. Low Isles is also the southern most of the forty-six low wooded islands of this type on the Great Barrier Reef. Woody Island, the windward shingle cay, is a complex of reef, mangrove and seagrass habitats and is also a significant bird nesting site.

Cultural values are very high as Low Isles is part of a geographic complex bearing the marks of the Dreaming to local Aborigines. Low Isles and Snapper Island bear the same name: "Minya Gambyi". Traditional folklore holds that the islands, the mouth of the Daintree ("Binda") and Cape Kimberley ("Baku") were originally together but become separated during the Dreamtime. Each site was traditionally visited to maintain tribal contact with the Dreaming. There is a legend that a down welling stream inland from Mossman Gorge exists undersea near Low Isles. Low Isles was used for traditional hunting and gathering, but Torres Imperial Pigeons were a local totem and not collected.

Low Isles could have high value as a site for interpreting traditional culture and activities in a range of habitats. Local Aborigines maintain a strong interest in Low Isles and associated sites such as Snapper Island.

Heritage values arising from the Low Isles lighthouse and early use as a research base. Built in 1878, the lighthouse has been an important navigational aid to shipping along the inner Great Barrier Reef shipping route and is listed on the Register of the National Estate as a significant part of Australia's cultural heritage. The unusual combination of vegetation on Low Island derives from and reflects the long human habitation.

Socio-economic values of Low Isles include tourism and private leisure, research and official purposes (lighthouse and meteorological station). Commercial fishing boats, charter and tourist vessels, cruising and local yachts and private boats regularly use the anchorage. The reef is an important pelagic bait netting site for local commercial fishers.

Scientific values of Low Isles derive from it's diversity of natural features and it's being the site of the 1928-29 Great Barrier Reef Expedition. It is one of the few coral reefs in the world for which a long series of data exists and presents an unusual and valuable opportunity for continuing long term studies.



CURRENT AND FUTURE USE

Low Isles is a major destination for tourism, the main fishing fleet anchorage immediately north of Cairns, an important bait netting site, a well known cruising yacht anchorage, an important local recreational site and a very significant scientific research site.

The diversity and level of use at Low Isles is illustrated by the numbers and types of vessels sighted by Coastwatch aerial surveillance over about two years:

Number of flights with sightings		199			
Total vessels seen		1440			
Average number of vessels seen per flight		7.2			
Private leisure	Dinghy	Tourist	Game fishing	Comm. Fishing	Aircraft
642	86	194	15	503	-

- Figures include all flights where vessel(s) were sighted at mooring during transect and sector plot flights.
- Figures do not include flights where no vessel(s) were sighted during transect and sector plot flights.
- This data represents a sample of actual use but is indicative of the types of vessels seen and the levels of use by different groups.
- Use is understated as sightings are during daylight and do not adequately reflect the high level of use as an overnight anchorage by private pleasure craft and commercial fishing vessels.

The main user groups, their patterns and characteristics of use now are:

Commercial Fishing

Commercial fishing boats use the anchorage overnight throughout any week, tending to arrive in the evening and depart in the early morning. Many commercial fishing boats are relatively small vessels that tend to anchor well into the anchorage. The numbers vary widely depending on season, weather and where fishing is best in the region. The island is rarely visited. The buffer zone allows for bait netting.

Commercial trawlers tend to arrive in the early morning and lay over on the fringes of the anchorage during the day, before departing for overnight trawling in the late afternoon. Numbers at any one time may vary from none to 30 depending on season and weather. Island use is rare.

Leisure

Four regular tourism operations, carrying from 20 to 156 passengers, are permitted to access Low Isles daily. Regular tourism operations could carry up to 234 persons to the island at the same or different times. This is potentially 14 persons per day more than the maximum which was allowed to this group under the draft Low Isles Management Plan. They now usually arrive and depart between 10.00 am and 4.00 pm, but there are no permit requirements tying any regular operation to particular times, and some operations are now trialling midday to late afternoon visits. Occasional night time visits are permitted for "special events", however regular night operations have not been permitted to minimise disturbance to other site users. Some programs don't operate every day, even if weather allows. Many of their passengers visit the island for between a half and three hours. Visitors are usually discretely supervised, and some organised beach or reef walking groups are constantly supervised. Regular tourism operations rarely carry full permitted numbers for more than a few days each year during the peak season. Consequently, actual use is estimated to be between 50 - 60% of the potential permitted use. Demand is expected to rise much closer to the permitted capacity for longer periods as tourism increases.

Five irregular tourism operations, with passenger capacities from 8 to 34 passengers, are permitted to access Low Isles up to twice per week. Some of these vessels time their use to be before and after the main regular operations arrive. These boats usually anchor in sand close to the island. Passengers visit the island, often in fairly small groups. Some irregular operations are seeking to increase their permitted frequency of visits.

Roving tourism operations have permitted access of once per month or less - 11 vessels with passenger capacities of between 6 and 30 passengers are permitted. However, most island use by this group seems to occur before or after the main regular tourism use. Most anchoring is close to the island in sand. Roving tourism use may increase as tourism grows.

Local recreational yachts mainly use Low Isles on weekends and overnight as an anchorage (usually on the far side of the access channel to the island). Crews rarely visit the island.

Visiting cruising yachts arrive and depart throughout the day and week. Some may stay for several days. Some access the island, especially when the main tourism operations aren't in the area. Most yachts anchor close to the island. Typically 4, and up to 20 yachts, use the area each night.

Private local boats are reputed to use the area less than in the past, but use appears to have stabilised over the last few years. Most private local boats are mainly for recreational fishing, and use Low Isles as an anchorage or rest-point in passage to or from fishing grounds - mainly on weekends, and before or after the main tourism use. Anchoring is usually in sand close to the island. Private local boating clubs and lightstation staff now operate a recorded weather-status telephone service used by private and commercial boating throughout the region.

Official purposes

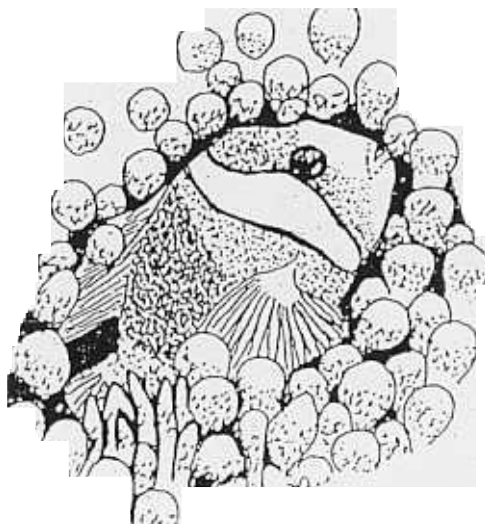
The lightstation operated by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) is to be automated from 1 July 1993. The consequent removal of staff from Low Isles has major implications for future management of the areas as discussed under 'Effects of Use'. The continuing need for a navigational mark is now satisfied by an automatic solar powered aid to navigation. This represents a significant change in the evolution of the functions of the lightstation.

The Australian Bureau of Meteorology collects regular weather data from Low Isles. Currently recording is through lightstation staff but future recording may be automated.

Research

Researchers use Low Isles for various studies, including some related to the 1928 - 29 scientific expedition. Low Isles has immense potential for long-term research based around earlier work, its natural values and the relative ease of access to it. Such research could play a valuable role in understanding issues affecting the entire Great Barrier Reef Region.

The known effects of use that require management are set out in the next section



EFFECTS OF USE

Overall, the different uses of Low Isles have remained steady for a number of years and conflicts have been minimised because:

- the permanent official presence on Low Isles discourages unacceptable activities
- limits on the number of visitors and types of activities on permitted tourism programs; and
- the different times and interests of different groups of users disperse use across time and enable flexibility in accommodating other users.

Actual and potential effects of use on the values of the area are:

Nature conservation values

Site visits and anecdotal evidence suggest the current actual level of use is within the local environment's sustainable capacity. However, peak levels of use during exceptionally high or low tides, appear to be resulting in small-scale ecological damage that may degrade the site over time:

- Most users consulted have given the opinion that the current level of use at Low Isles is 'about right';
- Lighthouse personnel, tourism operations owners and staff, and visiting biologists have expressed concern that:
 - damage such as trampling of coral occurs on days when there are large groups of tourists and when tides are low; foreshore vegetation tends to suffer on days when tides are high;
 - while the staff of most operations make an effort to enforce zoning requirements, the number of visitors is resulting in 'souveniring' (eg taking shells) and other damaging activities;
- Re-vegetation and site-hardening works have already been required to re-establish foreshore vegetation.

Future levels of use will more regularly tend toward current maximum permitted use and will have to be reduced or adapted to discourage, minimise or prevent incremental environmental damage.

The existing full time official presence heavily influences levels and types of use. Loss of that presence without replacement could lead to undesirable changes in use, causing serious destruction of natural and heritage values. The automation of the lightstation will require a transition to a new management system over the next year. The change in management arrangements is likely to have some risk of unacceptable changes in use until knowledge of the new arrangements and their impact upon use become widely known.

Socio-economic values

Effects of uses upon each other include:

Commercial trawlers have already moved to the fringes of the anchorage as tourism use has grown, but are affected by leisure users (mainly private yachts and some tourism vessels) transiting the main anchorage area for trawlers, and by large motor vessels accelerating too close to the anchorage area.

Commercial fishing boats may have their use of the anchorage for overnight resting affected by levels of noise and vessel wakes the main problems. There is no evidence that other use is affecting bait netting, although this practice is not welcomed by other users who consider it is inconsistent with conservation of the area.

Regular tourism operations influence other patterns of use, and each other, because their use is regular and because of the numbers of visitors they carry. The impacts of regular tourism operations on other users would greatly increase if the time band from 10.00 AM to 4.00 PM in which most activities are now conducted were to change, or visitor numbers allowed to increase. Impacts could include:

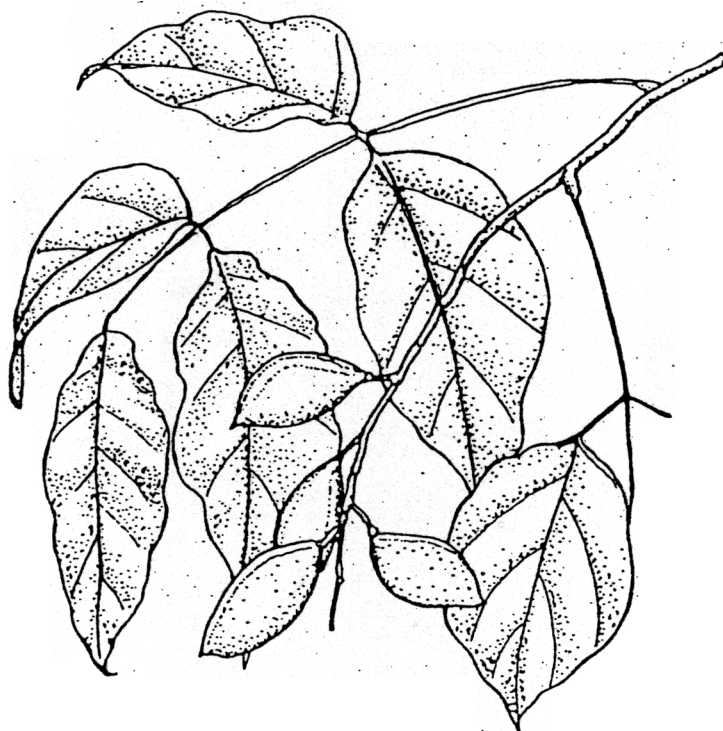
- larger numbers of visitors during times now regarded as 'quiet' and hence attractive to users seeking less crowded use of Low Isles, such as private yachts, local boats and many customers of irregular and roving operations; and
- disturbance of other anchored vessels, especially if access regularly occurs during evenings, at night or in the early morning.

Irregular tourism operators and roving tourism operators may affect other users by their visitor numbers, or by their vessels transiting the anchorage. Neither impact appears to be significant yet because use is dispersed over time and there is a ceiling on the total number of permitted tourists.

Local and visiting yachts and private boats are prone to disturbance by other users, especially those with large numbers of visitors. Disturbance appears to have limited levels of use by local yachts and private boats. Most private use now coincides with times of the day and week when other visitors, especially those in relatively large groups, are lowest.

Scientific values

The value of Low Isles for scientific research of regional and global significance could be jeopardised unless localised nutrient discharge from most sources, including visiting vessels and possibly island facilities, is controlled. Substantially increased use by any group could directly limit further research opportunities through increased risks of significantly altering the overall environment.



MANAGEMENT PURPOSES

In consideration of the values, uses and effects of use, Low Isles will be managed to:

Protect and conserve the environment, including protection and conservation of the Low Isles lightstation;

Maintain navigational and safe anchorage values of the area

Maintain and enhance the quality of natural, cultural and heritage-associated experiences available to visitors;

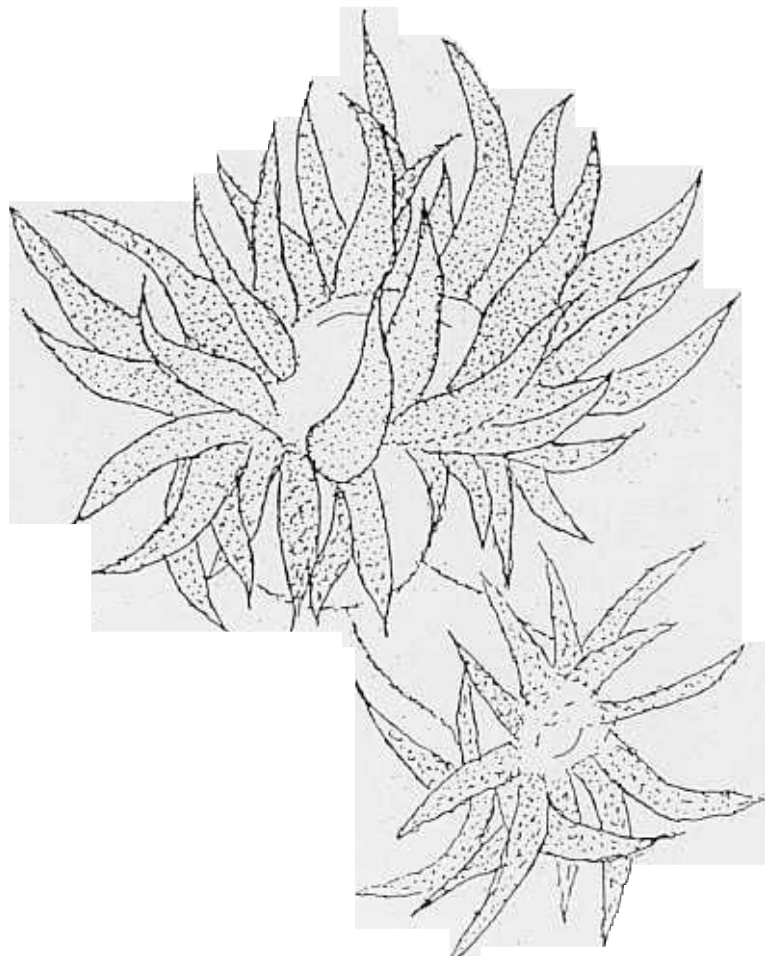
Promote wider appreciation and responsibility for the Great Barrier Reef and the need for conservation;

Encourage research, with particular emphasis on projects which build on the body of previous scientific research at the site;

Provide for educational use focussed on the natural, cultural and heritage values of the area and

Encourage and assist the involvement of the local community and other interests in the management of Low Isles.

The main strategies to achieve these purposes are shown in Appendix 1



IMPLEMENTATION

This Management Plan will be implemented by the following strategies:

- A. Resolving future on-site management with AMSA, the local community and users.
 - 1.1 *Permanent on-site manager is needed.*
- B. Concurrently with A, developing codes of practice, voluntary training and monitoring programs:
 - 1.2 *User codes of practice;*
 - 1.3 *Accredited guide training;*
 - 1.4 *Monitoring program.*
- C. Implementing the Area to be Avoided by Aircraft
 - 1.5 *Aircraft access below 915m by permit only to the Low Isles National Park and Buffer Zones airspace;*
 - *Aircraft overflight may be permitted.*
 - *Aircraft may not land in the SMA unless for official purposes.*
- D. Implementing the Special Management Area (SMA).
 - 1.6 *SMA over the most-used area, with the following strategies implemented through the SMA:*
 - 2.1 *40m size limit on vessels in SMA;*
 - 2.2 *Limits on numbers of visitors per day;*
 - 2.3 *Only limited education programs in SMA;*
 - 2.4 *Only limited research in SMA;*
 - 2.5 *No night access to islands;*
 - 2.6 *Limits on night water activities;*
 - 2.7 *No anchoring on coral areas;*
 - 2.8 *Motorised water activities prohibited;*
 - 2.9 *No waste discharge in inner anchorage;*
 - 2.10 *Limit on new private structures in SMA;*
 - 2.11 *No established food facilities on Low Island;*
 - 2.12 *No major structural changes to present buildings;*
 - 2.13 *6 knot speed limit in SMA.*
- E. The following strategies may be implemented once an SMA is declared and an on-site manager is appointed:
 - 2.14 *Monitor levels of private vessel use and introduce bookings when necessary;*
 - 2.15 *Limited education program quota;*
 - 2.16 *Roving tourism use by bookings;*
 - 2.17 *Limited night tourism in SMA;*
 - 2.18 *Managing unacceptable conduct.*
- F. The following strategies will be applied when applications for permits to use areas of Low Isles outside the SMA are assessed:
 - 1.7 *Limited access to Woody Island;*
 - 1.8 *Limited further development of the area;*
 - 1.9 *Limited effect of new activities on SMA;*
 - 1.10 *Limits on cruise ships;*
 - 1.11 *Long-term anchorage reserve.*

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING LOW ISLES

The strategies below are to be read with the *Cairns Section Zoning Plans* and the Cairns Marine Park Zoning Plans, the provisions of which are binding on this Management Plan.

The strategies are arranged for: - the Low Isles National Park and Buffer Zones as defined in the Zoning Plans, and the proposed Low Isles Special Management Area as shown in figure 3.

1. Low Isles National Park and Buffer Zones

Strategy	Values affected	Rationale	Discussion
<p>1.1 <u>Permanent on-site manager needed</u> Low Isles require a permanent on-site management presence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	Current uses, the natural and built environment are susceptible to disturbance or damage by activities and levels of use unless managed by an on-site presence.	The effective implementation of this plan is substantially dependant on an on-site management presence.
<p>1.2 <u>User Codes of practice:</u> Codes of practice should be developed by all groups regularly using Low Isles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	Voluntary codes of practice to establish clear understanding of preferred behaviour and standards can ensure most users 'do the right thing' by choice.	Codes of practice could be developed with commercial fishing, tourism, local boating and local yachting interests to ensure all parties are agreed on acceptable conduct.
<p>1.3 <u>Accredited guide training:</u> A voluntary system of accredited guide training should be established to develop and promote effective understanding and use of Low Isles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	Enhanced visitor enjoyment and reduced effects of use can be achieved by a voluntary training and accreditation system for persons supervising visitors or use, eg reef-walking.	An accredited guide training system should be non-compulsory, developed with direct users and for long-term management by local users.
<p>1.4 <u>Monitoring program</u> Effects of use will be monitored and users advised about the conduct of activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	Effects of use can be managed by changes to how activities are conducted. Local users could effectively determine a need for change by a well-established monitoring rationale.	The program could be developed and managed locally with official assistance and oversight. Monitoring tasks must be clear, capable of aggregation for results and involve minimal time.
<p>1.5 <u>Permitted aircraft access only</u> • An Area to be Avoided by Aircraft (ATBAA) will be declared over the Low Isles National Park and Buffer Zones. • Permits may be issued for occasional overflights of the area under 915 m for: - research or official purposes : all year; - filming: between April and September. • Permits may be issued for occasional access to: - the SMA: for official purposes only; - elsewhere: for all other purposes,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bird nesting on Woody Island is prone to disturbance by aircraft, especially during the main breeding season from October to March. • Use of Low Isles for leisure or as a rest anchorage could be compromised by aircraft overflight. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These arrangements allow for limited use of aircraft with minimal disruption to natural processes and other use. • There are two existing permits for access by aircraft - one for tourism and one for filming. These permits may be re-issued to the current holders only, provided that landings and take-offs are restricted to those areas outside the Special Management Area (SMA) and taxiing is permitted only in the outer anchorage of the SMA (refer 1.6, and

Strategy	Values affected	Rationale	Discussion
1.6 <u>SMA declared over most used area</u> (see Section 2 on next page for details)			
1.7 <u>Limited access to Woody Island</u> Access to Woody Island within the mangrove perimeter during October to March will be subject to bookings and restricted to: up to 4 guided groups of no more than 10 persons per group per day. Access will be by non-motorised transport only.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>The outstanding natural values of Woody Island provide specialised access for educational, leisure and scientific interests.</p> <p>Bird nesting on Woody Island is prone to human disturbance, especially during the main breeding season from October to March.</p>	<p>Implementation is subject to an on-site permanent management presence on Low Isles.</p> <p>Tourism access to Woody island in the nesting season should only be to the south-western quadrant of the island.</p>
1.8 <u>Limited further development</u> Further development is not considered appropriate. Proposed new structures outside the SMA should be subject to impact assessment and advertising.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic Management • Heritage Preservation • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>Any major further development in the area is likely to significantly alter heritage values and affect scientific research.</p>	<p>While some new structures may be acceptable, their effects should be minimised and subject to prior comment by Low Isles interests.</p>
1.9 <u>Limited effect of new activities- SMA:</u> Noisy or otherwise intrusive forms of transport or activity likely to affect natural processes or seriously affect other users in the Low Isles National Park or Buffer Zones, should not be permitted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>Intrusive transport or activities could jeopardise existing desirable uses and create disturbance of natural processes.</p>	<p>The 'intrusiveness' of a proposed activity is subjective, but could include aircraft, hovercraft, water skiing, paraflaying, large groups at night etc. Low Isles users and other interest groups should have the opportunity to comment on new proposals before a permit is issued.</p>
1.10 <u>Limits on cruise ships</u> Cruise ships are excluded from the SMA. The use of ships (gross tonnage over 1500) for tourism at Low Isles should be restricted to visits up to a maximum of 24 hours only.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>Ships in the vicinity of Low Isles could be a valid use of the area, but could alter the values of the area through their imposing appearance, large numbers of visitors and potential disturbance to natural processes. Effects can be limited by reducing the period of time used, and requiring supervision by permitted tourist operators.</p>	<p>Low Isles could develop a high public profile and attract visits by the steadily developing cruise ship industry. A limited number of days per annum access for such cruises could be desirable, depending on the effects found through experience if such ship visits occur.</p>
1.11 <u>Long-term anchorage reserve</u> An area shown within the dotted lines on Figure 3 is to be reserved as an anchorage in the long-term.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic Management 	<p>Commercial fishing vessel use of Low Isles requires continuing access to a secure and quiet anchorage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No permits for use of this specific area should be issued. • Commercial fishing vessels are not confined to use of this area.

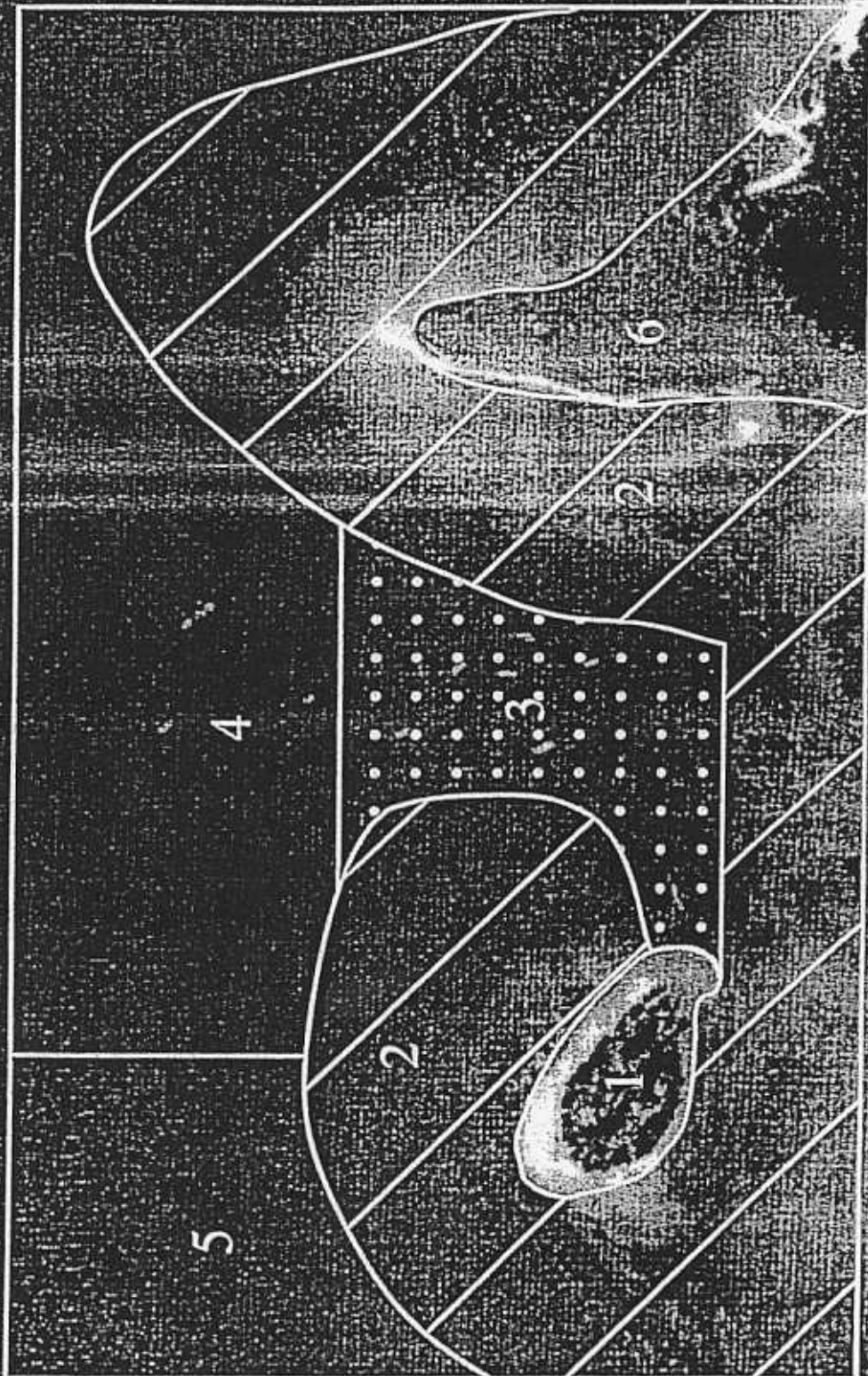
2. Low Isles Special Management Area

Strategy	Values affected	Rationale	Discussion
<p><u>SMA over most-used area</u> A Low Isles Special Management Area (SMA) will be declared over that part of the Low Isles National Park and Buffer Zones shown in Figure 3. SMA provisions are detailed below.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>The majority of use is concentrated now within the area of the SMA, requiring additional management provisions in addition to the Zoning Plans to protect and maintain the values of the area.</p>	<p>The area outside the SMA will be managed under the guidelines of this section to manage use which may otherwise adversely affect the values of the SMA.</p>
<p><u>2.1 Vessel size limit - 40 m</u> Vessels greater than 40 meters in length will not be allowed to access the SMA.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Heritage Preservation 	<p>The lagoon area is the main overnighting anchorage for small vessels. The lagoon is small in size and large vessels could physically disturb the anchorage, reduce space available to users, and visually dominate the area.</p>	<p>Vessels over this size can anchor elsewhere in the buffer zone.</p>
<p><u>2.2 Limits to use levels</u> The preferred maximum number of people allowed to access the area between 8 am and 6 pm will be 300; this limit allows for regular (daily) tourism operations with up to about 220 passengers, irregular and roving tourism operations with up to 30 passengers, and about 50 other users. The maximum of about 300 people represents both an acceptable maximum potential peak use and the acceptable total use between 8 am and 6 pm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>Large numbers of users would impact on all values of the area, regardless of whether large numbers are concentrated or dispersed in time. Maintenance of values requires limits to total numbers accessing Low Island or the area immediately around it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This limit is set to provide flexibility for use so that all acceptable users could be present at once. However, it is assumed that use would normally be spread over the day and the total daily use may exceed 300 people. • Effects of use are related to intensity of use, which is a function of the number of users, the types of activities undertaken and the manner in which activities are conducted. Other provisions relate to types and conduct of activities. • More than 1 visit per vessel per day between 8 am and 6 pm is to be prohibited.
<p><u>2.3 Limited education only</u> Only limited education programs (those with no collecting and as part of courses by accredited educational institutions as defined in the Cairns Section Zoning Plan) are allowed in the SMA.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>Unique educational opportunities are effectively promoted while managing effects on natural process and other users by limiting education programs in the main area to accredited bodies under guidance of local expertise.</p>	<p>Educational groups represent a special interest which can impact significantly on other users and the environment if not well managed. Refer also 2.15 below.</p>
<p><u>2.4 Limited research only</u> Only limited research (as defined in the Cairns Section Zoning Plan) will be allowed in the SMA, subject to booking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>Manipulative research may affect long-term scientific opportunities, some natural processes or other use. The high scientific profile of Low Isles and the limited area of the SMA require that research efforts be co-ordinated.</p>	<p>A system to identify and encourage research priorities should be established as guidelines for researchers and to assist prioritizing competing claims for bookings.</p>

Strategy	Values affected	Rationale	Discussion
<p>2.5 <u>No night access to islands</u> Low and Woody Island to be closed to the public between sunset and sunrise.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>Night use has high potential for significant disruption of natural processes (eg bird roosting/nesting), disturbance of other users and damage to heritage values.</p>	<p>Night use of the islands should be limited to authorised persons staying on Low island.</p>
<p>2.6 <u>Limits on night water activities</u> Organised water-based activities between 6 pm and 8 am are to involve not more than 30 persons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>Organised water-based activities at night for large numbers of people would affect other users and may disturb natural processes such as bird roosting.</p>	<p>This strategy allows for small scale activities such as diving.</p>
<p>2.7 <u>No anchoring on coral areas</u> Anchoring is prohibited in the areas of the SMA shown with hatching in figure 3.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>Anchoring in these areas is likely to result in unacceptable coral damage.</p>	<p>Vessels may anchor in sandy areas. Vessels with regular access to the area will require a mooring.</p>
<p>2.8 <u>Motorised water activities prohibited</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>Excessive noise may disrupt natural processes and detract from the values of the area and use as a quiet anchorage.</p>	<p>Motorised water activities could seriously affect other users, are not compatible with the high values of the area and could disrupt natural processes</p>
<p>2.9 <u>No waste discharge in anchorage</u> Discharge of wastes is prohibited in the areas of the SMA shown with stippling in figure 3.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Scientific Opportunity 	<p>The high natural and scientific values of Low Isles may be jeopardised if point source nutrient addition continues in heavily accessed areas with relatively low water volumes. Other use may be affected adversely by waste discharge.</p>	<p>Allowable waste discharge may still occur in adjacent areas, allowing for continuing use of the site by vessels without holding tanks. Public toilets will be available between 8 am and 6 pm on Low Island.</p>
<p>2.10 <u>Limit on new private structures</u> No new privately owned structures will be allowed in the SMA, other than to replace similar existing structures. Further private moorings should be allowed only if access and use values of the anchorage are not compromised.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Heritage Preservation 	<p>Further private structures could overcrowd the anchorage and are likely to be visually prominent, detracting from the heritage values of the area.</p>	<p>There is limited remaining space for structures in the SMA, and what is available should be reserved for public uses. Proposals to install structures or new moorings should be locally advertised.</p>
<p>2.11 <u>No established food facilities</u> No facilities for on-site eating or drinking are to be established on Low Island.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management 	<p>Such facilities would result in greatly increased use of the interior of the island, encourage visitors to linger in areas where vegetation is prone to disturbance and dramatically change current patterns of use in a way not consistent with the values of the area.</p>	<p>The prohibition does not ban eating and drinking on the island, only the establishment of facilities. Refer also 2.12 below.</p>
<p>2.12 <u>Lightstation preservation</u> No major structural or extensive superficial changes to the existing lightstation buildings will be permitted after de-staffing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity 	<p>The opportunity should be retained to readily restore the buildings to depict a tropical lightstation prior to automation.</p>	<p>Low Isles now presents a unique opportunity to retain the option of having a tropical, staffed lightstation preserved close to populated areas.</p>

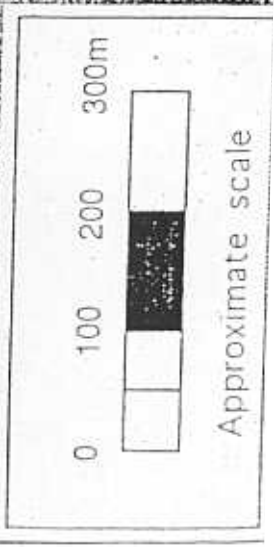
2. Low Isles Special Management Area

Strategy	Values affected	Rationale	Discussion
<p>2.13 <u>6 knot speed limit in SMA</u> A speed limit of 6 knots will apply in the SMA to all craft.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	Vessels or water craft moving at speed can disrupt natural processes, seriously affect other uses and disrupt the value of Low Isles as a quiet anchorage and place to enjoy high natural values.	A speed limit of 6 knots will be manageable, improve safety, reduce noise and wake disturbance and minimise the effects of motorised water sports.
<p>2.14 <u>Booking system - private vessels</u> Vessels which do not require permits will be managed by a prior booking system when their level of use is regularly more than 50 persons or 20 vessels per day.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	Use which does not require permits could reach a level requiring controls on numbers of people and vessels.	Bookings will be required when the allowed limits are regularly being approached.
<p>2.15 <u>Limited education program quota</u> Up to 25 persons per day may access Low Isles under a prior booking for a limited education program as passengers extra to those permitted under tourism program permits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity 	Limited education programs as defined in the Cairns Section Zoning Plan should have little effect on natural processes or other use. Small groups should not be counted against total visitor levels.	This provision may assist tourism operators to continue to provide reasonable access to Low Isles for <i>bona fide</i> educational groups.
<p>2.16 <u>Roving tourism use by bookings</u> Permitted tourism operations with general access to the Cairns Section may visit the SMA up to 12 times annually subject to a prior booking approval of the visit, providing that the limit of 30 persons per day allocated for irregular and roving tourism use is not exceeded. A visit means accessing the SMA, without departure, for a period not exceeding 24 hours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	Demand for occasional access by 'roving' tourism operations is high, and their ability to have occasional access may be necessary for the style of operation offered.	Reliant on an on-site manager. Bookings may not be accepted if the level of use by this group would exceed 30 persons between 8 am and 6 pm, if the level of use totally would exceed 300 persons between 8 am and 6 pm, or 200 at night, or if the number of vessels in the SMA at that time is likely to exceed 25.
<p>2.17 <u>Limited night tourism</u> Night visits to the SMA by regular and irregular tourism operations which are permitted to access the SMA between 8 am and 6 pm are allowed up to a maximum of 12 night visits annually per operation, subject to prior booking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	Limited night use of the SMA is acceptable for occasional night cruises or as an overnight anchorage providing that use does not affect natural processes or disturb other potential users.	Bookings may not be accepted if the level of use is likely to exceed 200 persons at the time sought, or if the number of vessels in the SMA is likely to exceed 25.
<p>2.18 <u>Managing unacceptable conduct</u> Visitors to the island may be directed to leave or change their behaviour if it is considered by an on site manager to be contrary to the maintenance of the values of Low Isles or the purposes of management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation • Heritage Preservation • Socio-economic Management • Educational Opportunity • Scientific Opportunity 	Access to Low Isles is by permission of the Commonwealth of Australia. Unacceptable individual behaviour may lead to withdrawal of that permission by an authorised agent of the Commonwealth.	This provision is intended for use in cases where activities unreasonably interfere with the quiet enjoyment of the area by others, or disrupt natural processes (such as bird nesting).



LEGEND

- 1 Low Island
- 2 No anchoring
- 3 Inner anchorage
- 4 Outer anchorage
- 5 Anchoring reserve
- 6 Shingle rampart



REVIEW

The Low Isles Management Plan should be reviewed at need, and to the extent necessary to the circumstances which require the review. However, the plan should be comprehensively reviewed not less than once every seven years.

The process of reviewing aspects or all the Low Isles Management Plan should include:

initial verification that the review is broadly required by persons and groups with a significant interest in Low Isles;

advertisement through local media of intention to review;

consultation with individuals and groups likely to be affected by changes to the issues under review; and

distribution to individuals and groups likely to be affected by changes of draft proposals for changes to the Low Isles Management Plan.

