



Australian Government
Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority



Queensland
Government

Types of permissions

What are permissions?

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Parks are multi-use areas. The Zoning Plans* provide for a range of ecologically sustainable recreational, commercial and research opportunities and the continuation of traditional activities. The Zoning Plans identify the activities that require a permit and rules that must be followed by all users of the Marine Parks.

A Marine Parks permission is required for certain activities on the Reef, including:

- research
- commercial tourism programs
- structures such as boat ramps, pontoons, or moorings
- carrying out works such as dredging and dredge spoil disposal
- some commercial fishing activities
- waste discharge from a fixed facility

People or businesses [apply](#) under a joint permissions system to the Great Barrier Reef

Marine Park Authority and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (the managing agencies). The Marine Parks comprise of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park.

The managing agencies assess the application against mandatory assessment criteria to see what risks the activity may pose to the values of the Marine Parks. Before a decision is made, the managing agencies ensure that identified risks to Marine Park environment, biodiversity and heritage values can be either avoided or appropriately managed, sometimes through permit conditions.



*The Zoning Plans include both the Commonwealth Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003 and the Queensland Marine Parks (Great Barrier Reef Coast) Zoning Plan 2004

Permit application assessment approaches

When a new permit application is received to enter and use the Marine Parks, the managing agencies must decide which of five assessment approaches will be used to assess the relevant impacts of the proposed activity. Assessment approaches are assigned to an application based on its complexity and risk level. Elements considered when assigning an assessment approach include variety of activities, impacts on Marine Park values, impact on other users, zones/locations proposed for access, activity scale, duration and public interest.

The five types of assessment approaches are outlined below:

Assessment approach	Risk to the values of the Marine Park	Impact the public's reasonable use	Impact Traditional Owner values	Public comment required?
Routine	Low	Unlikely	Unlikely	No
	Routine permits are fully standardised permits. It is a great introductory permit for new operators or operators conducting low risk activities in the Marine Parks.			
Tailored	Low or can be mitigated to low	Unlikely	Unlikely	No
	Proposed activities are unlikely to have noticeable or lasting impacts on the values of the Marine Parks, but there are some aspects which require detailed consideration.			
Public information package (PIP)	Medium	Possibly	Possibly	Yes
	The proposed activity is likely to pose a medium risk to the values of the Marine Parks or significantly impact matters of national environmental significance.			
Public environment report (PER)	Medium - high	Likely	Possibly	Yes
	The PER assessment approach is infrequently used as it relates to proposed activities that are likely to have significant impacts at a local or regional scale. Proposed activities that may undergo a PER assessment include a small fixed facility like a seawall, breakwater or marina with under 20 berths, or a new medium-scale discharge of industrial waste.			
Environmental impact statement (EIS)	High - very high	Likely	Possibly	Yes + public advertising
	The EIS assessment approach is rarely used as it relates to proposed activities that are likely to have significant impacts at a local or regional scale and may occur across multiple regions. Proposed activities that may undergo an EIS assessment include a large fixed facility like a resort or marina with over 20 berths, or a new large-scale discharge of industrial waste.			

Routine and tailored assessment approaches are the most common and the differences between the two are outlined overleaf. Further information on PIP, PER and EIS assessment approaches, can be found in the [Assessment and Decision Guidelines](#).

What is the difference between routine and tailored permits?

Routine permits are fully standardised permits, meaning the managing agencies have conducted a risk assessment for all the permitted activities which have been determined as low risk. In addition, standard conditions have been developed to protect the Marine Parks from potential impacts. This provides a more efficient application processing time so it is a great introductory permit for new operators or operators conducting low risk activities in the Marine Parks.

Managing agencies may provide routine permits for tourism, research, barge operations, education and crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS) and Drupella control. Some types of permissions such as dredging, facilities and discharge are ineligible for routine permissions due to their complexity and potential impacts.

All routine permits exclude access to Preservation Zones, unless providing charter services to non-tourists who are legally allowed to enter that zone/location. Below are some of the other key criteria for each type of routine permit:

Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vessels that have an overall length no greater than 35 metres, or if accessing permitted State rivers, streams and inlets no greater than eight metres. • Aircraft classified as a small aeroplane and/or normal category rotocraft under the Civil Aviation Safety Regulation.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No collecting/manipulating species within Buffer Zones, Marine National Park Zones or Commonwealth Islands Zones. • No take of coral or protected species.
Commercial Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be research of a commercial nature. • Limitations on take of marine species or products in Buffer Zones and Marine National Park Zones. • Undertake research from a vessel of less than 50m in length, or, if greater than 50m in length, the vessel will remain in the Designated Shipping Areas and/or General Use Zones.
Barge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The operation does not include works or transfer of bulk fuel, or operation of a cargo vessel. • Vessel is less than 50 metres. • When in a tug-and-tow configuration with a total length of tow greater than 150 metres, vessels are only operated within Designated Shipping Areas or General Use Zones unless transiting to or from an approved intertidal area.
COTs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COTS and/or Drupella control will be done in accordance with the Guidelines. • COTS and/or Drupella control is undertaken from a vessel of less than 50m in length, or, if greater than 50m in length, the vessel will remain in the Designated Shipping Channel and/or General Use Zones.

Each permission will specify where the activity or activities are permitted to occur within the Marine Parks. Permitted locations vary in scale and may include individual reefs or zones, Plans of Management, areas between lines of latitude, Management Areas or Marine Parks-wide permits.

Routine

While permit holders often operate within a specific region of the Reef, routine permits, and some tailored permits, are geographically broader. These broad permissions are advantageous to the permit holder as they allow flexible access for low risk activities to many areas of the Reef, reducing administrative burden.

For example, routine tourism permits allow for visiting and anchoring in most locations in the Marine Parks for up to two visits in any seven day period at each location outside a Planning Area (with conditions). While an operator might be based in a specific area (such as Cairns) and conduct their core business in this area, they are permitted to access other areas of the Marine Parks in accordance with the conditions of their permit, zoning and management arrangements if required.

Holders of Routine Permits may not access Preservation Zones, Restricted Access Special Management Areas and other sensitive areas except under certain conditions, usually requiring prior written approval from the managing agencies.

While broad permissions reduce administrative burden on both the permit holder and the managing agencies, it can make it difficult to identify where exactly different operations are taking place in the Marine Parks.

Tailored

The tailored assessment approach is more intensive than routine and is the most common assessment approach. A tailored assessment is used where an applicant wishes to undertake activities not provided for under a routine permit, or at a different location or frequency. Proposed activities must not restrict use of the Marine Park for other users or have significant impact.

Examples of activities that may trigger a tailored assessment approach include:

- Site specific operations
- Tourism operations using new technology
- Research involving the take of species
- Most existing fixed facilities (including moorings) seeking to extend the duration of their permission
- The continuation of a permission that may have been originally granted under a PIP, PER or EIS and has not significantly changed.

For example: applications to install structures in the Marine Parks (e.g. moorings), or use of a specific site daily outside of a Planning Area.

Although public comment is not required for routine or tailored processes, applicants are encouraged to consult with Traditional Owners, local communities and other interested parties about their proposal. The managing agencies may also seek the views of specific stakeholders where appropriate.

Tailored permits vary between reef-wide permits (as per Routine permits) and location-specific permits. Some permissions such as facilities (eg a pontoon or jetty) and moorings are permitted only for a specific location. This is considered during the assessment process to avoid conflicting or over-use of specific areas.

Summary

The permission system, although complex, is designed to protect all values of the Great Barrier Reef while allowing for ecologically sustainable use. The different assessment approaches allow permit applications to be considered depending on their level of risk, streamlining lower-risk processes and targeting resources towards mitigating impacts of more complex proposals. The permission system is just one of the ways the managing agencies manage the use of the Reef to protect this natural and cultural wonder for future generations.

See the Reef. Love the Reef. Protect the Reef.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

assessments@gbrmpa.gov.au

www.gbrmpa.gov.au