

## A Brief History of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park – Major Milestones

1 December 2005

**This document describes the significant milestones in the creation and management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.**

The Great Barrier Reef is an underwater paradise of astonishing colours and life forms. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is 345,400 square kilometres in area. It is both the largest world heritage area and the world's largest marine protected area.

The Great Barrier Reef has long been an important part of Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have relied on the Reef and coastal seas for traditional resources and customary and spiritual practices for thousands of years. European settlers saw the economic potential of the area and many coastal centres were developed around industries like agriculture (especially sugar cane and beef cattle), mining, commercial fishing and subsequently tourism.

There were a number of threats to the Great Barrier Reef in the 1960s and 1970s that led to various significant actions including:

- a *'Royal Commission into Exploratory and Production Drilling for Petroleum in the Area of the Great Barrier Reef'*. The Commission (under Sir Gordon Wallace, Chairman) considered submissions and information from 1970-74.
- *Report of the Committee appointed by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments on the problem of the Crown-of-thorns Starfish (Acanthaster planci)* (R.J. Walsh, Chairman) released and tabled in Commonwealth and Queensland parliaments in March 1971.
- House of Representatives Select Committee on Wildlife Conservation recommended that a program of conservation for the Great Barrier Reef be established and that the Great Barrier Reef be set aside as a marine national park.
- The *Report [of the] Royal Commission into exploratory and production drilling for petroleum in the area of the Great Barrier Reef* was released in October 1974. It recommended that no oil exploration be allowed and that "a special statutory authority should be established responsible to the appropriate Parliament for ecological protection and the control of research and development within the Great Barrier Reef province".

This recommendation led to the development of legislation that created the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the establishment of the Authority. Significant milestones in the history of the Marine Park and the Authority include:

#### 1975

- **12 June** – [\*Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975\*](#) was read as a Bill for the second time and passed through both Houses of Federal Parliament.
- **20 June** – The Act received Royal Assent and came into operation on 20 June. The Federal Act made provision for “the establishment, control, care and development of a marine park”, defined the area known as Great Barrier Reef Region, and created the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

#### 1976

- At its inception, the Authority had no permanent staff and was serviced by officers of the Department of Environment, Housing and Community Development.
- **July** – Dr D.F. McMichael, Commonwealth Director of Environment, was appointed as Acting Chairman of the Authority for one year.
- **August** – Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority holds inaugural meeting (membership was Dr D.F. McMichael, Sir Charles Barton and Dr J.T. Baker).
- **September** - First permanent staff member was appointed (R.T. Williams, Executive Officer).
- **September** – Consultative Committee members were appointed and held inaugural meeting (Mr J.F. Brown, Chairman)

#### 1977

- *Reflections*, a quarterly newsletter first published September 1977.
- Dr E. Frankel was commissioned to prepare a bibliography of literature relating to the Great Barrier Reef (approximately 5,000 references)
- Authority staff progressively moved from Canberra to permanent headquarters in Townsville at the Commonwealth Bank Building, Flinders Street.

#### 1978

- Authority held a major workshop in Townsville to review state of knowledge about the resources and utilisation of the section of the Great Barrier Reef extending from Lizard Island northward.
- **March** – Mr H.J. Higgs, Director of Environment in the Dept. of Environment, Housing & Community Development, appointed Chairman.

- **April** – *Bibliography of the Great Barrier Reef Province* by E.F. Frankel published.

#### 1979

- **20 April** – the Taiwanese vessel *Hui Ju Hup* taken under escort to Cairns for illegal clam fishing on the Great Barrier Reef. It subsequently sunk (after taking water) with explosives off Escape Reef.
- **14 June** – a meeting between Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and Premier of Queensland Joh Bjelke-Petersen in Emerald signed the [‘Emerald Agreement’](#) that described day-to-day management arrangements for the Marine Park and provided for the establishment of the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council.
- **October** - Capricornia Section was proclaimed covering 12,000 sq kms.
- **21 December** – Graeme Kelleher appointed the first permanent Chairman of the Authority.

#### 1980

- **17 February** - Graeme Kelleher announced plans to involve public in development of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park under a community participation program.
- **1 August** – A [Basis of Agreement](#) between the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments for the day-to-day management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, Capricornia Section was endorsed by Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council (membership was Hon Eric Robinson, Hon David Thomson, Hon Max Hooper, Hon Ivan Gibbs)
- **December** – Authority prepared papers nominating the Great Barrier Reef for inclusion on [the World Heritage List](#), which were lodged with World Heritage Committee in Paris, France.

#### 1981

- **1 July** - Zoning plan and regulations for the first part of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, Capricornia Section came into operation.
- **1 July** – First permit issued to Heron Island Pty Ltd.
- **October** – Cormorant Pass Section proclaimed.
- **26 October** – Great Barrier Reef was inscribed on World Heritage List, meeting all four of the ‘natural’ heritage criteria for listing.
- **November** - Cairns Section proclaimed

#### 1982

- **27 September** – Australian Heritage Commission placed the Great Barrier Reef Region and islands on the [Register of the National Estate](#).
- *REEF Bibliographic Database* became available online both nationally and internationally.
- **December** – *Great Barrier Reef Index Series 1:250,000* maps produced for GBRMPA. (compiled and drawn by P.J. Isdale, T. Shearn, D. Hopley and E. Rowe, Geography Dept., James Cook University of North

Queensland). This set of 5 maps, which covers the whole Great Barrier Reef region, offered a unique numbering system for reef identification for the whole reef region for the first time.

### 1983

- First permit for traditional hunting and fishing issued to Hopevale Aboriginal Community.
- **August** – Far Northern, Central and Southern Sections of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park declared.
- **October** – Townsville and Inshore Southern Sections declared, bringing the area of the Marine Park to 98.5% of the Great Barrier Reef region.
- **28 October** – [\*Great Barrier Reef Marine Park \(Prohibition of Mining\) Regulations\*](#) came into operation. These regulations prohibit drilling from those areas of the Great Barrier Reef Region not included in the Marine Park.
- **7 November** – [\*Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations\*](#) effective.
- **23 November** - Zoning plans for Cairns and Cormorant Pass Sections came into operation.

### 1984

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- **28 September** – Hon Barry Cohen, Minister for Home Affairs and Environment unveils plaque to commemorate the inscribing of the Great Barrier Reef on the World Heritage List.
- **October** – Southern, Inshore Southern, Central and Townsville Sections were amalgamated into the Central and Capricorn Sections.
- **1 November** – Start of the period of receipt of public representations on the preparation of zoning plan for the Central Section.
- **20 December** – Reappointment of Graeme Kelleher as Chairman.

### 1985

- **January** – Report of the Crown of Thorns Starfish Advisory Committee (COTSAC) (Professor K.J.C. Back, Chairman) released.
- **February** – Crown of Thorns Starfish Advisory Review Committee (COTSARC) established (Professor John Swan, Chairman).
- **19 July** – Amendments to the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations* to control offshore structures in unzoned sections of the Marine Park came into force.
- **September** – Central Section Zoning Plan gazetted.

### 1986

- **11 January** – Seven Reef Appreciation Areas were declared in Capricornia Section.
- **February** – Far Northern Section Zoning Plan came into effect.

- **17 February** – Crown of Thorns Starfish Advisory Review Committee established, and recommended a detailed program of co-ordinated research into Crown of Thorns Starfish on the Great Barrier Reef.

#### 1987

- **13 April** – an application for permit to construct and operate a marina at Nelly Bay, Magnetic Island submitted.
- **24 June** – Great Barrier Reef Wonderland (including the Great Barrier Reef Aquarium) opened – on schedule and within budget.
- **1986/87** – 636 permits were issued in the year.
- **September** – Mackay Capricorn Section declared.
- **1 October** – commencement of Central Section Zoning Plan.

#### 1988

- Initial construction begins at Nelly Bay Harbour for an approved development of a marina and ferry terminal.
- **Financial Year 1987/88** – 311,000 people visited the Aquarium.
- **May** - Installation and operation of the floating hotel at John Brewer Reef.
- **30 May** – a week after being put into operation Fantasy Island (operated by Reeflink Pty Ltd), a concrete, doughnut-shaped pontoon designed as a day trip destination, broke up and sank on John Brewer Reef.
- **1 August** – Public notice for the preparation of the Mackay/Capricorn Section Zoning Plan.

#### 1989

- Resource Inventory Database (joint project between Authority and Littoral Society) designed with data entry 1989/90 financial year.
- **February 1989** – Scientific Workshop on Effects of Fishing in the Great Barrier Reef Region held.
- **July** - [Floating Hotel](#) removed from John Brewer Reef and towed to Vietnam.
- **September** – Revoked Cormorant Pass Section and a new Cairns Section was declared.

#### 1990

- **28 February** – Conclusion of second public participation phase for the Cairns Section Zoning Plan – 731 written responses to draft zoning plan with a further 199 form letters sent from three separate interest groups.
- **September** - International Maritime Organisation declares the Great Barrier Reef as the world's first marine Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA). This demanded that any vessel longer than 70 metres or any vessel carrying oil or toxic cargo has to carry a pilot when navigating the northern part of the reef or in Hydrographers Passage.

- **October** - Dallhold Nickel Management Pty Ltd lodged appeal against Authority's decision not to grant permit to construct an offshore unloading facility for the transfer of overseas nickel ore to the Yabulu Nickel Refinery in Halifax Bay.
- **18 December** - Magnetic Keys Limited placed in receivership and work on the marina project ceased.

#### 1991

- Commencement of 11 management plans.
- **1 January** – Permit related assessment fees for tourism related applications introduced.
- **Financial Year 1990/1991** – 572 permits issued in the year.
- Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council endorsed principle of application of charges to commercial users of the park.
- **1 July** – Administrative Appeals Tribunal hearing against GBRMPA by Dallhold Nickel management Pty Ltd began.
- **October** – Commencement of a review of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority by J.F. Whitehouse.
- [Reef Research Newsletter](#) commenced.
- Pilot study for [Torres Strait Baseline Study](#) commenced.

#### 1992

- **February** – Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council endorsed program for Ocean Rescue 2000.
- **18 May** – Draft of the [25 year Strategic Plan for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area](#) released for public comment.
- **May** – 'Operation Clamsaver' pilot project to relocate over 5,000 giant clams from the reef flat at Orpheus Island to a number of research sites on the Great Barrier Reef.
- **July** - *Review of the Magnetic Island Marina Development* by J.F. Whitehouse published.
- **August** – [Administrative Appeals Tribunal hearing](#) concluded without a decision, after Dallhold Nickel Management Pty Ltd withdrew its application.

#### 1993

- **January** – UNESCO Albert Einstein Gold Medal awarded to GBRMPA 'in recognition of its outstanding contribution, particularly through its Aquarium, to the conservation of world heritage and to the advancement of environmental education'.
- **February** – Community Ranger Program employs 8 Indigenous community-based rangers.
- **28 April** – Draft [Whitsunday Plan of Management](#) released for formal public comment.
- **1 July** – System of charging commercial tourist operators using the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park introduced. Known as the

Environmental Management Charge, the proceeds to be used for research, education and management in relation to the Reef.

- **1 July** – [Cooperative Research Centre for Ecologically Sustainable Development of the Great Barrier Reef](#) commenced operation.
- **December** – *Managing multiple use in the coastal zone: a review of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority* by J.F. Whitehouse published and tabled in Federal Parliament.

#### 1994

- **September** - Independent review of the Environmental Management Charge by Professor Owen Stanley.
- Lodging of the first 5 Native Title claims covering part of the Marine Park, for areas which included parts of Cairns and Far Northern Sections.
- **May** - Launch and publication of *Great Barrier Reef: keeping it great; a 25 year strategic plan for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, 1994-2015*
- **Financial year 1994/1995** – Regional Marine Resources Advisory Committees (RMRAC) established.
- **December** – [Review of the Environmental Management Charge](#) by Professor Owen Stanley published.
- **19 December** – Professor Graeme Kelleher retired as Chairman of GBRMPA..
- **20 December** – Dr Ian McPhail appointed full-time Chairman of the Authority.

#### 1995

Significant amendments to the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* including the addition of a fourth member to the Authority to represent the interests of Aboriginal communities adjacent to the Park, increase in penalties under the Act, introduction of statutory management plans and clarified provisions of waste discharge.

- **February** – *Our sea, our future: major findings of the State of the Marine Environment Report for Australia* (SOMER) (compiled by L. Zann) published.
- **March** - [Great Barrier Reef & Torres Strait Shipping Study](#) published.
- **November** – [State of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area Technical Workshop](#) held in Townsville.

#### 1996

- Production of *Voices of the Cape* video and [Sea Country](#) newsletter.
- Development and provision of the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Manual* to all commercial tourism operators.
- Initiation of the Effects of Line Fishing Experiment.
- Completion of the ENCORE (Enrichment of Nutrients on a Coral Reef Experiment) Experiment.

## 1997

- **February** – GBRMPA establishes Tourism Advisory Group to provide feedback from an industry perspective on Reef-wide strategic issues.
- **14 March** – [Independent Review of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority](#) by R. Brown and Associates published.
- **March** – established the Environmental Research Ethics Advisory Committee.
- **14 June** – [Review of the Marine Tourism Industry in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area](#) by Tourism Review Steering Committee (G. Sturgess, Chairperson) published.
- GBRMPA recommends the establishment of a network of Dugong Protection Areas (15 in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and 1 in Hervey Bay/Great Sandy Straits).
- Completion of [Shoalwater Bay \(Dugong\) Plan of Management](#).
- **May** - *The outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef* by P.H.C. Lucas, *et al.* published, providing better understanding of World Heritage attributes of the Great Barrier Reef.

## 1998

- **14 January** – Gumoo Wojobuddee Section proclaimed.
- **February** – Australian National Audit Office report [Commonwealth management of the Great Barrier Reef](#) (ANAO Report 97/98, no. 33) released.
- **June** - [Environmental effects of prawn trawling in the Far Northern Section of the Great Barrier Reef 1991-1996: final report](#) published.
- **1 July** – Corporate restructure including four Critical Issue Groups (Tourism and Recreation; Conservation, Biodiversity and World Heritage; Fisheries; and Water Quality and Coastal Development) and three service groups (Information Support, Program Delivery and Corporate Services).
- **22 June** - [Cairns Area Plan of Management](#) and [Whitsunday Plan of Management](#) gazetted.
- Major coral bleaching event February-June 1998.
- Pilot accreditation program for Bareboat Charter Operators.
- **November** – [The State of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area 1998](#) published.
- **November** - hosted [International Tropical Marine Environmental Management Symposium](#) in Townsville.

## 1999

- **1 July** – Appointment of the Hon Virginia Chadwick as Chair.
- Overview of the Representative Areas Program distributed on the Internet.
- **16 July** - the [Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999](#) (EPBC Act) came into force, providing for the protection of world heritage values as well as greater environmental protection,



biodiversity conservation, and the protection of threatened and migratory species.

- Local Marine Advisory Committees (LMAC) established in nine regional communities.
- **November** – [The Great Barrier Reef partnership: cooperation in the management of a World Heritage Area](#) (by Gary Sturgess) published.
- **December** - the World Heritage Committee accepted two reports that had been requested for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (*Focussed Recommendations* and *Framework for Management*).

## 2000

- [Great Barrier Reef Marine Park \(Aquaculture\) Regulations 2000](#) introduced.
- [Whale and Dolphin Conservation Policy](#) finalised and released.
- Development of operational principles for the Representative Areas Program guided by various Advisory Committees (Scientific Steering Committee, Social, Economics and Cultural Steering Committee and Analytical Working Group).
- Reef Advisory Committees (RAC's) established, one for each of the four critical issue groups.
- 18 new coastal areas gazetted into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.
- **2 November** – Grounding of *MV Bunga Teratai Satu* on Sudbury Reef. Vessel was 22,000 tonne, 184 m long.
- **14 November** - *MV Bunga Teratai Satu* was refloated successfully without a fuel spill.
- **December** – [East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery Plan](#) (ECOTF) Management Plan came into force.

## 2001

- **January-March** – Sudbury Reef cleanup operation undertaken.
- A comprehensive bioregionalisation of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was prepared identifying 70 bioregions (30 reef and 40 non reef regions).
- 10 new coastal areas gazetted into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.
- Amended management plan for Queensland east coast trawl fishery capped and reduced level of trawl effort, made turtle excluder devices and by catch reduction devices mandatory.
- Grounding of *Bunga Teratai Satu* and subsequent clean up of Sudbury Reef.
- A comprehensive list of the high priority research needs for the management of the Marine Park and World Heritage Area was developed.
- Introduction of Whitsunday Bareboat Accreditation Program.
- **September** - [Great Barrier Reef water quality: current issues](#) released.
- **September** – [Great Barrier Reef water quality action plan](#) released.

## 2002

- **1 January** – Use of turtle excluder devices and by catch reduction devices mandatory for all areas of the east coast otter trawl fishery.
- **15 February** – Commencement of refurbishment of ReefHQ.
- Severe coral bleaching event.
- **17 April** – *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983* amended to include Mission Beach trawl closure.
- **April** – *Far Northern Section zoning plan* published.
- **7 May** – Launched first Community Participation Phase for Representative Areas Program resulting in over 10,000 submissions received.
- Impact Monitoring Program for Nelly Bay Harbour Development.
- **13 August** – Memorandum of Understanding between the Prime Minister and the Premier of Queensland aimed at halting the decline in water quality in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park signed.
- New zoning plan for Far Northern Section gazetted.
- **December** – report submitted to the World Heritage Committee on *The State of Conservation of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area* (part of Australia's first *Periodic Report*).

## 2003

- **February** – [\*Industries, Land Use and Water Quality in the Great Barrier Reef Catchment\*](#) published by Productivity Commission.
- **11 February** – Designation of 11 cruise ship anchorages.
- **June** – Draft *Zoning Plan for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park* released and the commencement of the second phase of Community Consultation resulting in approx. 21,000 submissions received.
- **July** – [\*State of Great Barrier Reef On-line\*](#) web site launched.
- Day to Day Management Review undertaken.
- **September** – Nelly Bay Harbour officially opened by Queensland Premier, the Hon. Peter Beattie.
- **September** – [\*Fisheries \(Coral Reef Fin Fish\) Management Plan 2003\*](#) for the Queensland coral reef finfish fishery introduced. The plan sets total allowable catch, reduces number of reef line fisheries, protects spawning aggregations by introducing closures during spawning season.
- **5 December** – [\*Reef Water Quality Protection Plan\*](#) released by Australian and Queensland governments.
- **December** – Revised *Great Barrier Reef Zoning Plan 2003* presented to the Federal Parliament; major initiatives included no-takes zones covering 33% of the Marine Park.

## 2004

- Reef Guardian Schools Program launched after a successful pilot in 2003.
- **21 April** – [\*Hinchinbrook Plan of Management\*](#) gazetted.
- **1 July** [\*Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003\*](#) in operation.

- **August** - GBRMPA signs agreement with Ecotourism Australia recognising their Eco-Certification program as an approved certification scheme for recognising best practice in the marine tourism industry.
- **September** – GBRMPA issues first 15-year permit to a certified standard tourist operator.
- **November** - the State of Queensland 'mirrored' the new zoning in virtually all adjoining State waters, ensuring there was complementary zoning for virtually all Federal and State waters within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
- **December** – [\*Status of Coral Reefs of the World 2004\*](#) report released, recognising the new levels of Great Barrier Reef protection have established a worldwide benchmark for other coral reef areas.

## 2005

- [\*Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority: enhanced community partnerships\*](#), a report prepared by Futureeye Pty Ltd, published.
- Wide national and international recognition of the Great Barrier Reef planning process leading to a total of 10 national and local awards, and recognition of the planning process and outcome as 'world's best practice'.
- 140 Schools now registered as part of the '[Reef Guardians Schools](#)' program.
- **March** - One of the four critical issue groups in GBRMPA renamed 'Conservation, Heritage and Indigenous Partnerships', reflecting greater recognition of Indigenous issues.
- **June** – [\*Policy on managing activities that include the direct take of a protected species from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park\*](#) released.
- **July** - Establishment of Regional Offices in Cairns (including Far Northern), Mackay and Rockhampton to enhance community partnerships.

## Further Reading

The history of scientific research on the Great Barrier Reef and the development of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority have been reported in detail in several publications. Some of the more relevant titles are listed below:

Bell, Peter and Veron, Charlie (1998), *AIMS: the first twenty-five years*, Australian Institute of Marine Science, Townsville.

Bowen, J. and Bowen, M. (2002), *The Great Barrier Reef: history, science, heritage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (Note: this book was awarded the prestigious New South Wales Premier's Australia History Prize in 2003)

Kenchington, R. (1990), *Managing marine environments*, Taylor & Francis, New York.

Lawrence, D., Kenchington, R. and Woodley, S. (2002), *The Great Barrier Reef: finding the right balance*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.

Stephen, James T. (1987), *The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority: a case study in executive federalism*, Master of Public Administration thesis to University of Queensland, St Lucia.

Search [GBRMPA Library Catalogue](#) for locations.