

RAP : Representative Areas Program

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park extends 2,000 kilometers along the eastern coast of Queensland, from Cape York to Bundaberg, with Mission Beach smack in the middle.

The Park is currently managed in four sections, with the dividing line between the Cairns Section and the Central Section being the good old Johnstone-Cardwell Shire boundary that cuts Mission Beach in half.

Each section has its own zoning plan, but these are now to be unified into a single scheme. Finalising the definition of that scheme is part of the Representative Areas Program (RAP) process.

In addition to the four large sections, there have been about 28 coastal strips added to the Marine Park as new sections in 2000-1. Clump Point Section and Mission Beach Section are our local examples. These small sections are currently "Unzoned", but will get their first zoning through the RAP process.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has been advised by its scientists that there are 30 reef bio-regions and 40 non-reef bio-regions within the Park, and that approximately 25% of each bio-region should be in a 'no-take' or 'green zone'. Currently the figure is less than 5% across the Park, with some bio-regions not protected at all. The RAP process will define those zones.

As you can see, this is going to be a process with profound long-term consequences.

GBRMPA could have started by drawing up some new zoning maps with 25% coloured green, but they didn't because they didn't want to be accused of having the whole thing worked out in advance, with public consultation being a mere after-thought. So the maps are blank, and the public are invited to be the first to draw lines on them.

One more thing – the GBRMP starts at the low water mark and excludes Queensland Waters, like Hinchinbrook Channel. The intertidal foreshore and parts of estuaries are Queensland Marine Park, and the Queensland EPA are doing a RAP exercise in parallel with GBRMPA.

Unified Zoning

There are probably going to be five different types of zones in the Marine Park, but there could be more. Five types of zone account for almost all of the Park at the moment.

- No restrictions (light blue)
- No Trawling (dark blue)
- No trawling, no netting, 2 lines per person (yellow zone)
- No take, diving OK (green zone)
- No public access (pink zone)

In addition there might be small Scientific Control Zones, Estuarine Conservation Zones (like at Mourilyan), No Structures Zones (e.g. Beaver Reef) and a variety of different kinds of buffer areas.

π I believe that recreational line fishing can be conducted in an environmentally friendly way, so long as it is properly managed and regulated. Using rod limits, bag limits, maximum and minimum sizes, seasonal closures and spatial closures (green zones), and with plenty of policing and monitoring, the impacts can be managed. But trawling is a very destructive fishing method, both in terms of the by-catch and long-term damage to the static seabed flora and fauna, and should be phased out.

π The Mission Beach Trawl Closure (implemented through other legislation) means that this area will be at least dark blue (No trawling). It is a great pity that this zone doesn't extend across Rockingham Bay to the Gould-Hinchinbrook no-trawl zone.

π Hinchinbrook and Gould Islands also have a Dugong Protection Area around them, which prevents commercial netting, but allows trawling in places like Shepherd Bay on Hinchinbrook where there are extensive seagrass meadows. This is an anomaly in the zoning scheme and should be fixed.

π The zone that allows recreational fishing (under control), but no trawling or netting is the Yellow Zone. I believe we should be asking for extensive yellow zones in the area from Double Point to Hinchinbrook.

π The main impact on recreational fishers would be the limit on the number of rods per person on a boat. At present in the Central

Section you are allowed only one rod per person, while in the Cairns Section you are allowed two. I can't see a problem with being limited to only two rods – how many rods could people want?

Green Zones

π I don't know how GBRMPA are going to sort out all the competing interests here. The commercial fishing industry (QSIA), the recreational fishers (Sunfish), the conservation movement (WWF) and the tourism industry are all well-known for their extreme ambit claims and their ability to dig their heels in, rather than compromise.

π The Hinchinbrook Marine Advisory Committee is reported to have proposed Rockingham Bay as a green zone, although I haven't seen any maps. I would support such a move as the area is adjacent to National Park from Tully Heads down to Meunga Creek, and deserves high protection.

π If you go eastwards from Clump Point, you pass through eight bio-regions running more or less parallel with the coastline. The outermost one is called Central Offshore and is so limited in extent that we will certainly be getting one green zone opposite us, and probably several.

π East of Hinchinbrook Island and beyond the reefs, is an interesting area where five different off-shore bio-regions meet. From an ecological point of view, this is a strategic area that should be fully protected so that each protected bio-region can support its neighbours.

RAP meeting

There will be a meeting on July 10th, 7pm at the Rainforest Room, Mission Beach Resort to discuss ideas relating to the RAP. This meeting coincides with a meeting of Mission Beach Marine Advisory Committee, so I am not quite sure how it will be run, but all welcome.

You can ring GBRMPA on: (07) 47 500 700 to get the maps and brochures and submission forms. Submissions close on 7th August.

π **Dave Kimble**