

The Coral Sea Marine Park: Protecting a Vast Ocean and Reef Wilderness in the Pacific Ocean

El Parque Marino Coral Sea: Que Protege un Vasto Océano y un Arrecife en el Océano Pacífico

Le Parc Marin de la Mer de Corail: Protégeant un Vaste Océan et un Récif Sauvage dans l'Océan Pacifique

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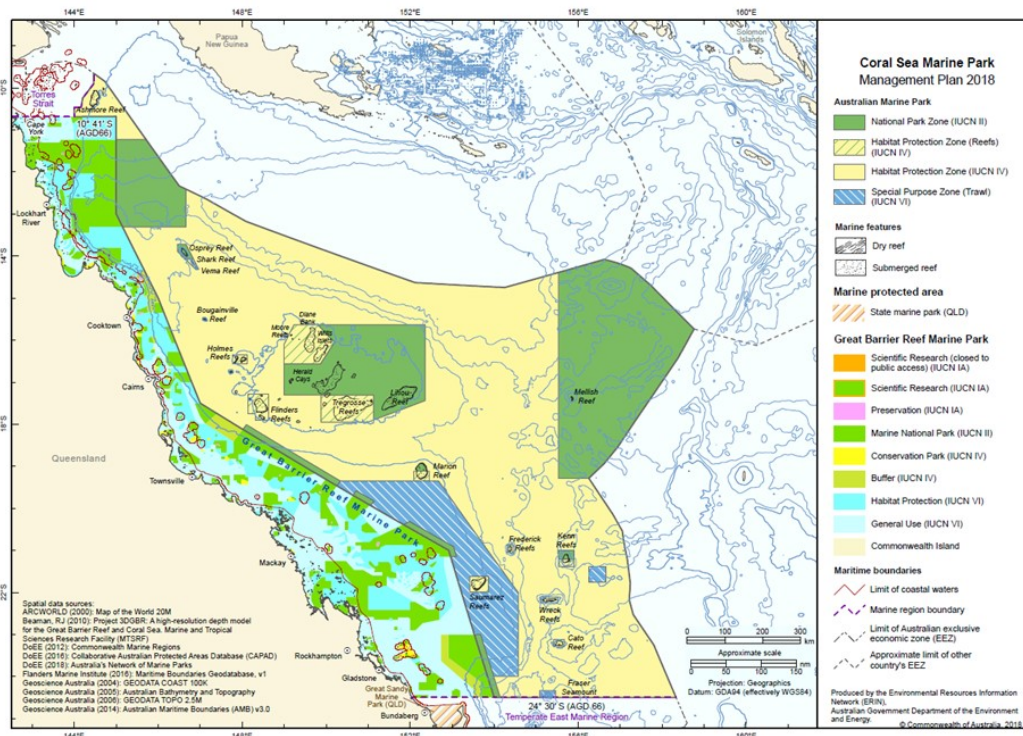
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The Coral Sea Marine Park is a protected and representative example of a relatively untouched and pristine ocean and reef wilderness. It covers 989,836 sq. km off the east coast of Australia in the Pacific Ocean. It borders neighboring Pacific Ocean islands of New Caledonia, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. There are 34 reefs covering 15,000 sq. km, and 56 cays and islets, many with low-profile vegetation, and significant seabird and turtle populations that nest and forage throughout the Coral Sea. With water depths down to 4,000 m, these cays and islets are on top of ancient sea mounts separated by vast distances, making them isolated and unique. The Coral Sea Marine Park is managed by Parks Australia, an Australian government division that manages 58 MPAs. Since July 2018 under a 10-year MPA management plan, it is managed using four MPA zone types; National Park Zone (IUCN cat. II), Habitat Protection Zone (IUCN cat. IV), Habitat Protection Zone (Reefs) (IUCN cat. IV) and Special Purpose Zone (Trawl) (IUCN cat. VI). These zones were developed over many years of consultation, debate, science and politics, and strike a balance in conservation protection while allowing for some sustainable use. Several reef areas are protected from fishing, including Osprey Reef, an iconic dive destination, and the Coringa-Herald and Lihou Reefs and Cays Ramsar site, where turtles and seabirds forage and nest with little interference from human activity. There is a relatively very low level of use in the Marine Park, with commercial, charter and recreational fishing; dive tourism; shipping; research and some Indigenous use occurring in parts. The Indigenous use is by Mer Islanders in the Torres Strait. Commercial and recreational fisheries are restricted to certain areas and include game fishing, tuna longline, demersal trawl, and hand collection of sea cucumber and aquarium fish. Mining, fish traps, and fishing nets are not allowed, and no other countries fish in the Marine Park. Only about four people live in the Marine Park, temporarily staffing a weather station. Balancing the management of these uses with a conservation outcome has proven difficult and highly controversial despite the low levels of use relative to other coral reefs in Australia.

KEYWORDS: Marine Park, Coral Sea, MPA



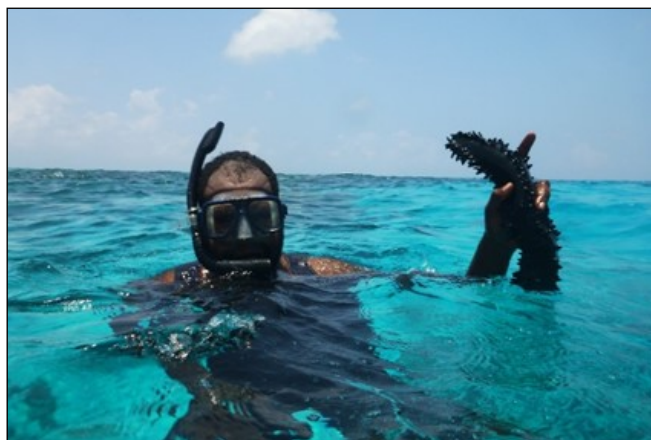
Coral Sea Marine Park



Willis Island weather station



Research diver recording coral and fish on Osprey Reef



Traditional Owner snorkelling on Boot Reef



Vegetated island in central Coral Sea



Lihou Reef in central Coral Sea



Mer Island community presentation on Coral Sea Marine Park monitoring