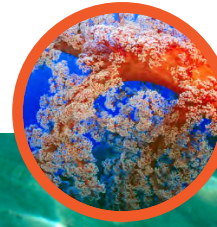




Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts



FACT SHEET

CORAL SEA CONSERVATION ZONE

WHAT IS A CONSERVATION ZONE?

A conservation zone is an interim protection measure established by the Australian Government under national environment law while an area undergoes a thorough assessment process to determine the need for any permanent protection measures.

WHY DECLARE A CONSERVATION ZONE IN THE CORAL SEA?

The Coral Sea is a near-pristine marine environment that is internationally recognised for its rich biodiversity and important heritage values.

The Coral Sea Conservation Zone will protect this environmentally significant area from increasing pressures while it is being assessed for more permanent protection via the marine bioregional planning process.

Stage one of the bioregional planning process - preparation of a bioregional profile - has been completed for the East Marine region, which encompasses the Coral Sea. The East Bioregional Profile includes detailed information about the key habitats, species, natural processes, conservation and heritage values, and human uses.

For more information on the East Bioregional Profile and the marine bioregional planning process, see:
<http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/east/index.html>

WHAT ARE THE NATURAL AND HERITAGE VALUES OF THE AREA?

The Coral Sea provides important habitats for a range of threatened and migratory species including humpback whales, sharks, marine turtles and a number of seabirds. The reefs, atolls and islands of the region also form an important link between the genetic diversity of South Pacific and the Great Barrier Reef.

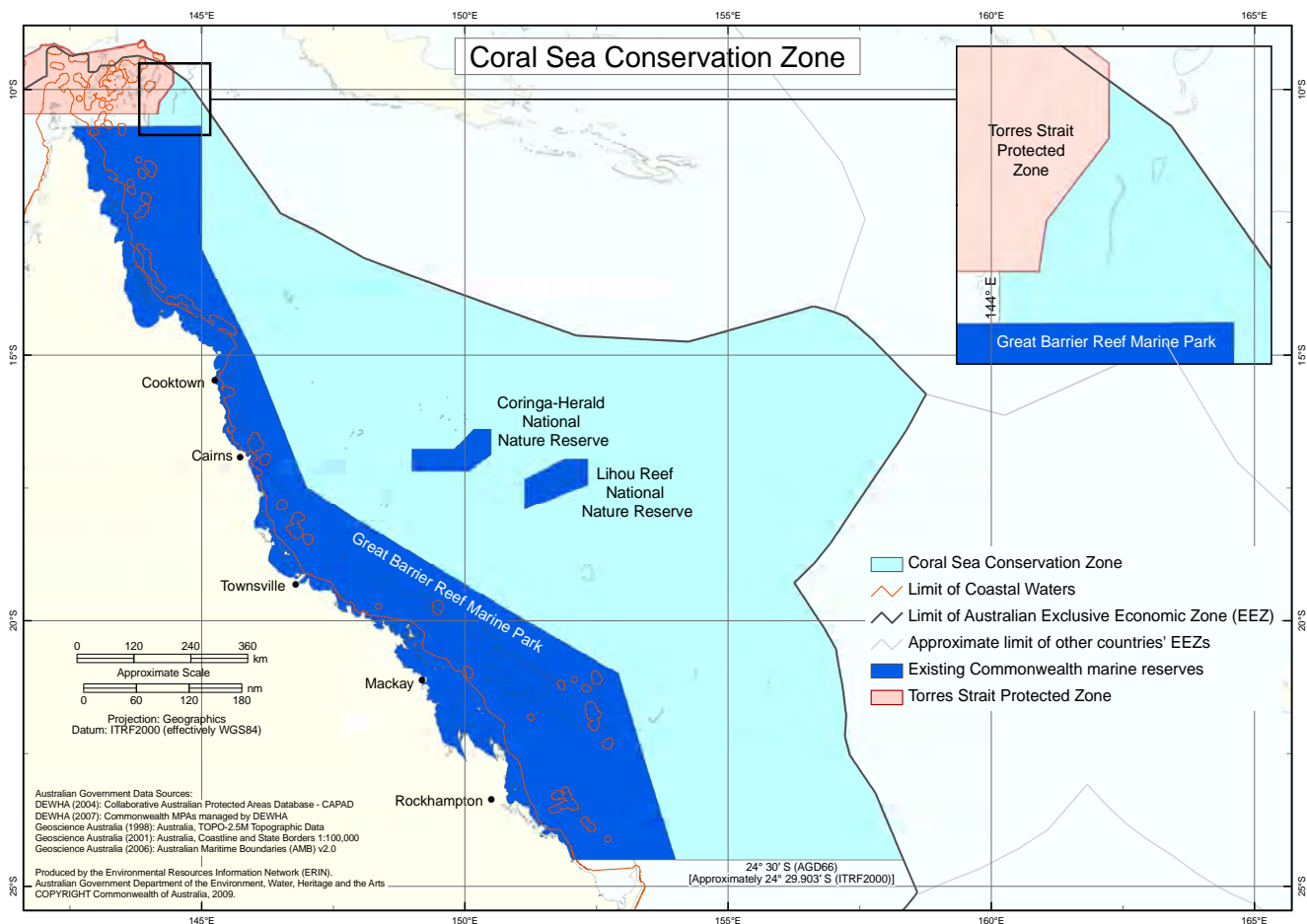
Also, significant cultural heritage lies within the Coral Sea, including a number of historic shipwrecks and sites of World War II naval battles.

WHERE IS THE CORAL SEA?

The Coral Sea Conservation Zone lies within the East Marine region and covers approximately 972,000 km² of Australian waters and seabed east of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, out to the edge of Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone.

It is the second (and largest) Australian marine conservation zone declared under the national environment law, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The Heard Island and McDonald Islands Conservation Zone was established in the Southern Ocean in 2002.

The existing Coral Sea National Nature Reserves – Coringa-Herald and Lihou Reef reserves – and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park are not included in the conservation zone.



HOW DOES THE CONSERVATION ZONE AFFECT CURRENT ACTIVITIES?

The conservation zone will have no additional regulatory impact on most current activities in the Coral Sea, such as commercial and recreational fishing, or cruise and merchant shipping. However, some commercial activities and scientific research activities will require a permit.

Recreational fishing

Recreational fishing is allowed anywhere within the conservation zone and remains subject to Queensland fisheries laws.

Commercial fishing

Commercial fishing operators authorised under Commonwealth or state law will not be subjected to additional regulation as a result of the declaration of the Coral Sea Conservation Zone.

Minerals, oil and gas

There are no current or proposed oil, gas or minerals exploration or production operations in the conservation zone area. New exploration or mining operations in the Coral Sea Conservation Zone will require a permit.

Shipping

Australian and foreign cruise ships and merchant shipping vessels that comply with existing regulations are not required to obtain a permit to transit through the Coral Sea Conservation Zone.

Other Commercial Activities

Commercial activities in the Coral Sea Conservation Zone, other than those listed above, such as charter boat operations, require a permit under national environment regulations. There is no cost associated with applying for these permits, and there will be a three month period of grace to allow existing operators in the area time to complete their application. Information on how to apply for a permit is available at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/coral-sea.html>

Scientific research

Scientific research activities proposed in the Coral Sea Conservation Zone require a permit. There is no application fee associated with these permits. If you are planning to conduct scientific research in the conservation zone, please contact the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. Contact details are below.

Indigenous activities

The Torres Strait Turtle Fishery is a traditional fishery, managed by the Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority, which extends a small way into the Coral Sea Conservation Zone. Traditional fishing activities are not affected by the establishment of the conservation zone.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The Coral Sea Conservation Zone will be assessed under the marine bioregional planning process. This will involve assessment of the conservation values and current and emerging pressures on the region. It will also involve extensive stakeholder consultation including two statutory periods for public comment before any permanent protection measures are put into place.

MORE INFORMATION ON THE CONSERVATION ZONE

Email: coral.sea@environment.gov.au
Phone: 02 6274 1111
Write: Marine Division
Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2601

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