



MARINE PARKS AUTHORITY

OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR THE SOLITARY ISLANDS MARINE PARK

October 2003

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Solitary Islands Marine Park Operational Plan

The *Marine Parks Act 1997* requires the preparation of an Operational Plan for each declared Marine Park. This Operational Plan outlines the management intent of the Marine Parks Authority in providing conservation and sustainable use of the Solitary Islands Marine Park in accordance with the objectives of the *Marine Parks Act 1997*.

The Solitary Islands Marine Park Operational Plan has been prepared in accordance with section 25 of the *Marine Parks Act 1997* and is adopted on this 10th day of October 2003.

Ian Macdonald
Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries

Bob Debus
Minister for the Environment

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The *Marine Parks Act 1997* requires the preparation of a zoning plan and an operational plan for each marine park.

The zoning plan, which is a separate document, details the location of each zone and activities permitted in each zone and it should be considered in conjunction with this plan.

This operational plan outlines the scheme of operations that the Marine Parks Authority intends to undertake or permit in providing for conservation and sustainable use of Solitary Islands Marine Park to attain the objects of the *Marine Parks Act 1997*.

The management actions in this operational plan complement provisions in the Zoning Plan. Activities undertaken in the Solitary Islands Marine Park (SIMP) are to be carried out in accordance with the Zoning and Operational Plans.

The actions identified in this document, are grouped into eleven management categories. In accordance with the objectives of the Act, there is a strong focus on the management of biological diversity, resource use in, and adjacent to, a multiple use marine park, as well as maritime heritage and cultural issues. Actions identified in this document will be undertaken over the life of this plan.

Many Government agencies that may provide assistance to the Marine Parks Authority in realising some of the management outputs are referred to in this document. Similarly, the Marine Parks Authority seeks to assist other Government agencies to meet their corporate goals. The omission of relevant Government agencies in this document, if any, was not intentional.

The Marine Parks Authority manages the Commonwealth's Solitary Islands Marine Reserve on a day to day basis, which is adjacent to the State managed Solitary Islands Marine Park. Therefore any reference to the Solitary Islands Marine Park in this document should be understood to incorporate both State and Commonwealth waters as complementary management arrangements are in place.

The Marine Parks Authority encourages the community to become involved in the management of the marine park through actions outlined in this document. The community can, for instance, become involved in community monitoring programs or in the development of codes of conduct for specific activities (in consultation with community groups).

2.0 MANAGEMENT FOR CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY AND MAINTENANCE OF ECOLOGICAL PROCESSES

The marine environment in the Solitary Islands Marine Park is biologically diverse and contains a unique mix of tropical, subtropical and temperate species. Within the Marine Park these species are found in a variety of habitats, including estuaries, intertidal rocky shores, island fringing and subtidal reefs, sandy beaches, subtidal soft substrate and open ocean. Ecological processes throughout the Marine Park are interconnected with both resident and migratory marine species relying on specific habitats for breeding, feeding and protection. Management measures aim to ensure maintenance of ecological processes and the protection of the diverse range of habitats within the Solitary Islands Marine Park.

2.1 Habitat Conservation

	Management Actions
2.1.1	Contribute to community and agency based programs that monitor water quality and the abundance of flora and fauna in habitats including; estuaries, intertidal rocky shores, island fringing and subtidal reefs, sandy beaches, subtidal soft substrate and open ocean.
2.1.2	Work with relevant organisations and individuals to develop and promote integrated approaches to minimising adverse impacts.
2.1.3	Provide advice on proposed developments adjacent to SIMP estuaries, in consultation with Coffs Harbour City Council and Pristine Waters Council.
2.1.4	Investigate the buffers in relation to developments, in consultation with Coffs Harbour City Council and Pristine Waters Council.
2.1.5	Participate in the preparation of estuary management strategies in consultation with relevant agencies and interest groups.
2.1.6	Develop and implement a Mooring and Anchoring Management Plan and Code of Conduct for all vessels, in consultation with relevant agencies and groups.
2.1.7	Install and maintain moorings at sites frequently used for anchoring.

2.2 Species Conservation

The Solitary Islands Marine Park provides habitat for many resident and migratory marine species, with some species located at the northern or southern most boundaries of their natural distribution. While management of the Marine Park aims to conserve all marine species occurring naturally within the Marine Park, particular emphasis is given to conserving marine species that are more susceptible to human impacts and are categorised as threatened, protected or endemic. Of particular interest are whales, dolphins, the grey nurse shark, sea turtles, seabirds and migratory wading birds.

	Management Actions
2.2.1	Require Commercial Tour Operators to provide sighting and activity records as part of their permits.
2.2.2	Assist National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) with the recording of threatened seabirds in SIMP.
2.2.3	Assist NPWS with the identification and protection of nesting sites, rookeries, feeding and roosting grounds within and within locality of SIMP.
2.2.4	Prohibit commercial swim with dolphin tours within the Marine Park

2.2.5	Develop management arrangements for identified turtle nesting sites in consultation with the NPWS, consistent with the National Turtle Recovery Plan.
2.2.6	Assess and adopt management actions in consultation with NPWS and New South Wales Fisheries (NSWF) identified in existing and developing recovery plans (eg. Grey Nurse Shark, Little Tern, Osprey and Beach Stone Curlew) that apply to SIMP.
2.2.7	Identify key habitat for Black Cod.
2.2.8	Identify endemic species populations and investigate management options.

3.0 MANAGEMENT FOR ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE USE

The marine park caters for a wide range of user groups and is of social, cultural and economic importance to the area. Popular activities include recreational and commercial fishing, scuba diving, boating and many beach activities. For the values of the marine park to remain intact for future generations it is important that all activities are undertaken.

3.1 Fishing and Collecting

	Management Actions
3.1.1	In consultation with NSWF and fishers develop a Code of Conduct for beach haul fishing within SIMP to minimise potential conflict with other users.
3.1.2	Develop a Code of Conduct for competitions in consultation with recreational fishers and NSWF.
3.1.3	Develop criteria for permit applications for fishing competitions in consultation with NSWF.
3.1.4	Assist PWC and local fishing clubs to ensure appropriate fish cleaning facilities are available in the vicinity of the Minnie Water Lagoon.
3.1.5	Determine levels of recreational effort, catch and bait collection within the SIMP, in conjunction with NSWF.
3.1.6	Apply moratorium on current charter fishing fleet operations.
3.1.7	Assess charter fishing commercial tour operator activities within the SIMP.
3.1.8	Develop a Code of Conduct for charter fishing activities in the SIMP and SIMR in consultation with NSWF, EA and charter fishers.
3.1.9	Introduce a permit condition that charter operators have sufficient insurance to cover recovery of vessel and removal from SIMP if wrecked.

3.2 Aquaculture

	Management Actions
3.2.1	Liaise with proponents and NSWF to ensure that aquaculture proposals in or “in the locality of the SIMP” are adequately assessed and that potential impacts on marine biodiversity are adequately considered.
3.2.2	Work with aquaculture proponents, NSWF and the Waterways Authority to develop strategies to increase the safety and navigability of areas containing aquaculture projects.
3.2.3	Develop operating guidelines based on best practice in conjunction with NSWF and aquaculture proponents within the Woolli Woolli and Sandon Rivers.
3.2.4	Undertake assessment of abandoned and unused aquaculture structures in the SIMP and develop strategies to remove identified structures.

3.3 Scuba Diving and Snorkelling

	Management Actions
3.3.1	Develop a Scuba Diving Management Plan and Code of Conduct for all scuba divers in the SIMP.
3.3.2	Investigate options to manage pre-certified diver training in sanctuary zones.
3.3.3	Limit the number of scuba diving charter operator permits to current numbers.

3.4 Marine Mammal Watching

	Management Actions
3.4.1	Maintain the number of whale and dolphin watching charter operator permits at current levels.
3.4.2	Undertake an assessment of the sustainability of whale and dolphin watching charter operators within the SIMP in conjunction with NPWS.
3.4.3	Implement the Australian and New Zealand Environment Conservation Council (ANZECC) Australian National Guidelines for Cetacean Observation in conjunction with NPWS.
3.4.4	Develop enforcement and public awareness plans for whale and dolphin watching activities within SIMP.

3.5 Boating and Personal Water Craft

	Management Actions
3.5.1	Monitor commercial parasailing operations and minimise potential conflicts with other users.
3.5.2	Assist in ensuring that adequate beach launching, boat ramp and other vessel access points are maintained in conjunction with the Coffs Harbour City Council, Pristine Waters Council and the Waterways Authority
3.5.3	Ensure that the impacts of existing and proposed access points to the marine park are adequately assessed.
3.5.4	Investigate policy requirements for private access points to the SIMP in consultation with Waterways and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR).
3.5.5	Identify disused wharves in the SIMP and develop strategies for their removal.

3.6 Beach and Camping Activities

	Management Actions
3.6.1	Permit beach cleaning, seaweed relocation and extensive driftwood deposit removal from beaches following major flooding and other events by Coffs Harbour City Council and Pristine Waters Council.
3.6.2	Monitor the incidence of seaweed and substantial driftwood deposits on beaches where appropriate
3.6.3	Develop guidelines for managing removal of seaweed and substantial driftwood deposits on high use / profile beaches and beach boat launching areas within SIMP.
3.6.4	Provide advice to the Waterways Authority with the issuing of aquatic licences for activities and events in or adjacent to SIMP.

3.7 Vehicles

	Management Actions
3.7.1	Investigate management arrangements to minimise impacts on beach fauna, ecological communities and habitat in consultation with Coffs Harbour City Council, Pristine Waters Council, NPWS, Reserve Trusts and NSW Police.
3.7.2	In consultation with local government and NPWS provide information to the general public on where vehicles are permitted within the SIMP.

4.0 MANAGEMENT FOR INDIGENOUS CULTURE

The Solitary Islands Marine Park is culturally significant to local Aboriginal communities, with many spiritually significant sites occurring within and adjacent to the Marine Park, coupled with a continuing tradition of cultural resource use. The ongoing protection of Aboriginal sites of significance and ecologically sustainable Aboriginal use of resources is recognised as an important objective by the Marine Parks Authority.

	Management Actions
4.1	Identify particularly sensitive sites at risk from natural processes or human activity in consultation with Aboriginal Corporations and Land Councils.
4.2	Prepare a conservation plan for the Arrawarra Fish Trap and Pipe Clay Lake special purpose zones in consultation with local Aboriginal land managers, Aboriginal Advisory Committee, NPWS Aboriginal Heritage Trust and NSWf.
4.3	Develop cooperative arrangements between Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation, educational institutions for the assessment and conduct of research at Arrawarra Headland.
4.4	Provide support for the Indigenous Advisory Committee to advise on SIMP management through the Solitary Islands Marine Park Advisory Committee (SIMPAC).
4.5	Consistent with NSWf Indigenous Fishing Strategy, investigate options for providing for traditional/cultural fishing and collecting within SIMP.

5.0 MANAGEMENT OF NON-INDIGENOUS HERITAGE VALUES

Heritage values contained within the Solitary Islands Marine Park include shipwrecks and scenic features both above and below the ocean surface. Coastal views add considerably to the appreciation of the local environment and the degree of enjoyment derived by marine park users. It is these features that were deemed of national significance and resulted in the Marine Park being listed on the Register of the National Estate in 1993. Significant underwater features also contribute to public enjoyment of the Marine Park, particularly by scuba divers and fishermen and include submerged pinnacles, sea caves, deep gutters and drop-offs.

	Management Actions
5.1	Assist NSW Heritage Office with management of shipwrecks and relics within the SIMP and develop cooperative guidelines for their protection where appropriate.
5.2	Through the NSW Heritage Office, train and authorise SIMP staff to undertake appropriate heritage management activities under the <i>NSW Heritage Act 1977</i> and the <i>Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976</i> .
5.3	Jointly develop a marine heritage track in consultation with the Coffs Harbour Museum, NSW Heritage Office and other relevant agencies.

6.0 OTHER MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Management of marine pollution is critical to the conservation and protection of habitats and species found in the Marine Park. Marine pollution can occur from a number of points and diffuse sources including coastal development, sewage effluent disposal, stormwater runoff, agricultural practices and vessel based discharges and waste disposal. Management measures aim to ensure a coordinated and rapid response to incidents with the marine park, early detection of marine pests, provision of safe moorings and appropriate consideration of development applications.

6.1 Pollution Control and Incident Management

	Management Actions
6.1.1	Develop systems and policies to ensure that the MPA meets its obligations under the <i>Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1998</i> as an Appropriate Regulatory Authority.
6.1.2	Contribute to management strategies and activities that minimise pollutants entering the SIMP.
6.1.3	Investigate and support initiatives promoting the use of gross pollutant traps and drain stenciling programs with relevant agencies.
6.1.4	Provide input into the Sewage Disposal Strategies, Urban Stormwater Management Plans, Estuary Management Plans and Catchment Management Plans and advise Catchment Management Boards, Estuary Management Committees, Water Management Committees and shipping authorities.
6.1.5	Investigate and promote SIMP being identified as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area for shipping through the Marine Environment Protection Committee of the International Maritime Organisation.
6.1.6	Develop and promote reporting procedures for the general public to report pollution incidents within the SIMP.

6.2 Invasive Pest Species

	Management Actions
6.2.1	Encourage the adoption and rigorous application of guidelines for introducing shellfish into the SIMP in conjunction with NSWF and oyster growers.
6.2.2	Conduct a risk assessment of invasive species in the locality of SIMP utilising existing national monitoring programs and strategies.
6.2.3	Review the adequacy, and improve where required, invasive marine pest response strategies, the level of equipment available in the local area and develop a local response strategy for the SIMP in consultation with the Coffs Harbour International Marina, the Waterways Authority and NSWF.

6.3 Marine Parks Authority Moorings and Markers

	Management Actions
6.3.1	Develop a vessel Mooring and Anchoring Management Plan in conjunction with the Waterways Authority, dive operators, recreational user groups and commercial fishers.
6.3.2	Develop management agreements with Clarence River and Coffs Harbour Fisherman's Cooperatives to fund ongoing maintenance of trawler moorings.

6.3.3	Appoint suitably qualified contractors to install and maintain moorings and marker buoys in accordance with a maintenance schedule and management agreement between the MPA.
6.3.4	Ensure mooring availability and conditions of use are advertised widely within marine notices and other relevant advertising mediums.
6.3.5	Ensure zone marker location and instructions for use are advertised widely within marine notices and other relevant advertising mediums.

6.4 Development within and adjacent to Marine Park Boundaries

	Management Actions
6.4.1	Assess development applications for development within Marine Park boundaries.
6.4.2	Undertake appropriate environmental impact assessment for all developments within the SIMP, in consultation with determining authorities
6.4.3	Assist in the development of MPA Policy and guidelines on the use of artificial reefs and fish attracting devices within marine parks.
6.4.4	Advise and comment upon artificial reef proposal
6.4.5	Comment on EIA documentation for Development Applications within the locality of the park as required.
6.4.6	Establish referral procedures with Coffs Harbour City Council, Pristine Waters Council, Department of Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources, State Forests of NSW, Roads and Traffic Authority, State Rail Authority, Department of Agriculture and local Reserve Trusts.

7.0 RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Research is a key component in the management of the Solitary Islands Marine Park. A research program seeks to expand our knowledge and understanding of the marine environment, provide a regular update on the health of marine ecosystems and the nature and extent of activities occurring in the Marine Park, and indicate the effectiveness of zoning and other management actions. Key research areas are:

- biodiversity and ecological processes;
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture and heritage;
- ecologically sustainable use; and
- specific impacts.

	Management Actions
7.1	Develop annual SIMP Research Plans consistent with the NSW Marine Park Strategic Research Plan, in consultation with research organisations.
7.2	Progress the development of collaborative research and monitoring programs with tertiary institutions and other research groups.
7.3	Assess research permit applications and seek expert advice where required for applications that involve collection, capture, tagging or harm.
7.4	Develop database and information set of research carried out or underway in the SIMP.

8.0 COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND INVOLVEMENT

The unique values of the Solitary Islands Marine Park and rich marine life attract large numbers of visitors to the marine area. To add to their experience it is important that marine park users are provided with adequate information and education to ensure an enjoyable and safe visit to the marine park, encouraging interaction with marine flora and fauna without causing undue harm.

	Management Actions
8.1	Formulate a communications plan consistent with the MPA Communications Strategy.
8.2	Establish a volunteer register for individuals interested in assisting MPA with research, monitoring, educational or other activities.
8.3	Produce advisory material in accordance with the communications plan on a range of topics.
8.4	Produce visual media (video, Community Service Announcements and CDs) in accordance with the communications plan on a range of topics.
8.5	Participate in Regional Tourism Planning and development avenues where appropriate.
8.6	Develop a strategy for the effective promotion of the Solitary Islands Marine Park to the wider public.

9.0 COMPLIANCE

The Solitary Islands Marine Park includes many estuaries and creeks, beaches, rocky headlands and islands which are ideally suited to many commercial and recreational activities. For the safety and enjoyment of marine park users, and to maintain biodiversity and ecological processes, it is essential that regular surveillance and enforcement patrols are undertaken. Compliance programs help to ensure users understand and comply with the zoning scheme.

	Management Actions
9.1	Develop and implement a compliance plan in conjunction with Environment Australia.
9.2	Increase compliance opportunities through interagency cooperation.
9.3	Provide information to locals and visitors detailing activities permitted in each zone of the SIMP, zone locations and zone identification.
9.4	Provide marine park officers with appropriate training and equipment to undertake enforcement activities.
9.5	Ensure marine park officers are adequately delegated under a range of legislation e.g. NSW Heritage Act 1977, Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976, Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1998, and Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.
9.6	Initiate a program, providing opportunities for the general public, commercial tour operators and commercial fishers to report suspicious or unlawful activities.
9.7	Together with NSWFW, enforce bag and size limits under the <i>Fisheries Management Act 1994</i> .

10.0 PERMIT SYSTEM

A permit system is an effective management tool for regulating activities and operations in the marine park, limiting impacts on particular areas, separating conflicting activities, and providing for appropriate use of the marine park by a large proportion of the general public. Permit systems also enable data collection and monitoring.

	Management Actions
10.1	Administer the MPA Permit System for all MPA permit holders within the SIMP in conjunction with Environment Australia (where appropriate).
10.2	Incorporate Codes of Conduct into permit conditions where relevant.
10.3	Provide information sessions and workshops for all current permit holders to improve understanding of SIMP management practices and plans.
10.4	Monitor compliance of permits and permit conditions.
10.5	Distribute advisory material to relevant local and visiting organisations regarding the nature of activities conducted in the SIMP that require a permit from the MPA, including visiting surfing safari's, private scuba instruction and commercial underwater photography and videography.

11.0 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS WITH COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

The Marine Parks Authority works in consultation with a number of other Government Departments under a variety of management arrangements.

	Management Actions
11.0	Manage the Commonwealth component of the SIMP (Solitary Islands Marine Reserve) in accordance with an Annual Business Agreement with Environment Australia.