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**Reference:**

CORAL SEA MARINE PARK DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN SUBMISSION

18<sup>th</sup> September, 2017

**Objective:**

Dive Queensland is again appreciative of the opportunity to contribute to the CMR Review. However, we strongly object to any reduction in the current protection measures or reduction of marine parks in general.

**Profile:**

Dive Queensland represents the entire Queensland dive industry, as well as several associated industries and stakeholders who indirectly rely on diving (scuba and snorkelling) and tourism to marine protected areas. The contribution these collective industries make to the economy of Australia is quite significant and has been valued consistently at \$4.6 billion dollars annually. The GBRMP, the reefs in the Coral Sea and marine parks are the major means by which this contribution can be made. Marine protected areas are collectively a unique gift to Australia, and along with that comes an international responsibility to maintain and protect them. Meanwhile, we are losing these pristine environments in other parts of the world which makes it even more important that we maintain our protective measures.

**Details:**

At a time when marine protected areas are in the international spot light, it is absolutely necessary for our Government to acknowledge its' responsibility to protect our global treasures. That is, we, Dive Queensland, assert that

maintaining the current protection of the GBRMP and the Coral Sea, in particular is not only essential, but Government must also remember UNESCO's acknowledgement of the efforts needed to reduce pressures on them. It is, therefore, not a time to back-off from protective measures. It is a time to step them up.

It is also a time when local employment in centres bordering our coastline is increasingly difficult to obtain. Our marine parks offer employment opportunities for a wide cross-section of individuals and drive environmentally sustainable industries. On the other hand, visitors pay to view these pristine environments. The dive industry service and product providers, accommodation facilities, transport modes, those that build and maintain the vessels, etc., etc., all rely either directly or indirectly on the protection of these marine parks. Therefore, when you take away these marine sanctuaries or reduce their protection, you take away regional employment and can end up with a society that has limited work opportunities that will need to rely on welfare. The message here is not to rob Peter and pay Paul!

It makes more sense to protect and encourage further marine special place tourism rather than to diminish the marine parks and in doing so, reduce the potential numbers that wish to go and see them. Additionally, we have seen an increase the number of international visitors to marine protected areas over recent times. This in-flow and the income it brings is essential to maintaining Australia's balance of payments. Increased flights from China, Korea, Japan, etc., into Cairns, for example, bring tourists to the reef and Dive Queensland members such as Mike Ball Dive Expeditions and Spirit of Freedom, not only take these tourists to the more remotely protected areas outside of the current GBRMP, but their clients snorkel, dive and photograph the underwater marine parks/reefs. In turn, promote further tourism and our international reputation for protecting them. That is, they share their images of marine protected areas through social media; showing the world how incredible and unique our reef systems and parks are.

Also at a time when coral bleaching and reef degradation is sadly becoming difficult to avoid due to climate variation, every effort should be made to protecting our incredible marine ecosystems. How can our Government on one hand be seen to be telling the international community that we are 'setting the standard' on protecting marine parks, and on the other, reduce the very size of them? For example, the Coral Sea, one such region that will be directly impacted by these proposed changes, is renowned for being a pristine ecosystem. The envy of the dive world! An iconic dive destination.

The overall health of marine parks and reserves rely on its' biodiversity. It is not possible to 'turn back the clock' on decimated populations. Once they are gone, they are gone. Additionally, the unique fishes and other marine life of the Coral Sea for example that exists at Osprey and Bougainville Reefs are precious to the ongoing survival of healthy oceans. Therefore, we at Dive Queensland, want to see them remain protected. That is, we cannot afford to make a dire mistake and not continue to protect them.

Over the past 12 months, our Border Protection Forces have intercepted the highest number of illegal poachers in Australian waters ever, and prosecutions for illegal fishing even in the GBRMP is the highest in many years (reference Local Marine Advisory Committee - Cairns). Therefore, it is not a time to reduce protection, but rather evidence seems to indicate a need to increase it more widely.

**Conclusion:**

We confirm that we support for the continuation of marine parks and condemn strongly any reduction in the protection measures.

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