



The Townsville Skindiving Club "TSC" on behalf of all our members would like to submit the following letter in response to the proposed Commonwealth Marine Reserve Management Plan. Additionally, we would like to notify you that we have all read the AUF submission and we agree with the points raised therein.

As a club we are pleased that the Coalition Government and your department have taken a step towards better protecting the livelihood and conservation of the marine species and habitats located within the Coral Sea and we thank you for taking a fairer, more inclusive stance for recreational fishing than that previously offered. As a club we endeavour to promote safe, sustainable and selective spearfishing to ensure future generations the same opportunities that we have today. However, we would like to bring to your attention a few key issues that our club members have raised in regards to the new proposed management plan. In particular the complete fishing closures around Bougainville, Ken and the northern most side of Osprey Reef.

The Townsville Skindiving Club was formed in 1982 and since the early days of its inception travelling to the Coral Sea has always been a top priority for our divers. The Coral Sea region presents an unprecedented underwater experience and it is arguably one of the most iconic spearfishing locations in the world. However, due to the remoteness of the Coral Sea only very few members get to visit these iconic locations each year, a culture that extends throughout the spearfishing community Australia wide. Furthermore, Spearfishing is generally supported by scientists as being the most sustainable form of fishing with very little impact on the environment with virtually no by catch. In considering this, we truly believe that spearfishers would have very little impact on the overall health of the Coral Sea and its vast ecosystems.

With this in mind we would like for you to review the following consideration; limited access for recreational fishing and spearfishing to Bougainville, Ken and Osprey Reef with a more conservative bag and size limit on fish species. In particular, Bougainville Reef, as it is much closer to the Australian Coastline and thanks to its abundant array of fish life, coral and underwater structures it presents as one of the biggest draw cards in the region. Removing recreational spearfishing and line fishing from this reef will simply put more fishing pressure on other reefs as well as increasing travelling expenses. In addition to this, spearfishers will have to venture further offshore on their coral sea trips to try and access reefs that offer a similar underwater experience. This could have the potential to expose travellers to adverse safety risks in the event of an emergency. Furthermore, our very presence could serve as a deterrent & activities observed could be reported & acted upon at these very remote locations.

Whilst spearfishing we already have to contend with weather, adverse water visibility, currents, surface conditions, ocean predators, and daylight availability. Considering these forever changing conditions as well as the extensive costs involved in travelling to the Coral Sea I hope you can see why we are so reluctant to lose these very unique spearfishing destinations.

On a final note we would like to thank you for allowing spearfishing to continue on Flinders reef. Flinders is the most accessible Coral Sea Reef off the Townsville Coast and it provides an exceptional diving experience at an affordable rate. The Townsville Skindiving Club has chartered several local marine tourism operators in previous years to reach Flinders and it is a club event that we will be continuing into the future. The decision to allow spearfishers the continuity to dive this location will help to ensure money is spent locally as well as creating another great attraction for foreign and interstate holiday makers. I hope you can consider the views of the Townsville Skindiving Club as well as the concerns raised by the AUF in the final planning stages of the new Commonwealth Marine Reserve Management plan. We wish you all the best in the future and if you have any further questions regarding our views, please feel free to contact either myself, or any of the TSC Committee members.

Kind Regards,  
Sam Staib  
Vice President  
On behalf of the Townsville Skindiving Club