



SAFEGUARDING THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK

A world and national heritage-listed area, the Great Barrier Reef is one of Australia's most significant environmental assets. It is one of the most diverse and remarkable ecosystems in the world, supporting an outstanding array of plants and animals.

Covering more than 344,000 square kilometres, it is one of the largest and best protected marine areas in the world.

The Great Barrier Reef is greatly valued by Australians, as well as visitors who come from all over the world to see it. It provides significant economic benefits for the region and for Australia, but its use depends on healthy and resilient ecosystems.

While the Great Barrier Reef remains one of the healthiest coral reef ecosystems in the world, its condition has declined since European settlement, and it faces many threats.

Protecting it to ensure that future generations can enjoy this natural wonder is crucial.

A stronger investigation and enforcement approach

While the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park will continue to be protected under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* (GBRMP Act) and the Great Barrier Reef Regulations 1983, changes have been made to better integrate this legislation with the national environment law—the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

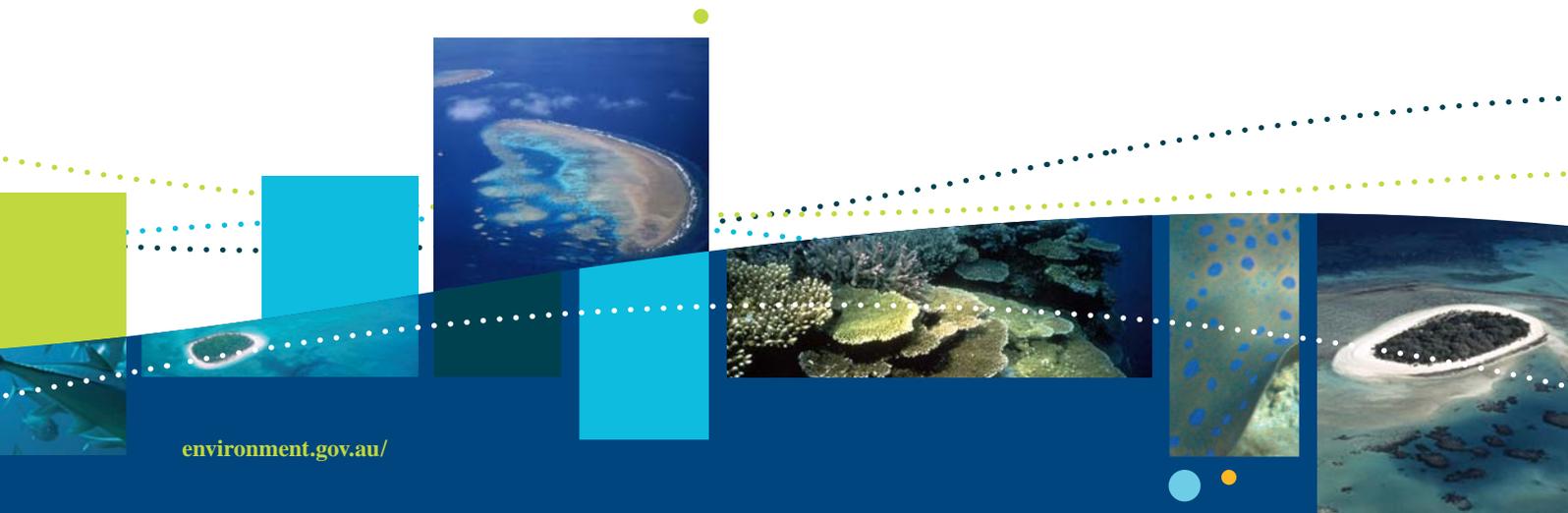
Activities in the marine park were already tightly controlled, and these changes make the more comprehensive investigation powers of the EPBC Act also available for the purposes of the GBRMP Act, so that a single investigation system applies to the marine park.

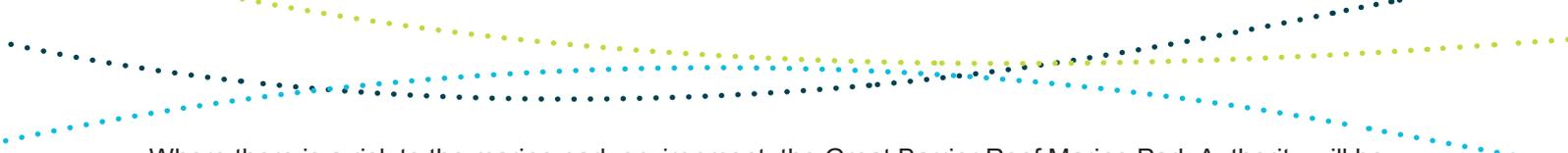
This refines the enforcement framework applying to the marine park, and provides more flexible and stronger tools that can be tailored to the circumstances.

Under the new rules, marine park users now have a duty to take reasonable steps to prevent or minimise environmental harm.

Inspectors can issue fines for a broader range of minor breaches. Civil rather than criminal penalties can be sought, although seeking criminal penalties is still an option.

Penalties have been adjusted to better fit the offence, so that small offences carry lower penalties, while serious offences carry higher maximum penalties.





Where there is a risk to the marine park environment, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority will be empowered to order the activity be stopped to avoid, reduce or eliminate the risk.

Being unaware of the marine park, of its zones, of location within the marine park, and of the restrictions on marine park uses is not an excuse under the law, unless it is an honest and reasonable mistake.

Added protection for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park has become a matter of national environmental significance under the EPBC Act. This means that activities that will have a significant impact on the environment of the marine park will trigger that Act.

The marine park was already protected under the EPBC Act because of its status as a world heritage and national heritage-listed area, which are already nationally protected matters.

But now, as well as the existing permit requirements under the GBRMP Act, activities inside the marine park that are likely to have a significant impact on the environment, and activities outside the marine park that are likely to have a significant impact on the environment of the marine park or other nationally protected matters must be assessed and approved with the same robust processes used under the EPBC Act.

Such activities may include major new pontoons, jetties and port developments within or next to the marine park; aquaculture facilities; tourism developments, including marinas and floating hotels; coastal large-scale subdivisions with potential runoff affecting the marine park; major coastal infill or spoil dumping; and new industry with significant marine discharges.

Less red tape

The new, streamlined approach tackles gaps in protection, while simplifying regulation, and removing duplication.

Permits under the GBRMP Act may still be needed for activities within the marine park, and most activities will not need approval under the EPBC Act.

But where permission is required under both pieces of legislation, the process is now simpler. A referral under the EPBC Act will be deemed to also be a permit application under the GBRMP Act, and, where possible, all assessments and approvals under both pieces of legislation will be streamlined and done at the same time.

The EPBC Act assessment process is a transparent process that places statutory timeframes on decision-makers, and provides opportunity for public input.

More information

For more information on these legislative changes, or on EPBC Act environmental impact assessments, and approval requirements and processes, go to www.environment.gov.au/epbc/index.html

If you believe your project may need approval under the EPBC Act, email the federal environment department at epbc.referrals@environment.gov.au or call 1800 803 772 in the first instance for advice on whether you need to submit a referral.

Fact sheets on the EPBC Act are also available by calling 1800 803 772 or emailing ciu@environment.gov.au

For more information on the GBRMP Act and its permit requirements, go to www.gbrmpa.gov.au

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