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Fishing Port Douglas News

with Heff



July 2024 marks 20 years since the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003 was legislated and became enforceable creating – at the time – the largest protected sea area anywhere in the world. Zoning is the cornerstone of all conservation and management activities undertaken by the Reef Authority and our partners. It serves as the Reef's insurance policy, protection tool, and safety net, among other critical roles.

Entering his sixth year as CEO of the Reef Authority, Josh Thomas shares his thoughts on the origins and ongoing importance of zoning in protecting the Marine Park.

Zoning is the foundation on which all Reef Authority – and its partners' – conservation and management activities are built. Josh says at its core zoning is simply a set of user guidelines to protect and preserve one of our most stunning and iconic natural resources.

And as the Reef slowly begins to recover from the fifth major climate-driven bleaching event in the last decade, the zoning plan, and its inherent benefits, are more crucial now than ever before.

"Consider the zoning plan a little bit like a town planning scheme; it simply outlines what you can do and where," Josh says.

"A planning scheme has commercial districts, residential districts, and public recreation space, and it's not dissimilar in the marine environment. There are places you can and can't fish and other zones that allow you to do different activities. Essentially there's a very prescribed set of rules against each of those. And we (Reef Authority) simply make sure that people are interacting with the Marine Park accordingly."

And for those who flout the rules in a protected area?

"If you're poaching from a World Heritage area, and if you break the rules in the Marine Park, you will get caught, it's as simple as that," Josh says earnestly.

"We have an incredibly sophisticated compliance team and close partnership with other agencies including Border Force, Maritime Safety Queensland, and Queensland Police, to make sure that we're protecting the Reef in line with the rules that exist for a reason."

The zoning reforms, which increased protected areas on the Reef from less than five per cent (5%) to more than 33 per cent (33%) when first introduced, were the culmination of an intense two-year planning period and more than 30,000 public submissions.

"It was essentially a cross-sectoral effort. And there was a lot of conjecture at the time as to whether it was the right thing to do and there were opposing views on all sides," Josh says.

"But the science is undeniably clear, and it is incredibly heartening to see the vision and foresight of our predecessors come to bear, while we continue to strengthen our wider Reef protection and management practises."

Coral trout stocks in particular, one of the most popular recreational fishing targets across the entire Reef, have returned to levels not seen for more than 40 years due, in large part, to the

introduction of green zones, which provide a sanctuary for trout to increase their reproductive capacity. The fish are larger and produce more offspring which yields a greater supply of baby fish to surrounding fished reefs (blue zones), replenishing fish populations, and enhancing fisheries sustainability.

Moreover, the increase in predatory fish stocks also correlates directly with significant reductions in the frequency of crown-of-thorn starfish (COTS) outbreaks on green zone reefs.

A recent study by James Cook University, also shows that partially protected zones, some of which allow restricted activities like spear fishing, can also provide benefits to fish stocks.

In 2005, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority was awarded UNESCO's Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Conservation, for developing and implementing the Zoning Plan but, Josh says, few realise there is actually a storied history behind the 20-year milestone, stretching back to the original zones of the early 80s.

"Australia has this incredible legacy and performance track record in how we protect the Great Barrier Reef," he says.

"And at a time when the Reef is facing unprecedented pressure from climate change, the positive effects of zoning are incredibly heartening and testament to our colleagues, partners and Reef users who have made it their life's work to protect the Reef."

But there is more work to be done.

"Both the Australian and Queensland Governments, through the Reef Authority, Australian Institute of Marine Science and Queensland Department of Environment and Science, continue to assess the effectiveness of Marine Park Zoning in protecting biodiversity, sustainability, and cultural and heritage values," Josh says.

"This includes working in close partnership with Traditional Owners to ensure their Sea Country is effectively managed in-line with their cultural values which date back for millennia."

The Great Barrier Reef is unmatched anywhere in the world in terms of its complex biodiversity and stunning natural environments; and over thousands of years has borne witness to ecological shifts that are almost beyond comprehension.



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Fishing On the Daintree

with Jamie Beitzel



Gee's I'm grateful for where I work and I mean that sincerely. The Daintree River allows me to go about my business pretty much as I wish which in the scheme of things presents very few dramas. There was one hiccup this month when the ferry broke down for a day forcing a cancellation but other than this it has been smooth sailing. The only other issue which does arise from time to time is some flooding during the wet season, but not at this time of year. Offshore charters would have found things a lot tougher with persistent south easterly winds but that's the beauty of the Daintree, we are calm water fishing.

If I reflect on years gone by the month of July is always a super busy month on the books but it can also be very challenging with some shady weather and can be cold and a bit wet. Well I'm am wrapped to say I was fortunate to experience the same amount of trade and the weather was superb for river fishing fort this time of year. I'd probably go one further and say it was one of the best July's I've had on the river when it comes to fish on offer.

It's a bit tongue in cheek and corny but it was like Christmas in July for me. Who would have predicted that in the middle of winter, our barramundi continued to plough along with outstanding results. Typically you'd be lucky to get a peek out of barra at ths time of year but instead they have been a steady highlight on my trips. The water temperatures haven't dropped off sufficiently to force them into hibernation and has kept

them active. Lure fishing is not cutting the mustard but live baiting is. Smart timing and a bit of patience with a juicy morsel twitching in front of their nose has been the key to prompting a response. Once one engages, often the others around will quickly join in. They are a schooling fish and can trigger each other into action in fear of missing out. They haven't been undersized or rat barra which can be the case in the middle of winter, but instead bonafide rippers ranging between 65cm to 80cm. I feel the days and weeks ahead will see the water temperatures maintain current status and improve further. So I anticipate this run of barra to continue in what has been the best year I've seen for this species for a very, very long time.

Not to be dismissed at all has been the great run of fingermark which have appreciated the same conditions. It never ceases to amaze the quality of fingermark this system possesses. 45 to 65cm models have been a feature of my trips.

Other than this javelin fish, golden trevally and river trevally have filled in the gaps. For some reason the big 1m queenfish slowed down a tad which has me a bit baffled. There has been quite a bit of bull shark activity around in the main channel and could be part reason as to why they are a bit shy for the moment.

Anyway onwards and upwards and look forward to a positive month in August. The mild winter will soon be warmer and the fishing red hot.



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Akula Sportfishing



with Jason Knack

When I look back through the log book the month of July proved to be a frustrating month mainly in regards to the prevailing south easterly winds which put pay to quite a few well laid plans. There was a lot of re-shuffling and at times the bad weather was too much for quite a few trips. It is disappointing for all involved when this happens but that is the nature of the beast which can be July and it just happens to coincide when there's quite a few people in town.

Despite the challenges we probably got through 60% of bookings, mostly half day style trips with a handful of offshore full day trips.

The half day trips were mainly families with kids and parents wanting to introduce them to pleasures of fishing. Our half day trips predominantly see us fishing the coastal reefs which are a rich nursery for a lot of species including cod, large mouth nannygai and coral trout. There's no problem with catching good numbers of fish but they tend to be on the cusp of being legal size. The main point of the exercise is having fun and catching fish. Still the weather did upset a few stomachs along the way despite fishing in the most affordable conditions available.

The offshore fishing is where the better action is and under some challenging conditions the more hard seasoned anglers forged ahead. As apposed to a month or so ago where the fish were in suicidal mode, this time around it required a bit more elbow grease to get the desired results. Quality large mouth nannygai and spangled emperor fishing



Great Barrier Reef Port Douglas



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deeper were active on the change of the tides and further up in the shallows there were some nice plump coral trout for the taking. I must admit if the we had more experienced anglers on some of the trips, we would have faired extremely well. However that can't be the case all the time in this line of work.

I'm not sure if I'm out of line but I do question some of the attitudes and behaviour of some youth that board my vessel at times. All I'll say is that they are a different generation if you get my drift.

Looking ahead the month of August looks indifferent with forward bookings but that can change in a heart beat if we get a good run of weather. People are tending at the moment to suck and see what happens when they arrive in the area and if fair weather prevails they'll bank on the chance there are vacancies. It's a sign of the times where careful spending is at the forefront of many minds.

Let's bring on some more settled conditions and the fishing will take care of itself in spades. It is categorically prime time to be fishing on the Great Barrier Reef.

Saltaire Charters



with Craig Newbold

The month of July has seen our 35ft Saltaire vessel continue work out of Lizard Island doing a combination of trips for the resort guests. Fishing, snorkelling and diving has been part of the program. From a fishing point of view it has been a lot of half day styled trips but the grounds are very productive up there and don't receive too much traffic. Spanish mackerel, ample coral trout and cod have been part of a typical trip. Naturally the clients are high end and it's been a great experience for our crew to sharpen their teeth when it comes to presentation and service of our product. It does appear that there will be quite a bit of repeat charters down the track both in Port Douglas and further stints at Lizard Island.

Unfortunately back in Port Douglas our 7.5m sportfishing option has been hindered by some terrible weather and all we can do is ride it out till the seas become settled. We are excited with the capabilities of this vessel to provide some great times

fishing on the Great Barrier Reef in the coming weeks. In the meantime it has a gig coming up with our Mothership as you'll read below.

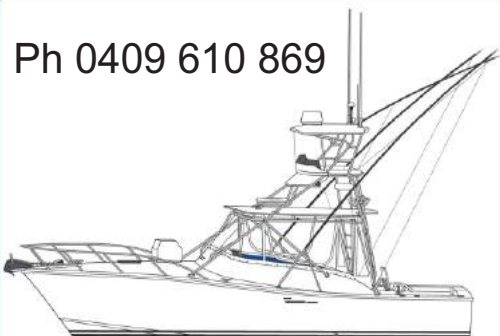
We are just in the final preparation for our first kite surfing trip with 7 clients over 7 days taking us to Lizard Island and back with our 50ft Mothership and 7.5m support vessel. Our clients are highly seasoned kite surfers having experienced trips all over the world. If July is any indication with regards to wind and weather they will be in for one hell of a ride.

Logistically with fresh south easterly winds these guys could reach Lizard Island in short time, coming back will require quite a bit of tacking to get home. It will be interesting to see how it all pans out but there will be no shortage of magical vista to see along one of the best stretches of coastline in the world. The plan is to offer several of these style of trips each year moving forward in a unique and specialised market.

Let you know how it goes !



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