

ELIZABETH AND MIDDLETON
REEFS MARINE
NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE



Australian Government
Director of National Parks

ELIZABETH AND MIDDLETON REEFS MARINE NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE SECOND MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs Marine National Nature Reserve (the Reserve), which covers 1,880 km², was proclaimed on 23 December 1987. It is protected under Commonwealth environmental legislation, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The reefs are the peaks of volcanic seamounts, which are part of the Lord Howe Island volcanic chain. There are more than 20 such peaks in the Tasman Sea, but only those named here rise above sea level.

Together with Lord Howe Island, Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs form the world's most southern coral reefs. Warm currents during summer and cold currents during winter, together with the remote locations of the reefs, have resulted in unique assemblages of tropical and sub tropical species, as well a number of endemic species

The remote location means replenishment from distant reefs is infrequent and it is more than likely that most species are self replenishing. Their isolation has also made them a refuge for the black cod, *Epinephelus daemelli*. Once common along the New South Wales (NSW) coast, the black cod is now rare and is protected under Commonwealth and NSW legislation. The black cod is widely distributed throughout most habitats at Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs, but they favour gutters, caves and overhangs.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs represent the southern most limit for many coral species. Although the diversity of corals at the Reefs is less than other areas, such as the Great Barrier Reef, many of the species that do occur are uncommon in other locations.

Over 300 species of fish have been recorded at the reefs. Most of these fish species are widely distributed, however a number of other species are restricted to the southern or south western Pacific Ocean. There are also a number species which are endemic to the Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs and Lord Howe Island, such as the double header wrasse, *Coris bulbifrons*.



MARITIME HISTORY

Middleton Reef was discovered on 20 July 1788 by Lieutenant John Shortland in the *Alexander*. He had sailed to Australia with the First Fleet and was returning to Batavia when he saw the reef. It was named Middleton Shoals in honour of Admiral Sir Charles Theodore Middleton. Elizabeth Reef was given its name following the wreck of the brig *Elizabeth* on the reef in 1831.

A number of wrecks are still visible at high tide in the Reserve. At Elizabeth Reef the Japanese tuna boat *Kaineo Maru* is visible on the western side of the reef. At Middleton Reef the most obvious wreck is the 13500 tonne meat freighter, the *Runic*, which is on the western side of the reef and is visible for several kilometres and is easily picked up on radar. On the southern side of the Middleton Reef is the wreck of the Japanese tuna boat *Fuku Maru*. The most recent wreck occurred in 1998 when the fibreglass longliner *Monray Frontier* was wrecked next to the *Runic*.



WHAT IS ALLOWED

| | Sanctuary Zone (Middleton Reef) | Habitat Protection Zone (Elizabeth Reef) |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Accessing the Reserve | Users can access this zone without a permit in accordance with the Management Plan and the EPBC Act. Under the EPBC Act visitors must not: | Entry into this zone without a permit is prohibited. Permits will be issued by the Director of National Parks in accordance with EPBC Act regulations. Access with a permit will be in accordance with the Management Plan, EPBC Act and permit conditions. |
| Commercial fishing | Prohibited | Prohibited |
| Recreational fishing | Prohibited | Vertebrate fish species (excluding the black cod) may be taken for non-commercial purposes in this zone in accordance with permit conditions and other (NSW) recreational fishing regulations. |
| Mining operations | Prohibited | Prohibited |
| Scientific activities | May be carried out with a permit. | May be carried out with a permit. |
| Other commercial activities | Assessed on a case by case basis and subject to permit. | Assessed on a case by case basis and subject to permit. |
| Access to aircraft | Limited to above 500 feet from sea level. | Limited to above 500 feet from sea level. |



ENTRY TO HABITAT PROTECTION ZONE - PERMIT CONDITIONS

All permit holders will be required to abide by the following permit conditions when undertaking visitation and or recreational fishing at Elizabeth Reef. The following conditions should be regarded as a minimum and new ones may be introduced, so please ensure that you refer to the conditions attached to your permit or if applying for a new permit, take note of the conditions which will be included in the permit application:

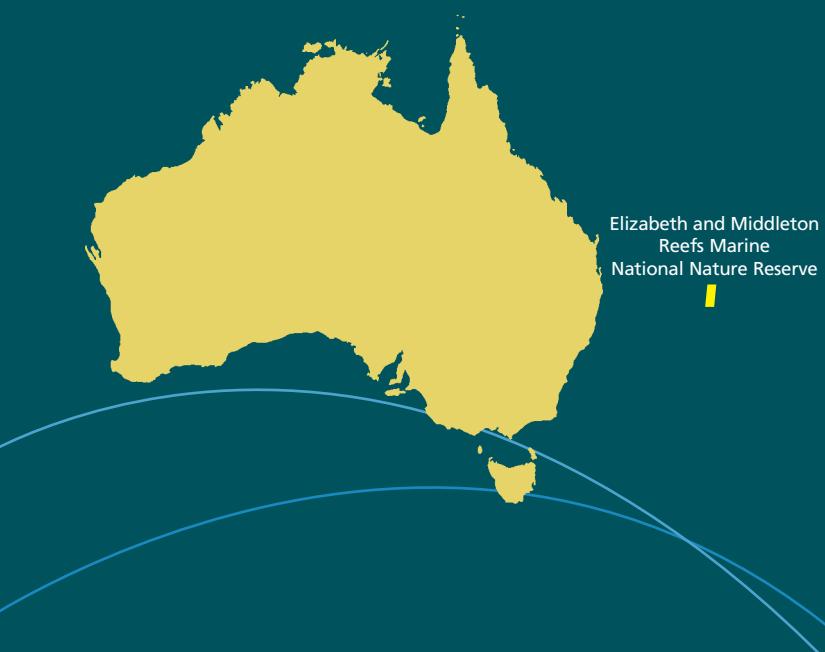
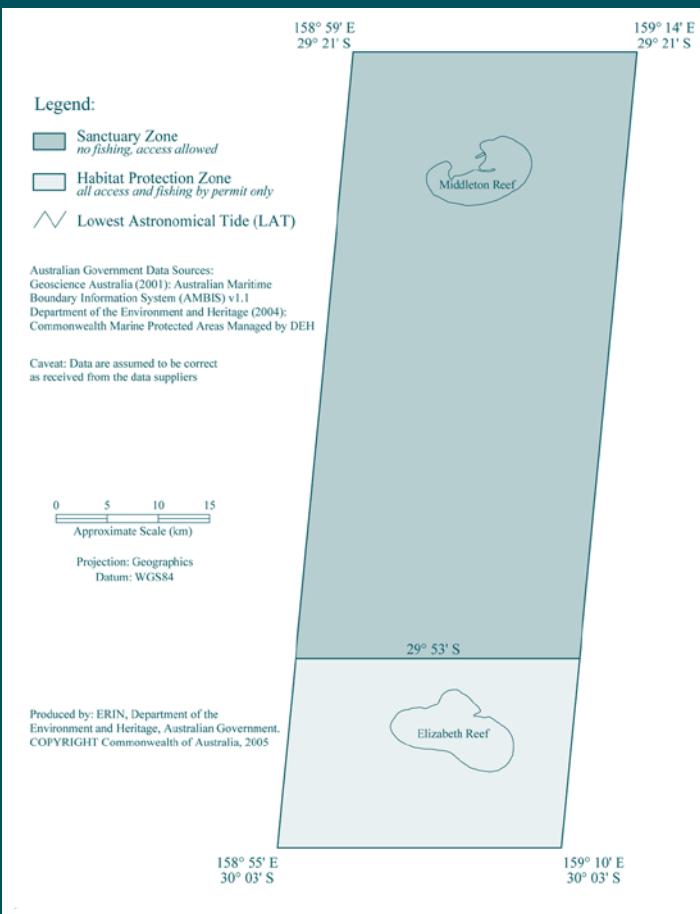
- fishing must be carried on in a manner that is consistent with the laws of NSW (NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994 and Regulations);
- a combined bag limit of a maximum of 10 fish per person, regardless of species. However, individual

species bag limits if less than 10, as prescribed by the NSW Fisheries Management Act and Regulations, still apply;

- a combined boat limit of a maximum of 30 fish regardless of species and regardless of how many people are on board;
- at least 24 hours prior notice to the Director or his representative on Lord Howe Island of an intended trip to the Reef and the intended length of stay;
- fish must not be filleted in the Reserve, except for the purpose of immediate consumption;
- a report must be submitted to the Director or his representative on Lord Howe Island, within 10 days of completing a trip, reporting on:

- a. the number and species of fish caught in the Reserve;
- b. the number and species of fish caught and released;
- c. any other vessels seen in the area, their observed activities and the vessel particulars if possible;
- d. environmental observations such as the presence of marine mammals, coral bleaching, crown of thorns starfish, marine debris, oil pollution etc.

These reports formalise the role of visitors to the reserve as environmental stewards and will be used by the Department as a valuable surveillance and monitoring tool that will, over time, provide an important compilation of activities and environmental conditions in the Reserve.



Cover: Redfin butterflyfish. Inside from left: Bluefish, Magpie sweetlip, Red Lionfish, Black Cod, Black-axil chromis and the Galapagos shark – Neil Gemmell, Department of the Environment and Heritage

Aerial photo of the wreck of the Runic at Middleton Reef – Department of the Environment and Heritage.

THE ELIZABETH AND MIDDLETON REEFS MARINE NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Reserve has a formal Management Plan approved under the EPBC Act. The Plan recognises the long-standing relationship between the Lord Howe Island community and the Reserve – Elizabeth Reef in particular. The Plan provides for ongoing access to the Reserve. It acknowledges the importance of working cooperatively with the community and the valuable stewardship role that the community has taken on to help protect the conservation values of the Reefs

When visiting the Reserve there are a few things you can do to help us manage the reefs. If you are diving take care not to damage the fragile coral surfaces. If you are fishing under a permit and accidentally catch a black cod return it to the sea immediately, preferably without removing it from the water. Do not collect or remove any marine plants or animals, including shells and coral (living or not). Be careful of the shipwrecks which are unsafe as a result of years of exposure to the elements. Do not climb on, interfere with, or remove artefacts from the wrecks.

Restrictions apply to recreational fishing and other uses of the Reserve. Permits are required for a number of activities including access to Elizabeth Reef. Visitors are reminded that it is their responsibility to know what activities are allowed in the Reserve and that regulations governing these activities are enforceable under the EPBC Act and the *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

The Director
Marine Protected Areas Management Section
Department of the Environment and Heritage
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone (02) 6274 1111

INFORMATION CAN ALSO BE FOUND ON OUR WEB SITES.

For permit application forms go to:
www.deh.gov.au/epbc/permits/parks

For copies of the Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs Marine National Nature Reserve Management Plan go to: www.deh.gov.au/coasts/mpa/elizabeth

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