

**Abstract for presentation to the Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) workshop. Cairns, June 2003. John Tanzer, Executive Director. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.**

**EBM Approach- Case study. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.**

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was established by the Australian Government in the mid 1970s in response to mounting public concern over development threats to the reef ecosystem. Even in these relatively early days in marine conservation it was realised that it was necessary to include within the park boundary sufficient area and a wide range of diverse habitats if successful long term protection was to be achieved. It is a multiple use park with a legislative and management framework, which allows for a range of uses underpinned by a fundamental principle of managing for ecological sustainability. Major uses include tourism, which is by far the most significant economic activity, shipping and recreational and commercial fishing. Indigenous people hunt and fish in the park.

Pressures on the ecosystem have steadily increased in keeping with growing population, technology and economic development. More recently, global warming is emerging as an increasing threat with two widespread bleaching events in the last few years. Declining water quality in the inshore areas and the impacts of fishing are the most immediate, direct and widespread pressures on ecosystem functioning and health.

The management of the park is the responsibility of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA). Management approaches applied to the park have evolved over the years but have always had as the foundation a broad scale spatial zoning and a permit system to regulate site-specific impact. Presently major initiatives are underway to address the problems associated with water quality and increasing threats to biodiversity. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority works with a range of other agencies to manage across Federal and State boundaries.

Twenty five years of endeavour has enabled the Authority to learn a good deal about what does and does not work and the need for flexible and adaptive management. It remains committed to the concept of broad scale ecosystem based management utilising the best available science and expertise. Uncertainty, resulting from the complexity of the ecosystem and a lack of predictive information make it critical that management intervention is risk based and precautionary. Biodiversity and connectivity, to the extent that they is known and broadly understood, are seen to be assets that require protection if the long-term resilience of the Great Barrier Reef is to be maintained. Involving the community and stakeholders in management planning has always been central to the Authority's management; it remains so. Achieving a satisfactory level of compliance also needs continual attention

and maintenance as its neglect can result in a loss of support for the entire management framework.