

Beefing up the reef

In a ceremony on 1 July at REEFVTS in Townsville, the Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP joined the Queensland Minister for Main Roads, Fisheries and Marine Infrastructure, the Hon Craig Wallace MP, to launch the extension of REEFVTS to the southern boundary of the Marine Park.

“Extending REEFVTS is a significant step in protecting the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait,” Minister Albanese said.

“The system gives seafarers important information about water conditions and the movement of other vessels, further helping to prevent accidents which could result in the release of pollution or cause physical damage to the Reef.

“This package of measures represents a comprehensive response to earlier incidents in the Great Barrier Reef. They strengthen controls over navigation, pilotage, under keel clearance, penalties and oversight in this sensitive area.”

Mr Wallace said he is proud this important protection for the reef is headquartered in Townsville.

“With many economically vital mineral and gas export projects being developed adjacent to this very sensitive marine environment, the completion of this project will boost protection for the reef,” said Mr Wallace.

“While we can’t directly influence the crew behaviour of multinational shipping giants, this gives us the best chance to catch them before they get into trouble.”

Facts and figures

There are eleven ports operating adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef, accounting for \$17 billion of our nation’s exports.

In recent years, the volume of shipping traffic transiting through the Reef has increased from 2,743 voyages in 2006/07 to 3,417 in 2009/10 – and in the coming decade that figure is expected to double.



Above: Attending the REEFVTS expansion ceremony from left – Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Queensland Minister for Main Roads, Fisheries and Marine Infrastructure, the Hon Craig Wallace MP and Leo Zussino, Chairman of the AMSA Board.

History of Reef Protection

The environmental and cultural significance of the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait region are nationally and internationally renowned and the significance of the area continues to be protected.

1975 – declaration of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park by the Australian Government

1981 – listing of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area by UNESCO

1983 – designation of the Capricorn and Bunker Groups of Islands as an Area to be Avoided by the IMO

1990 – declaration of the Great Barrier Reef as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) by the IMO allowing Australia to introduce associated protective measures

1991 – the establishment of a compulsory pilotage regime for ships transiting navigationally complex areas of the Reef with the pilot providing detailed local knowledge to assist safe passage

1997 – the establishment of the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait ship reporting system (REEFREP), adopted by the IMO in 1996, whereby ships transiting the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait are required to report their position on a regular basis

2004 – the introduction of a coastal Vessel Traffic Service (REEFVTS) allowing near real time monitoring of ship traffic to provide information to a ship’s master on potential traffic conflicts and other navigational information

2004 – a system of zoning was introduced by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to allow ships to transit the Reef in designated shipping areas

2005 – designation of Torres Strait as a PSSA

2006 – implementation of an emergency management towage system and associated response arrangements which includes the provision of a dedicated emergency towage vessel, the Pacific Responder

2010 – Australia’s proposal to extend REEFREP to the southern boundary of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park agreed by the IMO

2011 – launch of extended REEFVTS to southern boundary of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Code of conduct: tow-in the line

Maritime Safety Queensland's tow-in surfing Code of Conduct, which was developed to separate paddle surfers from motorised craft, has been well received by tow-in surfing enthusiasts.

The Code of Conduct, which was introduced in August 2010, was developed after final consultation between Maritime Safety Queensland, the Gold Coast City Council and Surfing Queensland to promote the safety of tow-in surfing operations.

Initial discussions regarding the possible introduction of a code of conduct began in 2009, and were led by staff from the Maritime Safety Queensland Gold Coast regional office. While tow-in surfing is a popular water sport throughout Queensland, the Gold Coast has seen a significant increase in tow-in surfing activities due to its big ocean swells that create ideal tow-in surfing waves.

The discussions were held with regional stakeholders such as the Gold Coast City Council, Gold Coast Lifeguard Service, Coastalwatch, Surfing Queensland and professional surfers and tow-in surfing representatives, all of who were keen to ensure the safety of waterways users.

As a result of the discussions with regional stakeholders, a discussion paper was released for public comment between January and February 2010. A number of responses were submitted, with overwhelming support received for the introduction of the proposed Code of Conduct.

The final Code of Conduct was released in August 2010 and provides guidance to tow-in surfing enthusiasts on a number of important safety aspects, including:

- general rules relating to proceeding at a safe speed, keeping a proper lookout and avoiding collision
- specific rules of operation for personal watercraft (PWC) in relation to speed and distance off requirements
- rules governing the operation of vessels in and near Gold Coast City Council bathing reserves
- requirements to be met to qualify for the tow-in surfing observer exemption
- specific requirements for tow-in surfing operations within Currumbin Alley and Tallebudgera Creek mouth.

Maritime Safety Queensland imposed a transitional period for the Code of Conduct from December 2010 to March 2011 to allow time for the public to become familiar with the new rules.

While the summer season of 2011/2012 did not provide extraordinary swell, enforcement officers reported that the voluntary compliance to the Code of those in the water during this peak traffic time was high.

The Code of Conduct can be downloaded from the Maritime Safety Queensland website under the 'Waterways' link.



Above: Marine officer Anton Alback stands beside one of the signs erected to provide information to the public on requirements for tow-in surfing.

A day in the life of...

Frank Thomson, Marine Officer, Thursday Island

Background history

I started my career as an apprentice boilermaker with the then Cairns Harbour Board. I went to sea at twenty as a deckhand on fishing and charter vessels working from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Bundaberg. At the age of twenty five I gained my Master Class 4, then spent the years until 1995 running charter and commercial vessels around the Queensland coast.

From 1995 to 1999 I worked on ore carriers and during this time I spent nine months at the Australian Maritime College in Tasmania studying for my Master Class 3.

I then joined Maritime Safety Queensland in 2006 as a Marine Safety Officer in Cairns before transferring to Thursday Island a year later. I have lived and worked on Thursday Island ever since.



What major changes have you seen happen during your time ?

There have been quite a number of changes during my time with Maritime Safety Queensland. Some of our prouder moments have been the introduction of the subsidised 406 MHz EPIRB programme with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), the introduction of BoatSafe training courses to all Torres Strait island inhabitants, and the reduction in the numbers of search and rescue incidents since the beginning of the Torres Strait Marine Safety project.

What happens in your average day?

My average day consists of:

- commercial licencing, seetime assessments and examinations
- ship monitoring
- buoy and beacon maintenance
- pollution equipment and vessel maintenance
- school and community visits
- liaison meetings with local schools, police, AMSA, the Torres Strait Regional Authority, TAFE, local councils and other support organisations
- visiting island communities and schools to assist in delivering BoatSafe courses.

What are some of the future projects happening in your area?

We will continue work with the Torres Strait Marine Safety project and will also continue to strengthen our relationships with the TAGAI Teachers to progress the incorporation of the marine safety into the schools curriculum.



Above: Marine Officer Frank Thomson discussing marine safety with school students .

What are some of the challenges you face in your area?

Being located in such a remote area definitely has its challenges. We are only accessible by boat or plane and the rough weather that affects the Torres Strait from April to October makes inter-island travel uncomfortable. The rough weather can also make the maintenance of navigation aids extremely difficult during these times.

There are also difficulties with communications. Mail can take up to a week to arrive from our office in Cairns, and most parcels take two weeks. Unreliable broadband access can increase the isolation, high cost of airfares and food can also be frustrating and there is a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables. Summers can also be extremely hot and humid.

What are some of the highlights living/working in your area?

Despite the challenges, there are many highlights of living and working in Thursday Island. The scenery is beautiful and there is always good fishing and camping in the outer islands if you are lucky to be invited out on a boat.

Good all-tidings we bring

A long standing shortfall in Townsville boating facilities will be addressed following the acquisition by the department of a further 3.9 hectares of land in the existing marine precinct at Townsville, which has been allocated for public recreational boating facilities.

This is a large scale project, the biggest to be undertaken outside state boat harbours, and is a joint undertaking between Townsville City Council and Transport and Main Roads, with the cooperation of the Port of Townsville Limited.

The land will become available following the relocation of the businesses occupying Port of Townsville's current marine precinct on the Ross River to the new Townsville Marine Precinct being built downstream of the port access bridge now under construction. This land is in addition to 2.9 hectares, which the department acquired for recreational boat launching purposes in 2009, making a total of 6.8 hectares.



Ross River is the only waterfront site in the Townsville area suitable for establishing sheltered recreational boat launching facilities accessible from the sea at all tides. The additional land will increase the number of boat ramp lanes able to be constructed from eight to 16, addressing the current shortfall in Townsville's all-tide boat ramps.

Waving away weather guesswork

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) has released a new long term weather forecasting product which is now available on their website. The Interactive Weather and Wave Forecast Maps have been derived from BOM's computer models and will provide mariners with all their weather forecast needs.

Using the interactive map viewer, mariners can display and animate computer generated weather and wave forecast maps out to seven days for the Australian region.

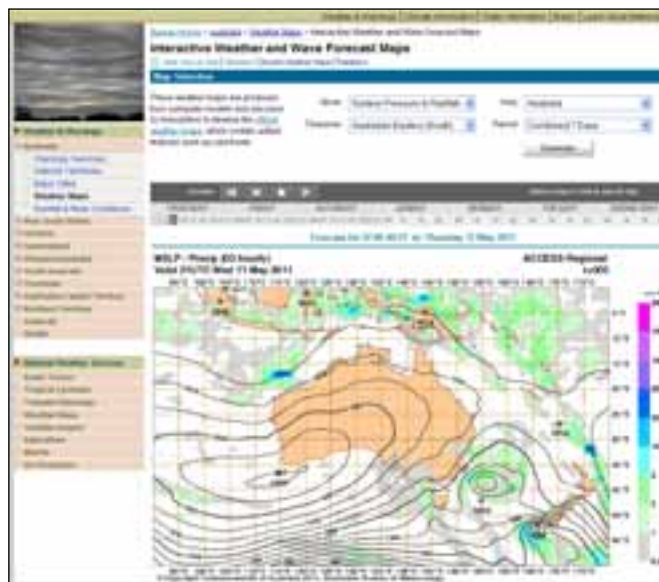
The default display will show the surface pressure and rainfall map for the Australian region for the next seven days at three to six hourly intervals. Mariners can animate the sequence of images by pressing the play button, or they can select the particular time step they are interested in.

The BOM also provides other information useful to mariners including wind speed and direction, combined sea and swell, primary swell, secondary swell, wind waves, and wave period. Smaller domains can be selected for four different regions around Australia, defined as South Eastern, South Western, North Western and North Eastern. These zoomed in maps will enable the user to look at the finer details for the next two days.

Mariners who go out to sea for up to a week will find this product suitable for planning their trip. Recreational boaters looking to plan their activities for the weekend will be able to assess wind, rain and wave conditions. Surfers will have access to the latest forecasts of wave height and direction, plus wave period and wind strengths to help pick the best surfing spots.

A word of caution; the accuracy of computer model forecasts decrease as you look further into the coming week. Computer model forecasts are run twice a day based on the latest information, and as a result forecast weather patterns may vary from what was previously shown. Mariners should always refer to the latest marine text forecasts and warnings from BOM before embarking on their trip.

The interactive map viewer can be accessed on www.bom.gov.au by clicking on Maps and then selecting Interactive Weather and Wave Forecast Maps, or via BOM's Marine and Ocean website.



Above: A screen snap shot of the BOM's website.

Industry profile

Des Thomson, Chairman Queensland Recreational Boating Council

The Queensland Recreational Boating Council, previously the Queensland Small Craft Council, is a division of Marine Queensland. The Council is made up of delegates from 14 southern Queensland boat and yacht clubs, along with government representatives from Maritime Safety Queensland, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Queensland Boating and Fishing Patrol, along with industry member representatives from Volunteer Marine Rescue, Coast Guard and Yachting Queensland.



How did you first become involved in the marine industry?

I started out in the marine industry by getting involved in water skiing in Ayr during 1957. I gained my trade qualification in 1960 and began working as a manual arts teacher in 1961. I ventured into the world of sailing after owning several larger power boats and eventually I obtained my Master Class IV certificate. As a result of having teaching qualifications and my marine certificate, I was approached to teach navigation part time at the Bundaberg TAFE and helped set up Queensland's first Marine Training Centre in Bundaberg. A few years and a few moves later, I became a member of the Moreton Bay Boat Club which ultimately led me to taking on the role of delegate to the Queensland Small Craft Council which has now evolved into the Queensland Recreational Boating Council.

How long have you been in your current role and what does it involve?

I have been involved with the Council for approximately 17 years, first as a delegate representing Moreton Bay Boat Club and for the last five years both as a delegate and Chairman. Chairing this group is a great experience for someone who has such a keen interest in the marine environment. The variety of ideas and opinions from the various delegates is extremely gratifying and contributions to the business at hand are always topical. As Chairman, I hold a position on the Board of Marine Queensland. This role involves attending various forums on behalf of the Council and acting as spokesman when required.

What does the Council set out to achieve?

The Council acts as representative spokesperson of member organisations in communications and other dealings with Government and Government departments, industry and the public generally. We encourage and promote safety, the practice of good seamanship and courtesy at sea amongst small craft owners and those with whom they share the use of the waterways. On top of all of this we also act as an expert advisory body on such matters as required.

“Chairing this group is a great experience for someone who has such a keen interest in the marine environment.”

What changes have you seen brought in during this time?

In my time on the Council we have seen several changes involving the make up of the Council delegates. We have increased the number of Government delegates along with the inclusion of the rescue organisations. For many years the Council was an identity in its own right but several years ago it became a division of Marine Queensland. The meeting attendance has been very gratifying over the past years as delegates attempt to have improved conditions implemented for the boating community. The Council was very active in the planning and consultation for the introduction of the legislative requirements for ship-sourced sewage. Marine Park zoning was also high on the agenda for the Council as a major stakeholder in this process.

What are some of the changes that you feel the Queensland boating industry needs to make?

It is important that closer ties be formed between those who have the responsibility of determining and enforcing marine regulations and those who undertake boating activities on a regular basis. We have made great progress in recent years with organisations like Marine Queensland, Maritime Safety Queensland and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. While this is heading in the right direction, more needs to be done so that other Government utilities become involved.

Some of the issues Council would like to see being dealt with are the possibility of recreational licence classifications based on the length and power of the boat being operated, keeping navigation channels clear for boaties at all tides, and continued input into the design and positioning of navigation aids.

What is the future direction of the council?

I see this council growing in membership especially as we make contact with other marine user groups such as skiing and PWC operators. We are also endeavouring to have more representation from clubs further up the Queensland coast. Our aim is to be a major stakeholder and voice at all discussions that take place concerning the wellbeing and future of boaties in Queensland.

What are your personal future directions?

As for my future, I enjoy the role of Chairman and would like to think, with the support of the delegates, I can hold this position in the near future. I would still see myself being a contributing delegate to the Council even after handing over the reins to another delegate.

Life jacket concern in incident report

The 2010 *Marine Incidents in Queensland* report has found a 30 percent decrease in fatalities last year compared to 2009.

The report found the loss of 14 lives in 2010 was a significant reduction compared to 20 deaths in 2009.

Only two out of 14 people who died on the water last year were wearing life jackets. This is a tragic reminder that life jackets are not only required equipment in commercial, fishing and recreational boats but are compulsory to wear in some situations.

Even where it is not compulsory to wear a life jacket boaties should wear one as a common sense precaution, especially when boating alone or at night.

The report also found alcohol was involved in four of the fatal marine incidents.

Boaties should remain vigilant and ensure they carried all required safety equipment including emergency position indicating radio beacons (EPIRBs), life jackets and flares – and ensure it is all up-to-date.

Always check the weather before heading out and tell local marine rescue organisations where you are going as well as when and where you're due back. Skippers should keep a proper lookout and remember that the same under .05 rule for drink driving applies on the water as on the road.

Every time someone applies for a boat licence they are made aware they must provide life jackets and other personal safety equipment for each passenger in their boat by law.

Under Transport Operations (Marine Safety) legislation, boat owners and operators have a general safety obligation to make sure their boat is safe, properly equipped and crewed and operated safely.

Each year Maritime Safety Queensland carries out regular safety compliance activity with the Water Police, particularly in the lead up to holidays, which see large numbers of people on the water.

As part of Maritime Safety Queensland's regional safety education programs, officers also undertake boat ramp days and ongoing education which involve checking vessels and advising boaties what they are required to have – including the provision of safety equipment such as life jackets.

The report looked at 779 marine incidents reported in state waters during 2010 – 320 marine incidents per 100 000 vessels.

For more information, and to obtain a copy of the report, visit the Maritime Safety Queensland website at www.msq.qld.gov.au.



Upcoming events 2011

JULY

1-10 Moreton Bay Fishing Classic

AUGUST

25-28 Brisbane International Boat Show

SEPTEMBER

10-11 Whitsunday Boat and Leisure Show

17-18 Bowen Fishing Classic

24-25 Tin Can Bay Boating and Camping Show

28-1 Oct Gold Coast Flat Head Classic

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Townsville _____ 07 4726 3400

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