

# Rowley Shoals and Mermaid Reef marine parks



## Visitor guide



Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions  
Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development



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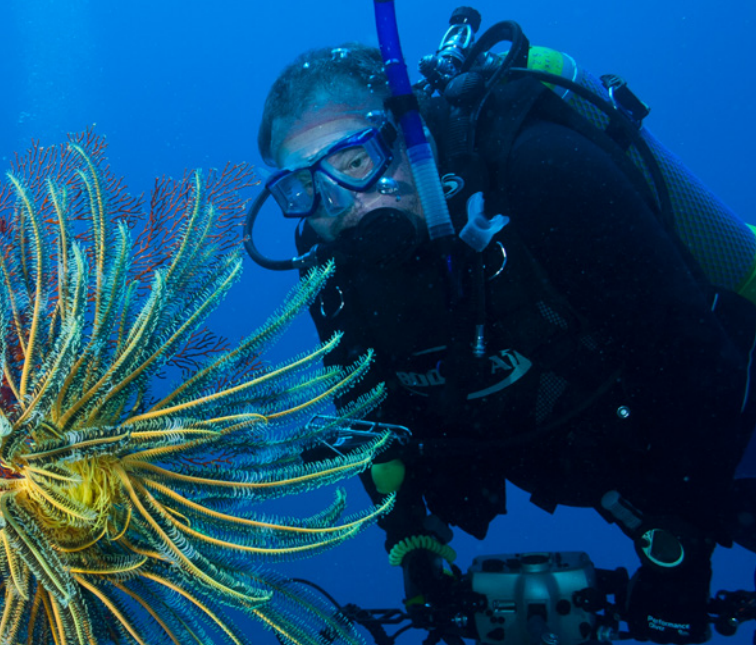


## The Rowley Shoals – one of the most remote and pristine marine areas in the world

The Rowley Shoals are located approximately 300km (160 nautical miles) west of Broome and include the State-managed Rowley Shoals Marine Park and the Commonwealth-managed Mermaid Reef Marine Park. Together the parks protect a chain of three coral atolls, Clerke Reef, Mermaid Reef and Imperieuse Reef, at the edge of Australia's continental shelf.

Mermaid Reef, the most northerly atoll, rises from depths of around 440m, Clerke Reef from 390m and Imperieuse Reef from 230m. The three atolls are strikingly similar in dimension, shape, orientation and distance apart. Each atoll is pear-shaped with a north-south orientation and approximately 14–18km long and 7.5–9.5km wide. These atolls produce spectacular intertidal and subtidal coral reefs which provide a home for fish, eels, sharks, manta rays and turtles as well as invertebrates including giant clams, sea stars, urchins, sea cucumbers and nudibranchs. They are tropical 'aquariums' in the middle of the ocean.

In 1818, Captain Phillip Parker King named the area Rowley Shoals after Captain Rowley who first sighted the atolls in 1800. The three atolls were named after the ships *Imperieuse* and *Mermaid*, and the third one after Captain Clerke.



## Caring for the marine parks

Marine parks are there for everyone to enjoy but we all have a role to play to keep them healthy. Please help look after the Rowley Shoals by following a few simple rules:

### Dispose of waste properly

Take all your litter home with you – plastics and fishing line can harm and kill marine wildlife.



Pay attention to waste management regulations and appropriate discharge zones. You may not discharge any grey or black water (even if treated) in the lagoons or within 1.85km (1 NM) of the reef edge. Do not discard rubbish of any kind (including food scraps) in the lagoons or within 5.56km (3 NM) of the reef edge. These rules align with State regulations.

### No camping or lighting of fires

Only access Bedwell and Cunningham Islands during daylight hours and high tide conditions.



When accessing the islands please do not drag your vessel onto the beach. Camping and the lighting of fires are not permitted.

### Protect nesting birds

Don't build nesting shelters for the red-tailed tropic birds as they are prone to collapse, potentially harming or killing chicks, eggs and adults.

Stay at least 10m from nesting or resting birds – disturbing animals during these important times can lead to the death of their young.





- Protect the coral by not walking on exposed reef.
- Take part in Coral Watch and help collect valuable coral health data, visit [coralwatch.org](http://coralwatch.org)

### Look but don't take

- Don't collect shells or specimens from any of the islands or reefs.



### Look after wildlife

- Don't feed the fish or other wildlife as it can lead to aggression and dependence on unnatural food sources.
- A licence is required from Parks and Wildlife Service to fly a drone in the Rowley Shoals Marine Park for commercial purposes. A licence is required from Parks Australia if flying a drone for recreational or commercial purposes in Mermaid Reef Marine Park. Drones must not disturb wildlife.
- Keep your vessel at least **300m from the front or rear** of a whale within a 60° arc, and **100m from the side**. If a whale approaches, you must re-establish this distance as soon as possible, by disengaging the vessel's motor or moving away slowly (<6 knots). Separation distances also apply for **aircraft** (300m), **helicopters** (500m) and **aerial devices** such as drones (60m).



Help others do the right thing – share your knowledge of these rules when you are visiting the marine parks.

Thank you for protecting the Rowley Shoals.



## Managing the Rowley Shoals

Two separate marine parks help protect the Rowley Shoals and are managed by three government departments. The Rowley Shoals Marine Park includes Clerke and Imperieuse Reefs, both of which have permanent islands above the high-water mark called Bedwell and Cunningham islands. These atolls and islands are in Western Australian coastal waters and are managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. Mermaid Reef Marine Park is in Commonwealth waters and is managed by Parks Australia. These three agencies work together to manage the Rowley Shoals, including participating in joint surveillance operations, scientific research projects and education activities.

The Rowley Shoals are further protected by the surrounding Argo-Rowley Terrace Marine Park. For more information about this Australian Marine Park, visit [parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/parks/north-west/argo-rowley-terrace](https://parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/parks/north-west/argo-rowley-terrace)



## Fish for the future

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development legally enforces gear, bag, size and possession limits in zones where **fishing is permitted in the Rowley Shoals (Recreation and General Use Zones)**. This management ensures there will always be fish for the future. It is your responsibility to know the zones and rules of each marine park.

Download the free Recfishwest or Marine Parks WA apps to access marine park maps and other info. These apps can be used offline once downloaded.



**All cod, groper, and wrasse species are fully protected in all zones at the Rowley Shoals. Molluscs (excluding cuttlefish, squid and octopus) and coral species are also fully protected.**

Please return undersize or unwanted fish to the water quickly and carefully. Use a wet cloth when handling them and avoid placing them on hot, dry surfaces.

### Line fishing

- Is permitted in General Use and Recreation Zones.
- Fishing is not permitted in the Sanctuary and National Park Zones at the Rowley Shoals.



### Recreational netting

- Throw nets may be used only in the General Use Zone.
- Recreational set and haul netting are not permitted.

### Spearfishing

- Is permitted in General Use and Recreation Zones (excluding Clerke Lagoon Recreation Zone).

### Spearfishing (compressed air)

- Is only permitted in the General Use Zone.



## Planning your visit

Most visitors arrive by commercial charter boat between September and December and enjoy an average of 4–7 days at the Rowley Shoals. Commercial operators typically depart from Broome at sunset and arrive at the Shoals in the morning, after spending a night steaming. A call to Broome Visitors Centre on **(08) 9195 2200** is a great way to find out more about what trips are available.

## Moorings and anchoring

To protect the reef habitats in the marine parks, it is important that visitors use the public moorings. Moorings are located on the outer edge of Imperieuse and Clerke Reefs and inside Clerke and Mermaid reef lagoons (map inside). The lagoons are accessible via navigable channels. There is no channel at Imperieuse Reef and the central lagoon can only be accessed using small tender vessels under the right tidal conditions. Mermaid Reef includes a designated anchoring area outlined on the map inside. Vessels may only anchor in the designated anchoring area if no moorings are available.

**Anchoring is discouraged throughout the Rowley Shoals Marine Park and only allowed on sandy bottom.**

**Great care must be taken not to damage any coral. Anchoring at Mermaid Reef is only permitted within the designated anchoring area except in the case of an emergency.**

All moorings must be booked with written permission obtained before arrival. This should be done well in advance of your trip to avoid the disappointment of missing out or risk of getting fined.

Commercial tour operators must obtain a commercial operations licence from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to visit the Rowley Shoals Marine Park, mooring fees apply.

For further information please call the Parks and Wildlife Service's Broome office on **(08) 9195 5500** or email **[rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au)**. If visiting Mermaid Reef Marine Park, commercial tour operators require a commercial tourism licence from Parks Australia – for more information, please visit **[parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/activities/do-i-need-an-approval/tourism](https://parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/activities/do-i-need-an-approval/tourism)**





**Above** Red-tailed tropicbird.

## Activities at the Rowley Shoals

### Diving and snorkelling

The Rowley Shoals offer a range of diving and snorkelling experiences including shallow lagoons, high-speed drift, and deeper reef wall dives. The outside walls of each atoll are alive with hard and soft corals in every imaginable colour, size and shape. Curious giant potato cod and Maori wrasse will likely join you on your dive, while scores of colourful reef fish, trevally, mackerel, tuna and hump headed parrotfish hover in schools.



### Wildlife viewing

Humpback whales pass by the Rowley Shoals around July to September on their annual migration to and from calving grounds off the Kimberley coast. Localised upwellings of cool water provide feeding opportunities for small and large species. You are likely to see bottlenose and spinner dolphins cruise around the deep water surrounding the shoals. Populations of large fish and shark species such as hammerheads, marlin and sailfish also live in these deeper waters.



Seabirds feed in the offshore waters, while others breed on the islands. Bedwell Island, on Clerke Reef, is home to the State's only breeding colony of red-tailed tropicbirds who nest among the limestone rubble and driftwood. Occasionally, they are joined by wedge-tailed shearwaters, white bellied sea eagles, ruddy turnstones, sand plovers, eastern reef egrets, various terns and rarely, white-tailed tropicbirds. Bedwell and Cunningham islands at Imperieuse Reef are important resting areas for migratory birds making their mammoth annual flights from as far north as Siberia.





## Marine parks – Know your zones

Marine parks help to conserve marine biodiversity and provide special places for people to learn about, enjoy and appreciate the spectacular marine life in Western Australia. To ensure humans and nature can thrive side by side, marine parks are zoned with different activities permitted in each area. You can contribute to the management of the Rowley Shoals by ensuring you know and follow the rules.

On [page 12](#) there are four zone types at the Rowley Shoals. The map and activity table provide a quick reference guide to the different zones and permitted activities in this area.

### **Sanctuary Zone (Rowley Shoals Marine Park) and National Park Zone (Mermaid Reef Marine Park)**

These 'look but don't take' areas provide the highest level of protection for marine habitats and wildlife, maximising conservation outcomes. You can still enjoy a range of non-extractive activities including boating, swimming, scuba diving, snorkelling and nature watching in these zones. **Fishing is not permitted.**

### **Recreation Zone (Rowley Shoals Marine Park)**

The Rowley Shoals Marine Park recognises these zones as areas of high value for recreational use and enjoyment. Line fishing is permitted but there are restrictions on netting, spearfishing and species that can be taken.

### **General Use Zone (Rowley Shoals Marine Park)**

This is the largest zone in the Rowley Shoals Marine Park, enabling a wide range of activities to occur. Line fishing, recreational netting and spear fishing are permitted in this zone but there are restrictions on species that can be taken.

# More information

## Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions Parks and Wildlife Service – West Kimberley District

111 Herbert Street, Broome WA 6725

Ph: (08) 9195 5500

[dbca.wa.gov.au](http://dbca.wa.gov.au)

To book or enquire about public moorings email the department at [rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au)

## Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development – Fisheries

Broome Office

Ph: (08) 9193 8600

[fish.wa.gov.au](http://fish.wa.gov.au)

## Parks Australia

Email: [marineparks@dcceew.gov.au](mailto:marineparks@dcceew.gov.au)

[parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/parks/north-west/mermaid-reef](http://parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/parks/north-west/mermaid-reef)

[@ausmarineparks](#) on your favourite social media platform.

Tag us in photos of your trip.

## Bureau of Meteorology – Weather call

Ph: 1300 754 389

[bom.gov.au](http://bom.gov.au)

## Department of Home Affairs – Border Watch

Ph: 1800 009 623

[abf.gov.au](http://abf.gov.au)

*Photos – Mick Eidam, George Shedrawi/DBCA, Suzanne Long, Eric Matson/AIMS, John Huisman/DBCA, Michael Hourn/DBCA*



Save the  
app that  
could save  
your life



[emergencyplus.com.au](http://emergencyplus.com.au)

Download the free Emergency+ app before your visit. Use the app in an emergency to call for assistance. If there is no mobile phone coverage you **WILL NOT** be able to call **000** but the app will provide you with your GPS location.



Check for alerts and updates directly related to parks and major trails at [alerts.dbca.wa.gov.au](https://alerts.dbca.wa.gov.au) and for all emergency information in Western Australia at [emergency.wa.gov.au](https://emergency.wa.gov.au)

Find more park visitor information, book campsites and share your experiences at [exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au](https://exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au)

@waparkswildlife



@exploreparkswa



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Publication available in alternative format on request.

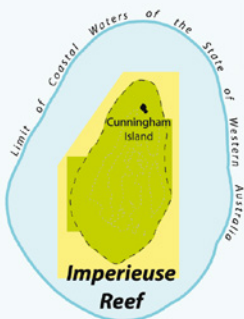
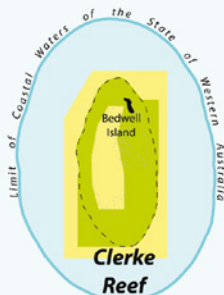
# Rowley Shoals and Mermaid Reef marine parks

## Mooring and Anchoring

Anchoring is discouraged throughout Rowley Shoals Marine Park and only allowed on sandy bottom. At Mermaid Reef Marine Park, anchoring is only permitted within the designated anchorage area, except in the case of an emergency. Moorings are available for day and overnight use in both marine parks. Written permission must be obtained prior to arrival and can be booked through the Broome Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Parks and Wildlife Service office on (08) 9195 5500 or [rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au). Detailed mooring maps are available from the Broome Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Parks and Wildlife Service office.

## Island Reserves




Cunningham Island on Imperieuse Reef and Bedwell Island on Clerke Reef are both Crown Reserves for the purpose of a marine park. Both islands are managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Parks and Wildlife Service. Access is limited to daylight hours and lighting of fires is not permitted. Please take care not to disturb nesting red-tailed tropic birds on Bedwell Island by keeping a minimum distance of 10 metres. The construction of artificial rock shelters is prohibited.







 Clerke Reef emergency anchorage area

 Mermaid Reef designated anchorage area



## Moorings - bookings required

-  12m mooring (max. 12m vessel LOA, day use only)
-  35m mooring (max. 35m vessel LOA, overnight use permitted)
-  50m mooring (max. 50m vessel LOA, overnight use permitted)

## Rowley Shoals Marine Park

-  Marine park boundary
-  Sanctuary Zone
-  Recreation Zone
-  General Use Zone

## Mermaid Reef Marine Park (Commonwealth)

-  Marine park boundary
-  National Park Zone



Government of Western Australia  
Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions  
Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development



[explore.parks.dbca.wa.gov.au/park/rowley-shoals-marine-park](http://explore.parks.dbca.wa.gov.au/park/rowley-shoals-marine-park)



Download the free Marine Parks WA app available through



## NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

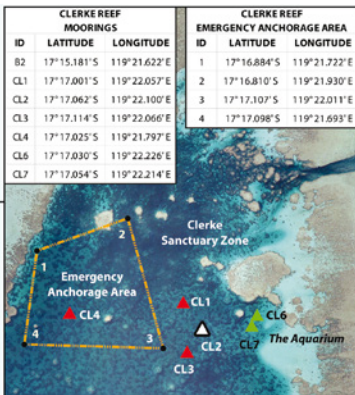
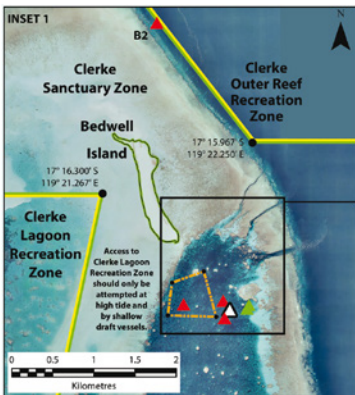
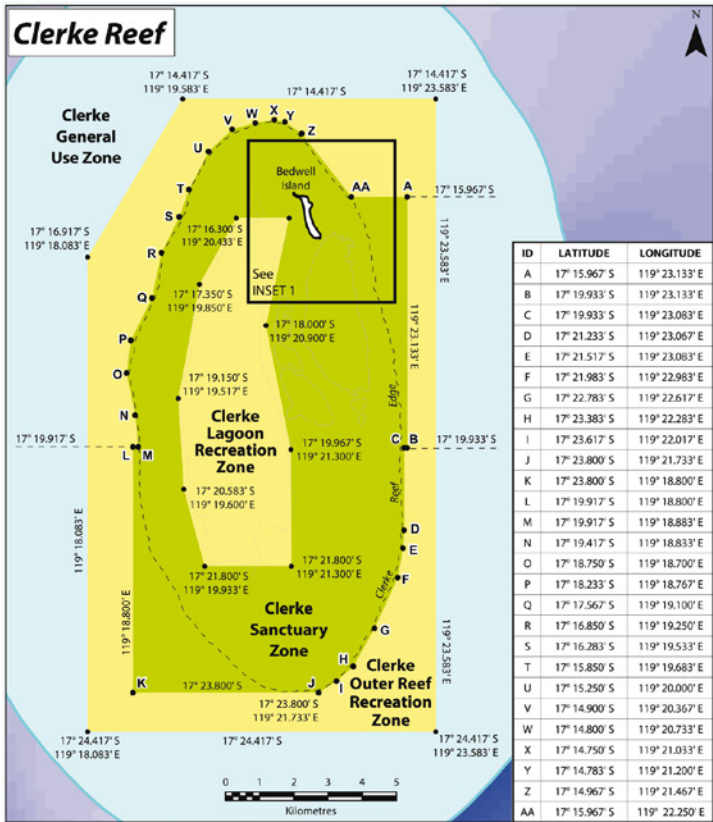
Co-ordinates on this map are referenced to the Geocentric Datum of Australia 1994 (GDA94).

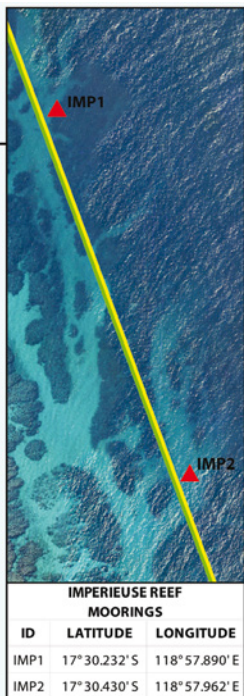
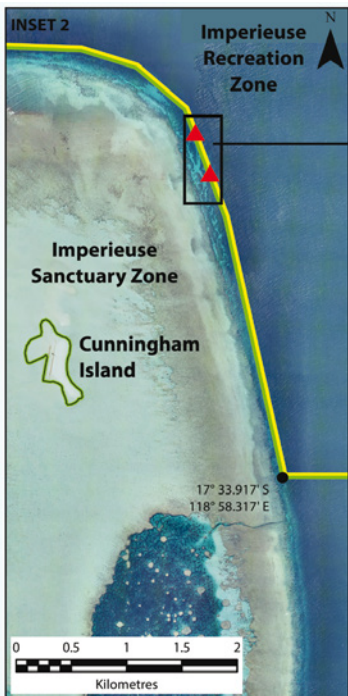
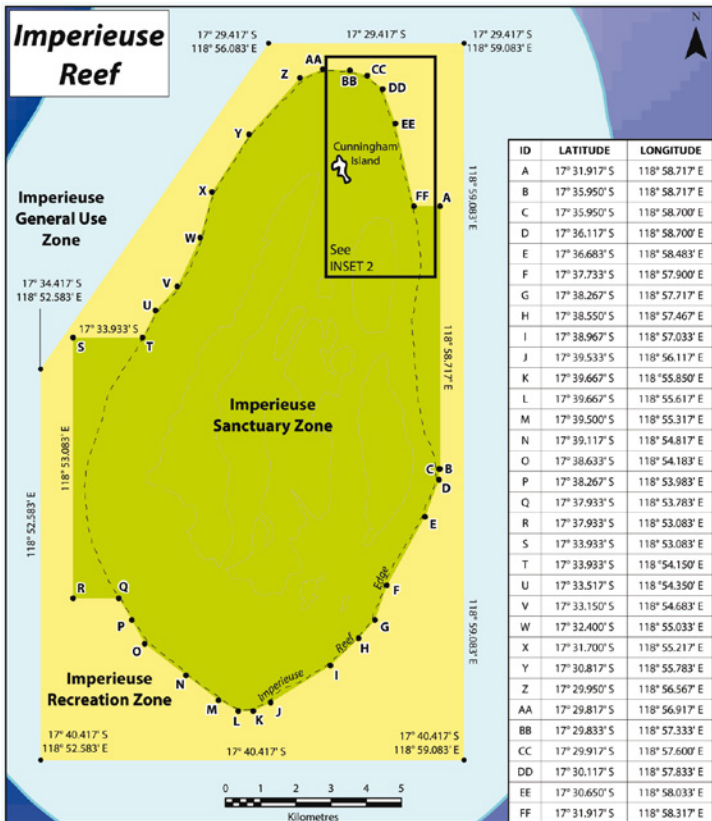
For GPS use, WGS84 approximates GDA94.

Waterlines positions shown on this map are indicative only and do not necessarily depict an exact cadastral boundary.

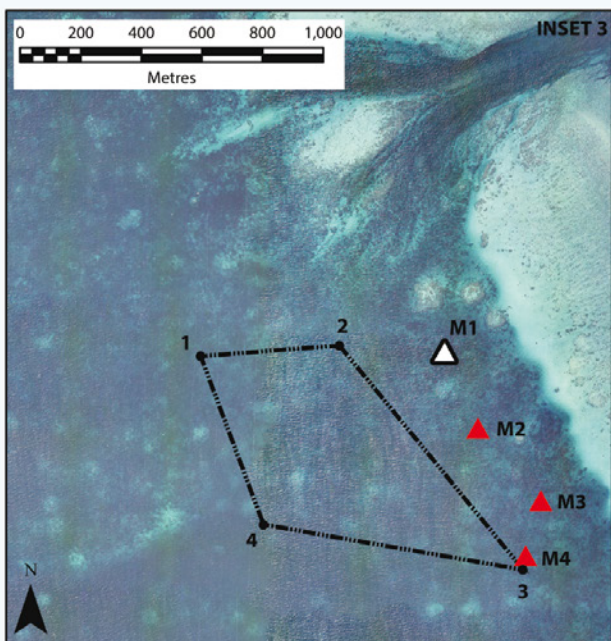
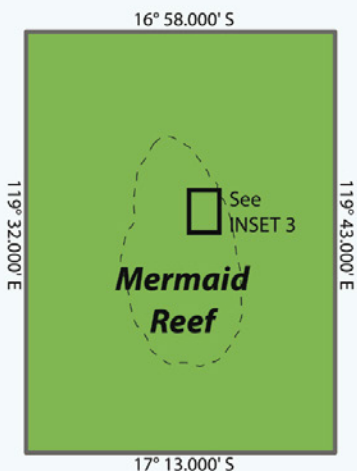
Produced by Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) Branch 03 November 2023







# Mermaid Reef Marine Park (Commonwealth)



**MERMAID REEF  
DESIGNATED ANCHORAGE AREA**

ID	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
1	17°04.272' S	119°38.153' E
2	17°04.253' S	119°38.400' E
3	17°04.652' S	119°38.727' E
4	17°04.572' S	119°38.265' E

**MERMAID REEF  
MOORINGS**

ID	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
M1	17°04.264' S	119°38.587' E
M2	17°04.400' S	119°38.647' E
M3	17°04.529' S	119°38.759' E
M4	17°04.627' S	119°38.732' E

ACTIVITIES ✓ = Permitted X = Not permitted	ROWLEY SHOALS MARINE PARK			MERMAID REEF MARINE PARK (COMMONWEALTH)
	SANCTUARY ZONE	RECREATION ZONE	GENERAL USE ZONE	National Park Zone (IUCN II)
Fishing from guided charter vessels <sup>2, 6</sup>	X	✓	✓	X
Line fishing (including trolling) <sup>2, 3, 6</sup>	X	✓	✓	X
Rock lobster fishing <sup>3, 4, 6</sup>	X	✓	✓	X
Throw netting <sup>5, 6</sup>	X	X	✓	X
Haul and Set netting <sup>5, 6</sup>	X	X	X	X
Spearfishing - breath-hold only <sup>6</sup> (No SCUBA or hookah)	X	✓ (except in Clerke Lagoon Recreation Zone)	✓	X
Spearfishing - on compressed air <sup>6</sup>	X	X	✓	X
Coral, shell and specimen collecting (alive and dead)	X	X	X	X
Aquarium fish collecting	X	X	X	X
Diving, snorkelling, swimming	✓	✓	✓	✓
Boating, yachting and non-motorised water sports	✓	✓	✓	✓
Anchoring <sup>7</sup>	✓	✓	✓	X (except in designated anchoring area — see INSET 3)
Wildlife viewing <sup>8</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Feeding fish and/or wildlife	X	X	X	X
Sullage and waste discharge <sup>9</sup>	X	X (see note 9)	X (see note 9)	X

Contacts:

Department of Biodiversity, Conservation  
and Attractions (DBCA) - Parks and Wildlife Service  
Broome - (08) 9195 5500

Department of Primary Industries and  
Regional Development (DPIRD)  
Broome District Office - Fisheries  
(08) 9193 8600

Department of Transport (Broome Office) -  
(08) 9216 8240  
Marine Safety Hotline - 13 11 56

1. This table is for recreational activities only. For information on permissible commercial activities contact the numbers below or refer to Rowley Shoals Marine Park Management Plan available at [www.dbca.wa.gov.au](http://www.dbca.wa.gov.au)

2. Fishing for all cods (Serranidae), groper (Serranidae) and wrasses (Labridae), including potato cod (Epinephelus taitai), rock cod (Luteres volucre) and related species, hump-head Moor wrasse (Chelinus undulatus), Queensland groper (Epinephelus longelatus), coral trout (Plectropomus sp.) and molluscs (except squid, octopus and cuttlefish) is not permitted within the Rowley Shoals Marine Park. For further details, visit [www.fish.wa.gov.au](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au)

3. A fishing licence is required for fishing from boats. Recreational fishing rules apply including bag and size limits, species and gear restrictions. For further details - visit [www.fish.wa.gov.au](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au)

4. A fishing licence is required and seasonal closures may apply. For further details visit [www.fish.wa.gov.au](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au)

5. A fishing licence is required for the use of throw nets. Set and haul netting is not permitted in the Rowley Shoals Marine Park. For further details refer to the Recreational Net Fishing Guide available at [www.fish.wa.gov.au](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au)

6. Size limits apply. For further details, visit [www.fish.wa.gov.au](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au)

7. Minimising environmental impact from vessels is of the utmost importance. Please use the overnight moorings where possible instead of anchoring. Moorings must be booked in advance to avoid disappointment through the Broome Office (08) 9195 5500, failure to do so may risk an infringement. Detailed mooring maps are available from the Broome Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Parks and Wildlife Service office.

8. Subject to the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 and Wildlife Conservation Act 1950.

9. No discharge of sewage in lagoons or within one nautical mile (1.85km) off reef edge.