

# Reef Watch Site Manual

Version 1 (24<sup>th</sup> January, 2007)



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## **Background**

From the inception of the program, Reef Watch has attempted to gain an overall picture of the reef communities characterising a site, as well as track change in such communities over time. For this reason, the placement of transect lines was made in a haphazard (semi-random) manner. However, following a scientific review of the Reef Watch methods in 2006, more emphasis is now being placed on tracking change over time, and there is consequently a need to be more specific about the placement of transect lines. Although the program is not adopting strictly fixed transect lines, the aim is to use landmarks and recognisable reef features to relocate transects between surveys and hence reduce the amount of spatial variation in the data being collected.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this manual is to provide the necessary information for divers and snorkellers undertaking Reef Watch fish, invertebrate and benthic surveys to place the transect line in the appropriate position at a site to ensure that the data collected will be useful for measuring change to reef communities over time.

It will also contain a range of practical and interpretive information about the various dive sites targeted by Reef Watch. Although much of this information will be useful for planning and executing safe diving practices, it should not replace a diver's own assessment of the dive site and the conditions at the time of their dive.

This document will be developed over a period of time, and therefore currently contains a number of gaps. Contributions are welcome!

For those dive sites for which are not listed in this manual, please refer to the final section, "Default transect position".

## **Default transect position**

Divers undertaking transects at a site not listed in this manual should take into account the following when placing their transect line:

- The area chosen should comprise reef habitat (with no major areas of sand or seagrass) extending 60m in length and ideally ten metres in width.
- The area should be at a fairly constant depth within one or two metres of a five metre increment, e.g. 4-6m.
- The starting point should be at or near a recognisable feature that is easily relocated (e.g. a trail marker, a bommie or the anchor if GPS is being used), and the direction should also be clearly defined (e.g. a reef contour, compass bearing).

All information used to locate the transect line should be recorded as a note that is entered with the survey data.