

RESOLUTION MEPC.133(53)

Adopted on 22 July 2005

DESIGNATION OF THE TORRES STRAIT AS AN EXTENSION OF THE GREAT
BARRIER REEF PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE SEA AREA

ANNEX 21

RESOLUTION MEPC.133(53)

Adopted on 22 July 2005

**DESIGNATION OF THE TORRES STRAIT AS AN EXTENSION OF THE GREAT
BARRIER REEF PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE SEA AREA**

THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COMMITTEE,

BEING AWARE of the ecological, social, economic, cultural, scientific and educational value of the Torres Strait, as well as its vulnerability to damage by shipping traffic and activities in the area and the steps taken by Australia and Papua New Guinea to address that vulnerability,

NOTING that the Guidelines for the Identification and Designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas adopted under resolution A.927(22) set out procedures for the designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas,

HAVING CONSIDERED the proposal from Australia and Papua New Guinea to extend the existing Great Barrier Reef Particularly Sensitive Sea Area to include the Torres Strait,

HAVING AGREED that criteria for identification of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area provided in resolution A.927(22) are fulfilled for the Torres Strait,

1. DESIGNATES the Torres Strait, as defined in Annex 1 to this resolution, as an extension of the Great Barrier Reef Particularly Sensitive Sea Area;
2. RECOGNIZES the establishment of a two-way route through the Torres Strait as defined in Annex 2 to this resolution;
3. RECOMMENDS that Governments recognize the need for effective protection of the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait region and inform ships flying their flag that they should act in accordance with Australia's system of pilotage for merchant ships 70 m in length and over or oil tankers, chemical tankers, and gas carriers, irrespective of size when navigating:
 - (a) the inner route of the Great Barrier Reef between the northern extreme of Cape York Peninsula (10° 41' S) and 16° 40' S and in Hydrographers Passage; and
 - (b) the Torres Strait and the Great North East Channel between Booby Island (latitude 10° 36' S, longitude 141° 54' E) and Bramble Cay (latitude 09° 09' S, longitude 143° 53' E).
4. REVOKES resolution MEPC.45(30).

ANNEX 1

DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE SEA AREA: TORRES STRAIT**1 Description of the area**

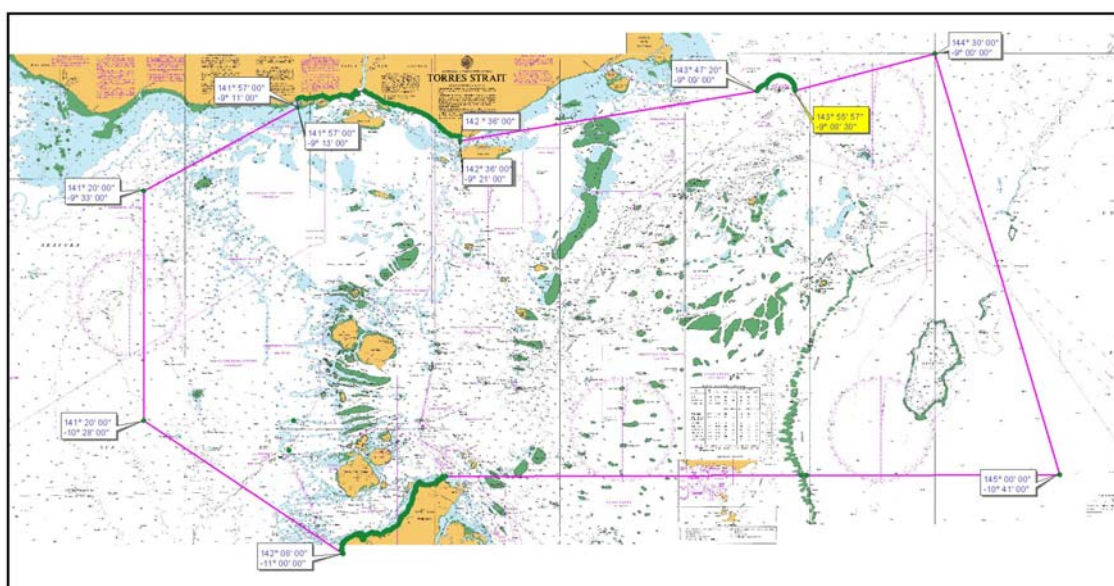
1.1 The Torres Strait lies to the north and north east of Cape York and separates Australia and Papua New Guinea. It is about 90 nautical miles wide and 150 nautical miles long although useable routes for larger commercial vessels are limited to the Prince of Wales Channel and the Great North East Channel. The area lies within the exclusive economic zones of Australia and Papua New Guinea and includes some areas of the territorial sea and internal waters of both countries. The recommended pilotage system that is operational in the area has pilot embarkation areas entirely within the territorial waters of Australia. The eastern boundary and part of the western boundary of the PSSA aligns with the "nearest land" definition included in Annexes I, II, IV and V of MARPOL 73/78. The northern and a large part of the western boundary aligns with the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) established by the Torres Strait Treaty between Australia and Papua New Guinea. The co-ordinates of the Torres Strait PSSA extension are set out below as amendments to the existing Great Barrier Reef PSSA described in resolution MEPC.44(30). Note that the geographic positions in italics are those adopted in 1990 to define the Great Barrier Reef Particularly Sensitive Sea Area and are unchanged.

1.2 The area is defined by a line:

- (a) commencing at a point on the coast of Australia in latitude 11° 00' South, longitude 142° 08' East;
- (b) running thence north-westerly along the geodesic to the point of latitude 10° 28' South, longitude 141° 20' East;
- (c) thence north along the meridian of longitude 141° 20' East to its intersection by the parallel point of latitude 9° 33' South;
- (d) thence north-easterly along the geodesic to the point of latitude 9° 13' South, longitude 141° 57' East;
- (e) thence north along the meridian of longitude 141° 57' East to its intersection by the southern coastline of the island of Papua New Guinea at low water;
- (f) thence generally easterly along the southern coastline of the island of Papua New Guinea, that is along the low water line on that coast and across any river mouth and in the case of the mouth of the Mai Kussa River along the parallel of latitude 9° 09' South, thence along the southern coastline of the island of Papua New Guinea, that is along the low water line on that coast and across any river mouth to its intersection by the meridian of longitude 142° 36' East;
- (g) thence south along that meridian to its intersection by the parallel of latitude 9° 21' South;

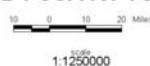
- (h) thence north-easterly along the geodesic between that point of intersection and the point of latitude 9° 09' South, longitude 143° 47'20" East;
- (i) thence along the outer limit of the three-mile territorial sea of Black Rocks, so as to pass to the north-west of Black Rocks, to the point of intersection of that limit by the outer limit of the three-mile territorial sea of Bramble Cay;
- (j) thence along that outer limit, so as to pass successively to the north and east of Bramble Cay, to the point of latitude 9° 08'30" South, longitude 143° 55'57" East;
- (k) thence north-easterly to the point of latitude 9° 00' South, longitude 144° 30' East;
- (l) thence generally southerly along a line joining the following geographic positions:
 - a. 10° 41' S 145° 00' E
 - b. 13° 00' S 145° 00' E
 - c. 15° 00' S 146° 00' E
 - d. 17° 30' S 147° 00' E
 - e. 21° 00' S 152° 55' E
 - f. 24° 30' S 154° 00' E
- (m) thence westerly along the parallel of latitude 24°3 0' South to its intersection by the coastline of Queensland at low water; and
- (n) thence generally northerly along that coastline at low water to the point of commencement.

1.3.1 A chartlet of the Torres Strait extension to the Great Barrier Reef PSSA is provided below.



PROPOSED PSSA for TORRES STRAIT

Scale in nautical miles rounded.
 Map the Australian Hydrographic Office.
 Soundings in metres - fathoms.
 1:1250000
 © Australian Government - 2005
 Please note: all distances in this chart are approximate.
 Copies will not be returned.



Legend
 — Mapped
 — Torres Strait Protected Zone
 — Gbrmpa
 — Proposed PSSA for Torres Strait



2 Significance of the area

2.1 The tidal influences of two ocean systems result in frequent anomalous tidal regimes and have a great effect on the area's biodiversity. The massive freshwater and sediment input from nearby coastal rivers further influence this unique marine ecosystem. Benthic communities, fish assemblages, seagrass coverage and coral communities have all been well documented. The Strait provides critical habitat for many vulnerable or endangered species, including dugongs, green and flatback turtles, as well as supporting commercial fisheries for tiger and endeavour prawns, Spanish mackerel, tropical rock lobster, reef fish, pearl oysters, trochus and beche-de-mer. Coral reefs and clear waters support a rich fauna of reef fish, molluscs, echinoderms and crustaceans. Due to low population pressure, only 18 islands are inhabited. The Torres Strait thus retains a high degree of natural and wilderness value.

2.2 Because of the limited water exchange in and out of the Torres Strait, there are concerns that if the Torres Strait water became polluted it would probably remain in the Strait for some time. This may pose a risk of adverse and prolonged impacts on ecological communities, indigenous and commercial fisheries and the life style of Torres Strait Islander people.

2.3 Several thousand people live in small coastal communities on Cape York, on the islands off the southern coast of Papua New Guinea and on the larger islands of the Torres Strait itself. Indigenous people of the Torres Strait traditionally hunt dugong and turtle and fish for a variety of marine species for food. The consumption of seafood by Torres Strait Islanders is amongst the highest in the world on a per capita basis. A commercial fishery estimated at 2,000 tonnes contributed approximately A\$35 million to the Australian economy in 1999/2000. Pearl farms operate on a number of islands. The Torres Strait has a small but expanding tourism industry.

2.4 More detailed descriptions of the ecological, socio-economic and cultural, scientific and educational criteria are contained in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.3.3 of document MEPC 49/8.

3 Vulnerability of the area to damage by international shipping activities

3.1 The Torres Strait, including the Great North East Channel, is used primarily by large vessels trading between ports in southern Asia, Australia and New Zealand, South America, Papua New Guinea and Pacific Island nations although the majority of tanker traffic bound for the Australian east coast refineries also uses it to link with the outer route of the Great Barrier Reef. Vessels entering or leaving the inner route of the Great Barrier Reef also use the Prince of Wales Channel at the western end of the Torres Strait.

3.2 Parts of the Torres Strait are isolated, remote and very demanding on the navigator. Passage through these waters also involves navigation within confined waters for long periods, with limited depths of water being a constant threat. The average depth of the Torres Strait is 30-50 metres in the east and 10-15 metres in the west. Tidal streams can be strong and variable. Most of the region has a monsoon climate and visibility is frequently adversely affected by seasonal rain squalls. The area as a whole is subject to seasonal tropical storms and cyclones.

3.3 There are narrow fairways and areas of converging traffic that, while not heavy by some standards, represent a wide range of ship types, carrying a variety of cargoes, including dangerous goods and potentially polluting materials. Ships navigating the area may encounter

concentrations of fishing vessels, tourist vessels and recreational craft that, by their very numbers, increase the dangers of marine incidents.

3.4 A spill occurred in Prince of Wales Channel in 1970 (*Oceanic Grandeur*) and numerous other groundings and near misses have occurred due to the combination of shallow water, narrow channels, strong tidal streams and strong winds.

3.5 The current recommended maximum draft for ships passing through Gannet Passage is 12.2 metres which, for a large percentage of ships, provides an underkeel clearance of one metre at the higher stages of the tide cycle. Careful calculations are required by Masters and pilots of deep draft vessels to establish the timing of “tidal windows” for their passage through the Strait.

3.6 A detailed description of the characteristics of the maritime traffic, the transport of harmful substances, and the threats from disasters, including a description of the meteorological, oceanographical and geographical conditions may be found in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.3 of document MEPC 49/8.

ANNEX 2

ASSOCIATED PROTECTIVE MEASURES

1 **Two-Way Route.** The forty-ninth session of the IMO Sub-Committee on the Safety of Navigation approved the implementation of a two-way shipping route through the Torres Strait. Details of this measure, including a chartlet, are provided in document NAV 49/3/3. The following co-ordinates (in WGS 84) define the two-way route:

A) The northern limits are bound by the line joining the following co-ordinates:

1.	10° 29'.70 S	142° 22'.63 E	2.	10° 29'.14 S	142° 25'.76 E
3.	10° 27'.80 S	142° 28'.45 E	4.	10° 26'.40 S	142° 31'.30 E
5.	10° 21'.90 S	142° 41'.50 E	6.	10° 19'.37 S	142° 47'.97 E
7.	10° 18'.14 S	142° 50'.82 E	8.	10° 13'.38 S	142° 54'.96 E
9.	10° 00'.50 S	143° 03'.42 E	10.	09° 47'.73 S	143° 10'.40 E
11.	09° 25'.80 S	143° 31'.07 E	12.	09° 12'.47 S	143° 51'.34 E

B) The southern limits are bound by the line joining the following co-ordinates:

13.	10° 30'.45 S	142° 24'.02 E	14.	10° 28'.38 S	142° 28'.66 E
15.	10° 27'.38 S	142° 31'.85 E	16.	10° 22'.85 S	142° 41'.95 E
17.	10° 19'.80 S	142° 48'.23 E	18.	10° 17'.63 S	142° 53'.29 E
19.	10° 09'.78 S	143° 05'.55 E	20.	09° 53'.97 S	143° 15'.61 E
21.	09° 46'.02 S	143° 18'.48 E	22.	09° 37'.96 S	143° 21'.97 E
23.	09° 27'.60 S	143° 32'.15 E	24.	09° 13'.95 S	143° 52'.62 E

C) The centre polygon is defined by the following co-ordinates:

25.	10° 16'.10 S	142° 53'.82 E	26.	10° 13'.79 S	142° 55'.85 E
27.	10° 01'.05 S	143° 04'.20 E	28.	09° 48'.10 S	143° 11'.30 E
29.	09° 41'.04 S	143° 18'.87 E	30.	09° 45'.72 S	143° 17'.51 E
31.	09° 53'.84 S	143° 14'.50 E	32.	10° 09'.15 S	142° 04'.70 E

2 **Pilotage.** Refer to paragraph 3 of this resolution.

RESOLUTION MEPC.133(53)

Adopted on 22 July 2005

DESIGNATION OF THE TORRES STRAIT AS AN EXTENSION OF THE GREAT
BARRIER REEF PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE SEA AREA