

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN FOR THE HOUTMAN ABROLHOS ISLANDS

Fisheries Management Paper No. 146

FEBRUARY 2001



Houtman Abrolhos Islands
Sustainable Tourism Plan
February 2001

Fisheries Management Paper No. 146
ISSN 0819 4327

Cover picture:

*Geraldton Reef and Sandy Beach on Pelsaert Island
(Southern Group) the Houtman Abrolhos Islands
B. Bachman*

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Inset picture:

*Anemone fish with commensal shrimps on host anemone
(Pic. C. Bryce)*

FISHERIES WESTERN AUSTRALIA
3rd floor, SGIO Atrium
168 St George's Tce, Perth WA 6000



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Houtman Abrolhos Islands (hereinafter “the Abrolhos”) is one of the most interesting parts of Western Australia. The Abrolhos is a complex of 122 low-lying islands and reefs located at the edge of the continental shelf between 28°15’S and 29°00’S at a distance of approximately 60 kilometres offshore from Geraldton on the mid-west coast of the State. There are three major groups of islands: North Island-Wallabi Group; Easter Group; and Pelsaert (or Southern) Group, separated by Middle and Zeewijk Channels which are each approximately 40 metres deep.

The islands are geomorphologically diverse, with some major islands being of ‘continental origin’. Other islands were formed more recently by the erosion and deposition of sediments during the rise and fall of sea levels and by storms, waves, winds and swell. Small tidal ponds which occur on many islands of the Abrolhos are important structures which are rare on other offshore islands in south-western Australia.

The Abrolhos coral reefs are the southernmost living reefs in the Indian Ocean. They have a unique assemblage of tropical species of fish, reef corals and other invertebrates, which live in close association with temperate species, particularly of algae, and species endemic to Western Australia. The Abrolhos is the centre of the fishery for the commercially valuable western rock lobster (*Panulirus cygnus*).

Terrestrial flora and fauna of the Abrolhos are relict and provide important reference areas on ecological interactions. Virtually all the islands of the Abrolhos archipelago have sea bird nesting and breeding areas, and populations of some species of seabirds are of international significance.

The Abrolhos is the site of a several important historic shipwrecks, including the 17th Century Dutch ships *Batavia* and *Zeewijk*.

This combination of features makes the Abrolhos a unique area of Western Australia. In recognition of this, the Minister for Primary Industry; Fisheries, has released the plan *Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System*, following a process of public consultation.

Future Tourism in the Abrolhos

The islands are becoming an increasingly popular destination for tourists attracted by the diving, fishing, bird watching, maritime history, and other features of the Abrolhos. The *Management Plan for Sustainable Tourism in the Houtman Abrolhos Islands* (this plan) has been developed to provide a framework within which tourism can be developed in the islands.

The basic thrust throughout the plan is to encourage environmentally sensitive tourism, or nature-based tourism, which is compatible with maintaining the Abrolhos system in an ecologically sound condition. The tourism plan is a subset of the overall management plan for the islands (*Management of the Houtman*

Abrolhos System – Fisheries Management Paper No.117), and should be viewed as such. If there is a conflict between the two documents, the overall plan will take precedence.

The overall management plan has strategies whose implementation may have implications for the development of tourism. Specifically, the plan for the *Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System* identified the need to consider the identification and management of marine and terrestrial areas with high conservation value. This may necessitate zoning and development of appropriate management plans for these areas, which may affect zoning for tourism; such zoning should be completed before existing tourism to the Abrolhos is expanded.

The goal of the *Management Plan for Sustainable Tourism at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands* is to:

“manage environmentally sustainable nature-based tourism which is consistent with the protection of the natural and cultural values of the Abrolhos System and provides appropriate managed access to the area for the community.”

One of the major constraints in planning tourism in the Abrolhos is the lack of information on the numbers of people actually visiting the islands at present and the numbers who would like to do so. Two basic types of tourists are recognised in the Abrolhos: private recreational tourists who make their own way to the Abrolhos and those whose visit to the islands is arranged through commercial tourism operators.

The potential for commercial tourism must be considered in the context of constraints which include:

- the fragility of some of the ecosystems in the islands, especially the large populations of seabirds and corals;
- the need to protect high conservation areas may limit tourism in some areas;
- the need to prevent the introduction and spread of exotic plants and animals;
- lack of fresh water;
- distance from shore;
- frequently unfavourable weather;
- the need to ensure sanitary waste disposal; and
- lack of supporting infrastructure.

Several types of commercial tourism are recommended for the Abrolhos.

It is emphasised that for all operations, consideration of the proposal will include a detailed analysis of the potential effects of the proposal on natural and cultural heritage values and the mechanisms proposed to minimise and manage the potential effects.

In the short-term, the following developments may occur:

Charter Boats: Charter boat operations with up to 20 passengers will be permitted throughout the islands, subject to the needs for safety and minimisation of adverse environmental impacts. This number of passengers is recommended to avoid environmental damage. These operations will be monitored and if no

damage occurs, larger operations may be permitted. Operators could tender for a shore-based jetty and shed to provide space to store equipment, and could engage in fly/boat ventures. It is also recognised that the charter operator may need one or more mooring sites in the islands.

Shore-based Facilities: Small scale (up to 40 people including staff), low impact shore-based facilities could be operated in one or more areas of the Abrolhos. Relevant areas may include:

- Long Island, Wallabi Group; and
- Little Roma Island, Easter Group.

These sites have been identified in previous reports and by the consultants which assisted in the preparation of the draft plan. Development proposals may proceed after consultation with conservation agencies and will be subject to an assessment process to ensure they are consistent with Standards Association of Australia requirements and are appropriate for the Abrolhos.

Moored Accommodation Facilities: The possibility of providing a moored accommodation facility of a size consistent with this plan within the Leo Island reef platform, Easter Group, is supported.

Medium-term development: East Wallabi Island, Wallabi Group: With its extensive sand beach and low, rolling dunes, Turtle Bay on East Wallabi Island is one of the prettiest areas of the Abrolhos, and an attractive position in which to base a tourist facility. This site is considered to have considerable conservation values and should not be carelessly developed. In the medium-term, an assessment will be made of the potential for tourism opportunities at East Wallabi Island, noting the high conservation values of the island and the need to conserve them.

Presently inhabited islands: A shore-based tourist facility could be considered on presently inhabited islands following consultation with the island fishing community, Abrolhos Islands Management Advisory Committee and other interested parties.

A strategy is proposed for developing commercial tourism in the Abrolhos, with the Minister for Fisheries calling for tenders from prospective operators.

The following management procedures will be established:

Visitor fees: A fee will be required for *all* visitors to the islands (except for those on governmental business) to help recover the costs of managing the islands and providing facilities for visitors. The fee will apply to A-zone fishers, private boats, tourists and other people not on governmental business. In the case of A-zone fishers, the fee will be incorporated into an annual licence fee. Private boat owners will be able to obtain either a single trip or annual permit to visit the islands.

Licences: For commercial tourist operators, licences will be granted for an initial period of seven years, with two possible renewals of seven years, for a total tenure of 21 years, before new tenders will be called. The renewals will be subject to the environmental and operational conditions required by the licence being met to the satisfaction of the Minister for Fisheries.

Draft application forms and evaluation forms: For commercial tourism ventures, these are provided in this report.

Monitoring program: Independent environmental monitoring of the effects of larger projects such as moored accommodation or shore-based facilities will be required. Such monitoring may also be required for smaller projects if there is concern over the potential environmental effects of the operations.

Tourism operators will be required to rectify any environmental damage caused by their operations and may be required to submit a bond.

Decommissioning: If permanent shore-based facilities or pontoons are established in the Abrolhos, they must be decommissioned and removed when the project is terminated or the permit expires. This is the responsibility of the proponent.

Facilities required: It is recognised that there is very little infrastructure at present to support either private or commercial tourism in the Abrolhos. The following facilities are recommended:

Airstrips: Upgrade of the East Wallabi airstrip and associated facilities upgraded to provide for access by tourists (completed).

Boat moorings: Commercial tourist operators should be allowed to arrange moorings for their use, which in some cases would be used by the industry as a whole. Such moorings must be installed in accordance with specified location and design criteria. Public moorings should be installed and may be rented for use by private boats.

Communications: Currently marine radio and mobile telephones are used. Reception on telephones is highly variable with the Southern Group being best served by mobile telephones. There is a requirement for an all weather communications system to commercial standards if the Abrolhos is to achieve its development potential. A combination of marine radio and Low Earth Orbiting satellites may be best suited to this remote location.

Relationship with the Management Plan for the Houtman Abrolhos Islands

This Management Plan should be integrated into the overall management plan for the islands when they are both reviewed in 2005.

Strategic Overview of Tourism Development in the Houtman Abrolhos Islands, Western Australia

The goal of this plan is to: *manage environmentally sensitive nature-based tourism which is consistent with protection of the natural and cultural values of the Abrolhos System and provide appropriate managed access to the area for the community.*

Tourism type	Period	Strategy
Independent	Immediate	<p>Collect data on tourism – ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘how’ and numbers of people.</p> <p>Provide more information on attractions in the islands and areas to avoid.</p> <p>Encourage visitors to utilise core areas by zoning and provision of facilities.</p> <p>Avoid conflict between nature conservation, private tourism, and fishers.</p> <p>Provision of moorings which can be rented through Fisheries WA.</p> <p>Access to East Wallabi jetty for private flights.</p>
	Medium-term	Progressively provide more facilities and control access to sensitive areas.
Commercial	Immediate	<p>Any tourism must be ecologically and economically sustainable.</p> <p>Consider the development in each island group for tourist ventures.</p> <p>Provide access to the airstrip on East Wallabi Island.</p> <p>Provide for establishment of common moorings.</p>
	Medium-term	<p>Ensure all tourism developments are environmentally sensitive and have a net environmental benefit to the Houtman Abrolhos.</p> <p>If agreement can be achieved, possible mixing of fishers and tourism.</p> <p>Any tourism development should use ‘best practice’ techniques.</p> <p>Permanent moored facility near Leo’s Island.</p> <p>Assess the potential tourism opportunities at East Wallabi Island while maintaining the high conservation values of the island.</p> <p>Other options for tourism facilities to be investigated, such as use of a large catamaran from shore.</p>

Table 1 – Strategic Overview for Tourism Development in the Houtman Abrolhos Islands.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Houtman Abrolhos Islands (hereinafter “the Abrolhos”) is one of the most interesting parts of Western Australia. The Abrolhos is a complex of 122 low-lying islands and reefs located at the edge of the continental shelf between 28°15’S and 29°00’S at a distance of approximately 60 km offshore from Geraldton on the mid-west coast of the State. There are three major groups of islands: North Island-Wallabi Group; Easter Group; and Pelsaert (or Southern) Group, separated by Middle and Zeewijk Channels which are each approximately 40 m deep (Figure 1).

The islands are geomorphologically diverse, with some major islands (North, East and West Wallabi, and Rat Island) being of ‘continental origin’ (that is, they were joined to the mainland during the lowered sea levels of the last ice age over 7,000 years ago). Other islands were formed more recently by the erosion and deposition of sediments during the rise and fall of sea levels, and by storms, waves, winds and swell.

Important geological features in the Abrolhos include pavement limestone, sand dunes and consolidated dunes on North, East and West Wallabi Islands which are unusual, easily disturbed structures that have a slow rate of regeneration. Internationally significant fossil sites occur on East Wallabi Island. Small tidal ponds which occur on many islands of the Abrolhos are important structures which are rare on other offshore islands in south-western Australia.

The Abrolhos coral reefs are the southernmost living reefs in the Indian Ocean. They are bathed by the warm waters of the Leeuwin Current (Pearce & Walker 1991; Pearce 1997), and have a unique assemblage of tropical species of fish, reef corals and other invertebrates, which live in close association with temperate species, particularly of algae, and species endemic to Western Australia. The Abrolhos is the centre of the fishery for the commercially valuable western rock lobster (*Panulirus cygnus*), a Western Australian endemic.

In 1994, the Marine Parks and Reserves Selection Working Group (CALM 1994) examined the 12,500 km coastline of Western Australia as the first step in developing a representative system of marine parks and reserves for the State. The final report of the working group considered the Abrolhos to be the most important marine area of Western Australia for preservation. In planning for the development of tourism in the Abrolhos, the importance of the conservation values of the islands and their surrounding waters is critical.

Terrestrial flora and fauna of the Abrolhos are relict and provide important reference areas on ecological interactions. The flora of the Abrolhos includes a number of communities which are of special conservation interest, including mangroves (represented by the single species *Avicennia marina*), *Atriplex cinerea* dwarf shrubland, and saltbush flats.

Virtually all the islands of the Abrolhos Archipelago have sea bird nesting and breeding areas, and the populations of some species of seabirds are of international significance (Storr *et al.* 1986; Fuller *et al.* 1994).

Other important fauna includes the tammar wallaby (*Macropus eugenii*), Abrolhos painted-button quail (*Tumix varia scintillans*), brush bronzewing (*Phaps elegans*), Abrolhos dwarf bearded dragon (*Pogona minor minima*), and Abrolhos spiny-tailed skink (*Egernia stokesii stokesii*).

The Abrolhos is the location of several important historic shipwrecks, including the 17th Century Dutch ships *Batavia* and *Zeewijk*. The *Batavia* shipwreck and associated events were some of the most significant episodes in Australia's history, and a number of artefacts dating from the incident can still be seen on the islands.

This combination of features makes the Abrolhos a unique area of Western Australia, one well worth preserving for future generations of Western Australians. In recognition of this, the Minister for Fisheries requested preparation of the plan *Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System*.

1.2 Abrolhos Attractions for Visitors

The unique features of the Abrolhos make it one of the most interesting areas of Western Australia to visit. There is world-class diving on coral reefs, which are intermingled in many areas with temperate algae. Colourful fish are abundant.

The establishment of Reef Observation Areas (where fishing for finfish is not permitted) in 1994 means that large territorial fish in these areas will become progressively less wary of divers in the future. The islands have a complex physical structure which provides dive sites for the full range of diving capabilities, from novice divers to the most advanced. Dives can be made at some localities in all but the most extreme weather conditions. All of these features combine to make the Abrolhos an excellent area for diving.

Above the water level, the most interesting natural feature of the Abrolhos is the spectacular numbers of seabirds from a variety of species. Seasonally there are literally millions of birds, and the Abrolhos is one of the most important areas for sea birds in the world. The plant and small animal life on the islands are interesting, and seals, whales and dolphins can be seen on the ocean surface.

Fishing in the Abrolhos is outstanding. There is a large variety of fish, including popular reef species such as baldchin groper and coral trout. In addition, there are large numbers of pelagic species such as mackerel and trevally. Invertebrate species available include western rock lobster (which are subject to stringent regulations on bag limits and catching methods), squid, octopus and scallops.

The wreck sites of the Dutch ships *Batavia* and *Zeewijk* and their associated land sites, particularly of the former, are an important draw-card.

These features, and many more, make the Abrolhos a potentially important area for tourism. Until now, there has been little tourist development of the islands. Facilities on the Abrolhos are minimal, the open

sea between the mainland and the Abrolhos is often rough, aside from rainwater there is no source of freshwater, and the terrestrial portions of most of the archipelago are a Class-A reserve.

This plan has been developed to provide a framework within which tourism can be developed in the islands. The basic thrust throughout the plan is to encourage environmentally sensitive or nature-based tourism, which is compatible with maintaining the Abrolhos system in an ecologically sound condition.

1.3 History of Tourism in the Abrolhos

While little is known of the early history of tourism in the Abrolhos, it is known to date from the early 1900s. As early as 1909, W.D. Christie wrote a book entitled, 'The Innocents Abroad: Christmas on the *Briny*, or, a Holiday to the Abrolhos', which was published by the Geraldton firm of Constantine & Gardner. Over the years a small number of newspaper articles and books were published about holidaying at the islands.

After the end of World War II, a partnership was formed between Dal Gaze and Alan Fox, both recently returned from service in the Royal Australian Air Force. The partnership is believed to have begun operating in 1946 using vacant buildings of Pelsaert Island which had been built by the guano industry. Over time a number of two-bed bungalows were also constructed.

The partnership continued for two to three years, taking tourists to the islands on the boats '*Batavia Road*' and '*Suda Bay*'. In about 1948 the partnership broke up. Alan Fox took the '*Suda Bay*' and commenced rock lobster fishing at North Island. Del Gaze continued the tourist venture using the '*Batavia Road*'. In addition to tourists, the vessel served as the carrier boat for Southern Group, carting fuel, bait and stores to the islands for the fishermen and returning with rock lobster. In June 1948 the boat was nearly sunk during a severe storm at sea during which she went aground on Half Moon Reef.

The operation ceased in about 1951. The abandoned huts were bought by Southern Group fishermen and used in their own camps. Remains from the guano industry and some of Del Gaze's camps on Pelsaert Island are still visible today (N. McLaughlan, *pers. comm.*).

In the early 1960s, a major proposal to develop a tourist and fishing centre for West Wallabi Island was put forward by real estate, marine and aviation entrepreneurs Ray Millard and Don O'Sullivan. The ambitious development was to include an airstrip, aircraft, boats and a motel. In 1964, a smaller proposal, involving leasing a section of Pelsaert Island, was put forward by Max Cramer and G. Travia. They hoped to build a minimum of six living units and arrange regular boat transport from the mainland.

The State Government responded to these proposals and a general interest in tourism to the area by appointing a Tourist Survey Committee. The committee's report to the Lands Minister in September 1965 stated that many problems needed to be overcome before a tourism project would be a success on the Abrolhos. The Tourist Survey Committee also reported that the Abrolhos Islands trustees had neither the resources nor facilities to control the islands adequately. As a result, the trustees agreed to surrender their powers whenever the Government desired. The Tourist Survey Committee concurred with the

recommendation of the Western Australian sub-committee of the Australian Academy of Science and agreed that East and West Wallabi Islands be maintained wholly for the conservation of flora and fauna.

Following the Tourism Survey Committee's report, the Government agreed to vest the whole of the Abrolhos Islands Reserve in the Minister for Fisheries and Fauna. It also agreed to change the vesting statement of the Class-A reserve to its present one: 'Conservation of Flora and Fauna, Tourism and Purposes Associated with the Fishing Industry.'

Until recently, the Abrolhos Islands charter boat industry fluctuated markedly, with few boats able to sustain a full-time operation at the Abrolhos. National and international exposure of the Houtman Abrolhos has increased in recent years, with documentaries, and magazine and newspaper articles appearing. Interest is increasing from diverse groups of people such as amateur ornithologists and historians, windsurfers and surfers, along with people interested in other water sports. The emphasis of tourist visitors to the Abrolhos Islands appears to be changing from mainly fishing and spearfishing to a far more diverse range of activities.

Visiting private yachts and pleasure boats have long been a source of tourists to the Abrolhos. This activity is increasing, with many people returning regularly, year after year. Predominantly, most of this activity coincides with the rock lobster fishing season because of relatively gentle autumn weather patterns. Visiting boats find conditions difficult and restrictive during the summer southerly weather pattern. The strong summer southerly winds and consequent lack of tourists on the Abrolhos have undoubtedly been a major contributing factor to the relative lack of disturbance to seabird rookeries during nesting time.

A major recent development has been the use of carrier boats to carry passengers to the Abrolhos. The carrier boats are operated by the commercial fishers during the islands' rock lobster season to carry supplies to the islands and, on the return trip, transport live rock lobsters to Geraldton for processing. Four co-operatives operate in the Abrolhos, with each island group (including North Island) being serviced by at least one carrier boat. During the last decade, the *Southern Lady II* and *Island Leader II* have been extensively used as charter boats during the off-season. The *Irus II* also undertook limited passenger carriage, but has been out of service during the recent off-season.

1.4 Recent Investigations of Tourism in the Abrolhos

At present, there are few opportunities for tourism on the islands. Access to the Abrolhos has been limited by their distance from the Australian mainland and the absence of facilities for visitors on the islands. People may stay with fishers who are resident on the Abrolhos or they may stay on boats. Camping is not permitted on the islands. Several recent studies have been undertaken to examine whether further tourism development should be allowed on the islands and in the State Territorial Waters of the Abrolhos.

The Abrolhos Islands Planning Strategy (AICC/AITF 1989) contained several recommendations for tourism, the most important of which was:

“The Abrolhos Islands should not be developed for tourism accommodation at this time. A review should occur within the context of the management plans, incorporating the above criteria. In the meantime, tourist accommodation should be located in Geraldton and nearby towns”.

The planning strategy further recommended that permanent moorings be set aside in each island group for recreational users. In the 1994 review this had still not been accomplished. The strategy also called for arrangements to be made to allow charter boats to operate in the islands.

The Abrolhos Islands Planning Strategy identified an opportunity for tours to the Abrolhos using fixed-wing aircraft or helicopters to get to the islands, in combination with boat-based tours in the islands. A fly/boat tourism trial was conducted in the islands between June 1992 and June 1993, in which visitors were flown to East Wallabi Island and transferred to the charter vessel *Force 5* for short-term visits to the islands. The trial was considered successful, but interpretation of the results was hampered by external influences.

The most recent and comprehensive of the examinations of tourism in the Abrolhos was the Abrolhos Islands Tourism Working Party’s *Final Report on Tourism at the Abrolhos Islands* (AICC 1995), released in June 1995, which examined existing and proposed tourism and recreational uses for the islands. The tourism report considered that large-scale developments on the islands would be ecologically damaging and probably not be economically viable. However, it found that there were substantial opportunities for the development of nature-based tourism ventures in the Abrolhos, provided these were undertaken in an environmentally sensitive manner. The report provided a broad framework for the development and management of tourism at the Abrolhos. Twenty-four recommendations were made (Attachment A) and the report cautioned that further studies were required to ensure that management guidelines for both tourism and the environment were in place before further development occurred.

As one of its first activities after being formed, the Abrolhos Islands Management Advisory Committee (AIMAC) examined the tourism report. Most of the report was adopted in principle, but AIMAC considered that several points warranted a more detailed examination (particularly with reference to recommendations 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 (*Management Plan, Section 7.1*)). The recommendations are:

- the need to ensure development is consistent with the conservation of the area;
- the requirement for equity;
- the need for fishers and tourism operators to cooperate;
- the need to further examine the possibility of using some inhabited islands for tourism development;
- the possibility of using East Wallabi Island for land-based tourism;
- the need to monitor tourist numbers;
- the need for Government to recover the cost of administering tourism while retaining affordable public access; and
- the need to plan infrastructure development.

AIMAC also undertook the completion of the draft plan *Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System* with Fisheries WA. As part of the process, wide public consultation was held with approximately 50 groups. The report on the public consultation program states: “Of foremost importance to people was the uniqueness and importance of the Abrolhos Islands and the need to conserve and manage the area. Many people said that this needed to be kept in mind at all times when considering how the area will be developed and managed.” (Henry & Ruiz-Avila 1997). The report contains a number of items relevant to the development of tourism on the islands. These include:

- tourism needs to be well managed, to minimise any impact on the environment;
- concern was expressed about the potential for overseas investors to buy tourism licences. The belief was expressed that these licences should only be available for local operators;
- concern was voiced that tourism was already occurring in a *de facto*, uncontrolled way, with friends staying with fishers and carrier boats operating as charter vessels;
- charter boat operators expressed the need to have shore-based facilities for tourism;
- groups from Dongara and Kalbarri expressed a desire to have an air service operating from these ports; and
- a number of groups suggested having a low-key facility built for day use by a range of users (tourism operators, school camps, etc).

1.5 Tourist Numbers in the Abrolhos

One of the major constraints in planning tourism in the Abrolhos is the lack of information on the numbers of people actually visiting the islands at present and the numbers who would like to do so. Anecdotal information is unreliable, conflicting and probably biased by the viewpoint of the source as to whether or not tourism should occur.

One issue is that friends of fishers visit during the Abrolhos Islands rock lobster season. Tourism operators consider this to be *de facto* tourism, while the fishers argue that if a friend visits someone on the mainland it is not considered tourism. The Western Australian Tourism Commission definition of a tourist is a person who has been away from his or her place of residence for any purpose except work for a period of at least one night, at a location at least 40 km from his or her usual place of residence. Thus, the WATC would consider friends of fishers that visit the islands to be tourists.

Fishers can use their huts during the off-season only for maintenance and repairs. Again, there are claims and counter claims that friends participate in some of these trips and they are treated as holidays. No numbers are available on the number of visitors.

Private yachts also visit the islands, but there is little data available on these. For safety reasons, Fisheries WA requires that yachts visiting the Abrolhos outside of the season register with Fisheries WA in Geraldton prior to the trip. During the one year period from 25 January 1996 to 24 January 1997, a total of 28 boats carrying 252 people registered. Undoubtedly there were skippers who were unaware

of the new requirements and failed to register. It must be emphasised that the great majority of private yacht visits to the islands occur during the Abrolhos Islands rock lobster season, when weather conditions are most suitable.



2 PRINCIPAL MANAGEMENT DIRECTIONS FOR TOURISM IN THE ABROLHOS

2.1 Management of the Abrolhos Islands

(Management Plan, Section 3)

This plan outlines in detail management arrangements for the Abrolhos. Fisheries WA, operating under terms of the *Fish Resources Management Act (1994)*, is currently the lead management agency in the Abrolhos.

2.2 Abrolhos Islands Management Advisory Committee

(Management Plan, Section 2.2.3.1)

Under the terms of Section 42 of the *Fish Resources Management Act (1994)*, the Minister for Fisheries established the Abrolhos Islands Management Advisory Committee to provide information and advice to the Minister about:

- the management of all fish and fisheries within the Abrolhos Islands (being the subject of Reserve No. A20253) together with the territorial waters around those islands (“the Abrolhos Islands Area”) which are not managed in accordance with a management plan made under the Act, with a view to the proper conservation and management of those fish and fisheries;
- the management of the Abrolhos Islands Area for those activities related to fishing, conservation and nature-based tourism, including the need for sanctuary areas, the protection of coral and similar organisms and the use of the Abrolhos Islands Area by the public;
- appropriate development of, and access to, the Abrolhos Islands Area, including proposals for tourist development, the construction and use of airports, tracks, fences, signs, jetties, moorings and airstrips;
- the impact on the Abrolhos Islands Area of proposed aquaculture developments;
- any plan for management of the Abrolhos Islands Area;
- how to promote public understanding, knowledge and appreciation of the natural and cultural resources of the Abrolhos Islands Area and the conservation of the natural and cultural values of the Abrolhos Islands Area;
- a consultative process which ensures the community, State and Local Government agencies and tertiary institutions have an ongoing involvement in the planning for, and management of, the Abrolhos Islands Area; and
- a consultative process with other advisory bodies concerned with fishing and other relevant activities within the Abrolhos Islands Area, including the Rock Lobster Industry Advisory

Committee, Western Australian Fishing Industry Council, Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee and the Recreation and Sports Fishing Council.

2.3 Abrolhos Islands Management Authority

Legislation is currently being developed to amend the *Fish Resources Management Act 1994* to create an Abrolhos Islands Management Authority (AIMA). The authority will be developed in a manner similar to the Rottnest Island Authority. While the terms of reference for AIMA have not been finalised, AIMAC will be abolished and AIMA will undertake the functions currently being managed by AIMAC. In addition, AIMA will be the agency with primary responsibility for management of the Abrolhos. AIMA will be responsible to the Minister for Fisheries, but will have an independent budget. In the following sections of the tourism plan responsibility for undertaking the strategies is placed jointly between AIMA and Fisheries WA. Once AIMA is established many of these functions, aside from management of fisheries, will be undertaken by AIMA.

2.4 Other Agencies and Relevant Acts

(Management Plan, Section 3.2)

Other State agencies with legislative responsibilities at the Abrolhos are the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Western Australian Museum, Department of Transport, Department of Minerals and Energy and Department of Environmental Protection. Close consultation between all agencies with responsibilities in the Abrolhos is required to ensure effective and efficient management.

The **Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM)** was established under the *Conservation and Land Management Act (1984)*. CALM administers the *Wildlife Conservation Act and Regulations (1980)* which aim to conserve Western Australia's native flora and fauna. In the Abrolhos, these responsibilities are primarily for the native flora and fauna on the islands, including seabirds, marine mammals and reptiles.

The **Western Australian Museum** has administrative responsibilities for the State's *Maritime Archaeology Act (1973)* and the Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act (1976)*. These Acts effectively combine to protect Western Australia's and Australia's valuable maritime heritage sites, both above and below the water. The two Acts aim to preserve the integrity of Australian shipwrecks for the benefit of the community's present and future generations.

The **Western Australian Museum** through the *Museum Act (1992)* has the task of documenting the fauna of Western Australia. The museum's Western Australian Museum of Natural Science has undertaken considerable work in documenting both the marine and terrestrial fauna of the Abrolhos.

The **Department of Transport** through the administration of the *Western Australian Marine Act (1982)* has responsibility for ensuring the safety of all vessels in State Territorial Waters, including the administration of moorings.

The **Western Australian Department of Minerals and Energy** through the *Petroleum Act (1967)* and the *Western Australian Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act (1982)* has the responsibility of overseeing the petroleum industry and is the body which handles permit applications for oil and gas surveys on, or adjacent to, the Abrolhos. Any such surveys are subject to the terms and conditions established under the *Environmental Protection Act (1987)*.

2.5 Management Plan for the Houtman Abrolhos Islands

The plan *Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System* covers the overall strategy for managing the Abrolhos Islands.

The present document, the tourism management plan, is a subset of the overall plan and should be read in the context of the larger concerns. If there is a conflict between the two documents, the overall plan will take precedence. The remainder of the tourism plan refers where appropriate to sections of the Management of the *Houtman Abrolhos System*, as (*Management Plan, Section x*). The sections below outline the portions of the overall plan which are most relevant to people proposing or considering making a proposal to undertake a tourist venture in the Abrolhos Islands.

Objective

(N.B. The goals and objective have been updated to match those in the final management plan.)

The objective of the plan *Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System (Management Plan, Section 2)* is: “To conserve the environment of the Abrolhos system for present and future generations, as a viable ecosystem by protecting natural diversity, cultural heritage and ensuring ecologically sustainable use.”

Goals

A number of specific goals have been set (*Management Plan, Section 2*):

- **Conservation**
To conserve the ecosystem and cultural heritage values.
- **Management**
To determine and implement appropriate management processes to facilitate planning, control (licensing, enforcement), dispute resolution, consultation, information flow and resource funding and allocation, which takes into account legislation and statutory arrangements.
- **Research and Monitoring**
To gain and disseminate the knowledge required to understand and manage the Abrolhos system.
- **Community Awareness and Involvement**
To raise awareness, appreciation and understanding of the unique values of the Abrolhos System, and involve the community in the processes required to plan for and manage the area.

- **Use and Development**

To enable multiple, equitable and sustainable use and development of the historical, social and economic attributes of the Abrolhos.

- **Legislation**

To create the legislative framework sufficient to manage and protect the area.

- **Implementation and Resources**

To provide a program for resourcing and implementation of the management plan.

2.5.1 Management of the Terrestrial Environment **(Management Plan, Sections 6.9 to 6.12)**

The terrestrial environment of the Abrolhos is managed in two very different ways. Most of the islands are a Class-A reserve intended to maintain the natural and cultural features of the Abrolhos. A number of islands are inhabited during the Zone A western rock lobster season. Licensed rock lobster fishermen with an A-Zone endorsement for the Abrolhos Islands are allowed to establish permanent camps on the Abrolhos to assist them in fishing in the adjoining waters. The camps are occupied during the Abrolhos season (15 March to 30 June). Only certain islands in each group are available for the development of camps.

Early development of the camps occurred on an *ad hoc* basis without regard to overall planning and normal building standards. Consequently, some development was of a standard which would not have been acceptable elsewhere. In recent years Fisheries WA, in consultation with the fishers, has introduced regulations to require a minimum standard, but there is still a need for considerable improvement. Any future development of camps will adhere to strict standards, and existing sub-standard structures will be upgraded in accordance with a schedule agreed to between Fisheries WA and the occupants.

All new camps and tourism developments will be constructed in accordance with the standards and in a manner which is consistent with the importance of the Abrolhos system.

Because of the unplanned manner in which development has occurred at the Abrolhos, the occupancy of sites has not been formalised in accordance with properly constituted leases or licences. This deficiency will be rectified as a matter of priority. A system of leases and licences is required to provide approved operators with an agreed level of security of tenure, and to enable the Minister for Fisheries to manage issues of liability, waste management and building standards (*Management Plan, Section 4.2*).

As mentioned above, development on the Abrolhos has occurred in an unplanned manner, resulting in some inefficient use of space and loss of amenity. There is need for a land use plan for each developed site to enable resolution of some of these issues (*Management Plan, Section 4.3*). Such plans will be developed by planning consultants after consultation with the island residents and the wider community. There is also a need for proper emergency planning to deal with natural disasters including fires and cyclones (*Management Plan, Section 4.3*); a draft plan for this has recently been developed.

2.5.2 Management of the Marine Environment (Management Plan, Sections 6.1 to 6.8)

The State Territorial Waters of the Houtman Abrolhos Islands are one of the most important marine areas of Western Australia. Managing these waters in a manner which ensures the retention of their natural values while allowing fair and equitable access to the various resources of the Abrolhos is the basic goal of the management plan for the Abrolhos.

The principal mechanism for protecting the Abrolhos marine system is the recent declaration of a Fish Habitat Protection Area (FHPA) under the *Fish Resources Management Act (1994)* for all State Territorial Waters of the Houtman Abrolhos Islands (*Management Plan, Section 6.4.1*). Just as occurred in the development of management practices on land, management of the Abrolhos waters developed in an *ad hoc* fashion as fisheries developed on the islands. The introduction of a limited entry fishery for western rock lobster in 1963 tightened management arrangements for the fishery itself.

A major development in managing the marine system of the Abrolhos occurred in 1994 with the introduction of Reef Observation Areas (ROAs), with one such area being declared in each island group, including North Island (*Management Plan, Section 6.7*). Except for the use of rock lobster pots, fishing by both recreational and commercial fishers was prohibited in the Reef Observation Areas. These regulations were intended to allow the recovery of finfish populations towards their original state, providing an area where divers could observe large fish that were not frightened by their approach. There is also an expectation that, as population densities of previously fished territorial species increase, there will be a movement of some of the fish into areas where they can be fished. The Reef Observation Areas are illustrated in Figures 2-4:

- North Island ROA: off the southern end of North Island;
- Wallabi Group: Beacon Island ROA: the Beacon Island platform and coral bombies off the northern end of Long Island;
- Easter Group: Leo's Island ROA: surrounds Leo's Island, White Island and Bynoe Island; and
- Pelsaert Group: Coral Patches ROA: the coral patch area of the eastern part of Pelsaert Group.



3 RECREATION, TOURISM AND VISITOR USE

3.1 Overall Thrust of the Tourism Management Plan

(Management Plan, Section 7.1)

Objective

Manage environmentally sustainable nature-based tourism which is consistent with the protection of the natural and cultural heritage values of the Abrolhos System and provides appropriate managed access to the area for the community.

There has been a growing awareness in recent years of the features of the Abrolhos and an increasing demand that they be made more available to the general public. The basic thrust of the Abrolhos Islands Tourism Working Party's Final Report on Tourism at the Abrolhos Islands (AICC 1995) was to expand opportunities for tourism in the Abrolhos.

This plan recognises that there is a wide variety of possible commercial tourist operations that can occur in the islands. The basic goals of the plan are to make the islands more accessible to a variety of people from Western Australia, interstate and overseas so they can enjoy the many attractions of the islands, while at the same time undertaking tourism in an environmentally sensitive way.

The final report of the Tourism Working Party (AICC 1995) pointed out that "little is known about the conservation status and needs of many marine ecosystems" and "urged that a precautionary approach be adopted with tourism to the Abrolhos Islands, as the long-term viability of resource use relies on the maintenance of the ecological processes of the ecosystem". For this reason a strong emphasis in the assessment of development proposals will be given to the environmental effects of the proposal, both actual and potential. Tourism in the Abrolhos will be restricted to nature-based tourism designed to minimise environmental effects.

This plan recognises that there is a wide range of activities which can be considered under the umbrella concept of nature-based tourism. The thrust of the plan is to make the islands more accessible.

It is recognised that there will be a considerable difference in the impacts of a charter boat operating for short periods throughout the islands, as compared to a shore-based facility which may accommodate up to 40 people at a time in a single venue. The plan is intended to outline all of the requirements and processes which may be required for the larger development. Many of these requirements will not be necessary for a smaller operation. This consideration should be kept in mind at all times when reading and considering the Management Plan.

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

1. Protect the marine and terrestrial environments of the Abrolhos Islands. As a first step, this will include the development of guidelines for providing access for tourists which will ensure the maintenance of the natural and cultural heritage values. This will include the identification areas which will not be available for visitors' use. These areas will include sites with significant bird colonies during the breeding season. (AIMA, FWA, CALM, WAM)
2. Encourage the development of environmentally sensitive nature-based tourism in the Abrolhos. (AIMA, FWA, WATC, CALM)
3. Encourage the development of sustainable and appropriate facilities to support the nature-based tourism. (AIMA, FWA, CALM)
4. Incorporate local communities into the decision-making processes for tourism development and management. (AIMA, FWA)
5. Recognise that due to the fragile nature of the Abrolhos ecosystem it will be necessary to define an upper limit on the number of visitors using the area. (AIMA, FWA, CALM, WATC)

3.2 Ethics of Nature-Based Tourism

The Western Australian Tourism Commission and the Environmental Protection Authority have developed a guide to the 'eco-ethics' of tourism developments (O'Brien 1989), which contains a detailed analysis of how nature-based tourism projects should be approached. The booklet includes all of the environments of Western Australia. Only those guidelines relevant to the Abrolhos are listed below:

1. A tourism development (whatever its scale) dependent on the natural environment should enable visitors to enjoy it without degrading it, and should increase their appreciation and understanding so that they can develop an instant but long-lasting sense of awareness, oneness and involvement with the environment.
2. Every tourism development that relies on natural features should be designed so as to emphasise, so far as is practicable, the highest degree of positive creative interaction with those natural features and the highest degree of respect for natural forces.
3. In planning, development and operation of a tourism project, rapport and empathy with the site should be developed, and its ambience maintained and enhanced harmoniously.
4. Tourism developers should view the environment not as an undesirable constraint, but as a positive challenge to their professional ability to work ingeniously and constructively in harmony with the millennia of work that preceded them.

5. The size and scale of a tourism development should be planned carefully right from the outset with the environment as a critical limiting component, so as to ensure that even in its final format it does not exceed the carrying capacity of the local environment.
6. In its final form, a tourism development shall not reduce the environmental attractiveness of the vicinity, and during construction any adverse environmental effects should be minimal and short term.
7. Developers should take account of local community attitudes and feelings, including the way that a local unaltered environment contributes to a community's sense of place. Developers should take such actions as necessary to avoid polarisation of attitudes, which can cause unfruitful confrontation between the developer and non-supportive elements of the local community.
8. The development should not lessen enjoyment of the local environment by the local community and, where practicable, should enhance it.
9. It is essential to view the environmental implications and consequences of large developments in a regional sense, and of small developments in the light of their possible cumulative effects.
10. The tourism developer has a joint responsibility with the Government's environmental managers to accept the potential synergism of tourism and the environment, and without diminishing safeguards, to provide proactively the characteristics of each site in order to enhance the environment with a sympathetic tourism development.
11. Those involved in tourism at all levels, and on all scales, should accompany their entrepreneurial activities with promotion of environmental awareness and accurate understanding, knowing that by doing so they can lessen their management costs while enhancing their visitors' enjoyment.
12. The production of accurate informative brochures on environmental matters in specific areas should be encouraged.
13. Tourists, particularly in remote areas, should be encouraged to "tread lightly on our land," while "taking nothing but photographs and leaving nothing but footprints".
14. Tourism developers and promoters should foster in their management and employees a sense of environmental awareness, enjoyment and accurate understanding, through staff development programs.
15. A tourism development should bear an ongoing responsibility for environmental protection, including assessments and management. While taking responsible advantage of the resilience of much of the natural environment, developers should nurture it, maintain it and avoid depreciation, because the environment, unlike most of the plant and equipment, is often irreplaceable.
16. A tourism development should recognise that there was a valid spectrum of land-use values and allocation before its involvement. Any extension of recreational activities should not distort the range of fundamental land-use values, particularly towards the primitive and wilderness end of the spectrum.

17. In all aspects of a tourism development, a systematic attempt must be made to follow relevant broad conservation policies. For example, conservation of water and energy should be encouraged, as should retention of native vegetation, prevention of soil degradation and preservation of native fauna.
18. In all aspects of a tourism development, a systematic attempt should be made to minimise pollution in any form, particularly in rural and remote areas where the scale of the development may make its operations a model for the local community.
19. Tourism developments along the coast should be planned to conform with nodal patterns of development and access, so as to localise and efficiently manage environmental consequences, while at the same time minimising diffusion of capital expenditure.
20. The location, scale and form of coastal developments should be in harmony with their uniquely sensitive environment.
21. Most remote tourism ventures concerned with native flora and fauna are best if they provide for small parties and intense personal participation, so as to maximise participation but minimise perturbation.
22. Tourism developments, especially in remote areas, should provide locally-knowledgeable environmental experts and guides. Steps should be taken at appropriate levels, to train or otherwise obtain the services of such experts.

3.3 Private Recreational Tourism

Objective

To manage private recreational tourism in the Abrolhos Islands consistent with the carrying capacity of the environment.

Very little is known of the use of the Abrolhos Islands for recreational tourism. There have been no systematic surveys undertaken, and no records of visitor numbers maintained. The use is highly seasonal, with Easter weekend being very popular. Because of the proximity of the Abrolhos to Geraldton, these visitors are concentrated in Pelsaert Group.

Recreational visitors can be divided into two groups: people visiting on yachts, and friends of fishers who stay in camps on the occupied islands. As no camping is allowed on the islands, people on yachts are required to stay on-board overnight (*Management Plan, Section 7.1*). Fires are not allowed on the islands.

Visiting private yachts and pleasure boats have long provided a source of tourism at the Abrolhos. This activity is increasing, with many people returning regularly, year after year. Most of this activity predominantly coincides with the rock lobster fishing season because of relatively gentle autumn weather patterns. Visiting boats find conditions difficult and restrictive during the summer southerly weather pattern. The strong summer southerly winds and consequent lack of tourists have undoubtedly been a major contributing factor to the relative lack of disturbance to seabird rookeries during nesting time.

Private visitors to the Abrolhos are required to conform to the Abrolhos Islands regulations (*Management Plan, Section 43.1*). These include:

- camping on the islands and the lighting of fires are prohibited;
- use of moorings, jetties and such, without the written permission of their owner is prohibited;
- boats travelling to the Abrolhos outside of the Abrolhos rock lobster season must notify the Fisheries WA office in Geraldton of their visit before travelling to the Abrolhos; and
- no pets are allowed on the islands.

This list is not exhaustive and people planning a visit to the islands should obtain a copy of the regulations before leaving port.

The planned islands' visitor fee described in Section 4.1 will apply to private visitors (*Management Plan, Section 12.2*).

STRATEGIES

Long Term

6. Information and facilities may be provided for private visitors to the islands, such as moorings and limited infrastructure for those visiting during the day. *(AIMA, FWA)*
7. Provide information to prospective visitors through the Geraldton Region Museum. *(AIMA, FWA, WAM)*
8. Survey the number of private visitors and monitor their activities *(AIMA, FWA)*

Short Term

9. Provide copies of the Abrolhos Islands Regulations and other information through the Geraldton office of Fisheries WA. *(AIMA, FWA)*

3.4 Commercial Tourism Operations

Objective

To manage the development of environmentally sensitive nature-based tourism in the Abrolhos through licensing tourism operators.

3.4.1 Opportunities for Tourism in the Abrolhos

As outlined in Section 1.1, there are substantial natural and cultural attractions which encourage an interest in visiting and enjoying the Houtman Abrolhos Islands.

3.4.2 Constraints on Tourism in the Abrolhos

There are also a number of constraints on tourism in the Abrolhos which are discussed below.

Environment

The environmental attractions for tourism in the Abrolhos are considerable. However, the fragile nature of the Abrolhos terrestrial and marine systems is also one of the major constraints for tourism in the Abrolhos (*Management Plan, Section 7.1*). In particular, many of the islands are susceptible to erosion as they have little or no vegetation cover. As expressed in Section 3.2, one of the key features for nature-based tourism is that it be undertaken in sympathy with the environment so that no permanent damage is done to the terrestrial and marine systems.

The fragile nature of many ecosystems suggests their human carrying capacity is low. Tourism developments must be undertaken in a manner which does not exceed the carrying capacity of the ecosystem in question.

The seabird populations of the Abrolhos are of international significance. The colonies are very vulnerable to disturbance, and protecting the colonies has a very high environmental value.

Exotic species such as mice and rats have already been introduced to the Abrolhos. An eradication program of rats at Rat Island has been successful. Care must be exercised by all people using the islands to ensure that new pests are not introduced, and mice spread to additional islands.

Protection of High Conservation Areas

The management plan *Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System* has strategies whose implementation may have implications for the development of tourism. Specifically, the plan identified the need to consider the identification and management of marine (*Management Plan, Section 6.4.1*) and terrestrial (*Management Plan, Section 6.9*) areas with high conservation value. This may necessitate zoning and development of appropriate management plans for these areas, which may affect zoning for tourism.

Water

There are no known sources of fresh water on the islands. The coral shingle and limestone base present on most of the islands means that there will be little, if any, fresh water trapped as groundwater. While it is possible that there is fresh (or brackish) groundwater on the larger, continental islands, the amount present would be small and it would probably not be environmentally acceptable to utilise this water for human consumption.

Almost all of the water used on the Abrolhos comes from rainwater. The mean rainfall of 469 mm per year is gathered from the roofs of fishers' huts and stored in water tanks. Normal precautions in collecting and using water from this source must be undertaken. The roof must be properly cleaned periodically of bird droppings and storage tanks must be maintained in good condition.

The water supply is suitable for a family or small group of fishers who recognise the continuing need to conserve the limited fresh water supplies, but the amount of water available would be a problem for a larger group. In addition, rainfall is seasonal, with the great majority falling during the winter – there is normally little replenishment over the summer. Any tourist venture depending on rainwater will need to constantly remind clients of the need to conserve fresh water. This problem is not unique to the Abrolhos, and is faced by many coastal settlements in Western Australia, so it can be managed.

A second option for obtaining water supplies is to cart it by boat from the mainland. This is expensive and probably not viable, as the primary supply source for a pontoon or shore-based tourist venture. It would not be a problem for a charter boat going to the Abrolhos from the mainland for a trip of a few days, and perhaps topping up the boat tanks with water from the rainwater storage tanks on shore is an option.

A third possibility for water supplies is desalination. This is an attractive option in an area such as WA, where coastal water supplies are limited. Many charter boats operating in WA already use desalination for at least part of their water supplies.

Weather

(Management Plan, Section 6.2).

One of the key constraints for tourism in the Abrolhos is the weather. The low-lying islands are very exposed, with little natural shelter from the winds and rain. The open crossing of over 60 km from the mainland to the islands can be very rough, and is uncomfortable to many people on all but the calmest of days.

The weather pattern of the Abrolhos is influenced by the north-south movement of the sub-tropical anticyclonic wind belt and an eastward progression of high pressure cells. The dominant wind direction in summer is southerly, from the south-east to south-west, with high speeds: 76 per cent of wind speeds exceed 11 knots (20 km/hr) and 44 per cent exceed 17 knots (31 km/hr). Calm conditions are rare and occur mainly in winter.

Storm events occur primarily in winter, but the Abrolhos is also subject to occasional tropical cyclones. The possibility of wind speeds reaching 165 kph occurs once every 50 years, with the possibility of 176 kph winds once every 100 years.

Sanitary waste disposal

(Management Plan, Section 4.4).

The hard limestone base of most of the islands in the Abrolhos does not allow the installation and use of septic tanks. Many fishers have toilets along the shore where the cliff is undercut or on the ends of jetties, providing direct access to the underlying seawater. In both cases, raw sewage is released directly into nearshore waters, and no treatment is undertaken. This is an unsatisfactory system which has not yet been eliminated.

Some huts have sewage pipes extending directly into the sea, which release sewage at a point well away from the islands. Methods are currently being investigated to upgrade the management of sewage

on the islands. Any tourism facility built on the Abrolhos or operating in Abrolhos waters will be required to meet acceptable sanitary waste disposal standards.

Infrastructure

(Management Plan, Section 4).

There is virtually no public infrastructure available on the Abrolhos. The few facilities that are present have been developed by fishers at their own expense to support the fishing industry. The jetties are all privately owned, either by individual fishers or small groups. There are no medical facilities except for a Silver Chain nursing station on Rat Island which operates only during the fishing season. There are no navigational aids except informal ones installed by fishers. Seaphone service is available, but there are no land or satellite lines.

During the fishing season, there are regular carrier boat services to each of the island groups which operate at intervals of two to four days, except when prevented by weather conditions. Separate cooperatives operate the five boats. The carrier boats convey supplies from Geraldton to the fishers, and on their return take live rock lobsters to the mainland for processing. As was indicated in Section 1.4, three of the carrier boats have recently been taking passengers to the Abrolhos during the off-season.

Airstrips on the islands were built and maintained by fishers with permission from the Minister for Fisheries. In 1996, the airstrips were upgraded with substantial assistance from State government monies.

STRATEGIES

Short Term

10. To develop a series of proposed tourism opportunities in the Abrolhos. *(AIMA, FWA)*
11. To provide information on the opportunities and constraints for commercial tourist ventures in the Abrolhos. *(AIMA, FWA)*
12. To publicly call for tenders for the commercial tourism opportunities and determine the most appropriate tenders. *(AIMA, FWA)*

Table 1 – Strategic Overview for Tourism Development in the Houtman Abrolhos Islands, Western Australia

The goal of this plan is: *to manage environmentally sustainable nature based tourism which is consistent with protection of the natural and cultural values of the Abrolhos System and provide appropriate managed access to the area for the community.*

Tourism type	Period	Strategy
Independent	Immediate	<p>Collect data on tourism ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘how’ and numbers of people.</p> <p>Provide more information on attractions in the islands and areas to avoid.</p> <p>Encourage visitors to utilise core areas by zoning and provision of facilities.</p> <p>Avoid conflict between nature conservation, private tourism, and fishers.</p> <p>Provision of moorings which can be rented through Fisheries WA.</p> <p>Access to East Wallabi jetty for private flights.</p>
	Medium-term	Progressively provide more facilities and control access to sensitive areas.
Commercial	Immediate	<p>Avoid conflict between nature conservation, fishers, and commercial tourism.</p> <p>Any tourism must be ecologically and economically sustainable.</p> <p>Consider the development in each group for tourist ventures.</p> <p>Provide access to the airstrips on East Wallabi Island.</p> <p>Provide for establishment of common moorings.</p>
	Medium-term	<p>Ensure all tourism developments are environmentally sensitive and have a net environmental benefit to the Abrolhos.</p> <p>If agreement can be reached, possible mixing of fishers and tourism.</p> <p>Any tourism development should use ‘best practice’ techniques.</p> <p>Permanent moored facility near Leo’s Island.</p> <p>Assess the potential tourism opportunities at East Wallabi Island while maintaining the high conservation values of the island.</p> <p>Other options for tourism facilities to be investigated, such as use of a large catamaran from shore.</p>

3.5 Facilities in Geraldton to Support Tourism in the Abrolhos Islands

Objective

To provide facilities in Geraldton which will assist potential visitors to the Abrolhos in understanding the Abrolhos Islands and their natural and cultural attributes.

With their unique blend of natural features such as geology, high latitude coral reefs, mixture of marine biota from different biogeographical regions, outstanding seabird populations, Dutch shipwrecks, and other features, the Abrolhos is a tourism attraction of state, interstate and international significance. Tourism in the Abrolhos should be recognised as forming an important component of tourism in the broader Mid-West Region of WA. Many – perhaps most – of the visitors to the islands will also wish to visit other attractions in the region.

Aside from a few people arriving in the Abrolhos Islands by boat directly from areas such as Perth, the great majority of tourists visiting the islands will depart from an adjacent point on the mainland coast, such as Geraldton, Dongara or Kalbarri. Facilities should be provided on the mainland to allow island visitors to learn about and gain an appreciation of the Abrolhos before and after their visit. This will enhance their enjoyment of their time in the islands.

For many people, a visit to the mainland facilities will provide all of the information and enjoyment they want, and they may not actually visit the Abrolhos. For example, during periods of bad weather, such mainland facilities will provide an alternative to actually going to the islands for short-term visitors.

The development of two facilities in Geraldton are of direct relevance to this draft tourism management plan for the Abrolhos Islands: The Batavia Coast Marina in Geraldton (officially opened in 1995, and providing infrastructure to house facilities for tourism accommodation, charter services for diving, fishing and wildlife appreciation, helicopter facilities); and the planned new Geraldton Regional Museum (a part of the Western Australian Museum).

The master plan for the new Geraldton Regional Museum has an ‘eco-museum’ approach, which recognises that the Mid-West’s natural and cultural heritage should be preserved and developed *in situ* wherever possible. The museum’s eco-museum approach to the natural history of the region will be developed in collaboration with other responsible agencies, preserving and interpreting as much as possible in the field.

The Geraldton Regional Museum will also include systematic collections of Mid-West specimens and/or representative examples of living species as the best means to preserve, study, display and interpret the unique earth sciences, flora and fauna of the region for residents and visitors. The project objectives for the Geraldton Regional Museum are:

- To establish a museum which will provide interpretive material for the people of the region and their visitors on the story of the Mid-West, accompanying its diverse culture; fishing, agricultural, mining and industrial heritage; and Dutch shipwrecks, as well as settlement and development.
- To develop a major display gallery to house artefacts from the *Batavia* wreck. It will provide visitors with a 'Batavia Experience' through the use of displays, dioramas and theatrical productions.
- To attract intrastate, interstate and international visitors to the Mid-West Region.
- To take an eco-museum approach and encourage visitors to explore heritage, natural history in situ, cultural facilities and areas of interest throughout the region.
- To offer visitors a 'window' on the Abrolhos and surrounding waters.

STRATEGIES

Long Term

13. To assist in the development of mainland facilities to help potential visitors to the Abrolhos to gain an understanding of the natural and cultural attributes of the islands. (AIMA, FWA, WAM)

3.6 Types of Operations

Objective

To develop a range of potential commercial tourism opportunities in the Abrolhos Islands to cater for a variety of visitors. (*Management Plan, Section 7.1*).

The final report of the Abrolhos Islands Tourism Working Party (AICC 1995) recommended the following types of nature-based tourism for the Abrolhos:

- Charter vessel – long visits, boat-based accommodation (up to 20 people for up to one week visits).
- Charter vessel – daily visits, boat-based accommodation (20 people).
- Moored accommodation facilities – either accommodation on a vessel or pontoon of a size consistent with this plan.
- Low density, low impact site – land-based (maximum 40 people).

The reasons visitors go to the islands vary widely, and include fishing charters; dive trips; an interest in wreck sites; and a wish to view the flora and fauna, particularly sea birds. Some groups of visitors have a mixture of these interests.

For all operations, consideration of the proposal will include a detailed analysis of the potential effects of the proposal on natural and cultural heritage values and the mechanisms proposed to minimise and manage the potential effects.

3.6.1 Charter Boat Visits (for Short or Long Visits)

In many ways, charter boat visits offer the most flexibility in establishing tourism ventures in the Abrolhos. The area of operation can be changed to suit the requirements of particular individuals or groups chartering the boat, and the time frame can be modified to suit individual needs and budgets. The area visited can be changed immediately to adapt to changes in weather conditions, and the accommodation is always available in each new area. Small boats can be used for visits ashore or to particular areas where a large boat cannot operate. Equipment which can be taken on charter boats is less limited than that which can be carried on an aircraft.

The disadvantages of charter boats are the rough conditions which often prevail in the open waters between the coast and the Abrolhos, and the aversion of some people to being on a boat.

The sea voyage to and from the Abrolhos can be avoided by using a 'fly/boat' combination of travel. In this scenario, visitors fly to the Abrolhos, join a charter boat or a permanent facility for their time at the islands, then fly back to the mainland. This can be done using fixed wing aircraft operating from the East Wallabi airstrip by seaplane or helicopter.

Advantages of fly/boat travel include rapid movement from the coast to the islands and back, and the relative comfort of flying versus the open ocean voyage. In addition, the flight provides visitors with a very different perspective of the islands than that which they receive at sea or shore level.

The disadvantages are the expense of the flights and the relatively limited weight that can be carried on the aircraft. The latter is particularly important for divers, surfers and recreational fishers, who wish to carry more equipment that can be accommodated on the aircraft.

Seaplanes and helicopters can operate in most areas of the Abrolhos, and would thus be suitable for all four groups. Due to the absence of an airstrip in the Pelsaert Group, fly/boat tourism in this group would have to utilise one of the other airstrips.

While the restrictions are much less severe than for aircraft, charter boats are limited in the amount of equipment they can take to the islands. One possibility is for an operator to establish a jetty and shed on one of the islands, to allow passengers to go ashore for a while and to store equipment for the charters. Such a facility could be built on any of the islands suggested in Section 3.7.2 for a land-based facility, or alternatively a charter operator could reach agreement with a tourism operator with access to an existing facility to use this for storage.

Assessment of proposals for charter boat operators will be undertaken as outlined in the *Future Management of the Aquatic Charter Industry in Western Australia (Fisheries WA 1998)*

3.6.2 Moored Accommodation Facilities

The advantages of a moored accommodation facility are that it can be established in an area of interest, while having minimal effect on the environment. In a suitable area there will be little effect from wave action. The facility can be constructed elsewhere and towed to the Abrolhos, further decreasing

environmental impact. However, there are impacts which still occur, including shading of the underlying bottom and waste disposal issues.

3.6.3 Low Density, Low Impact Shore-based Tourism

A key feature of tourism in the Abrolhos is that it should not adversely affect the fragile environment. For this reason, shore-based accommodation must be low density and low impact. The Tourism Working Party (AICC 1995) recommended that a shore-based facility should accommodate no more than 40 people. It was considered that this was large enough to be economically viable, but small enough to minimise adverse environmental impacts.

The advantages of shore-based accommodation are that it provides a place to get away from the waves and swell of the sea, and has more space available than moored accommodation, both to walk around in and for the development of facilities and storage areas. Such a shore-based facility would be limited to areas of lower environmental sensitivity. A disadvantage of this situation is that it restricts activities to one area of the Abrolhos, but this can to some extent be overcome by using small boats to move about in the local area.

The final report of the Abrolhos Island Tourism Working Party (AICC 1995) considered the interests of rock lobster fishers and tourism operators to be largely incompatible. Huts on the inhabited islands are very close together, much more so than in mainland communities. The fishers leave early (usually at 4:00-5:00 a.m.) to pull their pots and accordingly have a very early night. There is concern amongst the fishers that tourists visiting the islands would be wandering through their camps and disrupting the community by wishing to party at night. In addition, there is concern about loss of property. Should tourist facilities be considered for presently inhabited islands, a process of consultation with the islands' fishing community, AIMA and other interested parties would be undertaken.

The final report of the Abrolhos Island Tourism Working Party (AICC 1995) left open the possibility of a shore-based tourism facility on an inhabited island if the operator and fishers agree. Recommendation 6 states: *"If the Abrolhos Islands Land Management [Sub]committee and future tour operators reach agreement for access to islands inhabited by A-Zone rock lobster fishers, this access may occur."* This possibility is maintained in the present draft tourism management plan.

3.7 Recommended Sites

A number of potential mechanisms for developing tourism in the Abrolhos were identified in the 1995 final report of the Abrolhos Islands Tourism Working Party (AICC 1995). All of the possibilities discussed in the 1995 report have been included below, and additional possibilities added. The individual sites present different opportunities for tourism, and these are discussed.

It may well be that in future a prospective operator will identify a potential site or mechanism not identified in the present draft tourism management plan. The draft plan is not intended to preclude such possibilities. If any are proposed, they will be assessed in the same manner as proposals for sites identified

in the plan, but in addition, the prospective operator will be required to present a justification for their proposal.

Development proposals may proceed after consultation with conservation agencies and will be subject to an assessment process to ensure they are consistent with Standards Association of Australia requirements and of a standard appropriate to the Abrolhos.

A number of additional possible sites have been proposed during the course of the development of the present draft tourism management plan and the previous investigations of tourism in the Abrolhos Islands. Reasons for not recommending these sites in the draft tourism management plan are provided in Section 3.7.4 below.

3.7.1 Charter Boats

Charter boat operations can be conducted throughout the islands, subject to the needs for safety and minimisation of adverse environmental impacts. As suggested above, the operator could tender for a shore-based jetty and shed to provide space to store equipment, and engage in fly/boat ventures. It is also recognised that the charter operator may need one or more mooring sites in the islands.

Charter boat operators may also tender to develop a shore-based facility, or to engage in joint ventures with the operator of such a facility.

3.7.2 Possible Shore-based Facilities

A primary thrust of the Abrolhos Islands Planning Strategy (AICC/AITF 1989) was to prohibit the use of new islands by the fishing industry and to consolidate existing fishing camps on particular islands to reduce environmental impacts.

The Abrolhos Islands Tourism Working Party (AICC 1995) agreed in essence with this recommendation, but considered that Long Island in the Wallabi Group could be used to develop a shore-based facility. While there are bird populations on Long Island, they are of a low density and the environmental attributes of the island are lower than on other islands. The advantages of Long Island for a shore-based tourism facility are outlined below. Also included on the list of possible sites below is one in the Easter Group.

Long Island, Wallabi Group

Long Island was selected by the Abrolhos Islands Tourism Working Party for several reasons. It is centrally located in the Wallabi Group, where the *Batavia* was wrecked. Beacon Island, where the survivors went ashore and established a camp, is only 1 km to the east. Long Island itself was where the traitors were hanged by the rescue party sent from Batavia. The forts on West Wallabi Island are 7 km away.

Long Island is located in Goss Passage, where shore dives can be made along the coral slope to a depth of 30-35m and the coral gives way to the essentially sandy bottom of the passage. Three *Porites* coral bombies and the newly installed dive trail are just off the northern tip of the island. The adjacent Beacon Island platform is a reef observation area, and offers the possibility of diving among coral reef fish which have not been hunted by spear for several years. In good weather, the *Batavia* wreck site can be dived.

Other dive sites, including those on the front of the reef, can be easily reached by small boat from Long Island.

The central position of Long Island means that there are a variety of fishing opportunities. The reef slope to the east offers good supplies of reef fish and pelagic species can be caught in Goss Passage. As with diving, fishing can be undertaken throughout the Wallabi Group by small boats operating from Long Island.

Long Island is near the airstrip on East Wallabi Island, and can be easily reached by small boats. In good weather East Wallabi Island can be used for day trips and picnics.

To the west of Long Island, the lagoon offers good anchorages. A jetty could easily be built onto this side of Long Island or onto Goss Passage.

Long Island is recognised as a 'maritime archaeological site' under the State *Maritime Archaeology Act 1973* because of its association with the wreck of the *Batavia*. The Director of the Western Australian Maritime Museum must be consulted about any proposals for the installation of a tourist development on Long Island.

West Wallabi Island, Wallabi Group

West Wallabi Island is one of the largest islands in the Abrolhos, and has extensive sand beaches along its western side. Although the beaches are on the other side of the island, it is also the site of the forts established by the *Batavia* survivors. There are a few huts on the south-west corner of the island.

West Wallabi has by far the greatest concentration of seabirds in the Abrolhos, with an estimated 1,030,000 pairs of shearwaters, both wedge-tailed and little shearwaters, breeding on the island (Fuller *et al.* 1994).

The Abrolhos Island Planning Strategy (AICC/AITF 1989) called for the removal of the huts as part of the program of consolidating fishers to a limited number of islands of lower conservation value. It would be inconsistent with this policy to open the island to land-based tourist accommodation. In addition, there is no anchorage and boats are moored well offshore. In order to minimise the possibility of introducing feral species, no jetties are permitted on the island. Access is by small boats beached on the shore.

Little Roma Island, Easter Group

Little Roma Island is a small island located to the south of Rat Island. It is uninhabited, and thus separated from the commercial fishers, but near enough to Rat Island to have ready access to its airstrip. Both islands are located in the heart of Easter Group, with access to a wide variety of fishing and dive sites, including the Reef Observation Area of the Leo Island Platform, which has the Anemone Lump – one of the premier dive sites in the Abrolhos.

3.7.3 Possible Moored Accommodation Facilities

The final report of the 1995 Abrolhos Islands Tourism Working Party identified the opportunity of providing a moored accommodation facility of a size consistent with this plan in the Easter Group near the

Anemone Lump. As discussed above, this type of facility will offer the comfort of a stable platform while at the same time minimising adverse environmental effects.

The Leo's Island platform is in a Reef Observation Area, with the Anemone Lump already being one of the premier dive sites in the Abrolhos. As fish in the ROA become less wary of divers, there will be more opportunities to view them at close range.

Leo's Island is a small island, with sandy beaches and tame cod in tidal ponds. There is a variety of bird life on the island, making it of high conservation value. The margins of the island are fringed by coral, which can be easily viewed by snorkelers and offers dive sites for scuba divers. Fishing is not permitted in the Leo's Island ROA, but there are a number of sites available near by.

The Leo's Island platform is only a few kilometres from the airstrip on Rat Island. Shine Aviation has been making tourist flights to Leo's Island in recent times using a seaplane, offering the possibility of flying directly from Geraldton to a moored facility in the area.

Moored accommodation facilities could also be established in other areas of the Abrolhos, and this does not preclude this possibility.

3.7.4 Shore-based Facilities

North Island

North Island is a continental island with sand beaches, seabird breeding areas, and attractive dive sites in the associated Reef Observation Area. However, the island has only restricted anchorage and jetty space, which is already occupied by commercial fishers.

There are presently 25 resident fishers on the island during the rock lobster season. However, the areas surrounding the island may continue to be visited by charter vessels. If a suitable arrangement is made with a North Island fisher, there is jetty access.

East Wallabi Island, Wallabi Group

With its extensive sand beach and low rolling dunes, Turtle Bay on East Wallabi Island is one of the prettiest areas of the Abrolhos, and an attractive position in which to base a tourist facility. However, the island has a very high conservation value, particularly since it has never been occupied by fishers. A fossil site at one end of the bay is of international significance (Kohn 1997).

Turtle Bay itself has extensive beds of seagrasses of the genera *Posidonia*, *Amphibolis* and *Halophila* (Brearley 1997) – habitats which are key nursery areas for rock lobster and fish. However, the bay is exposed during northerly conditions and therefore does not provide an all weather anchorage.

The site has considerable conservation value and any development will require full environmental assessment. In the intermediate term, a detailed assessment should be made of the potential for East Wallabi Island for tourism, taking into account any issues which arise from the experience gained from the monitoring of tourism operations which have occurred in other parts of the Abrolhos.

Leo's Island, Easter Group

There is a single fisher living on Leo's Island at present. Leo's Island has a high conservation value because of the large seabird populations on it. Under the terms of the Abrolhos Islands Planning Strategy (AICC/AITF 1989), the island is to be vacated as part of the program of consolidating fishers to a limited number of islands.

When the present licensee sells his licence, the purchaser will be required to set up a camp on another already occupied island. Despite its small size, there are an estimated nearly 4,000 pairs of seabirds of seven species breeding on Leo's Island (Fuller *et al.* 1994).

The island was rejected as a potential site for land-based accommodation because of its conservation value, but it could be readily visited from a moored facility on the Leo's Island platform.

STRATEGIES

Long Term

14. Monitor the development of commercial nature-based tourism in the Abrolhos with a view to expanding opportunities. All of these activities will be controlled by appropriate standards for protecting the marine and terrestrial environments (Management Plan, Section 7.1).

Short Term

15. Call for public tenders for the following tourism facilities:
- a. Charter boats (up to 20 passengers).
 - b. Land-based overnight facilities (up to 40 people, including staff) at Long Island, Wallabi Group and Little Roma Island, Easter Group.
 - c. Moored accommodation facility on the Leo's Island Platform, Easter Group.
 - d. Other possible sites suggested by the tenderer.

Initially, the number of operations should be limited to two until the environmental impact has been assessed and economic viability established. (AIMA, FWA)

Medium Term

16. Call for public tenders for the following tourism facilities:
- a. Assess the potential for tourism opportunities at East Wallabi Island, Wallabi Group, based on experience gained in the short term and recognising the high conservation values of East Wallabi Island and the need to conserve them.
 - b. Other possible sites as suggested by the tenderer. (AIMA, FWA)



4 REQUIREMENTS FOR TOURISM OPERATIONS IN THE ABROLHOS

Objective

To manage tourism in the Abrolhos in a manner which enhances the enjoyment of the visitors while at the same time maintaining or enhancing the natural and cultural amenity of the islands, and recovering part of the cost of providing the necessary facilities.

4.1 Visitor Fees

(Management Plan, Section 12.2).

A fee will be required for all visitors to the islands to help recover part of the costs of managing the islands and providing facilities for visitors. The fee will apply to A-zone fishers, private boats, tourists, and other people visiting the islands not on governmental business. In the case of A-zone fishers, the fee will be incorporated into their licence fee on an annual basis.

Private boat owners will be able to obtain either a single trip or annual permit to visit the islands. The fee will be collected by tourism operators for people using the facilities and arrangements will be made to transfer the monies to Fisheries WA.

4.2 Licences Required

(Management Plan, Section 7.1).

A licence from the Minister for Fisheries will be required for any proponent to undertake a tourism venture in the Abrolhos. A draft information sheet for prospective tourism operators is included as Appendix A of this document, while an assessment procedure for tourism proposals is included in Appendix B. The assessment procedure has been developed to provide the Minister with information for use in considering whether or not a licence should be granted.

To develop tourism in the Abrolhos Islands in a rational manner commensurate with levels of tourism, the number of licences will be limited, as described in Section 4.7 of this document.

Licences will be granted for an initial period of seven years, with two renewals of seven years each being possible, giving a total tenure of 21 years before new tenders are called. The renewals will be subject to the environmental and operational conditions required by the licence being met to the satisfaction of the Minister for Fisheries.

If all other aspects of an application are equal, preference in considering tenders for the development of commercial tourism facilities in the Abrolhos should be given to operators who have already been working in the islands, and who have undertaken initial work towards developing facilities, a market and a clientele.

4.3 Areas Where Operations are Allowed

(Management Plan, Section 7.1).

In planning a tourism venture in the Abrolhos, a proponent should carefully consider both the areas proposed for development in Section 3.6 above and the *Management Plan for the Houtman Abrolhos Islands* (Fisheries WA 1997), in order to ensure the proposal is consistent with the area(s) in which the operations will occur. For example, fishing (except for rock lobster potting) is not allowed in Reef Observation Areas, and there may be seasonal exclusions of visitors from some areas of the Abrolhos during the bird breeding season.

4.4 Applicable Policies

(Management Plan, Section 7.1).

An assessment fee will be charged at the time an application for a tourism venture is lodged. Once paid, the fee will be non-refundable. As part of the assessment process, the proponent will be required to demonstrate the financial viability of their proposed operation.

An annual licence fee will be charged. If the fee is not paid on the appropriate date, the permit will be withdrawn. Licences will be transferable only with the written permission of the Minister for Fisheries and a licence transfer fee will be charged. The new licence will be required to meet the criteria which are applied to the original licence.

In order to minimise the potential for environmental effects, the Minister may seek an independent assessment of the design, location and environmental acceptability of boats, pontoons or shore-based facilities. Installation of the facilities will be overseen by Fisheries WA.

The environmental effects of the tourism operation must be monitored, as provided in Section 4.5 of this document. In addition, the licensee will be required to provide Fisheries WA with detailed annual returns on the number of visitors and staff at the facility.

When a licence is issued, it will require commencement of construction or operation of the venture within a specified period. This requirement is necessary in order to prevent speculative proposals, that have little chance of proceeding, tying-up potential tourism sites.

The Abrolhos Islands Regulations will apply to all tourist developments, so that as far as possible, tourism developers are equal in the face of the law with commercial fishers, and neither group benefits from a perceived favouritism. As proposed in Section 2.2.1, the Abrolhos Islands Land Management Sub-committee will be expanded to include representatives of the tourism industry, nominated by an appropriate tourism industry association.

4.5 Monitoring Program

(Management Plan, Section 7.1).

Independent environmental monitoring of the effects of larger tourism projects such as pontoons or shore-based facilities will be required. Such monitoring may also be required for smaller projects if there is concern over the potential effects of their operation.

Proponents are cautioned that a pre-installation examination of the area will be required to establish a baseline to evaluate changes which might occur after the tourism venture starts. There may be a requirement for the monitoring program to continue after the facility ceases operation in order to measure recovery of the area.

The monitoring program will be tailored to the particular activity and include three aspects:

- physical environment;
- biological environment; and
- socio-economic factors.

Tourism operators will be required to rectify any environmental damage caused by their operations. Independent checks may be done by Fisheries WA and/or CALM at any time.

4.6 Decommissioning

(Management Plan, Section 7.1).

If permanent shore-based facilities or pontoons are established in the Abrolhos, they must be decommissioned and removed when the project is terminated or the associated permit expires. This is the responsibility of the proponent.

The proponent must outline in detail the expected costs of removing the facility when a proposal to establish it is made. Before a licence is issued, a bond will be required to ensure that, if for any reason the proponent fails to remove the facility, funds are available to allow Fisheries WA to undertake the task.

4.7 Process for Establishing Commercial Tourism Ventures in the Abrolhos

(Management Plan, Section 7.1).

As recommended by the Abrolhos Islands Tourism Working Party (AICC 1995), the establishment and operation of tourism operations will occur as a formal process. After the Management Plan for Sustainable Tourism at the Abrolhos Islands receives approval by the Minister for Fisheries, Fisheries WA will publicly advertise a request for tenders. The initial call will be for the following tourism facilities in the Abrolhos Islands:

- a limited number of charter vessel operations;
- one shore-based operation; and
- one pontoon-based operation.

The tenderers will be required to provide details of the location(s), methods of operation, details of expected visitation levels, and other information required for the Minister for Fisheries to select the preferred tenders. The Minister will not necessarily award all of the above tenders.

The successful tenderers will be allowed a period of five years to establish facilities and develop their operations before tenders will be called for the development of additional facilities in the Abrolhos.

STRATEGIES

Short Term

17. Institute a visitation fee for all visitors to help recover the cost of managing the islands and provide facilities for them. *(AIMA, FWA)*
18. Develop a limited entry licensing system for commercial tourism facilities in the Abrolhos. *(AIMA, FWA)*
19. As part of the plan 'Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System', develop regulations governing visitation to environmentally sensitive areas. *(AIMA, FWA, CALM)*
20. Develop appropriate management mechanisms for commercial tourism operations, including:
 - a licence fee;
 - possible independent assessment of the design, location and feasibility of boats, pontoons or shore-based facilities;
 - a licence transfer fee;
 - environmental monitoring of impacts of the tourist facility; and
 - security of tenure for tourism operators. *(AIMA, FWA)*
21. Call for public tenders for:
 - a limited number of charter vessel operations in the Abrolhos;
 - one shore-based operation in each island group (not including North Island); and
 - one pontoon-based operation. *(AIMA, FWA)*

5 PUBLIC FACILITIES NEEDED FOR ABROLHOS VISITORS

5.1 Airstrips on the Abrolhos Islands

(Management Plan, Section 5).

Objective

To provide safe and efficient facilities to transfer people by air from the mainland to the Abrolhos and back in a manner compatible with retaining the conservation values of the islands.

There are three airstrips for fixed wing aircraft in the Abrolhos Islands: on Rat Island (Easter Group); East Wallabi Island (Wallabi Group); and North Island. The airstrips were initially developed and maintained by rock lobster fishers to provide transportation to and from the islands and a method of emergency evacuation. In 1996 the Western Australian Government provided funds to substantially upgrade the airstrips.

Southern, Easter and Wallabi Groups are also serviced by helicopter during the rock lobster season. The existing arrangements for air services to the Abrolhos are:

- The Minister for Fisheries is empowered to determine who can operate air services to the islands and under what conditions.
- The Minister for Fisheries granted an order for use of the airstrips to the Geraldton Fishermen's Cooperative on 24 March 1977, and again on 17 November 1982, subject to conditions concerning maintenance, safety, non-disturbance of fauna, and the use of the airstrips only to support fishing operations (that is, they were not to be used for tourism).
- Under the 1982 arrangements, the maintenance of the airstrips was the responsibility of the Geraldton Fishermen's Cooperative and the air charter operator.
- It was the responsibility of the Geraldton Fishermen's Cooperative to determine how it provides a service to Abrolhos Islands rock lobster fishers.

On 28 February 1999 a heads of agreement came into effect between the Geraldton Fishermans Cooperative and the Minister for Fisheries. This agreement appointed the cooperative as the Fisheries WA Air Services Manager for the Abrolhos Islands with responsibility for appointing a single air service provider for both fixed-wing and rotary-wing air services to the islands. The air service contractors are permitted to carry tourists to the islands with approval from Fisheries WA.

The heads of agreement expired on 28 February 2001.

An attempt to provide legislative regulation of air services to the Abrolhos under the *Fish Resources Management Act 1994* was unsuccessful. There is currently no regulation of this important means of access to the Abrolhos Islands.

For improved tourism to occur in the Abrolhos, it will be necessary to have the charter for use of the airstrips broadened by the Minister for Fisheries to allow the strips to be used for tourist visits. A previous fly/boat trial (AICC 1993) demonstrated the viability of this type of tourism in the Abrolhos.

In the past, the Geraldton Fishermen's Cooperative conducted a public tender process to select operators to provide an air service and a helicopter service to the Abrolhos Islands for rock lobster fishers. These arrangements have been reviewed and are to be broadened for tourist access to the islands. The East Wallabi Island airstrip has been upgraded to provide basic facilities including toilets, shaded areas and an adjacent public jetty. These facilities, including the airstrip, are available for use by tourist operators.

There is a requirement to develop a user-pays principle for use of airstrips at the Abrolhos relevant to the purpose of the passengers visit to the islands.

In the longer term, facilities at the airstrips should be upgraded to provide amenities, such as a waiting area for passengers, toilet facilities and telephone service, in a manner consistent with the environmental values of the Abrolhos Islands. Interpretive signage about the islands should also be installed.

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

22. Maintain and develop the airstrips in the Abrolhos so that at least the present level of service can be maintained. (AIMA, FWA)
23. Levy an airport usage fee for every passenger using an Abrolhos airstrip. Funds so generated will be used to maintain and develop the airstrips. (AIMA, FWA)
24. Allow the use of the East Wallabi airstrip by approved tourism operators. (AIMA, FWA)

Short Term

25. Modify the terms of operation of the East Wallabi airstrip to allow its use for tourist operations as appropriate. (AIMA, FWA)
26. Make the East Wallabi airstrip and associated facilities available for use by tourism operators. (AIMA, FWA)

5.2 Moorings and Jetties

(Management Plan, Section 8.1)

With the exception of the jetty at East Wallabi Island, all of the jetties in the Abrolhos are operated by individual fishers or groups of fishers for purposes associated with the rock lobster industry. These are privately-owned and operated under the Abrolhos Islands regulations. The only public facilities in the Abrolhos are on East Wallabi Island.

The final report of the Abrolhos Islands Tourism Working Party (AICC 1995) determined that: *“Safe mooring sites need to be developed under a code of practice that considers mooring siting, use and maintenance and environmental impact on the marine habitat where permanent moorings are to be located. Island environments adjacent to these moorings, likely to be visited by tourists, need to be investigated for impact on the flora and fauna.”*

Flora and fauna on the Abrolhos Islands likely to be affected by the establishment of an adjacent mooring, and marine flora and fauna under the proposed mooring, should be identified prior to any installation of that facility.

In the preparation of the tourism plan, meetings were held with tourism operators and A-Zone rock lobster fishers. Both parties agreed that installation of permanent moorings for commercial operators would minimise environmental damage.

Fisheries WA will install moorings at the Anemone Lump and the Long Island dive trail to support diving operations.

If Fisheries WA and tourism operators agree, additional moorings can be established in other areas. These moorings will be open to all commercial tourism operators licensed to operate in the Abrolhos.

When more than one boat is in a mooring area at a time, the operators will negotiate usage amongst themselves. All such moorings will be installed only if they meet appropriate location and design criteria.

In a similar fashion, Fisheries WA may, as funding permits, install moorings for use by private yachts which will be available for rent.

The jetty at East Wallabi has been upgraded and is available as a public facility.

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

27. Provide rental moorings for private yachts. (AIMA, FWA, DOT)

Short Term

28. Provide moorings for commercial tourism operators at the Anemone Lump, off the northern end of Long Island, off the forts on West Wallabi, and other locations agreed by the operators and AIMA. (AIMA, FWA, DOT)

29. Upgrade the jetty at East Wallabi Island for use by both commercial tourism operators and private individuals. (AIMA, FWA, DOT)

Long Term

30. Investigate the possibility of commercial tourism operators accessing the airstrips at Rat and North Islands, as well as sharing fishermen's jetty facilities for passenger transfer. (AIMA, FWA)

5.3 Beacon Island Education Centre

(Management Plan, Section 9.2).

The Final Report on Tourism at the Abrolhos Islands (AICC 1995) recommended: "The Beacon Island camp (Dransfield House) be used as a residence/study facility to accommodate bona-fide education and scientific groups who wish to work at the Abrolhos." This recommendation was adopted by the Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System and was incorporated in the draft tourism management plan released for public comment in December 1998.

However, extremely high tides and rainfall which persisted for most of the western rock lobster season in the Abrolhos during 1999 meant that the area planned for expansion of Dransfield House was underwater for most of the season. The area is thus unsuitable for expansion.

Fisheries WA investigated the issue, and determined that their needs would be best met by building a new facility on Long Island. As the tourism management plan envisages the development of tourism facilities on Long Island there will be benefits to both groups of having facilities on one island. Thus the current plan is to move the Fisheries station at Beacon Island to Long Island. A small, static interpretive display will be retained on Beacon Island.

6 OTHER MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS

6.1 Incorporation into the Management Plan for the Houtman Abrolhos Islands

The overall management plan for the Houtman Abrolhos Islands is titled *Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System*. This plan considers in detail a subset of the management issues which deal specifically with tourism.

The two plans will be managed in parallel. The overall management plan for the Houtman Abrolhos Islands will be operational for five years, after which it will be reviewed and renewed. During the renewal process, the tourism management plan will be incorporated into the overall plan for the second five-year period.

There are a number of other management questions of a procedural nature which are covered by the management plans. Because of the close association between the tourism plan and the overall Abrolhos management plan, these portions are summarised below only as they relate to tourism.

6.2 Abrolhos Islands Communication Plan (Management Plan, Section 9.1).

Fisheries WA has recently completed a communication plan for the Abrolhos Islands. The plan stresses the conservation values of the Abrolhos, introduces the regulations governing visitors to the Abrolhos and gives reasons for the rules; and covers safety concerns and private property (such as camps, moorings and jetties) in the Abrolhos.

The communication plan provides for the development of information signs for Geraldton boat ramps explaining the unique nature of the Abrolhos and the expected code of conduct while visiting them; an update of *The Abrolhos Islands – a Visitors' Guide* and supplementary resources (such as educational and promotional packages); and facilities (such as interpretive dive and walk trails).

The communication plan provides a series of strategies for developing partnership and sponsorship opportunities to ensure an Abrolhos Island education package can be offered to teachers at minimal price, and for the production of a book on the Abrolhos which will cover their history, marine and terrestrial environments, and natural values. It also provides for the development of a number of maps, displays, and other information on the Abrolhos, for use both in the islands themselves and on the mainland.

The plan recommends the establishment of an Abrolhos volunteer program, inviting the spouses and families of commercial fishers working on the islands to form the basis of the group. The duties of these volunteers will be similar to those of Fisheries WA's Volunteer Fisheries Liaison Officer program, plus carrying out interpretative activities for visiting school and tourist groups.

Progress towards completing the communication strategies, and the effectiveness of each strategy in communicating identified messages and achieving objectives, will be regularly evaluated, reviewed and, if necessary, modified. Community and stakeholder surveys should be done at least annually.

The charter for community awareness and education with regard to the Abrolhos ecosystem is to increase and enhance the knowledge, understanding and appreciation by members of the public and tour operators of:

- the unique natural and heritage values of the Abrolhos;
- the potential impacts that their activities may have on the Abrolhos ecosystem; and
- the management regimes for the Abrolhos to ensure minimal impacts on the ecosystem and minimise conflict between users and the need to adhere to the management regulations.

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

31. Implement the communication plan for the Abrolhos Islands in cooperation with other agencies, community groups and interested individuals. (AIMA, FWA)

Short Term

32. Develop mechanisms for the exchange of information and ideas between stakeholders. (AIMA, FWA)
33. Foster development of acceptable codes of behaviour. (AIMA, FWA)
34. Develop processes that encourage stakeholders to participate in management activities for the area. (AIMA, FWA)

6.3 Knowledge

(Management Plan, Section 10).

Objective

Plan and implement a coordinated program of research into the use of the Abrolhos by visitors, looking at whether the visit meets their expectations, the effects of visitors on the natural and cultural attributes of the islands and to evaluate the effectiveness of management programs.

Very little information exists on visitation to the islands, including answers to such basic questions as how many people visit the islands, why do they go there, how do they get there, where do they go in the islands, what do they do, and the effects of their visits on the natural and cultural attributes of the islands. Such information is fundamental to developing knowledge of tourism in the Abrolhos Islands, and a high priority will be given to developing this information.

Research which can answer such questions with direct management applications will be actively encouraged through the provision of funding, use of facilities and other infrastructure, and support in funding applications. Research which does not provide information directly applicable to management questions will also be encouraged, but have a lower priority.

As visitation to the Abrolhos Islands increases, there is potential for its detrimental effects – people inadvertently or deliberately causing damage – to increase. The effects of visitation will be monitored to develop strategies for minimising or counteracting these effects. The information generated by monitoring will also be used to improve the quality of future visits to the islands.

The effectiveness of management strategies will be continuously monitored to determine whether they are having the desired effects. This monitoring will provide information for those people associated with the management of the Abrolhos Islands to allow them to continuously improve island management strategies.

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

35. Encourage management-oriented research on tourism in the Abrolhos, including the effects of visitors on the natural and cultural attributes of the islands. *(AIMA, FWA, CALM)*
36. Use the results of this research for refining the management approaches in the Abrolhos. *(AIMA, FWA, CALM)*

6.4 Implementation

(Management Plan, Section 12)

A major key to the tourism management plan is to ensure that it is effectively implemented. This section provides details of the mechanisms to be used for the implementation.

6.4.1 Community Liaison

(Management Plan, Section 12.1)

The objective is to develop, encourage and facilitate liaison with the community, including tourism operators, and involvement in the management of tourism in the Abrolhos Islands.

Ongoing liaison with the community, particularly tourism operators working in the Abrolhos or planning to do so, is essential. This liaison occurs primarily through contact by members of the public with Fisheries WA and CALM staff as they work in the Abrolhos, but also through talks, and the presentation of brochures, signs and other information.

The Abrolhos Islands Management Advisory Committee will also consult with the community in an appropriate manner as issues arise.

STRATEGIES

37. Fisheries WA and AIMA will communicate regularly with the Abrolhos community, tourism industry and other interested parties to inform them of management practices and developments concerning tourism on the Abrolhos and seek their advice. (AIMA, FWA)
38. Community participation in the implementation of the management plan will be actively sought. (AIMA, FWA)
39. Community and industry consultation and participation on priorities for the research program will be encouraged. (AIMA, FWA)

6.4.2 Resourcing, Surveillance and Enforcement (Management Plan, Section 12.2)

Objective

To provide sufficient resources to provide effective management of tourism.

Aside from use by the fishing community living in the islands, the Abrolhos have been largely protected from over exploitation by their distance from land, the requirement for a large boat to make the crossing from the Australian mainland and the lack of accommodation on the islands. Visitor numbers have increased substantially in recent years, with larger boats becoming more accessible to the general public and charter boats operating in the islands.

The expected increase in visitor numbers to the Abrolhos makes it imperative that effective plans are made to provide information to the visitors and ensure they understand the reasons for the regulations on the islands.

In recent years there has been a substantial increase in public interest in WA in participating in interpretive programs (such as the Rottnest volunteer guides initiative) and management of the environment (the Volunteer Fisheries Liaison Officer Program). This public willingness to help should be tapped in the Abrolhos through a volunteer program.

Surveillance activities in the Abrolhos serve several purposes. They provide basic information on visitor usage of the islands, where visitors are going, why they want to go there, when they go, how they get there, and other data which is essential in providing information necessary for optimal management. The presence of officers undertaking surveillance rewards those visitors utilising the island in an appropriate manner by minimising misuse, and penalises those who abuse the situation.

STRATEGIES**Ongoing**

40. Provide resources for implementing the tourism management plan. Outside funding will be sought from appropriate sources. (AIMA, FWA)
41. Ensure surveillance activities are coordinated between Fisheries WA, CALM, WA Tourism Commission and other governmental agencies. (AIMA, FWA, CALM, WATC)

Short Term

42. Provide information to visitors on the values of the Abrolhos system, their wise use, and applicable regulations. (AIMA, FWA, CALM)

6.4.3 Safety**(Management Plan, Section 12.3)****Objective***To enhance safety of visitors to the Abrolhos Islands.*

The major safety issues in the Abrolhos are those created by boating and other activities in the marine environment or on inhabited islands. On land, trails will be established to sites visited by people to ensure their safety and protect the environment. Search and rescue operations are most likely to occur if a boat is in distress and the people come ashore on one of the islands.

STRATEGIES**Ongoing**

43. Provide information to the public on safety while on the Abrolhos Islands. (AIMA, FWA, DOT)
44. Assist the Police and Department of Transport in search and rescue operations on the islands. (AIMA, FWA)

6.4.4 Plan Implementation and Review**(Management Plan, Section 12.4).****Objectives***To implement the management strategies outlined in this plan and to review the plan as required.*

The tourism management plan in the Abrolhos provides a comprehensive approach for obtaining 'best practice' management of human visitation to the Abrolhos Islands, but in order for it to be implemented,

adequate resources must be available. Throughout the tourism plan, priorities have been established, in case available resources are inadequate to implement all of the strategies.

The strategies are divided into three groups: ‘ongoing’ (already implemented, or to be implemented as required); ‘short term’ (to be implemented as soon as possible); or ‘medium term’ (to be implemented later). These categories are based on current priorities, but may change (as necessary) during the course of the first five year management plan.

After the overall Abrolhos management plan is finalised, an implementation plan will be developed to put it into effect. The implementation plan will be reviewed annually; progress assessed; new information analysed; and the implementation plan modified if necessary. The tourism plan will be incorporated into this process.

The Abrolhos Islands Management Advisory committee (AIMA) advises the Minister for Fisheries on management of the Abrolhos Islands. AIMA will monitor the implementation of the tourism management plan.

This plan will be in effect for five years from the date it receives Ministerial approval and remain in effect until the management plan for the subsequent five years (with the tourism section incorporated into it) is approved. Amendments can be made to the management plan while it is in effect, but only after they undergo the mandatory public consultation process. The five year review will evaluate:

- the successes and failures of the first five year management plan;
- new information with the potential to affect management practices and strategies for tourism in the Abrolhos; and
- new proposals for the management of tourism in the Abrolhos.

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

45. Obtain resources to implement the tourism plan. (AIMA, FWA)

46. Annually review and report on progress or otherwise in the implementation of the tourism plan. (AIMA, FWA)

Short Term

47. Develop a program for implementation of the tourism management plan. (AIMA, FWA)

Medium Term

48. Towards the end of the five years of the operation of the plan, prepare the review of the plan and a draft plan for the following five years. (AIMA, FWA)

7 SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES

The strategies that follow are given sequentially, in the order that they appear in the various sections of *Management Plan for Sustainable Tourism at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands*. There are a total of 48 strategies. Acronyms listed after strategies indicate groups and organisations that may have an interest with the Abrolhos Islands Management Authority and Fisheries Western Australia in the development of the respective strategies.

Basic Environmental Thrust of the Tourism Plan

STRATEGY

Ongoing

1. Protect the marine and terrestrial environments of the Abrolhos Islands. As a first step, this will include the development of guidelines for providing access for tourists which will ensure the maintenance of the natural and cultural heritage values. This will include the identification of areas which will not be available for visitors' use. These areas will include sites with significant bird colonies during the breeding season. *(AIMA, FWA, CALM, WAM)*
2. Encourage the development of environmentally sensitive nature-based tourism in the Abrolhos. *(AIMA, FWA, WATC, CALM)*
3. Encourage the development of sustainable and appropriate facilities to support the nature-based tourism. *(AIMA, FWA, CALM)*
4. Incorporate local communities into the decision-making processes for tourism development and management. *(AIMA, FWA)*
5. Recognise that due to the fragile nature of the Abrolhos ecosystem, it will be necessary to define an upper limit on the number of visitors using the area. *(AIMA, FWA, CALM, WATC)*

Development of Tourism in the Islands

STRATEGY

Long Term

6. Information and facilities may be provided for private visitors to the islands, such as moorings and limited infrastructure for those visiting during the day. (AIMA, FWA)
7. Provide information to prospective visitors through the Geraldton Region Museum. (AIMA, FWA, WAM)
8. Survey the number of private visitors and monitor their activities. (AIMA, FWA)

Short Term

9. Provide copies of the Abrolhos Islands Regulations and other information through the Geraldton office of Fisheries WA. (AIMA, FWA)
10. To develop a series of proposed tourism opportunities in the Abrolhos. (AIMA, FWA)
11. To provide information on the opportunities and constraints for commercial tourist ventures in the Abrolhos. (AIMA, FWA)
12. To publicly call for tenders for the commercial tourism opportunities and determine the most appropriate tenders. (AIMA, FWA)

Long Term

13. To assist in the development of mainland facilities to help potential visitors to the Abrolhos gain an understanding of the natural and cultural attributes of the islands. (AIMA, FWA, WAM)

Types of Commercial Tourism Operations

STRATEGIES

Long Term

14. Monitor the development of commercial nature-based tourism in the Abrolhos with a view to expanding opportunities. All of these activities will be controlled by appropriate standards for protecting the marine and terrestrial environments *(Management Plan Section 7.1)*.

Short Term

15. Call for public tenders for the following tourism facilities:
- a. Charter boats (up to 20 passengers).
 - b. Land-based overnight facilities (up to 40 people, including staff) at Long Island, Wallabi Group; and Little Roma Island, Easter Group.
 - c. Moored accommodation facility on the Leo's Island Platform, Easter Group.
 - d. The above does not preclude the Authority from considering other proposals.

Initially, the number of operations should be limited to two until the environmental impact has been assessed and economic viability established. *(AIMA, FWA)*

Medium Term

16. Call for public tenders for the following tourism facilities:
- a. Assess the potential for tourism opportunities at East Wallabi Island, Wallabi Group, based on experience gained in the short term and recognising the high conservation values of East Wallabi Island and the need to conserve them.
 - b. Other possible sites as suggested by the tenderer. *(AIMA, FWA)*

Management Mechanisms for Tourism

STRATEGIES

Short Term

17. Institute a visitation fee for all visitors to help recover the cost of managing the islands and provide facilities for them. (AIMA, FWA)
18. Develop a limited entry licensing system for commercial tourism facilities in the Abrolhos. (AIMA, FWA)
19. As part of the plan '*Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System*', develop regulations governing visitation to environmentally sensitive areas. (AIMA, FWA, CALM)
20. Develop appropriate management mechanisms for commercial tourism operations, including:
 - a licence fee;
 - possible independent assessment of the design, location and feasibility of boats, pontoons or shore-based facilities;
 - a licence transfer fee;
 - environmental monitoring of impacts of the tourist facility; and
 - security of tenure for tourism operators. (AIMA, FWA)
21. Call for public tenders for:
 - a limited number of charter vessel operations in the Abrolhos;
 - one shore-based operation in each island group (not including North Island); and
 - one pontoon-based operation. (AIMA, FWA)

Public Facilities Needed for Abrolhos Visitors

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

22. Maintain and develop the airstrips in the Abrolhos so that at least the present level of service can be maintained. (AIMA, FWA)
23. Levy an airport usage fee for every passenger using an Abrolhos airstrip. Funds so generated will be used to maintain and develop the airstrips. (AIMA, FWA)
24. Allow the use of the East Wallabi airstrip by approved tourism operators. (AIMA, FWA)

Short Term

25. Modify the terms of operation of the East Wallabi airstrip to allow its use for tourist operations as appropriate. (AIMA, FWA)
26. Make the East Wallabi airstrip and associated facilities available for use by tourism operators. (AIMA, FWA)

Moorings and Jetties

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

27. Provide rental moorings for private yachts. (AIMA, FWA, DOT)

Short Term

28. Provide moorings for commercial tourism operators at the anemone lump, off the northern ends of Long Island, off the forts on West Wallabi, and other locations agreed by the operators and AIMA. (AIMA, FWA, DOT)
29. Upgrade the jetty at East Wallabi Island for use by both commercial tourism operators and private individuals (completed). (AIMA, FWA, DOT)

Long Term

30. Investigate the possibility of commercial tourism operators accessing the airstrips at Rat and North Islands, as well as sharing fishermen's jetty facilities for passenger transfer. (AIMA, FWA)

Abrolhos Islands Communication Plan

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

31. Implement the communication plan for the Abrolhos Islands in cooperation with other agencies, community groups and interested individuals. (AIMA, FWA)

Short Term

32. Develop mechanisms for the exchange of information and ideas between stakeholders. (AIMA, FWA)
33. Foster development of acceptable codes of behaviour. (AIMA, FWA)
34. Develop processes that encourage stakeholders to participate in management activities for the area. (AIMA, FWA)

Research on the Abrolhos

STRATEGY

Ongoing

35. Encourage management-oriented research on tourism in the Abrolhos, including the effects of visitors on the natural and cultural attributes of the islands. (AIMA, FWA, CALM)
36. Use the results of this research for refining the management approaches in the Abrolhos. (AIMA, FWA, CALM)

Implementation

STRATEGIES

37. Fisheries WA and AIMA will communicate regularly with the Abrolhos community, tourism industry and other interested parties to inform them of management practices and developments concerning tourism on the Abrolhos and seek their advice. (AIMA, FWA)
38. Community participation in the implementation of the management plan will be actively sought. (AIMA, FWA)
39. Community and industry consultation and participation on priorities for the research program will be encouraged. (AIMA, FWA)

Resourcing, Surveillance and Enforcement

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

40. Provide resources for implementing the tourism management plan. Outside funding will be sought from appropriate sources. (AIMA, FWA)
41. Ensure surveillance activities are coordinated between Fisheries WA, CALM, WA Tourism Commission and other governmental agencies. (AIMA, FWA, CALM, WATC)

Short Term

42. Provide information to visitors on the values of the Abrolhos system, their responsibilities, and applicable regulations. (AIMA, FWA, CALM)

Safety

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

43. Provide information to the public on safety while on the Abrolhos Islands. (AIMA, FWA, DOT)
44. Assist the Police and Department of Transport in search and rescue operations on the islands. (AIMA, FWA)

Plan Implementation and Review

STRATEGIES

Ongoing

45. Obtain resources to implement the tourism plan. (AIMA, FWA)

46. Annually review and report on progress or otherwise in the implementation of the tourism plan. (AIMA, FWA)

Short Term

47. Develop a program for implementation of the tourism management plan. (AIMA, FWA)

Medium Term

48. Towards the end of the five years of the operation of the plan, prepare the review of the plan and a draft plan for the following five years. (AIMA, FWA)

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are pleased to acknowledge the considerable assistance received from a wide variety of sources during the course of the project. Numerous members of the public provided written and verbal comments, and fishers and tourism operators spoke to us at meetings in Geraldton. Several members of the Abrolhos Islands Management Advisory Committee spoke freely about the project and reviewed the Draft Management Plan. At Fisheries WA, Colin Chalmers and Kim Nardi were very helpful.

The study benefited considerably from a trip to the Abrolhos Islands in June 1998. We appreciate the help of all we met during the trip, in particular the assistance of Tony Lemmon and his crew on *FV McLaughlin*, and Mick Rogers and Ian LeProvost.

The report was prepared by Dr Fred Wells and Jim Singleton of LeProvost Dames & Moore and Dr Ross Dowling of the University of Notre Dame, Western Australia.



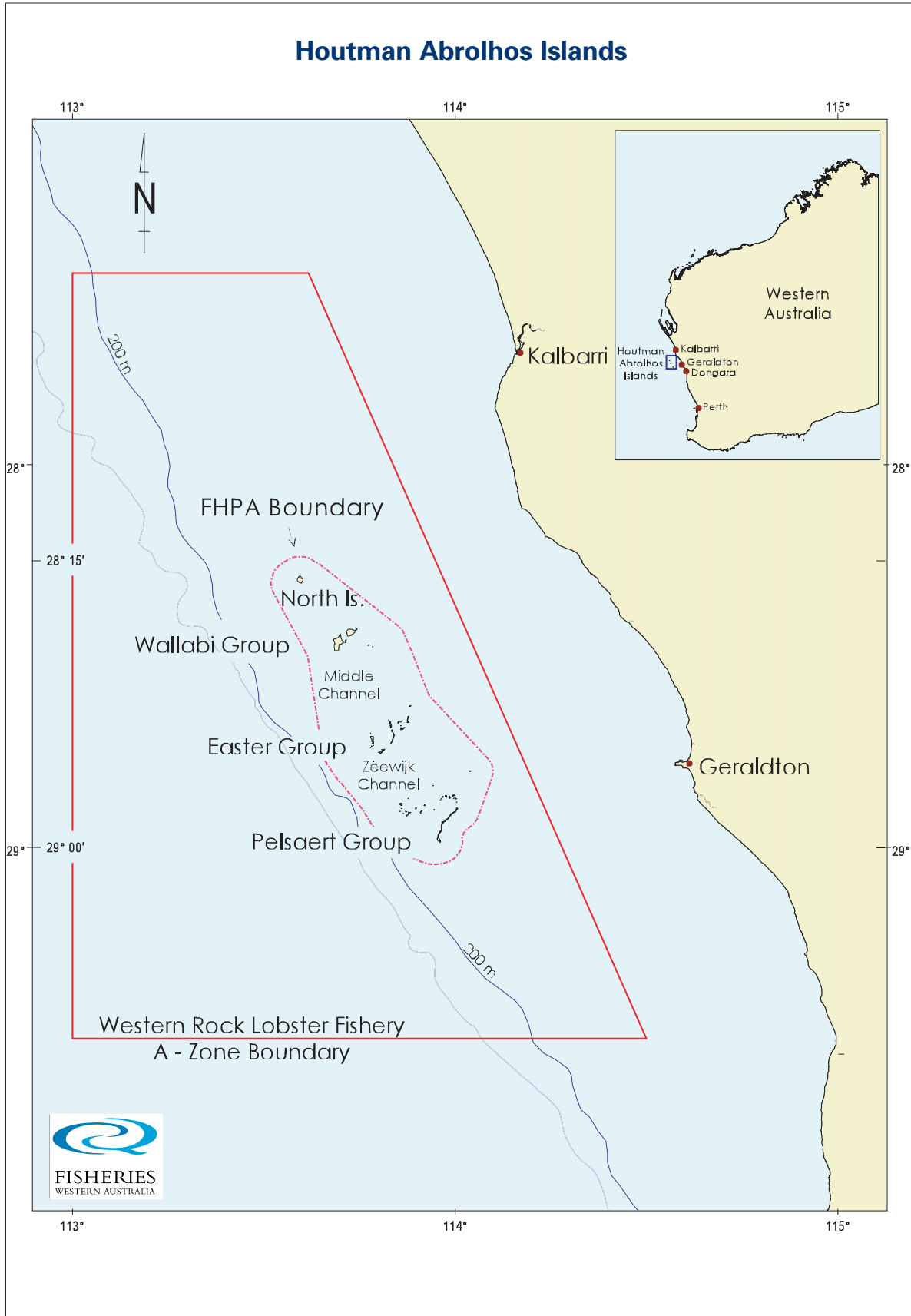
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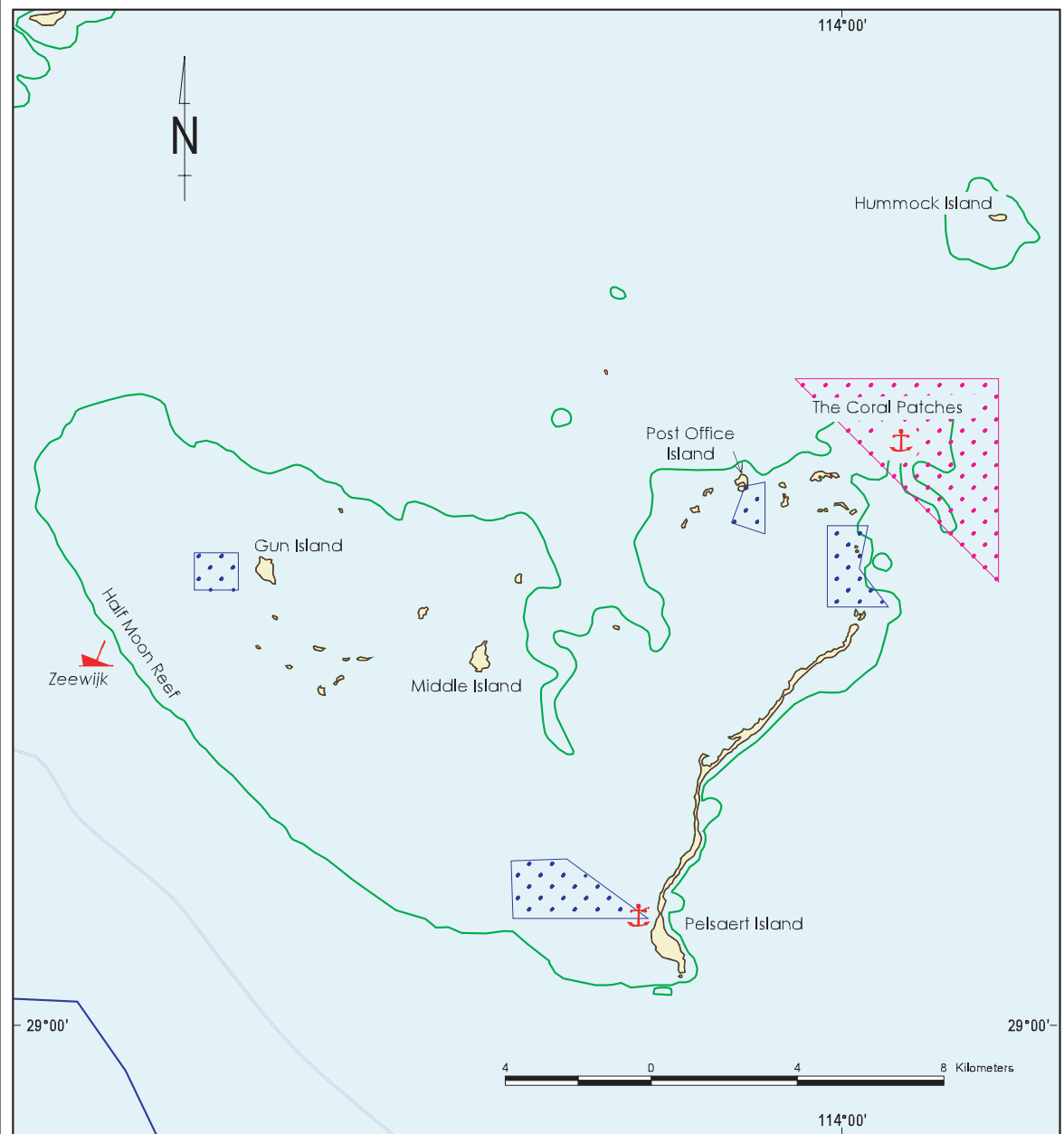


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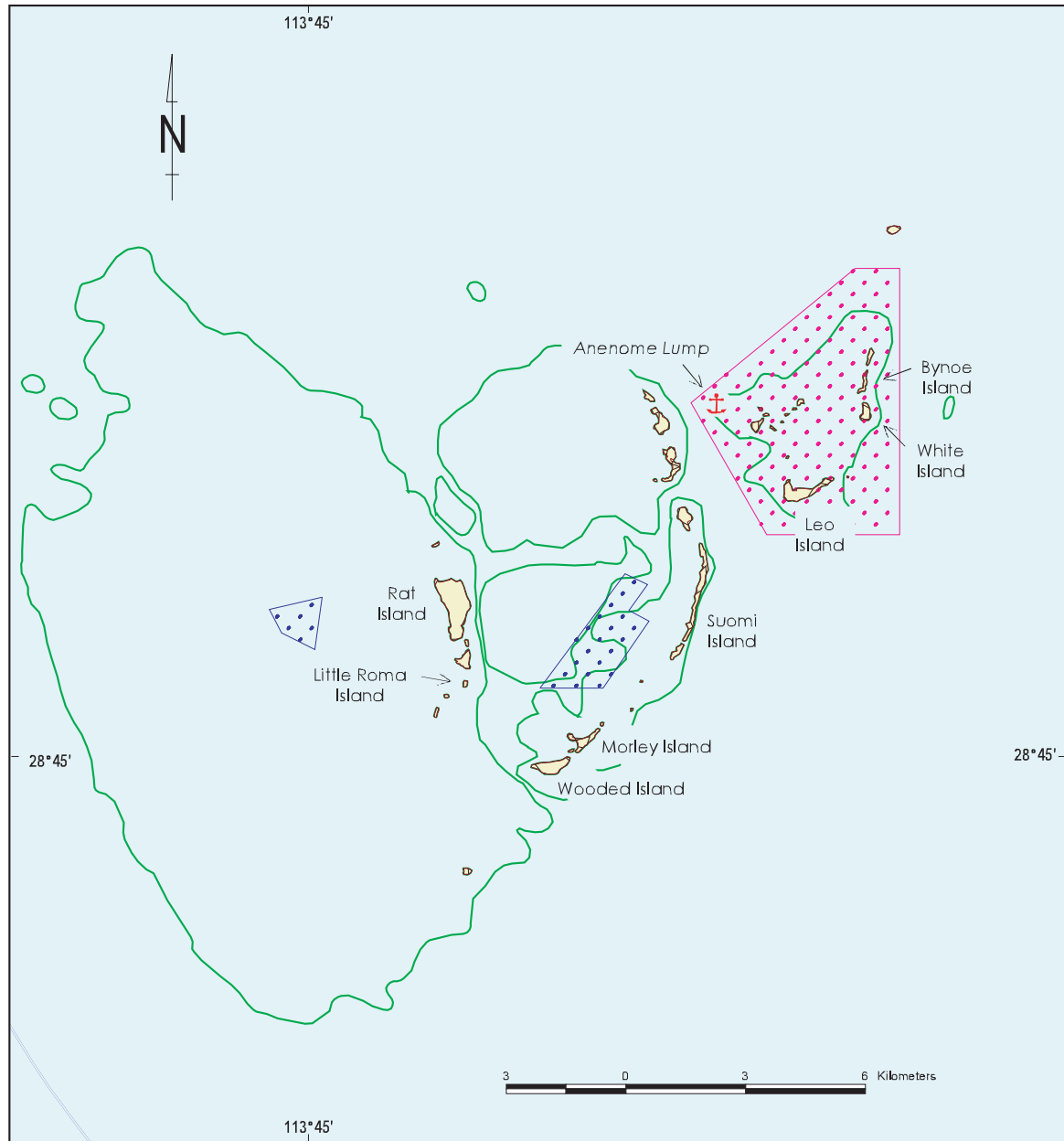
Pelsaert Group Houtman Abrolhos Islands



- 10 meter depth contour
- 200 meter depth contour
- Island
- Aquaculture Lease
- Reef Observation Area (ROA)
- Proposed Mooring location
- Historic Shipwreck



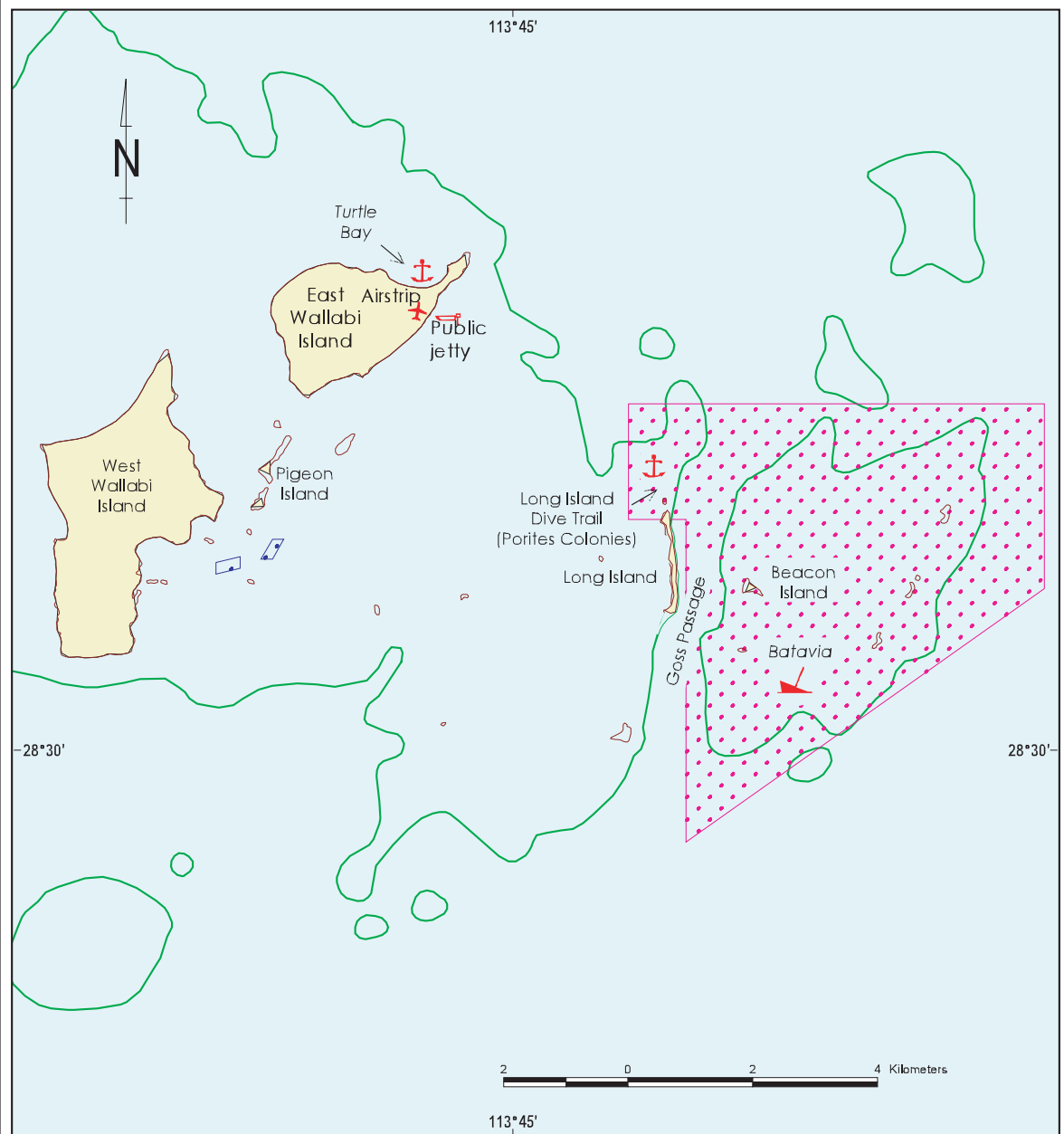
Easter Group Houtman Abrolhos Islands



- 10 meter depth contour
- 200 meter depth contour
- Island
- Aquaculture Lease
- Reef Observation Area (ROA)
- ⚓ Proposed Mooring location
- ⚓ Historic Shipwreck



Wallabi Group Houtman Abrolhos Islands



- 10 meter depth contour
- 200 meter depth contour
- Island
- Aquaculture Lease
- Reef Observation Area (ROA)
- Proposed Mooring location
- Historic Shipwreck





ATTACHMENT A

Recommendations of the Abrolhos Islands Tourism Working Party (AICC 1995)

- “1. It is recommended that the establishment and operation of tourist developments at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands should be permitted, provided that both are subject to strict environmental and management provisions.
2. Rules and a code of practice need to be developed for the siting, use and maintenance of permanent mooring sites.
3. Flora and fauna on the islands likely to be affected by the establishment of an adjacent mooring, and marine flora and fauna under the mooring, should be identified prior to any installation of that facility.
4. The liability associated with the use of moorings by owners of other vessels should be investigated.
5. The appropriate authorities should determine the environmental constraints of each terrestrial site and categorise the permitted level of access to those sites.
6. If the Abrolhos Islands Land Management Committee (AILMC) and future tour operators reach agreement for access to islands inhabited by A-Zone rock lobster fishers, this access may occur.
7. The responsible management authority should develop policies, operating guidelines and a management plan for tourism development on the Abrolhos Islands before advertising for Expressions of Interest.
8. The financial viability of any tourism venture proposed for the Abrolhos Islands be assessed by a panel of competent people including a member of the Western Australian Tourism Commission after Expressions of Interest have been invited.
9. The four modes of potential tourism considered to be suitable for the Abrolhos Islands be:
 - i) Charter Vessel – long visits, boat-based accommodation (20 people for up to 1 week visits).
 - ii) Charter Vessel – daily visits – boat-based accommodation (20 people).
 - iii) Moored Accommodation Facilities – either accommodation on a vessel or pontoon (25 people).
 - iv) Low density, low impact site – land-based (maximum 40 persons).
10. That North Island continue to be accessed by charter vessels for either long-term or short-term visits, but it not be considered for a land-based tourist site.
11. Long Island in the Wallabi Group should be considered for the establishment of a low key, low density, land-based tourist accommodation facility. Establishment at this site must have minimal impact on the surrounding environs and be subject to strict environmental and heritage guidelines.

12. That the Beacon Island camp (Dransfield House) be used as a residence/study facility to accommodate bona-fide education and scientific groups who wish to work at the Abrolhos Islands.
13. Charter vessels continue to operate to the Easter Group and that the Leo's Island platform be considered for a moored accommodation facility.
14. The Southern Group should continue to be accessed by tourists in charter vessels for long and short-term visits and recreational vessels from the mainland.
15. An Advisory Committee reporting to the Minister for Fisheries should be established, with a view to later creating an independent community-based Management Authority responsible to the Minister for Fisheries to control and manage the area subject to the new Fish Resources Management Act (1994).
16. The Management Advisory Committee should consist of the following persons appointed by the Minister for Fisheries:
 - An Independent Chair;
 - Representatives from the following user/interest groups:
 - Commercial Fishing;
 - Recreational Fishing;
 - Tourism; and
 - Community/Conservation Interests.
 - Executive Directors or their nominees (ex officio) from the Fisheries Department, Department of Conservation of Land Management, Western Australian Maritime Museum and the Western Australian Tourism Commission.
 - The power to co-opt as required.
17. Further investigation of tourism models for island archipelagos should continue. The management plans and policies that were successful elsewhere be modified and utilised, where possible, to ensure wise and sustainable use of the resources of the Abrolhos Islands.
18. The Working Party endorses the preparation of both marine and terrestrial management plans and recommends that tourism at the Abrolhos Islands be developed within the context of these plans.
19. That the Abrolhos Islands tourism model and associated plans should be monitored on a regular basis and be the subject of a major review at five yearly intervals.
20. The resources (persons and equipment) required to effectively manage the expected increase in use by tourists of the Abrolhos Islands area should be identified. Furthermore, the identification of the costs associated with these resources; the administration of fee collection and entry licence conditions; and a mechanism for managing tourist movements through the archipelago must be determined prior to the promotion of tourism at the Abrolhos islands.
21. Fly/Boat tourism to the Abrolhos Islands be considered as a preferred ongoing mechanism for managed tourism to the Abrolhos Islands.

22. That the Fisheries Department contract an appropriate consultant to consider the options and costs for all forms of air transport to the Abrolhos Islands with a view to determining the future use of the airstrips for tourist operators.
23. Operators of the Fly/Boat visitor option be permitted to utilise only the East Wallabi Island airstrip and jetty until the completion of the airstrip study (Recommendation 22).
24. That a movement fee per passenger utilising the Fly/Boat option to the Abrolhos Islands be charged to assist with the maintenance costs of the East Wallabi Island airstrip, jetty and other infrastructure.”



APPENDIX A – TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AT THE HOUTMAN ABROLHOS ISLANDS – GUIDELINES FOR PROPOSALS

Part 1 Background Information

INTRODUCTION

The Minister for Fisheries has recently approved the *Management Plan for Sustainable Tourism at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands*. Broadcast connect to ‘these guidelines’ is intended to provide information to assist potential proponents in developing their plans for proposals for tourism in the Abrolhos, and give them an understanding of how their proposal will be assessed.

Proponents should also consult the overall Houtman Abrolhos management plan (*Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System*), as all aspects of the tourism plan fit within the broader aspects of the overall plan. Copies of both plans are available from Fisheries Western Australia.

Careful reading of ‘these guidelines’ and the management plans, addressing fully the questions raised, will assist in making an application that can be considered in as short a time as possible.

The proponent is strongly advised to discuss the proposal informally with appropriate Abrolhos Islands Management Authority staff before submitting a formal proposal. This will allow a low key examination of the concept, which may highlight potential problems that can be addressed in the formal application, expediting the assessment process.

TYPES OF OPERATIONS

The *Management Plan for Sustainable Tourism at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands* recognises that there is a wide variety of possible tourist operations that can occur in the islands. The basic goals of the plan are to make the islands more accessible to a variety of people from Western Australia, interstate and overseas, so they can enjoy the many attractions of the islands while at the same time undertaking tourism activity in an environmentally sensitive way.

For this reason, a strong emphasis in the assessment of development proposals will be given to the environmental effects of the proposal, both actual and potential. Tourism in the Abrolhos will be restricted to nature-based tourism designed to minimise environmental effects.

The types of nature-based tourism which can occur in the Abrolhos include:

- charter vessel – long visits, boat-based accommodation (up to 20 people for up to one week visits);
- charter vessel – daily visits, boat-based accommodation (20 people);

- Moored Accommodation Facilities – either accommodation on a vessel or pontoon (25 people); and
- low density, low impact site – land-based (maximum 40 people).

The reasons visitors want to go to the Abrolhos Islands also vary widely, and include: fishing charters; dive trips; wreck site visits; flora and fauna observation, particularly of sea birds; or a mixture of these interests.

With the variety of possible tourism strategies and visitor desires, it is difficult to devise an application procedure which covers all eventualities. Clearly, the environmental effects of a charter boat taking small groups on visits of a few days to a variety of areas in the Abrolhos are different to those of a shore-based operation that involves constructing accommodation, meal areas, a jetty, and the operation of small boats for local trips.

Thus the amount of detail required in the application for a permit to develop a tourism operation will vary, depending on the extent and potential impact of the project. The essential requirement is that the proponent provide as much accurate information as possible on which to make an assessment. Provision of the information at the beginning of the assessment process will expedite consideration.

LICENCE REQUIRED

A licence from the Minister for Fisheries is required for any proponent to undertake a tourism venture in the Abrolhos. The assessment procedure outlined below has been developed to provide the Minister with information for use in considering whether or not a licence should be granted.

AREAS WHERE OPERATIONS ARE ALLOWED

In planning a tourism venture, a proponent should carefully consider both the aforementioned overall Houtman Abrolhos management plan and the associated tourism management plan (available from Fisheries WA), to ensure the proposal is consistent with the area(s) in which the operations will occur. For example, fishing (except for rock lobster potting) is not allowed in Reef Observation Areas, and there may be seasonal exclusions of some areas during the bird breeding season.

APPLICABLE POLICIES

The overall policies for tourism in the Abrolhos are outlined in the *Management of the Houtman Abrolhos System* and the *Management Plan for Sustainable Tourism at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands*.

An assessment fee will be charged at the time an application for a tourism venture is lodged. Once paid, the fee is non-refundable and will not be repaid even if the proponent withdraws the proposal.

Licences for tourist ventures will in general be issued for a period of seven years, but may be renewed twice for additional periods which may total 14 years, following an assessment of the effects of the operation. An annual licence fee will be charged.

If the fee is not paid by the required date, the licence will be withdrawn. Licences are transferable only with the written permission of the Minister for Fisheries. A permit transfer fee will be charged.

In order to minimise the potential for environmental effects, the Minister may seek an independent assessment of the design, location and feasibility of boats, pontoons or shore-based facilities. Installation of the facilities will be overseen by the Abrolhos Islands Management Authority.

Before a licence will be issued, the proponent must agree to remove pontoons or shore-based facilities at the end of the licence period. A bond must be posted to provide funds for the Abrolhos Islands Management Authority to remove the facilities if the proponent fails to do so.

When a licence is issued, it will require commencement of construction or operation of the venture within a specified period. This requirement is in place to prevent speculative proposals that have little chance of proceeding.

Independent environmental monitoring of the effects of larger projects such as pontoons or shore-based facilities will be required. Such monitoring may also be required for smaller projects if there is concern over the potential effects of the operation. Proponents are cautioned that a pre-installation examination of the area will be required to establish a baseline to evaluate changes which might occur after the venture starts. The monitoring program may continue after the facility ceases operation to measure recovery of the area.

Independent checks may be done by the Abrolhos Islands Management Authority, Fisheries WA and/or Conservation and Land Management at any time.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The assessment criteria listed below are used to measure the proposed project against the management strategy for the area, its acceptability, conflicts (if any) with other users, and any future plans that exist for the area. The criteria include:

- zoning for the area;
- the protection of natural and heritage values;
- effects on existing use and amenity;
- environmental effects of the project and management strategies to minimise them;
- financial viability of the operation;
- the safety of visitors and staff;
- provision for decommissioning of pontoons or shore-based facilities;
- history of operations in the industry; and
- any other requirements which are appropriate for the particular proposal.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In considering the application, the Minister will seek advice from the Abrolhos Islands Management Authority, Fisheries WA and, as appropriate, other departments with legislative roles in the Abrolhos, such as the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Environmental Protection Authority,

Department of Transport, and the Western Australian Museum. The Minister may also consult with any other agency or person considered to be appropriate.

For any proposal, including shore-based or pontoon facilities, the Environmental Protection Authority may initiate its own evaluation procedures. Advice on this aspect can be obtained from the Department of Environmental Protection.

Part 2 Application for a Tourist Venture

INTRODUCTION

The Minister for Fisheries has recently approved the *Management Plan for Sustainable Tourism in the Houtman Abrolhos Islands*. The information outlined below is required by the Minister to use in determining whether the proposal is appropriate for the area of the Abrolhos in which it will operate.

Proponents should recognise that, with the variety of possible tourism strategies and visitor desires, it is difficult to devise an application procedure which covers all eventualities. The information listed below is not intended to be bureaucratic and excessive. On the contrary, it is intended as a guide to help proponents in making their application.

For smaller ventures much of the information will not be required. The amount of detail required in the application for a permit will vary, depending on the extent and potential impact of the project. The essential requirement is that the proponent provide as much accurate information as possible on which to make an assessment. Provision of the information at the beginning of the assessment process will expedite consideration.

The proponent is strongly advised to discuss the proposal informally with the Executive Officer of the Abrolhos Islands Management Authority at the Fisheries WA office in Geraldton before submitting a formal proposal. **The Executive Officer will help proponents understand the requirements and assist in framing the application.** This will allow a low key examination of the concept, which may highlight potential problems that can be addressed in the formal application, expediting the assessment process.

1. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

1.1 Project identification

Provide the title of the project, and the name and contact details for the project representative, including address, telephone number, fax number (if any), and, if applicable, the company name and address.

1.2 Description of project

Give a brief (one paragraph) description of the project, including:

- background to the project;
- objectives of the venture; and
- location(s) where it will be operated.

2. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

2.1 Description of project

A detailed description of the project should be provided in this section. Information to be included is:

- the type of project: pontoons, shore-based, charter boat, etc.;
- details of the project: size and type of boat, pontoon, shore facility, details of the structures, where moorings will be placed, types of moorings to be used, jetty structures, and other relevant information;
- location of the project: maps, drawings, etc., to show exactly where the project will operate;
- whether the development requires a form of exclusive lease or licence;
- the number of visitors to be catered for at one time;
- how supplies will be obtained;
- seasonality of the operation; and
- any other details relevant to the assessment of the proposal.

2.2 Constraints assessment

Examine in this section any constraints which will have an impact on the project. These could include zoning requirements, weather conditions, presence of sensitive areas such as corals and bird breeding sites.

Include in this section a consideration of alternative opportunities which will be foregone if the development proceeds.

2.3 Alternatives analysis

Detail here alternatives (such as site locations and type of structures) which were investigated during the development of the proposal and the reasons why they were rejected.

2.4 Installation of the project

Describe how the project will be installed:

- whether the proposal requires a form of exclusive lease or licence;
- where it will be built and how it will be shipped to the Abrolhos;
- the number of people required for the construction phase;
- accommodation arrangements and amenities for construction staff; and
- environmental effects of construction/installation:
 - terrestrial impacts: area to be disturbed for the facility, birds and breeding sites, etc.;
 - marine impacts: turbidity, destruction of habitat, etc.;
 - cultural heritage impacts;
 - visual impacts; and
 - special features of the area.

2.5 Operation of the project

2.5.1 Normal operation

In this section, describe the day-to-day operation of the project:

- number of staff and amenities available to them, including accommodation and meals;
- how supplies will be obtained;
- sewage and waste disposal mechanisms;
- source(s) of fresh water;
- environmental effects during the operational phase:
- fish communities;
- damage to bottom from anchors, moorings, etc;
- litter;
- anticipated changes to water quality;
- vegetation effects, including trampling on islands;
- disturbance to birds and nests; and
- effects on other users.

2.5.2 Abnormal/emergency operations

In this section, describe how abnormal or emergency situations will be handled, including;

- prevention and handling of spills of oil or other contaminants;
- emergency evacuations; and
- fires.

3. MONITORING PROGRAM

Independent environmental monitoring of the effects of larger projects such as pontoons or shore-based facilities will be required. Such monitoring may also be required for smaller projects if there is concern over the potential effects of the operation.

Proponents are cautioned that a pre-installation examination of the area will be required to establish a baseline to evaluate changes which might occur after the venture starts. A requirement may be made that the monitoring program continues after the facility ceases operation, in order to measure recovery of the area.

This section of the application describes the monitoring program which will be undertaken during the life of the project. The program will be tailored to the particular activity and include three aspects:

3.1 Physical Environment

Detail the rationale for monitoring aspects of the physical environment, along with the aspects to be monitored.

3.2 Biological Environment

Detail the rationale for monitoring aspects of the biological environment, along with the aspects to be monitored.

3.3 Socio-Economic Factors

Detail the rationale for monitoring aspects of the socio-economic environment, along with the aspects to be monitored.

3.4 Financial Viability

Provide information on expected income, expenditures and profitability to demonstrate the financial viability of the proposal.

3.5 Provisions to eliminate or ameliorate adverse impacts

Outline here procedures to be followed and commitments to eliminate or ameliorate any adverse environmental impacts which are uncovered by the monitoring program.

4. DECOMMISSIONING

If permanent shore-based facilities or pontoons are established in the Abrolhos Islands, they must be decommissioned and removed when the project is terminated or the permit expires. This is the responsibility of the proponent.

The proponent must outline in detail the expected costs of removing the facility, including a pontoon which has sunk. A bond will be required to ensure that if for any reason the proponent fails to remove the facility, funds are available to allow the Abrolhos Islands Management Authority undertake the removal.

5. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Outline sources of information used in developing the proposal, including discussions with experts in particular aspects, technical reports, and published papers.

WHERE TO APPLY

The Executive Officer of the Abrolhos Islands Management Authority at Fisheries WA's Geraldton office and other Authority staff are available to help you in presenting your proposal and answering questions about procedures. Please contact them with regard to whatever information and assistance you need.

Applications, with a cheque for the assessment fee of \$ _____, should be sent to:

Executive Officer
Abrolhos Islands Management Authority

Fisheries Western Australia

PO Box 1171

Geraldton WA 6530

Telephone: (08) 9921 6800

Fax: (08) 9921 3617

APPENDIX B – TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AT THE HOUTMAN ABROLHOS ISLANDS: ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS

(N.B. This document will be used by staff of the Abrolhos Islands Management Authority in assessing proposals for commercial tourism in the Abrolhos Islands.)

Type of Operation

What type operation is involved in the proposal?

Charter vessel – long visits, boat-based accommodation (up to 20 people for up to one week visits).

Charter vessel – daily visits, boat-based accommodation (20 people).

Moored Accommodation Facilities – either accommodation on a vessel or pontoon (25 people).

Low density, low impact site – land based (maximum 40 people).

Other:

Assessment Fee

Has the assessment fee been paid? Yes No Receipt number:

If the assessment fee has not been paid, the proposal cannot proceed.

Application Requirements

The application is for a period beginning:

and ending:

Date commencement required:

Does the operator have a history of working to develop tourism in the Abrolhos Islands?

Yes No

If yes, outline the history:

Will an independent assessment of the environmental effects be required for your proposal?

Yes No

If yes, what assessment has been provided?

Is the proposal consistent with the zoning for the area?

Yes No

If no, outline the inconsistencies:

Does the project protect natural and heritage values?

Yes No

If no, what problems arise?

Are there any adverse effects on existing use and amenity?

Yes No

If yes, outline the adverse effects:

Are there undue environmental effects of the project, and if so are these properly managed?

Yes No

If no, outline the adverse effects:

Are sufficient provisions made for the safety of visitors and staff?

Yes No

If no, outline the deficiencies:

Is the project financially viable?

Yes No

If no, outline the provisions needed:

Is there sufficient provision for decommissioning of pontoons, shore-based or other facilities?

Yes No

If no, outline the provisions needed:

Are there any other requirements which are appropriate for the particular proposal?

Yes No

If yes, what are they?

Assessment Process

Is advice needed from:

Fisheries Western Australia	Yes	No
Department of Conservation and Land Management	Yes	No
Environmental Protection Authority	Yes	No
Department of Transport	Yes	No
Western Australian Museum	Yes	No
Any other agency?	Yes	No

If yes to the last question, which agency?

If yes to any of the above, obtain the advice.

Recommendation

(Outline reasons for recommendation)

Signed:

Date: