



Australian Government
Director of National Parks



Australian
Marine Parks

Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs Guide (Lord Howe Marine Park)

Located in the Lord Howe Marine Park, Elizabeth and Middleton reefs are the southernmost open ocean platform coral reefs in the world.

These remote coral reefs have been protected since 1987, and now form part of the Lord Howe Marine Park (Commonwealth waters).

Located approximately 150 km north of Lord Howe Island, Elizabeth and Middleton reefs sit atop the peaks of volcanic seamounts which form part of the Lord Howe Seamount Chain.

Warm waters from the East Australian Current converge with the cooler waters of the Tasman Sea at the reefs to create an environment conducive to tropical, sub-tropical and temperate species.

The outstanding characteristics of the reefs led to their listing in 2002 as 'Wetlands of International Importance' under the Ramsar Convention.

Diverse marine life

Elizabeth and Middleton reefs are home to an incredibly diverse and unique assemblage of marine life, including several species endemic to the region.

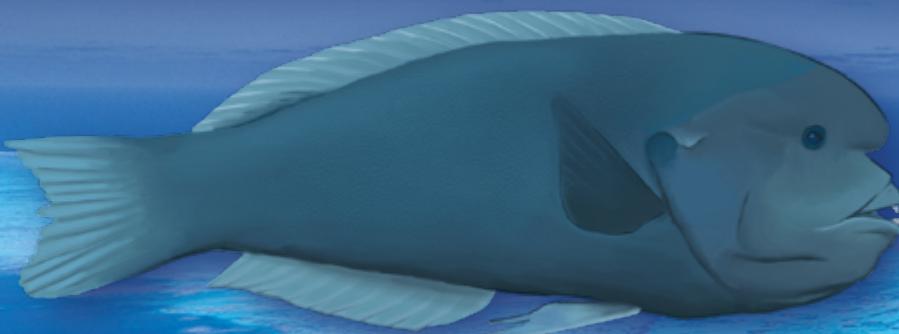
Over 120 species of coral have been identified at the reefs, many of which are either at or near their northern or southern limits of distribution. The isolation of the reefs means any larval replenishment from nearby reefs is very limited.

More than 300 species of fish inhabit the reefs, including a number that are restricted to the southern or south-western Pacific Ocean, and several found only at Elizabeth and Middleton reefs, as well as Lord Howe Island. This includes the distinctive double header wrasse, *Coris bulbifrons*.

The reefs support important populations of endangered species, such as the black rockcod, *Epinephelus daemelli*. Once common along the New South Wales (NSW) coast, the black rockcod is now rare and is protected under Commonwealth and NSW legislation. The reefs are renowned for being the last remaining strongholds for this species.

Significant numbers of the Galapagos shark, *Carcharhinus galapagensis*, have also been observed at the reefs. An apex predator, their size suggests that the reefs function as important nursery areas for this species.

Elizabeth and Middleton reefs and their surrounding waters are also used as feeding grounds by a number of species of migratory seabirds as well as by green turtles, and as breeding grounds for the common noddy, *Anous stolidus*.



Activities

All activities such as fishing, scuba diving, snorkelling and nature watching must be undertaken in accordance with management rules and zoning.

Non-commercial, non-extractive activities such as diving and sailing are allowed without a permit at both Elizabeth and Middleton reefs.

Fishing

Commercial and charter fishing are not allowed at either of the reefs.

Recreational fishing is only allowed at Elizabeth Reef under permit from the Director of National Parks. The reef is subject to special daily bag and boat limits for species that are additional to the fishing rules that apply throughout NSW. These limits are set out in the permit conditions. Spearfishing is prohibited.

It is illegal to catch black rockcod, *Epinephelus daemelli*. Any black rockcod caught must be immediately released and returned to the water, taking care to handle it carefully to maximise its chance of survival.

Applications for permits can be made through Parks Australia's online portal: <https://onlineservices.environment.gov.au/parks/australian-marine-parks>. Check this website for timeframes.

Visitors to the reefs are our eyes and ears

Post-trip reports from recreational fishing permit holders should be submitted within 10 days to the Director of National Parks representative on Lord Howe Island.

Voluntary informal reports are also welcomed from non-fishing visitors to both reefs, especially if you see unusual species or something of concern like coral bleaching or unidentified objects.

Management rules and zoning

The *Temperate East Marine Parks Network Management Plan 2018* contains the management arrangements and rules for operating in the Lord Howe Marine Park.

If you plan to visit Elizabeth or Middleton reefs, it is important that you are familiar with the zoning and rules that apply.

Elizabeth reef is classified as a Recreational Use Zone. Recreational fishing is allowed by permit (spearfishing is prohibited).

Middleton reef is classified as a National Park Zone. This no-take area is managed to protect and conserve ecosystems, habitats and native species in as natural a state as possible. Fishing, spearfishing and collecting are not allowed.

The table below details what activities are/are not allowed.

More detailed information about zoning and rules in the management plan can be found at: www.parksaustralia.gov.au/temperate-east

Middleton Reef exclusion zone

Visitors to Middleton Reef are advised not to enter the 500 metre exclusion zone that has been established within the following coordinates and shown on the map on page 4:

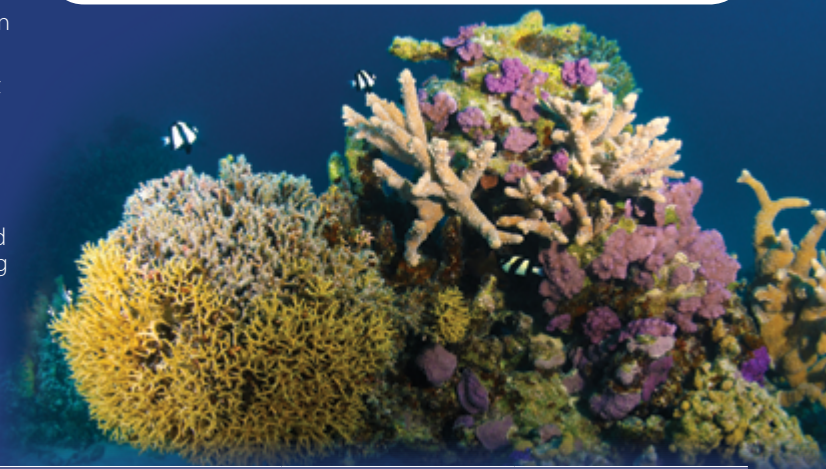
29°27.12' S 159°02.92' E
29°26.58' S 159°02.92' E
29°26.58' S 159°03.55' E
29°27.12' S 159°03.55' E

The zone designates the location of a submerged unexploded ordnance (UXO) that could be hazardous if disturbed. Navigators are advised to exercise caution when near this area, including not anchoring within the exclusion zone.

If you encounter an unidentified object that could be a UXO:

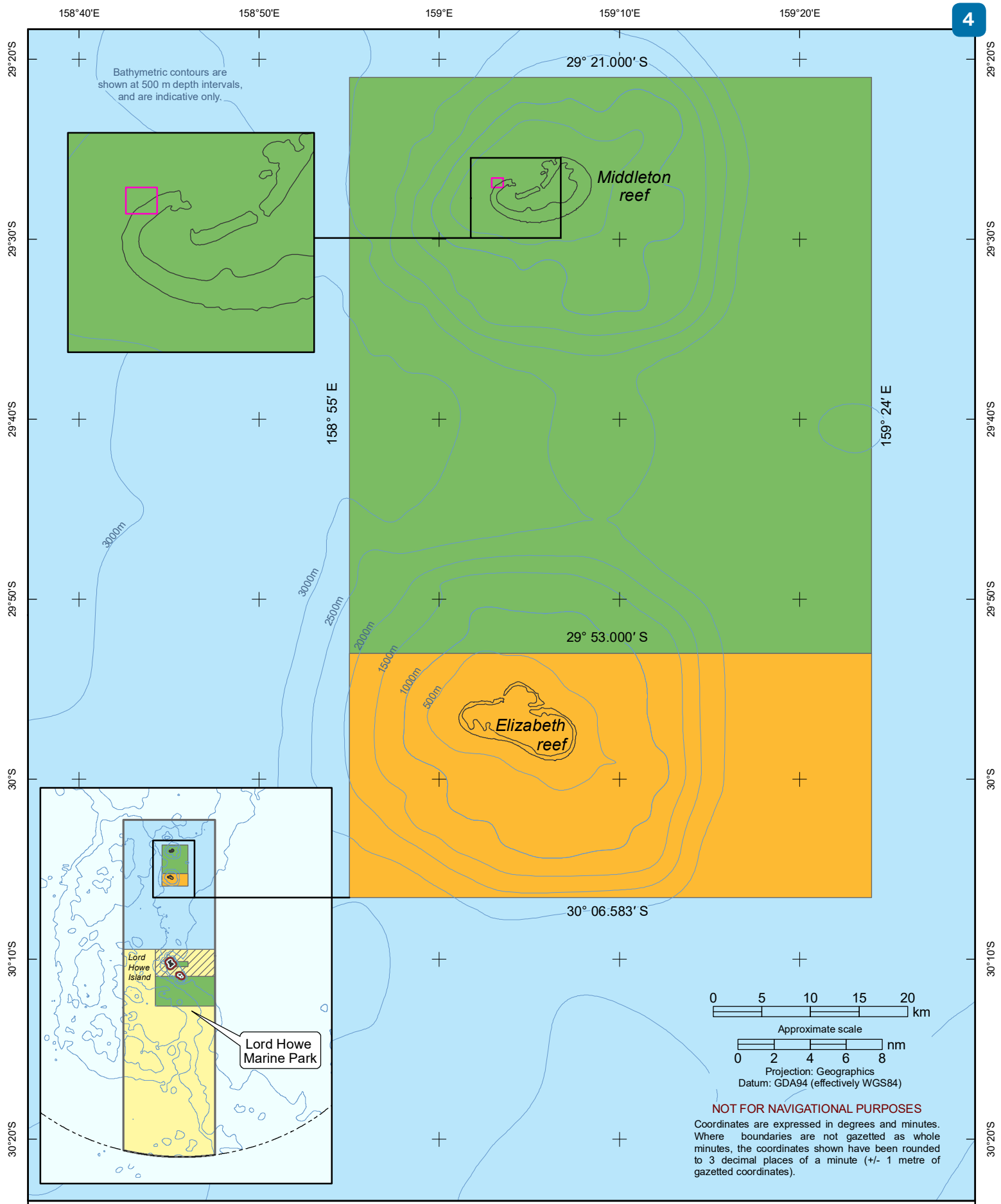
- ❶ Do not touch it
- ❷ If safe to do so, take a photograph
- ❸ Record the position of the object by GPS
- ❹ Report it to:
 - Parks Australia on **1800 852 975**
 - marine.compliance@dcceew.gov.au** or
 - Lord Howe Island Marine Parks office on **(02) 6563 2359**
 - or **lord.howe@dpi.nsw.gov.au**

More information about the exclusion zone and the rules for operating in the Lord Howe Marine Park are available at: www.parksaustralia.gov.au/lordhowe



Activity		Recreational Use Zone (IUCN IV) – Elizabeth Reef	National Park Zone (IUCN II) – Middleton Reef
Recreational fishing (no spearfishing)		A	×
Commercial tourism	Anchoring and vessel transiting	✓	✓
	Non-fishing related tourism (including nature watching, scuba/snorkel tours)	A	A
	Charter fishing tours	×	×
Commercial fishing		×	×
General use, access and waste management	Ballast water discharge and exchange at least 12 nautical miles from the reefs	✓	✓
	Disposal of waste from normal operations of vessel in accordance with MARPOL requirements	✓	✓
	Recreational use (non-fishing, nature watching, boating etc.)	✓	✓
	Non-commercial remote piloted aircraft, drones etc.	A	A

✓ Activity is allowed × Activity is not allowed A Authorisation (permit) required



- Zoning**
- National Park Zone (IUCN II)
 - Recreational Use Zone (IUCN IV)
 - Habitat Protection Zone (Lord Howe) (IUCN IV)
 - Habitat Protection Zone (IUCN IV)
 - Multiple Use Zone (IUCN VI)

Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs (Lord Howe Marine Park)

- Maritime boundaries**
- Limit of Australian Exclusive Economic Zone
 - Limit of state coastal waters (NSW)
- Other boundaries**
- Prohibition area

Spatial data sources:
DCCEEW (2023): Australia's Network of Marine Parks
Geoscience Australia (2005): Australian Bathymetry and Topography
Geoscience Australia (2006): GEODATA TOPO 250K
Geoscience Australia (2020): Australian Maritime Boundaries

Produced by the Environment Data and Analysis Branch
Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

Reporting illegal activity

As part of the Lord Howe Marine Park, Elizabeth and Middleton reefs are managed by Parks Australia in partnership with NSW Department of Primary Industries

The reefs are patrolled in order to ensure the rules for recreational fishing (by permit) at Elizabeth Reef and no-take at Middleton Reef are being followed.

Heavy penalties apply for breaches of regulations.

To report illegal activity, any unusual species or other observations from the reefs or surrounding waters, please contact Parks Australia on the number below.

Key contacts

Lord Howe Marine Park (Commonwealth waters)

Parks Australia
GPO Box 3090

CANBERRA ACT 2601

Ph: 1800 852 975

E: Marine.Compliance@dcceew.gov.au

www.parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/parks/temperate-east/lord-howe

Lord Howe Island Marine Park (NSW State waters)

DPI Fisheries
PO Box 161

LORD HOWE ISLAND NSW 2898

Ph: (02) 6563 2359

E: lord.howe@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Image acknowledgments

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