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Navigation advice for visiting vessels

The Rowley Shoals are located approximately 300 km (160 nautical miles) west of Broome and include the State managed Rowley Shoals Marine Park and the Commonwealth managed Mermaid Reef Marine Park. Together the parks protect a chain of three coral atolls, Clerke Reef, Mermaid Reef, and Imperieuse Reef, at the edge of Australia's continental shelf. Mermaid Reef, the most northerly atoll, rises from depths of around 440m, Clerke Reef from 390m and Imperieuse Reef from 230m. The three atolls are strikingly similar in dimension, shape, orientation, and distance apart.

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

At all locations moorings must be booked, and written permission obtained before arriving. This should be done well in advance of your trip to avoid the disappointment of missing out or risk of getting fined.

Tour operators must obtain a commercial operations licence from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to visit the Rowley Shoals Marine Park, licence charges fees apply. For further information, please call the Parks and Wildlife Service's Broome office on (08) 9195 5500 or email rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au. If visiting Mermaid Reef Marine Park, tour operators require a commercial tourism licence from Parks Australia. For more information, please visit parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/activities/approvals/tourism

Check weather forecasts and tides before departing for the Rowley Shoals. Spring tidal range is 4–5m.

Imperieuse Reef



Moorings

Two 35m swing moorings on the outer NE side of the atoll. For mooring bookings and enquiries please contact rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au or (08) 9195 5500.

Weather and Tides

Weather and tide information is available for Imperieuse Reef. Visit bom.gov.au/australia/tides/#!/wa-imperieuse-reef

Lagoon Access

There is no access for larger vessels into the Imperieuse Reef lagoon.

The channel to the lagoon is extremely narrow (<2m in places) and shallow. It is only navigable by small (<7m) vessels with good manoeuvrability. It is steep sided and has several bends and elbows. Once in the channel, it is too narrow to turn a vessel around.

To avoid damage to the coral and/or your vessel, only attempt the channel if necessary and stem the tidal flow. Alternatively, time the tide so your vessel's draught will clear the reef and proceed slowly and carefully over the top of the reef to access the lagoon.



Inside the lagoon there are several coral bommies at varying depths. Extreme caution must be taken when moving through the lagoon to avoid damage to the coral and/or your vessel. Proceed at slow speed and maintain a good lookout.

Early morning and late afternoon sun glare will reduce through-water visibility making safe navigation difficult. If possible, time your lagoon visit for the middle of the day.



Note

Tidal flow at the moorings can be considerable, especially on spring tides, which often creates turbulent conditions. Take caution when swimming off the back of your boat as the tide can pull you away quickly.

Clerke Reef



Moorings

There are seven moorings:

- One 35m mooring on the outer NE corner.
- Three 35m and one 50m mooring inside the lagoon.
- An additional two 12m tender moorings for day use at the "Aquarium" snorkel site.

For mooring bookings and enquiries please contact rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au or (08) 9195 5500.

Weather and Tides

For weather information use either Imperieuse or Mermaid Reef forecasts. Visit bom.gov.au/australia/tides/#!/wa-mermaid-reef



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Lagoon Access

The lagoon channel entrance is on the NE side of the atoll. It is narrow and should be attempted with caution. Good conditions and local knowledge are essential to safe passage through the channel. It is strongly suggested to scout the passage first by tender to gauge depths and route to steer.

Vessels with a draught of 2.5m or more should not enter the lagoon.

To maintain adequate steerage, enter while stemming the top of an outgoing tide and exit by stemming the top of an incoming tide. On spring tides, the channel can flow at up to 8kts.

Ideally, navigate the channel between 10:00 and 14:00 so that the sun is high, and visibility is clear. In the afternoon or early morning sun glare limits visibility through the water. Use a spotter on the bow and/or up high on your vessel.

There is a dogleg in the channel at the narrowest section. When entering steer to port to avoid the large section of reef in the centre of the channel. This marks the start of the dogleg.

There are several bommies at varying depths within the channel. Whether you clear them or not may depend entirely on your vessel's position within the channel.

With strong easterly winds and an outgoing tide, the waters at the entrance to the channel become turbulent with standing waves and strong tidal flow. Large, breaking waves will be on either side of the channel. In these conditions, it is strongly recommended not to enter or exit the channel.

Inside the lagoon there are several bommies at varying depths. Proceed at idle speed only to your mooring and maintain a good lookout.



Note

There are two smaller channels to the north of the main channel which are navigable by tender only. On spring tides these can flow at >8kts and should not be attempted in full flow.

If you have swimmers drifting in the channel on an outgoing tide, ensure the drop-off vessel is seaward of the swimmers to pick them up once outside the channel. The tide will push swimmers to sea quickly once out of the channel. Ensure a head count is done on each drift.

Clerke Reef lagoon is smaller than Mermaid lagoon. With less fetch it offers comparatively better protection in strong winds.

Mermaid Reef Marine Park, managed by Parks Australia

Some activities such as commercial tourism and research require a licence or permit from Parks Australia to visit Mermaid Reef Marine Park. To find out if this applies to you, visit onlineservices.environment.gov.au/parks/australian-marine-parks



Moorings

To prevent damage to the reef, vessels must use existing moorings. There are Three 35m and one 50m mooring inside the lagoon. For mooring bookings and enquiries please contact rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au or (08) 9195 5500.

Weather and Tides

Weather and tide information is available for Mermaid Reef at bom.gov.au/australia/tides/#/wa-mermaid-reef

Lagoon Access

The channel entrance is located on the NE side of the atoll and is wider and deeper than Clerke Reef. Care must be taken when navigating the channel. Use a lookout and avoid the early mornings and late afternoons.

Vessels with a draught of up to 2m may pass through the channel on any tide. Vessels with a draught from 2–3m may pass through the channel on a tide of 2m or more only. **Vessels with a draught greater than 3m should not enter Mermaid lagoon.**

When entering the lagoon, there is a dogleg to follow. Turn to port when approaching the large, central section of reef in the channel.

With strong easterly winds and an outgoing tide, the waters at the entrance to the channel can be rough with standing waves and strong tidal flow. Large, breaking waves will be on either side of the channel.

Inside the lagoon there are several bommies at varying depths. Proceed at idle speed only to your mooring and maintain a good lookout.



Note

Mermaid lagoon has significantly more fetch than Clerke and may become uncomfortable in strong winds, particularly at high tide. On the top of spring tides residual swell will roll over the reef and through the lagoon.

More information

For more information and a detailed mooring map, ask for a copy of the Rowley Shoals and Mermaid Reef marine parks brochure from Parks and Wildlife Service Broome (08) 9195 5500 or email rsmp@dbca.wa.gov.au.
dbca.wa.gov.au