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Visiting the Abrolhos Islands

No facilities or accommodation for visitors are available at the Abrolhos, and there are no sources of fresh water on the Islands. Before setting out make sure that you have enough supplies and fresh water to last the length of your intended visit. Emergency medical assistance is available from the Silver Chain nurse on Rat Island (Easter Group) between 15 March and 30 June. Contact channel 16 on VHF.

No boat may visit the Islands between 15 July and 20 February the following year without giving written notice to the Fisheries Department's Geraldton Regional office - call for further details.

Wildlife is protected on all Islands in the Abrolhos. Landing is permitted on uninhabited Islands, but lighting fires, camping and firearms are banned. Please take great care not to disturb nesting seabirds. If you do go ashore it is better to walk along the shoreline, rather than across the islands, as you may destroy seabird nesting burrows.

Safe anchorages

When you first arrive at the Abrolhos we suggest you identify a safe anchorage for the night. A number of anchoring areas are indicated on the map overleaf. These areas are not all-weather anchorages. You will need to assess the prevailing weather conditions before deciding on an anchorage.

Coral reefs and seagrass beds are important fish habitats, and are easily damaged by boat anchors and anchor chains and are very slow to regenerate. Take care not to drop your anchor on top of coral reefs - sand and mud provide the best holding bottom (see map).

Navigating around the Abrolhos

Consult nautical chart AUS 751 for soundings and other charted features. The Abrolhos reefs are notoriously treacherous, and a wide safety margin should be allowed, particularly by skippers unfamiliar with Island waters.

Bear in mind that the Abrolhos are first in the path of any weather moving in from the west or north-west. Weather conditions can be highly changeable, and cold and warm fronts may reach the Islands 24 hours or more in advance of weather bureau forecasts for the mainland.

In the event of an impending cyclone, take heed of weather forecasts and take appropriate action.

Be prepared for a prevailing westerly or south westerly swell which may reach several metres in unprotected waters.

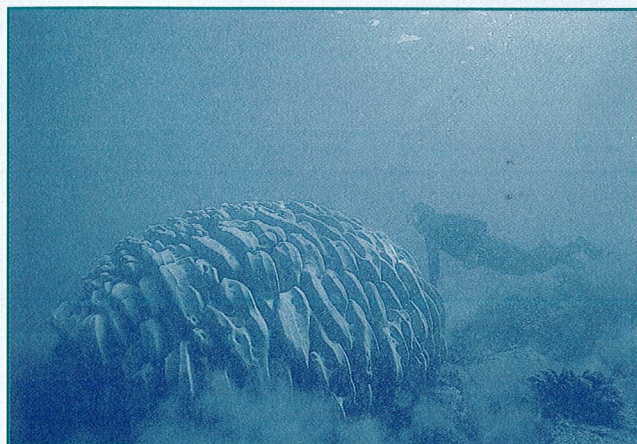


Photo: Jiri Lochman, Lochman Transparencies

Sea safety

Make sure you have life jackets, flares, two-way radio, EPIRB (electronic position indicating radio beacon), fire extinguishers and other safety gear aboard in line with marine safety regulations for open sea (over 30 miles offshore). Full details are available from the Maritime Division of the Department of Transport.

A CODE OF CONDUCT

When you visit the Abrolhos, remember - this is a special place that needs your protection.

- ◆ Anchor away from corals and seagrass to avoid damage.
- ◆ Take your rubbish away with you - don't drop it in the water.
- ◆ Only take enough fish for your personal consumption.
- ◆ Take care not to disturb birds and other wildlife on the Islands.
- ◆ Shipwrecks and historical relics are the heritage of all Western Australians. Please do not interfere or remove objects from the sites. Report the location of any finds to the WA Maritime Museum Ph (09) 431 8444.
- ◆ When diving, avoid standing on fragile corals - they break easily.
- ◆ No domestic pets are allowed on vessels or at the Abrolhos Islands.
- ◆ Private property - The residences, jetties and rainwater tanks of commercial fishermen on the 22 Islands designated for their use are private property. You may land on the islands, but you may not use the facilities unless you have written permission on board your boat from the owner. You may not stay in fishermen's camps unless the owner is present.

FURTHER INFORMATION

FISHERIES DEPARTMENT OF WA
3rd floor, SGIO Atrium building,
168 - 170 St Georges Terrace, Perth, 6000.
Ph (08) 9 482 7333

Midwest Regional Office
PO Box 1171, Geraldton 6530
Fishermen's Wharf, Geraldton
Ph (08) 99 216 800. Fax (08) 99 21 3617

Dongara District Office
PO Box 63, Dongara 6525
Ph (08) 99 271 187. Fax (08) 99 21 2019



Website: <http://www.wa.gov.au/westfish>

THE ABROLHOS ISLANDS



Photo: Eva Boogaard, Lochman Transparencies

VISITOR'S GUIDE

FISHERIES DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

March 1997



The Abrolhos Islands

and their surrounding coral reef communities form one of Western Australia's most unique marine areas.

The Abrolhos lie about 60 km west of Geraldton, and consist of 122 Islands clustered into three main groups: the Wallabi Group, Easter Group and Pelsaert Group, which extend from north to south across 100km of ocean.

Lying in the stream of WA's warm, southward-flowing Leeuwin Current, the marine environment surrounding the Abrolhos is a meeting place for tropical and temperate sealife.

The Leeuwin Current starts to flow in April each year, and runs through the winter months until October, bringing masses of warm, low nutrient, tropical water down Western Australia's continental shelf from Indonesia. The Current carries with it a cargo of larvae, eggs and juveniles of many species of corals and other marine life taken far south of their normal range.

The Current maintains water temperatures throughout the winter at around 20-22°C, enabling corals and tropical species of fish and invertebrates to thrive in latitudes where they wouldn't normally survive.

Large breeding colonies of seabirds exist on many of the Islands, and depend for their food on schools of pelagic baitfish. More than 90 species of seabird have been identified on the Islands. Smaller seabirds, in turn, provide food for white breasted sea eagles which also occur in unusually large numbers throughout the Islands.

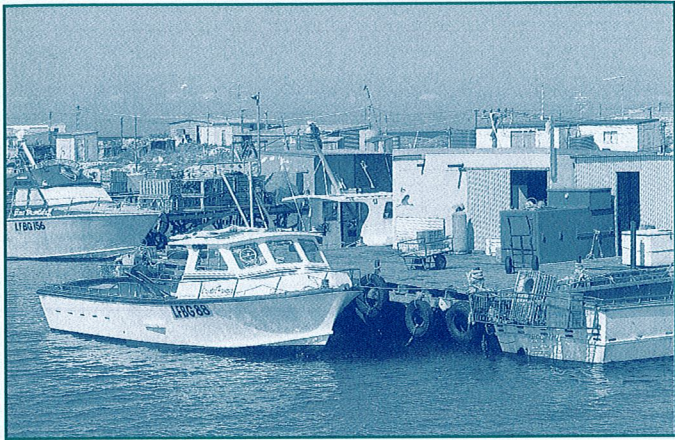
The Abrolhos also form an important part of Western Australia's most valuable commercial fishery - for western rock lobster - and during the open fishing season from 15 March to 30 June each year around 150 fishermen licensed to fish the Abrolhos waters, their families and deckhands, take up residence on the 22 Islands designated for fishers' camps.

In the 14 weeks the Islands are open for commercial rock lobster fishing they produce an average of around 1.5 million kilos of lobster, worth over \$40m, and comprising about 15 per cent of the total catch from the fishery.

The Abrolhos are also famous for their historic shipwrecks, the best known of which are the Dutch East India Company vessels *Batavia* (1629), on Morning Reef near Beacon Island in the Wallabi Group, and the *Zeewijk* (1727) on Half-Moon Reef in the Pelsaert Group. Eighteen other historic wrecks, mostly from the 19th Century, have also been discovered in Abrolhos waters.

Every year the rich fish life, unique coral reef formations, birdlife, shipwrecks and the wild beauty of the Abrolhos are attracting an increasing number of visitors from the mainland.

Many come as part of a diving or fishing charter, while others come to observe the wildlife, explore the history or simply experience the Islands' unique environment.



The Islands' environments - both marine and terrestrial - are very fragile, and need the protection of island residents and visitors alike.

The Abrolhos are part of the aquatic heritage of all West Australians - it is our task to ensure that we hand the islands, their fish stocks and their wildlife onto future generations undamaged and still productive.

This brochure is your guide to visiting and looking after the Abrolhos Islands. The Fisheries Department hopes you enjoy your time here - and leave no trace of your visit.

Conserving Island fish stocks

The importance of the Abrolhos Islands as a marine conservation area is becoming more apparent as research gradually unveils their place in WA's marine ecology.

One of their most important features until recently was their remoteness, and the low level of recreational and commercial fishing pressure, particularly on resident reef species such as baldchin groper, coral trout, and West Australian dhufish.

Scientists have long suspected that the Abrolhos play a vital role as major habitats for the spawning stock of western rock lobster. Eggs and larvae from the Abrolhos and the deepwater refuges further north along Big Bank are thought to be distributed by ocean currents along the west coast, replenishing many areas of reef where the resident stock of mature spawning lobsters has been depleted by intensive fishing.

It is also likely that stocks of mature tailor, baldchin groper, dhufish and other species at the Abrolhos may also help replenish other areas, as their eggs and larvae are swept southward by the Leeuwin Current.

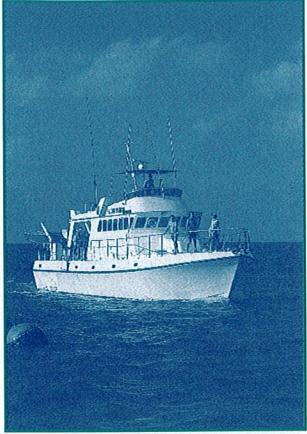
In recent times Island residents have reported a decline in fish numbers and sizes - particularly among resident species such as baldchin groper. There is no question that these declines are linked to increased fishing pressure.

The anchorage areas of some Islands are home to a number of resident samson fish (*Seriola hippos*), many larger than 1.5m in length. These fish have been fed by commercial fishermen for many years, and now appear for a daily feeding time, leaping out of the water and taking fish directly from the fishermen's hands. This partnership is one of the unique features of the Abrolhos. Visitors are not permitted to catch or spear these remarkable fish in the anchorage areas.

Fish for the future at the Abrolhos, and only take enough fish for your personal needs.

Recreational fishing

State daily bag limits, minimum legal sizes and other recreational fishing regulations apply in Island waters, but it is also important for fishers to remember that the Abrolhos are a unique area. If the quality of fishing in the Islands is to be maintained, then the take of excessive quantities of resident reef fish from Island waters needs to stop.



Full details of state fishing regulations are contained in a brochure "Fishing for the Future", which is available from the Fisheries Department and most fishing tackle and dive shops.

Rock lobsters may only be taken by pots - it is illegal to take them by diving in Island waters. The Island rock lobster fishing season opens on 15 March and closes on 30 June. You must have a recreational fishing licence if you wish to take rock lobsters.

Reef Observation Areas

Four special areas have been set aside for the conservation and study of resident reef fish species and their habitats - one in each Island group. These areas are shown and co-ordinates given on the map overleaf.

Catching fish by line, spear or any other method is banned in these reef observation areas. However, lobster pots may be used in reef observation areas.

A research program on baldchin groper (*Choerodon rubescens*) is being conducted by the Fisheries Department. The groper are being studied to understand their growth rates and breeding biology. Groper are thought to change sex from female to male at about four years old and 40cm in length. If this is the case, the current minimum legal size of 40cm may not be the best management strategy for protecting baldchin breeding stocks.

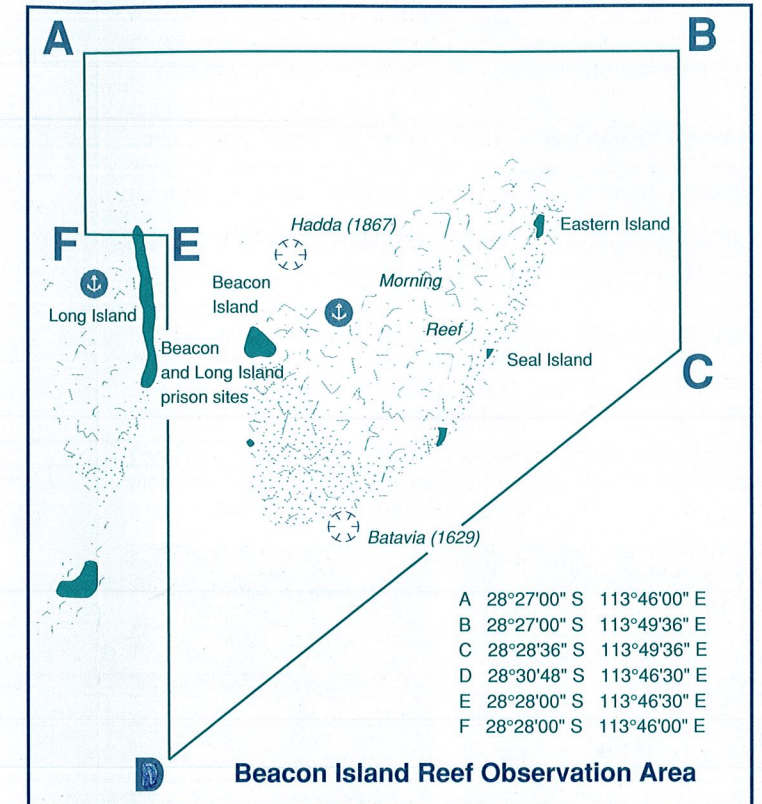
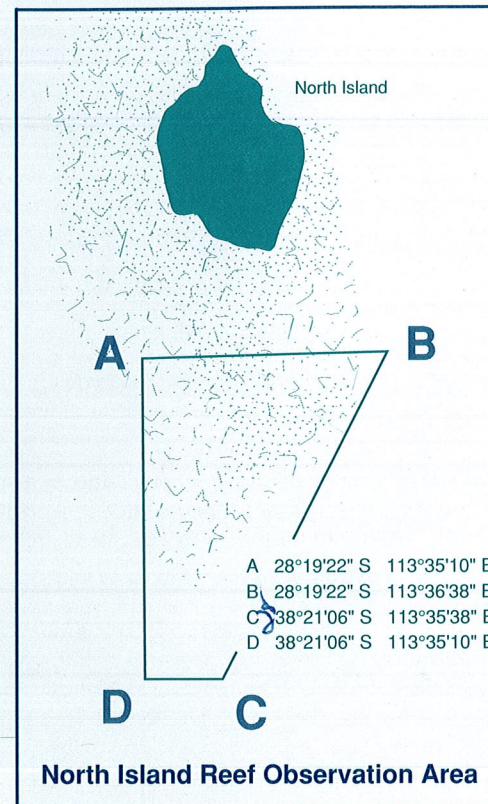
The Abrolhos Islands

This map is not suitable for navigation. Consult nautical chart AUS 751.

The Abrolhos reefs are notoriously treacherous, and a wide safety margin should be allowed, particularly by skippers unfamiliar with island waters.

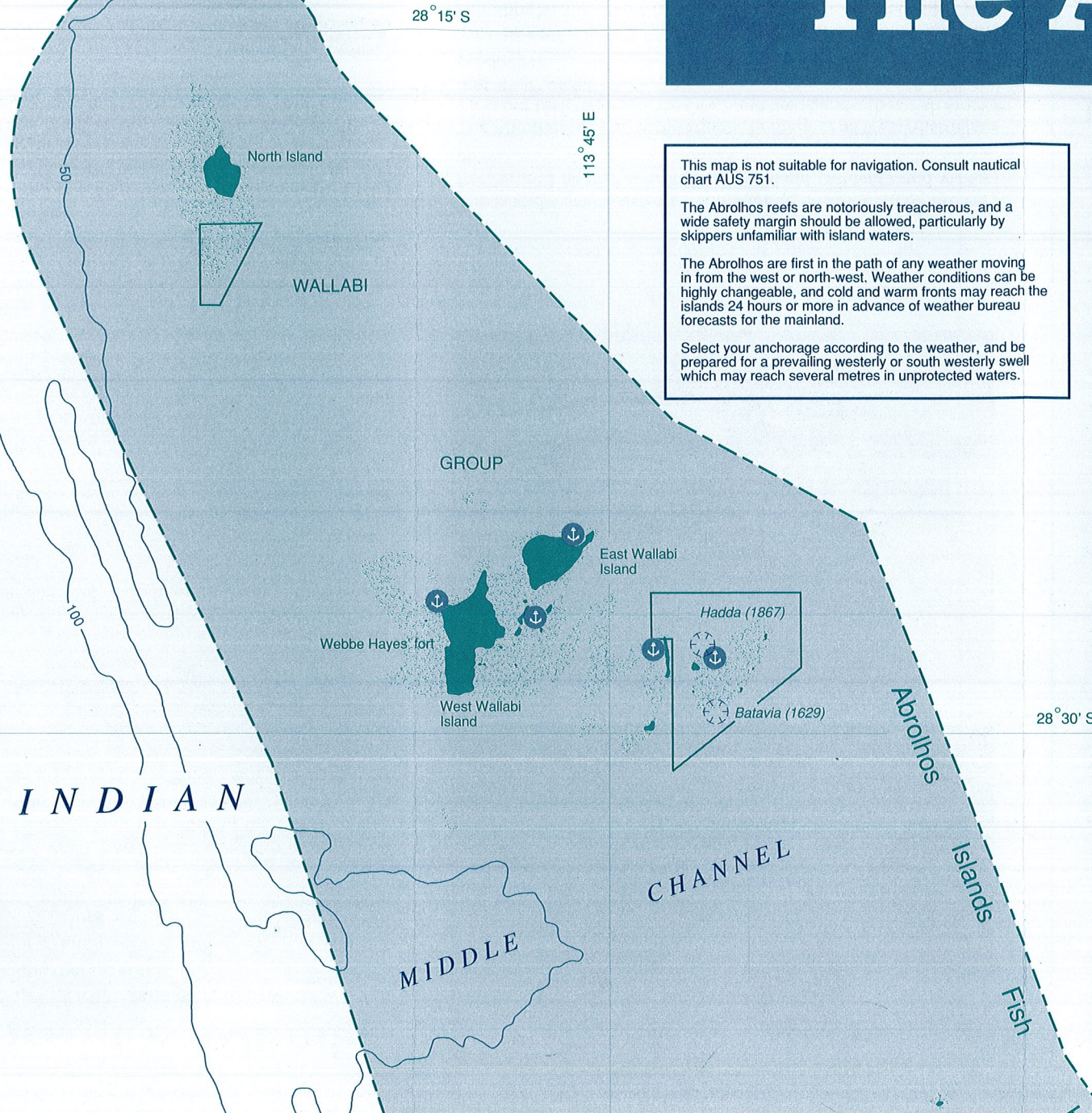
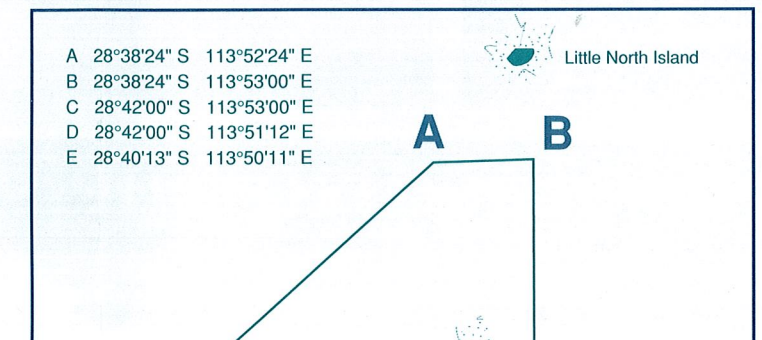
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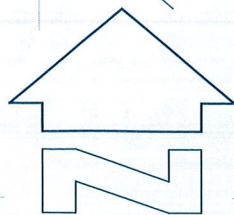
Select your anchorage according to the weather, and be prepared for a prevailing westerly or south westerly swell which may reach several metres in unprotected waters.



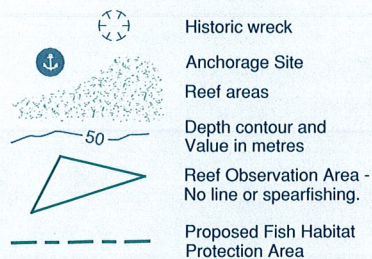
Datum : Coordinates based on Australian Geodetic Datum

Positions obtained from satellite navigation systems are normally referred to WGS 72 Datum. Such positions should be moved 0.07 minutes SOUTHWARD and 0.08 minutes WESTWARD to agree with this map.





SYMBOLOLOGY

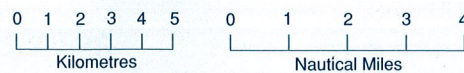


LOCALITY MAP



OCEAN

SCALE 1 : 240 000



INSET SCALE 1 : 75 000



EASTER

Rat Island

GROUP

Wooded Island

Suomi Island

CHANNEL

ZEEWIJK

Zeewijk (1727)

Gun Island

PELSAERT

Middle Island

GROUP

Ben Ledi (1879)

Pelsaert Island

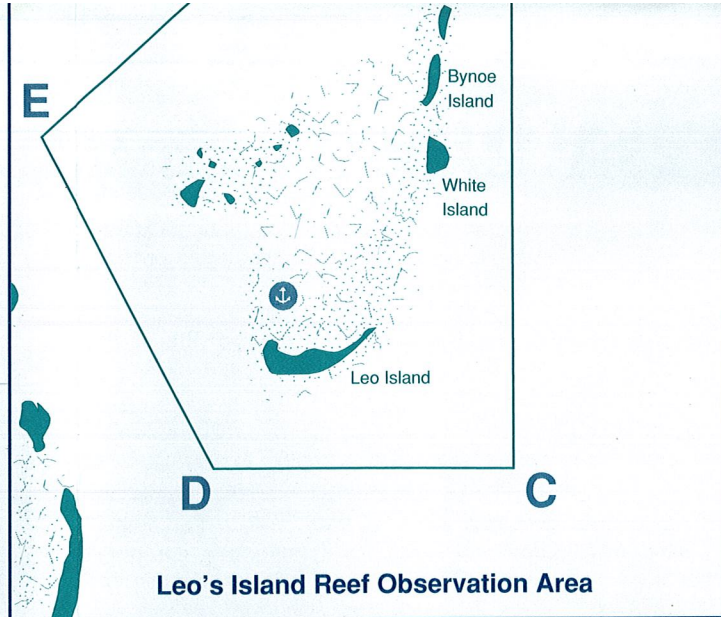
Ocean Queen (1842)

Windsor (1908)

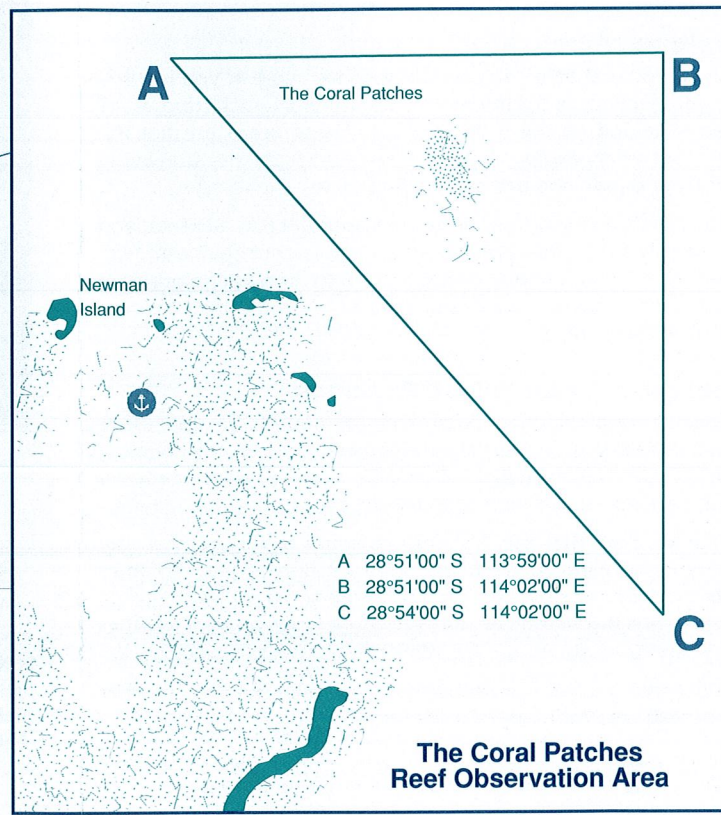
Hummock Island

28°45' S

29°00' S



Leo's Island Reef Observation Area



The Coral Patches Reef Observation Area