

No Boat Zone Regulations

No Boat Zone location:

- (a) 07 07.208n / 134 16.225e
- (b) 07 07.134n / 134 16.262e
- (c) 07 07.096n / 134 16.188e
- (d) 07 07.170n / 134 16.152e

Carp Island side: There is a 200 foot passage way between the no boat zone and the mooring buoys.

Ngemelis side: There is 50 feet between the no boat zone and the main mooring buoy.

See attached drawing.

The main goals of a No Boat Zone are:

- ✓ To assure the safety of the divers, the snorkelers and the mantas.
- ✓ To make sure that manta rays remain in the area by minimizing disturbance to their natural behavior.
- ✓ To protect their critical habitats.
- ✓ To prevent the development of avoidance behavior by manta rays.
- ✓ To make diving with the mantas a more enjoyable experience.

In order to accomplish this, the following should be included in the law:

Boats

Except in the case of an emergency, no boats are allowed in the No Boat Zone.

Outside of the No Boat Zone, boats must keep a distance of at least 200 feet from all manta rays.

All boats transiting through the area must do so on the Carp Island side of the No Boat Zone.

All boats approaching the Ngemelis side mooring buoys must do so at a very slow speed.

Divers & snorkelers

Enter and exit the water only outside of the No Boat Zone.

Safety sausages must not be deployed in the No Boat Zone. Move out of the No Boat Zone before deploying it.

Reasons for a No Boat Zone

German Channel is the second most popular dive site in Palau. As a result, it has become very crowded with as many as 28 boats there at a time. The number of boats operating overhead the divers has resulted in an unsafe situation for the divers and manta rays. A No Boat Zone in the area where the mantas feed will make the area safer for the mantas and also for the divers and snorkelers.

By leaving a 200 foot wide transit zone along the Carp Island side, all through traffic will be away from the main dive area. There is ample room and depth of water in this transit zone for all vessels using German Channel.

Mantas feed right on the surface of the water and many have already been injured by boat propellers. Mantas feeding on the surface are disturbed by boats overhead and boat noise and may leave the area. This not only prevents them from feeding but also prevents the tourists from seeing them.

German channel is where the mantas come to mate and also to give birth so it is very important to protect this area. Last year there were 6 pregnant mantas. Two years ago there were 4 pregnant mantas. This year there are none. Mantas mate close to the surface and boat traffic interrupts this.

Watching the manta rays is a very beautiful experience. The noise of boats overhead ruins this experience for the tourists.

Most divers want to take photos of the mantas. They photograph the manta ray from below, looking towards the surface where the mantas are feeding. Having a boat in the background of their picture ruins it.

Mantas cannot see the small strings on the safety sausages and can become entangled. If this happens, the manta usually does barrel rolls to try to get loose and ends up wrapping the string tightly around them. Then they cannot swim or feed properly and die. Deploying the safety sausages outside of the No Boat Zone prevents this and also allows the boats to pick up the divers without having to enter the No Boat Zone.

Snorkelers and divers can still swim in from the side and swim back to a side or up or down channel for pick up. If they are not a strong swimmer, they can drop in up current, drift with the current and get picked up down current, all outside of the No Boat Zone.

Experiences in Yap

Yap has far fewer divers visiting than Palau does and here is what happened there because of overcrowding and too much traffic. Here is how Bill Acker, owner of Manta Bay Resort described it:

“To those who follow diving in Yap and the Manta Ray Bay Resort, you think of manta rays before anything else. The resident population has been so reliable and dependable over the years that diving with these wonderful animals has been taken for granted, even though they are obviously wild, pelagic creatures free to roam the ocean. Beginning last August, the mantas suddenly "disappeared" and we were hard pressed to find them on a regular basis. All of their past cleaning stations were empty and, even more puzzling, they weren't seen coming and going through the channels. What had happened, where had they moved to? Well, in December, we put a big push together with all of the dive staff at Yap Divers to "find" them again and alas we did. The rays had moved further inside Mi'l Channel to a new cleaning station.”

This has already started to happen at German Channel. Without active management and the enforcement of protective regulations, this site can become devoid of the very animals which the tourists come to see.

Laws in Countries Close to Palau

Yap legislature passed a law in 2008 protecting the manta habitat out to 12 miles offshore. Anyone harming a manta ray or destroying their habitat would face a maximum penalty of six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine. The new law also calls for the development of a management plan to further define how the habitat for the manta ray will be protected.

The Philippines passed a law which imposes imprisonment of one (1) year to two (2) years and/or a fine of Twenty thousand pesos (P20,000.00) to Two hundred thousand pesos (P200,000.00), for maltreating and/or inflicting injuries on a manta ray.

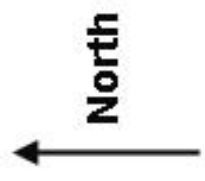
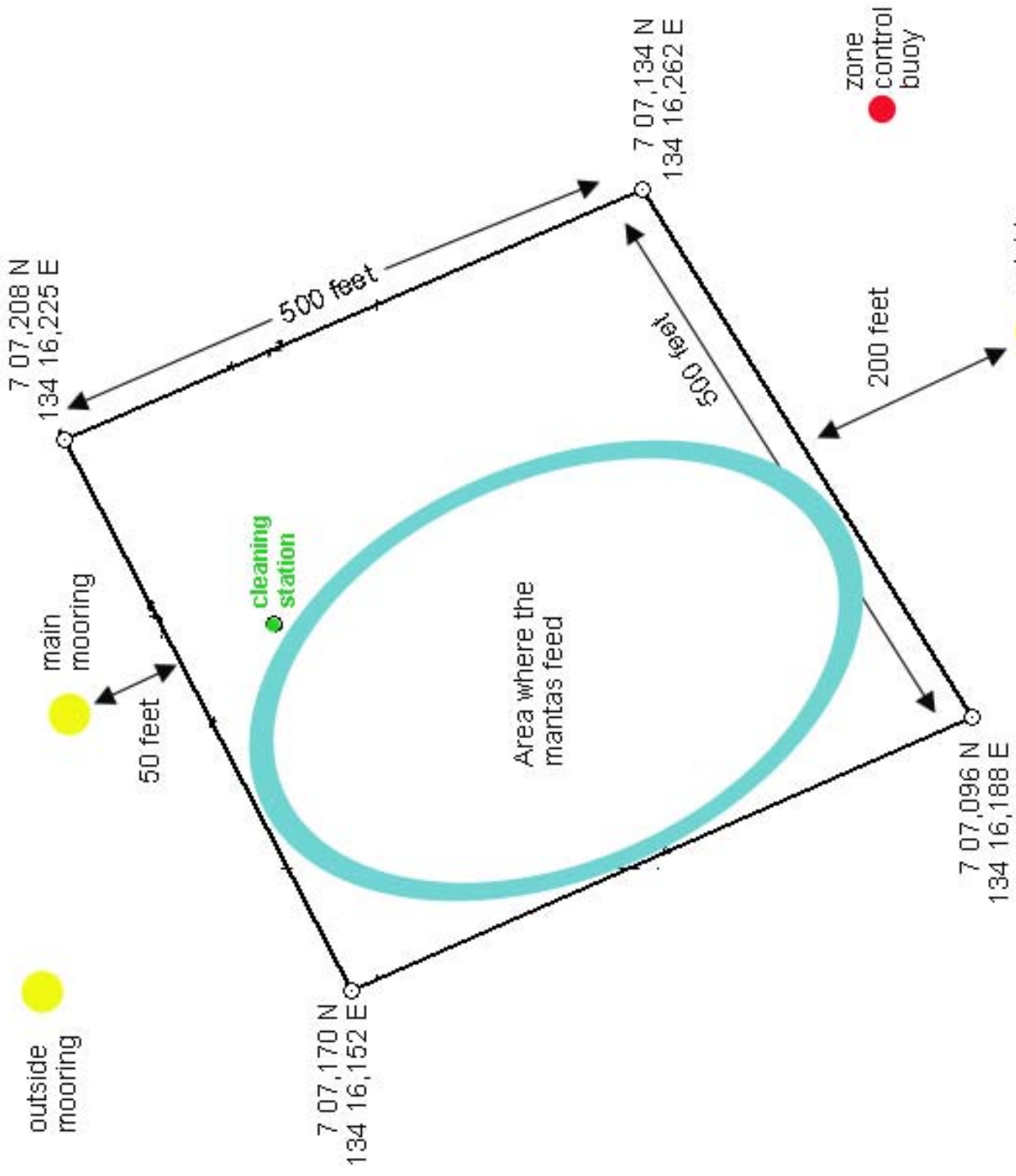
The Maldives passed a law in Hanifaru Bay which establishes a no boat zone where the mantas feed. All divers and snorkelers must swim out from and back to the moored boat.



Palau is very fortunate to have manta rays as they are currently listed as "Vulnerable" on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Diving or snorkeling with them is an incredible experience. This law is needed to make sure that the mantas do not leave German Channel.

Ngemelis side

outside mooring



lagoon side mooring

zone control buoy

Carp Island side

outside mooring