

# River Diving Information & Etiquette

By Gary Cobb

In this paper we will be referring to the Mooloolah River, La Balsa Park, Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia as "The River".

**The River is a body of salt water located about 200 m from the river mouth. There is a bend in the River and after that there is a Park with stair access to the water. The River here runs north and south. If you need to get out go east (escape). If you go west you will be in the boating channel - avoid!**

**This part of the River is one of the most diverse marine environments. It has many species from tiny nudibranchs to 3 m stingrays to 2 m sea snakes. Over 700 species of nudibranchs have been recorded.**

In this paper we will be discussing the 3 sets of stairs north of the Boat Ramp. The stair closest to the Boat Ramp is known as "Fish Cage". The next stair is known as the "Rotunda". The third stair is known as the "Toilet Block".

The River has a tidal influence that varies from 1.1 m to 2.2 m which equals the speed of the current. 1.1 m tide has a current that is very slow to nil. 2.2 m tide is very fast to a point you need to hang on. The top of the tide or High Tide is the time where the current stops and then reverses back to the ocean. The speed of the current will dictate how the stirred up silt cloud will react, from clearing quickly to standing still.

The best time to dive The River is just before High Tide and during High Tide. **All dives begin against the incoming current.** If the tide is 1.1 m the dive can start about 3 hours before High Tide where as if the tide is 2.2 m 1 hour or less before High Tide will work best.

The River has varying degrees of visibility (vis). If there has been a lot of rain the run-off can turn the River brown making the vis poor. If there is a large swell in the ocean that can bring particles into the River also making vis poor. If you are a macro diver the River can be enjoyed with 1-2 m vis. The Fish Cage and Rotunda are easy to navigate. The Toilet Block is large and wide so navigation is a must. **Do not dive in the boating channel! Remember 'E' (east) is Escape.**

River water temperatures vary from 29C in summer to 18C in winter.

Because the River is shallow, dive times can vary depending on the individual from 1 hour to 6 hours.

The River has a tidal flow that brings with it silt. The silt eventually lays down on everything. This silt brings nutrients to the marine environment. It also can be annoying when stirred up. Hence the following recommended River diving rules.

## Thoughts to make everyone's dive enjoyable...

1. **No vertical finning** - when fins go up and down they stir up the silt which blocks other divers vision, particularly when photography is involved.

2. **Frog kick finning or bent knee flutter kicks are recommended.** The fins do not stir up the silt when using these styles of finning to move.

3. **Always be aware of divers in your immediate vicinity.** Most divers you'll encounter will be searching for very small marine life and will be shooting macro/micro.

4. **Avoid at all costs finning over other divers.** If you are entering the water for a dive and you see a dive flag/float be beware of the divers and do not disturb them. **The best thing to do is dive another site!**

5. Since the River has a max depth of 6 m it is vital to **over-weight yourself, it is a shallow dive.**

6. The recommended way to dive the River when searching for macro life to record is to over-weight yourself, vent off and lay on the bottom. No you won't break the sand or rocks! **To move, simply creep slowly along - keeping in mind of others behind you, do not stir up the silt!**

7. **Make all diving movements slowly, avoiding a silt cloud!**

8. **If you are the "perfect buoyancy diver" that fins around 1-3 m above the substrate avoid diving where there is a dive flag already present, go to another site.**

9. When diving the River **always take a dive flag/float with you** - do not leave it in one spot!

10. When diving with other divers always **be aware of the diver with a line attached to the dive flag/float, avoid the line!**

11. **Be aware of small animals on the sand.** It might look barren but many species of animals live on and in the sand.

12. **Be aware of Hazards!** ie. Stonefish, Rays, Fortescue fish, Entanglement (discarded fishing line), Fish hooks, People fishing, Boats, the Dredger and the Profiler.

13. **Do not disturb photographers be aware!**