

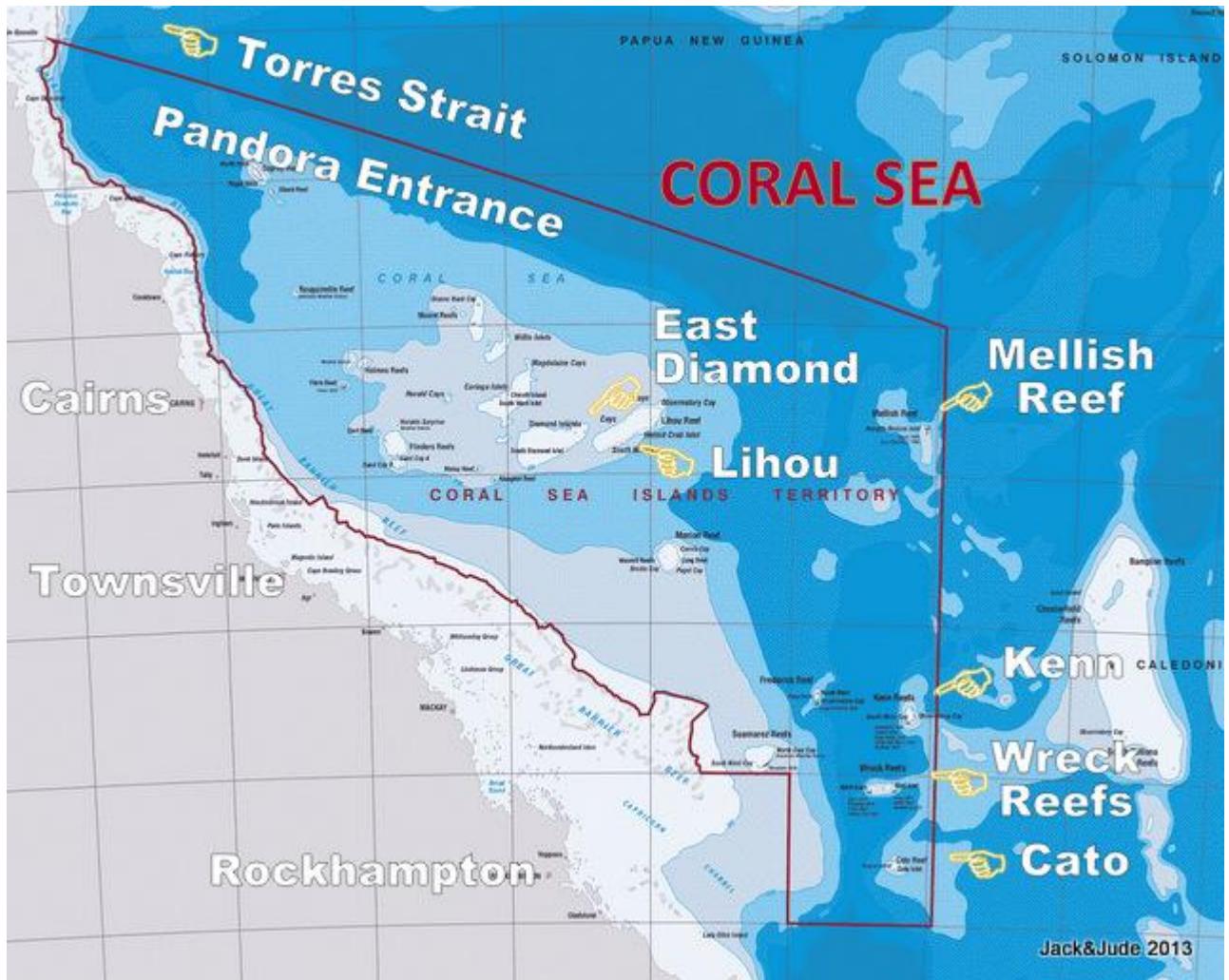
Beautiful tropics with terrible winds

Part 1. We went out into the open sea...

December and January 2018 were spent in preparation for a double expedition to OC-183 Favorite and OC-211 Houtman Abrolhos islands. There were no special problems, it was necessary only to combine all the dates. Both islands are in the state of Western Australia, between them about 150 km by land, and it would be tempting to activate both in one trip. At the end of February just few days left before the date that was set for the purchase of air tickets to Western Australia. And at that moment ...

As usual, at the same time, I was negotiating a couple of other islands for the future, trying to figure out if it was possible to get a permission, how to do it and how to get there.

Suddenly, in the middle of February, to my request for the Cato Island OC-265, along with a positive response, I received discouraging information - that at present the draft of changes to access to the Cato area lies on the minister's desk, containing suggestions for toughening access, including a complete ban on camping. It will most likely be adopted on July 1, 2018, and thus make virtually no sense of any attempt to activate the island - after all, propagation on HF during the day simply does not exist in this phase of the solar cycle.



At that moment I realized that it was necessary to run very quickly. Formal request for permission has been sent out immediately and I frantically began to update information on how to get there. Preparatory work was done a year ago. A website of Big Cat Reality was found here <http://www.bigcatreality.com/>, the only boat that conducts 9-day tours to Cato for fishermen several times a year. Even then, I called their office. Consent to my journey with a landing on Cato then did not follow - only uncertain answers, a promise to call back - that's all. This is understandable; they have not met such crazy people yet. I did not want to force, because there was not any sense to plan something - it's too expensive for me.

Now I had no way to retreat, as there were no other options. A multiple phone calls began, as a result of that I received an approval for my participation. For sure, copy of the camping permit has been sent through because I've got it already from the Marine Resources Department.

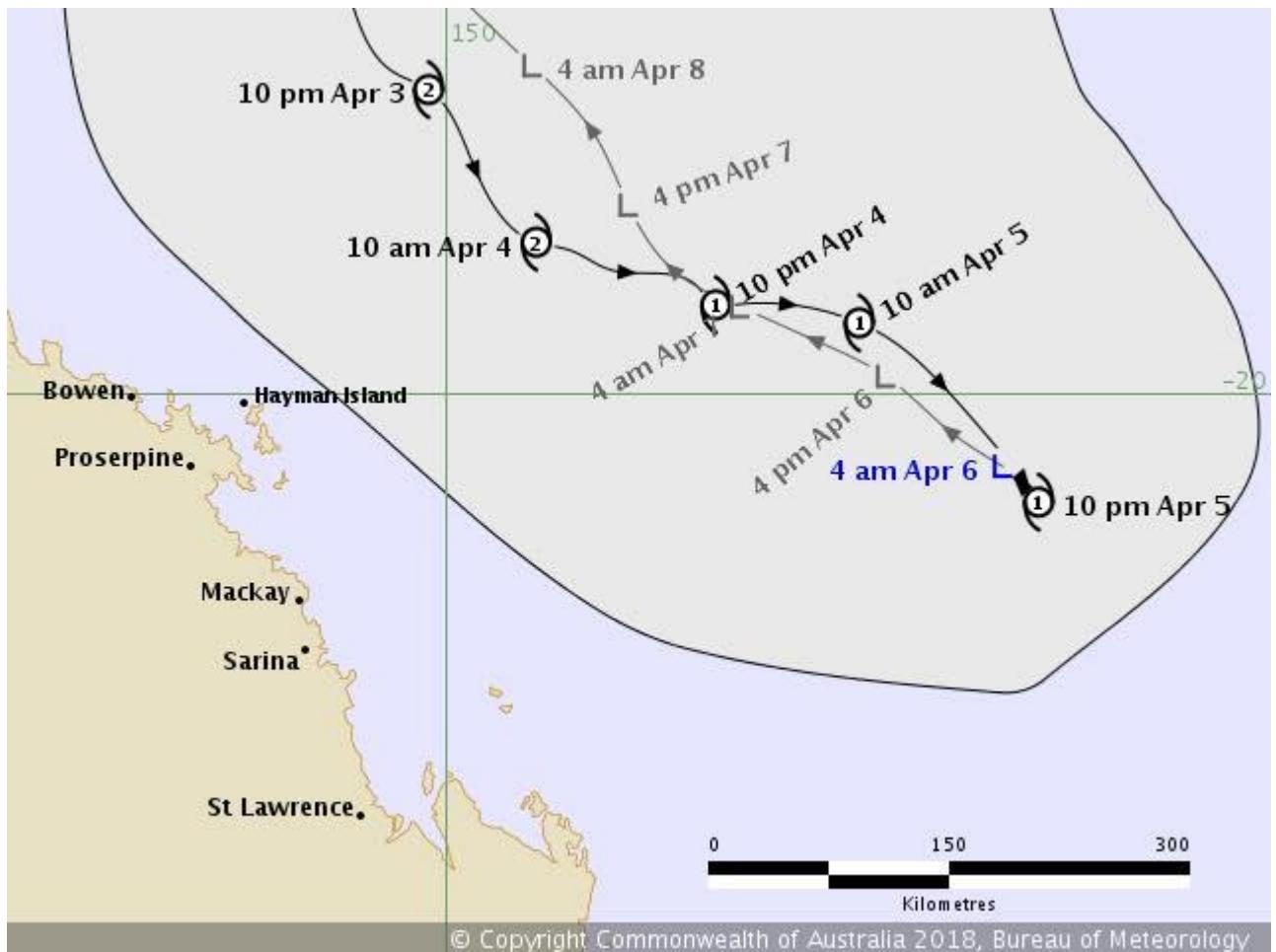
The nearest tour was from 9 to 18 April, the next - in May, and that's it. I had to book tickets urgently, to resolve issues with annual leave at work, to send pieces of baggage (generator, tent, etc.) to Bundaberg, where Big Cat's moored.

At the same time, I actively communicated with the captain of Big Cat, hammering his head with my luggage, asking him to prepare 60 litres of petrol for me and other nonsense. It was uncomfortable to do this, because at that time Big Cat was being completely repaired at the shipyard and James was busy day and night.



At the same time, the situation around the trip was tense with a strong cyclone, which came from the north and was hanging out just in the Cato area. The forecasts were disappointing and very unpleasant. Strengthen to Cyclone Category 4 was possible, several opposite scenarios of development were on the stage at the same time because of very weak uncertain stampings in almost the same place.

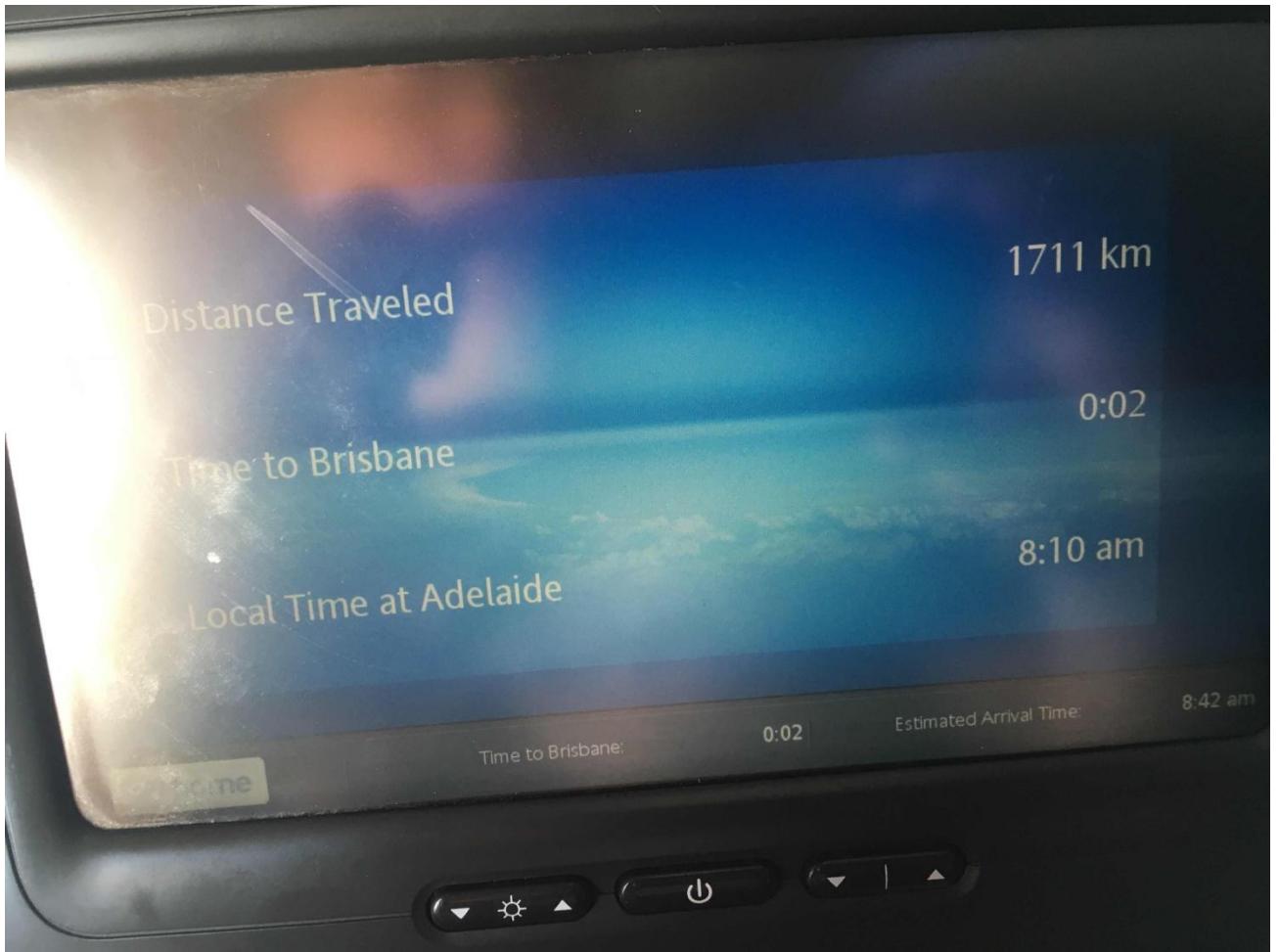
For several days the cyclone practically did not move at all, and hanging over Cato Reef.



But slowly everything fell into place - a few days before the start the cyclone was exhausted by torrential rains over the coast; fresh, repaired Big Cat returned to Bundaberg from the shipyard and took the usual place at the pier, ready to receive fishermen and one crazy ham radio operator.



I went on annual leave on Friday, April 6th, to complete all the forgotten preparations, medications and all sorts of trivia. From arrival to loading on the ship, I will have only 4 hours, and to run to unknown places, trying to buy everything, wasn't reasonable idea. Therefore, I had to take everything with me from Adelaide (except water). At 4 am on April 9th, a taxi came after me. After a hot farewell to Larysa and half an hour in the night city, Qantas picked me up with 4 pieces of luggage weighing about 80 kg at 6 am and carried to the Brisbane direction, where I expected a transfer to the flight to Bundaberg.



The flight and 2 hours of waiting passed quickly enough. The local airline's plane to Bundaberg did not look radiant, but did its job perfectly well.

This time I preferred to stay inside and not leave "clean zone" to smoke outside of the airport. Just remembered how it was last year, when I was traveling to OC-267. I was carefully checked in Brisbane after such an exit. Although check-in baggage did not leave the airport, but the hand luggage, in which there was a transceiver, the key and wires aroused close interest of security officers.

Local airline's planes to Bundaberg did not look radiant - such a working horse. In addition, it was turboprop airplane. I have not seen turboprop airplanes for a long time - probably because I rarely fly to the remote places. There they serve with might and main. However the its job has been done perfectly well. Service, cleanliness and convenience were the same as at the Boeing fled from Adelaide. There was only one thing

missing: there were no displays in the armchairs, but they are not needed for a 40-minute flight, you do not have time to get bored.



40 minutes - and I came out to Bundaberg.



The minibus booked in advance was already waiting at the airport, and we set off, simultaneously picking up 2 more people who - surprise, surprise - were fishermen and went on a tour with me.

In just half an hour, after driving through the streets of a one-story city (population 14 thousand), we arrived to Bundaberg Port marina.



The marina met us a little gloomy, reminding that the sea does not like jokes and never forgive mistakes..



"FV Cassandra. Tragically lost in the sea on 4th of April 2016."

There was still 4 hours left before loading and it was necessary to buy water (the fact that my boxes with the generator and tent have been delivered, and 60 litres of petrol were waiting onboard I checked right away).

Although a few small shops are in the port, buying of bottled water was a problem. To buy 20 litres, I had to run through all the shops and several restaurants. The water was everywhere, but in 0.5 l bottles and without packaging. But zeal is rewarded, and at the last restaurant somewhere from the depths of the freezer I got two boxes.



Taking them to the pier, where the arriving anglers dropped off their belongings, I decided to have a bite. Huge size Fishburger with fresh fish and hill of chips - what else I needed? And even on fresh air. But it was a mistake - when I sat down on a bench, a gust of wind just snatched a box of things from my hands - and I had to be content only with a fishburger, since it was wrapped separately. All the rest had to be collected from the ground and discarded. At that moment I did not think that it was for the best, and that the weather warned me. Well-fed, but slightly displeased I returned to the pier, where a strange action unfolded.

A videographer was walking along the pier, making footage, a tripod with another camera was standing on the pier, and someone was snorkeling in the water under the pier.



It turned out that in the turmoil, an anti-glare filter was dropped into the water and it was actively searched by the crew member. The search ended successfully.



As it turns out, we are accompanied by a group of professionals headed by Al McGlashan, who has his own regular TV show on Channel 10 named Fishing with Mates, entirely devoted to fishing in Australia and other countries. I am very glad that they came with us, especially Al - a wonderful, energetic person with enormous charisma as well as whole team.



If you have even a bit of interest in fishing - I advise you to do a search for Al's name – you won't be disappointed. On the photo - he stands.

Well, it was 6 pm and we were all invited to load. My things were stored on the upper deck - to not make a mess with anglers preparing their equipment.

Each of 10 people, including the video crew, brought not one or two fishing rods. As far as I could see, some brought in 5-6 different shapes and sizes. Plus a large number of sinkers, floats, hooks, lures and the rest . I must say that I, with my luggage, looked poor.

But this is understandable - the Coral Sea, and especially Cato Reef area, is famous for its huge variety of fish species and their size. If something has been left at home – no way to get it in the sea. Different ways of fishing planned - trolling, from the beach, from the boats - all possible types and combinations (perhaps, except ice fishing, but I wasn't very sure). By the way, this tour is so-called "sport fishing", when specially prepared hooks only are in use. They allow to release the fish without damage.



By the end of the loading, the cook surprised us by a pleasant smell - large dishes with fresh shrimps and delicious fish pies were served.

When the process of acquaintance, destruction of tasty food and beer was completed, a serious and obligatory part began.

Captain James talked about the area where we go, the restrictions and exact plans, how everything will be organized. He also talked about the weather forecast in the Cato Reef area.

Training on safety and emergency procedures was held - how to use mandatory lifejacket when in the boat , VHF radio, GPS tracker, and also how to react to any abnormal situations on board.

It took about 40 minutes. After that, another briefing began, not for me - how to catch, what to catch, restrictions and requirements. Instead, I went to the ship, getting to know Big Cat from the inside.

It was interesting and unexpected - the ship was beautifully repaired and equipped - but I will touch it in the next part of the story.



Well - everything has been loaded on the boat, Big Cat took full tanks of fuel and water - and unnoticed by the noise of conversations at the stern - we went to Coral sea.



Captain James – on the left.



The night began, swell was not strong, the stomach was pleasantly burdened with everything that had been eaten-an hour after dinner was offered a large piece of tender beef with garnish. As usual, the Australian portions are huge and virtually do not leave any space inside to breath.

There were more than 25 hours to Cato Reef ahead and the night was just beginning ...