

# North Marine Reserve Network

## A Detailed Guide for Contributing to the Review

Despite years of science and overwhelming community support, the Australian Government has suspended the North Marine Reserve Network and announced a review leaving all our Commonwealth marine sanctuaries at risk of being cut back or erased completely.

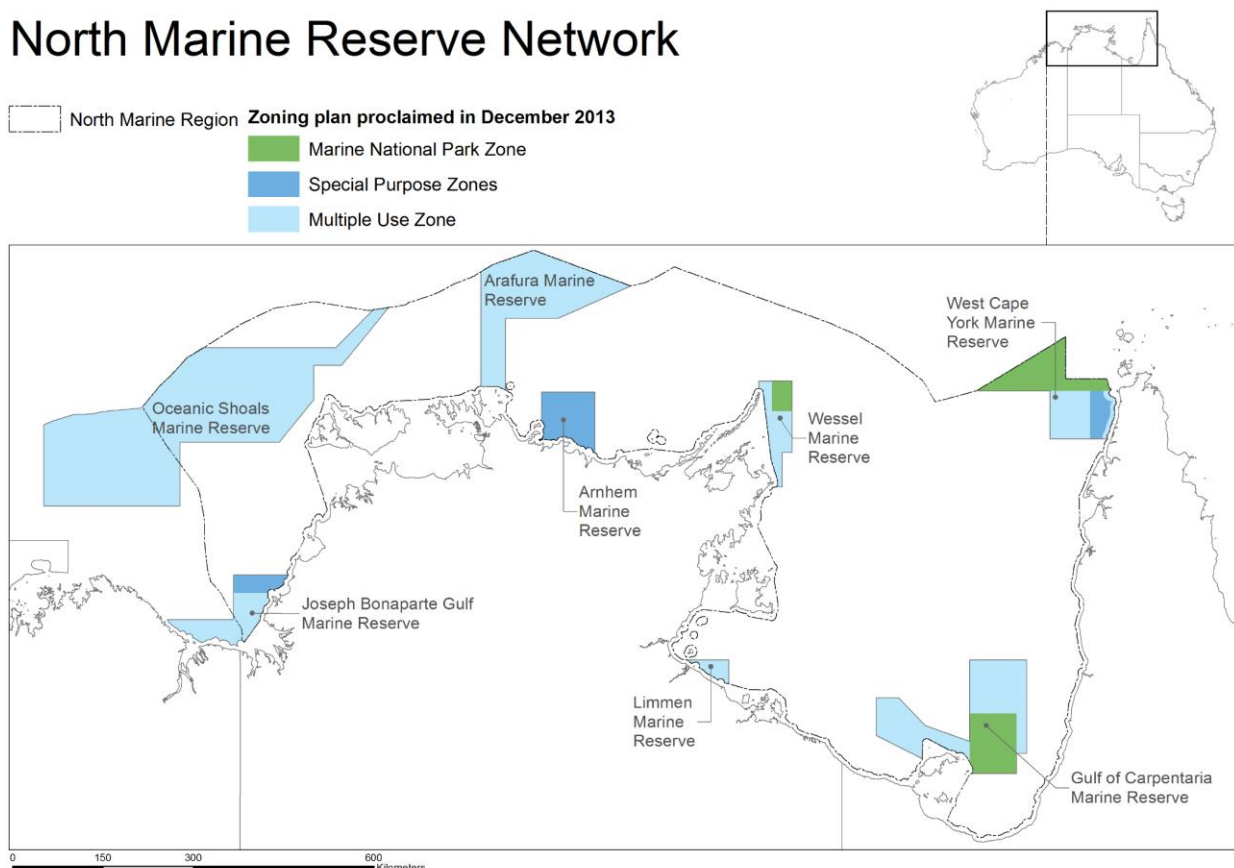
We can't let this occur. As a key stakeholder your submission will make a difference. Please make one by **31 March 2015** at [haveyoursay@marinereservesreview.com.au](mailto:haveyoursay@marinereservesreview.com.au)

### Main Points to make in support of marine life:

1. **Retain the existing zoning** in all Commonwealth Marine Reserves - at a bare minimum.
2. **Improve and expand the marine national park zones** (marine sanctuaries) as suggested by the science community.
3. **Implement the marine reserves immediately**, with marine national park zones retained and improved.

The following is a summary of the submission the Save our Marine Life Alliance (SOML) had commissioned by the Centre for Conservation Geography. It is based on available data on the North Marine Bioregion.

## North Marine Reserve Network



### Retain the Existing Marine National Park Zones

The Marine Reserve Network for the North region maximises the protection of marine life by:

- Establishing the first protection for the Gulf of Carpentaria, West Cape York and the Torres Strait: the West Cape York Marine National Park Zone establishes the first ever protection within Marine

National Park Zones for the unique marine life of the Torres Strait, West Cape York and Carpentaria bioregions (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). This includes the first ever protection within Marine National Park Zones for the inter-nesting habitats of the world's largest flatback turtle nesting population at Crab Island as well as the interesting habitats of critically endangered hawksbill turtles, vulnerable Olive Ridley turtles and biologically important areas for coastal dolphins.

- Establishing the first protection for the Wellesley Islands: The Gulf of Carpentaria Marine National Park Zone establishes the first ever protection within Marine National Park Zones for the waters surrounding the Wellesley Islands a major hotspot for marine life.
- Establishing the first protection for the Wessel Islands: The Wessel Marine National Park Zone establishes the first ever protection within Marine National Park Zones for both the waters surrounding the Wessel Islands and for the unique marine life of the Arafura bioregion.
- Protecting a diversity of marine habitats: the North Marine Reserve Network increases the level of Marine National Park Zones within the Commonwealth waters of the North region from 0% up to 3%.
- Protection from destructive fishing practices: The North Marine Reserve Network protects 18% of the North Marine Region from trawling, demersal longlining and gillnetting.
- Some protection from oil, gas and mining: The North Marine Reserve network protects 3% of the North Marine Region from oil, gas and other mining activities including parts of West Cape York, the Torres Strait, the Gulf of Carpentaria and parts of the waters around the Wellesley and Wessel Islands.

## Marine National Park Zones

- Marine National Park Zones are critical as they are the only zones that scientific research consistently shows are capable of delivering broad ranging and significant benefits for marine life. Marine National Park Zones are critical to scientific research to understand Australia's oceans. They are the baselines against which it then becomes possible to understand and improve the management of current and future impacts on Australia's oceans.
- All other zones, including recreational fishing zones, or those that include vertical zoning like benthic protection zones only offer partial protection and are designed either to achieve particular social, or economic outcomes, or to act as buffers to the Marine National Park Zones.
- The scientific evidence is now clear that zones which allow recreational fishing do not protect marine life as effectively as Marine National Park Zones. Additionally recreational fishing has the capacity to cause trophic cascades through the removal of older individuals in a population, or through the removal of top order predators.
- The majority of recreational fishers are supportive of Marine National Park Zones to protect marine life. Surveys of Australian recreational fishers show that the clear majority have supported the Marine National Park Zones already in place, citing benefits for sustainability and conservation.
- There are very strong economic, social and scientific arguments for establishing extensive Marine National Park Zones as key regional economic infrastructure for nature based tourism, particularly dive tourism and whale watching, to maintain ecosystem services and to realise the economic value of community aspirations for healthy oceans.

## Expanding the number and size of Marine National Park Zones

Science community submissions to the public consultation process for the North-west Marine Reserves from the CSIRO and the Australian Marine Science Association (AMSA) each focussed on the need for the

North Marine Reserves to contain more Marine National Park Zones particularly on the shelf and upper slope. Key locations for new Marine National Park Zones to address the poor protection of the shelf and upper slope are:

- **Limmen Marine Reserve**  
A Marine National Park Zone in the Limmen Marine Reserve is recommended by the CSIRO and would satisfy the Government's long standing commitment to create a Marine National Park Zone within the Pellew Bioregion.
- **Arnhem Marine Reserve**  
A Marine National Park Zone in the Arnhem Marine Reserve is recommended by the CSIRO and would satisfy the Government's long standing commitment to create a Marine National Park Zone within the Arnhem-Wessel bioregion.
- **Arafura Marine Reserve**  
A Marine National Park Zone in the Arafura Marine Reserve is recommended by the CSIRO and would satisfy the Government's long standing commitment to create a Marine National Park Zone within the Timor Transition and Cobourg bioregions. It would also provide the first ever protection within Marine National Park Zones of the tropical canyon systems and shelf edge and slope ecosystems of the North Marine Region, all of which are key ecological features for the region's marine life.
- **Oceanic Shoals Marine Reserve**  
A Marine National Park Zone in the Oceanic Shoals Marine Reserve is recommended by the CSIRO and would satisfy the Government's long standing commitment to create a Marine National Park Zone within the Oceanic Shoals bioregion. It would also provide the first ever protection within Marine National Park Zones of the turtle feeding habitats of the Bonaparte Gulf and the carbonate banks and terraces of Van Diemen Rise, a key ecological feature for the marine life of the North Marine Region.
- **Joseph Bonaparte Marine Reserve**  
A Marine National Park Zone in the Joseph Bonaparte Marine Reserve is recommended by the CSIRO and would satisfy the Government's long standing commitment to create a Marine National Park Zone within the Anson Beagle, Cambridge-Bonaparte and Bonaparte Gulf bioregions.**Error! Bookmark not defined.** It would also provide the first ever protection within Marine National Park Zones of the feeding habitats for endangered green turtles within the Bonaparte Gulf and the inter-nesting habitats of one of the world's largest populations of flatback turtles nesting at Cape Dommet.

## Social and Economic Impacts

The North Marine Reserve Network provides opportunities for economic growth and wellbeing that are very important to local businesses and communities. This must be taken into account in the review. The review needs to incorporate the views and evidence of the many stakeholder groups and communities that can, and have already, benefited from highly protected marine parks that are currently in place throughout Australia. The economies and communities of the North stand to reap substantial benefits from the Marine Reserve Network. In fact positive impacts on nature based tourism, recreational fishing, indigenous employment and regional employment are expected to outweigh possible negative impacts on commercial fishing.

- **Community support** - Community support for the marine reserves is very strong with over 99% of the more than 10,000 submissions to the public consultation process supportive of increased protection for the North Marine Region.
- **Tourism** - The tourism industry of the Northern Territory is worth over \$1.6 billion per annum (Tourism NT, 2013). With some of the most intact coastal tropical environments in the world the tourism brand of the North Marine Region is inextricably linked with nature on a grand scale. A

healthy and abundant marine life is a key part of the narrative that draws visitors to the region. The North Marine Reserve Network, particularly its Marine National Park Zones are a piece of critical regional economic infrastructure for maintaining and growing this industry. Their role in protecting marine life and providing opportunities to market the health of Australia's oceans is critical to attracting visitors not just to the North Marine Region but to Australia as a global destination for nature based tourism (Prideaux, 2012).

- **Oil, Gas and Mining:** the North Marine Reserve Network has no impact on the Oil and Gas industry. This is because there is a 0% overlap between marine reserves and oil and gas production, or retention leases and 0% overlap between Marine National Park Zones and any current oil and gas lease of any kind.
- **Recreational fishing:** the North Marine Reserve Network has no negative impacts on recreational fishers with Marine National Park Zones established exclusively outside of the areas utilised by recreational fishers (AFANT, 2011).
- **Commercial fishing:** the North Marine Reserve Network is very effective at minimising the displacement of commercial fishing activities. The North Marine Reserve Network extends over 20% of the North Marine Region but displaces only 2.4% of the commercial fisheries active in the region (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). Some commercial fishers are claiming that the marine reserves will have too great of an impact on their businesses. However this is questionable considering that the maximum potential displacement of commercial fishers within the North Marine Region is less than 5% for all commercial fisheries operating in the region (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). Only one fishery in the North, the Gulf of Carpentaria Line Fishery has a displacement of greater than 3% of the annual value of their catch.

### Traditional Owner engagement

Where Government planning processes overlap with Indigenous people's sea country this needs to be recognised by incorporating traditional owners and other relevant Indigenous bodies as decision makers rather than a stakeholder within the process. Even if native title doesn't extend into Commonwealth waters traditional owners and rangers have important cultural, social, environmental and economic perspectives, knowledge and aspirations that need to be better incorporated into the planning process. Existing indigenous ranger groups already involved in managing their sea country in the North Marine Region are likely to have key skills, knowledge and capacity to assist with the management of the new Commonwealth Marine Reserves. For example in 2013 the Yolngu Wanga Watangu, supported by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments, declared Australia's first sea country indigenous protected area (Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation, 2013). The Dhimurru Sea Country IPA overlaps with the Wessel Commonwealth Marine Reserve and the Dhimurru Rangers expect to make a significant contribution to and involvement in the management of the reserve.

Much greater consideration needs to be given to how indigenous ranger groups could be involved in Commonwealth Marine Reserve decision making and management.

### Oil, Gas and Seabed Mining

The zoning plan for the North Marine Reserve Network currently allows mining for oil, gas and minerals over 97% of the North Marine Region. Australians don't want mining across such large swathes of our oceans. The North Marine Reserve Network needs to find a better balance between protecting marine life and facilitating the development of the North oil and gas industry. The North Marine Region contains areas of global, national and regional significance for marine life that needs some areas to be set aside as 'no go' areas for oil, gas and seabed mining. For example Limmen Bight which supports an internationally significant population of dugong is not an appropriate location for experimental seabed mining. These are locations like seabird and turtle nesting sites where consequences for marine life in the event of an oil spill like that in the Kimberley in 2009, or from pollution from the mining of minerals would be particularly drastic.

The zoning plan for the North Marine Reserve Network would be substantially improved by prohibiting mining from operating in those parts of the Marine Reserves that are currently outside exploration leases. This would increase the area protected from mining and exploration from 3% to 18% of the North Marine Region.

For more information about the Governments Review of our marine reserve network:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/marinereservesreview/home>

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