

Victorian National Parks Association

Fact sheet – Why not multi-zone marine parks?



Multi-zone parks, size really does matter

Is there really any difference between a “marine national park” and a “marine park”?

The prime purpose of a marine national park (a “no-take” area) is the protection of marine biodiversity and ecological systems and processes. This is also the alleged objective of “marine parks”, but this claim exploits the common misconception marine parks primarily conserve the marine environment.

In practice, conservation in marine parks falls victim to a management regime that tries to minimise conflict between many potentially conflicting uses that often violate conservation goals.

What value multi-zone marine parks?

The proponents of multi-zone marine parks use the Great Barrier Reef, Great Australian Bight and Western Australian marine parks to justify their stance. But just how relevant are these parks to Victoria?

A question of scale

The average size of Victoria’s marine national parks was 4070 ha (40.7km²), which makes them tiny by comparison with the interstate multi-zone marine parks.

The Western Australian marine parks cover 14,450km². Rowley Shoals, one of the smallest, is 20 times larger than the average Victorian marine national park, while Ningaloo is 110 times larger and Shark Bay 185 times!

The Great Australian Bight Marine Park in South Australia is 490 times larger. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (343,500 km²) is 34 times the 10,174 km² of Victoria’s marine waters, 544 times the 529 km² of no-take proposed by the Environment Conservation Council (ECC), and 8440 times the average size of Victoria’s marine national parks.

And what of the NSW multi-zone marine parks?

The Solitary Islands Marine Park is 71,000 hectares in area, or 18,000 hectares more than the total area within the ECC’s 13 marine national parks. The proposed



Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia is 110 times larger than the average Victorian marine national park.

Photo: Brian Air, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/brian-air>

Byron Bay Marine Park is 23,000ha, similar in size to the Jervis Bay Marine Park and larger than any of Victoria’s parks.

There are three main no-take areas in Solitary Islands and they average 2700 hectares in area. This is the same size as the French Island Marine National Park, 3 times the size of Yaringa Marine National Park and 4 times the size of Churchill Island Marine National Park. Bunorong (2100 hectares) is also smaller.

To apply multi-zone management to each of the small marine national park proposals in Victoria, as some fishers are urging, would be of no value in protecting marine biodiversity and would receive little community support. In addition, it would be a complex and confusing approach, as well as time consuming and expensive to establish and enforce.

There is, however, one clear parallel between the very large, multi-zone marine parks and the Victorian marine national parks system. Because of their large size, the marine parks should be compared with the



Wilsons Promontory is Victoria's largest marine national park, covering 15,500ha.

Photo of Sealers Cove: David Neilson

total area of Victoria's marine waters, and their no-take percentages should be compared with the total percentage of Victoria's marine waters to be included in the marine national parks.

This would reveal that the 5.3 per cent (529 km²) of Victoria's marine waters recommended to be no-take by the ECC is within the no-take percentage range for the interstate marine parks.

In the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park the no-take figure is currently 4.6 per cent (16,000 km²), but this is set to increase under the marine park authority's representative areas program that aims to improve bioregional representation.

At Ningaloo the no-take figure is 10 per cent (222 km²) of the state component, while at Shark Bay, where the park is wholly in Western Australian waters, it is 6 per cent (455 km²). At Solitary Islands and Jervis Bay, the proposed no-take percentages are 12 per cent and 19 per cent respectively.

General-use zones manage but do not protect

General-use zones make it very difficult to establish clear objectives. They are essentially about managing competing resource uses, not protection, and allow for many uses including commercial and recreational fishing, shipping and tourism.

The management of general-use zones struggles to deal with overfishing, habitat damage and land-based impacts, as well as uses that conflict with one another

or are incompatible with marine protection, such as prawn trawling on The Reef.

Multi-zone management zones need to be built around highly protected areas, not within them, and managed first and foremost for the marine environment using an ecosystem approach. Otherwise they will legitimise unsustainable use under the guise of conservation.

Marine national parks are multiple-use

Fishers have been proposing multi-zone marine parks for Victoria, and often refer to them as "multiple-use" to contrast them with what they claim is the "single-use" of no-take areas: conservation.

But Victoria's marine national parks have many uses

They provide essential natural services such as larval dispersal and transport, pollutant breakdown and nutrient cycling.

They protect areas in a way that allows us to determine the natural levels of marine productivity, and to quantify the level of our impact.

And they can be used by snorkellers, divers, swimmers, surfers, sailors, scientists, tourism operators, teachers and students involved in non-extractive activities, used to increase the community's awareness of marine conservation needs, and used to generate many environmental, economic and social benefits.