

# NATIONAL PARKS

## Marine Protected Areas

### Summary

- We cannot survive without our oceans.
- Oceans are a fundamental and indispensable provider of ecosystem goods and services, such as carbon dioxide absorption, nutrient cycling and coastal protection.
- The pressures on our marine environment are significant and continuing, from unsustainable use of ocean resources and climate change.

#### Our oceans need protection.

- Australia's marine environment is the world's third largest marine jurisdiction, at 13.86 million square kilometres.
- The Commonwealth Government created the largest National System of Marine Protected Areas (NSMPAs) in the world.
- This system, despite its size, failed to deliver the conservation outcomes that Australia's unique marine life is dependent upon, and is being modified by the current government.
- The proposed NSMPA network is not comprehensive, adequate or representative and the present Government wishes to decrease it.

### ISSUE

Australia's marine environment is the world's third largest marine jurisdiction, at 13.86 million square kilometers. It is home to a diverse array of marine life, many of which are endemic. Our cultural identity has been shaped by our love of the sea and we cluster around it; its bounty is a great economic asset, supporting commercial fishing industries and aquaculture, worth \$2.5 billion in 2013-14 and growing; and tourists from all over the world are drawn to Australia's coasts and oceans, the Great Barrier Reef being our most beloved marine treasure.

Ultimately, our oceans are a fundamental and indispensable provider of ecosystem goods and services, such as carbon dioxide absorption, nutrient cycling and coastal protection. We cannot survive without these and yet the pressures on our marine environment are significant and continuing, from unsustainable use of ocean resources and climate change. For example, the Great Barrier Reef is dying; recent record high temperatures have resulted in widespread coral bleaching and die-off throughout this 25 million year old natural wonder. There is no argument that our oceans need protection.

To this end, all Australian governments have committed to the establishment of a network of marine protected areas (MPAs) that is comprehensive, adequate and representative, is effectively and equitably managed, and well connected and integrated into the wider seascapes.

The Commonwealth Government created the largest National System of Marine Protected Areas (NSMPAs) in the world and by much more than the modest headline Aichii target of 10 per cent by 2020. Approximately 36 per cent of commonwealth marine waters will be within the protected area network. However, the proposal, despite its size, fails to deliver the conservation outcomes that Australia's unique marine life is dependent upon. It is reported that the current Australian Government is planning to reduce its effectiveness.



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Even under the earlier proposal, NSMPA network was not comprehensive, adequate or representative of Australia's marine bioregions, ecosystems or species; it is skewed towards areas less important to industry and, not coincidentally, areas less important for conservation. The proclamation by the current Commonwealth Government of the outer boundaries of the 40 new reserves declared in 2012 reflects bi-partisan acceptance of the new NSMPA network and clear resistance to adjusting boundaries to better incorporate under-represented values.

Also evident is an insidious progression towards relaxation of management to better incorporate the interests of industry over conservation – especially in highly protected areas where the strictest adherence to the protection of biodiversity should be upheld. This is neither equitable and nor effective.

Given the importance of the marine protected area network to nature conservation and Australian society in general, it is essential that these shortcomings be addressed. Without national leadership and a vision that is implemented without compromising the very values these areas are in place to protect, it is unlikely that Australia will be able to uphold its international reputation as a world leader in protected area establishment and management, and risks compromising the long-term survival of its unique marine wildlife.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

Establish a National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas that is comprehensive, adequate and effective and is managed equitably and effectively.

#### **Further reading**

See the National Parks Australia Council (NPAC) Briefing Paper, National Parks: Marine Protected Areas <http://www.npac.org.au/>

### **ABOUT US**

The National Parks Australia Council (NPAC) has a mission to protect, promote and extend national park systems within Australia. NPAC was formed in 1975. We are a national body that coordinates and represents the views of a range of State and Territory non-government organisations concerned with protecting the natural environment and furthering national parks. NPAC provides a forum for regular communication between State and Territory National Parks Associations and acts as a united voice supporting conservation of the National Reserve System across Australia.

**Victorian National Parks Association**  
Visit [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)

**National Parks Association of Queensland**  
Visit [www.npaq.org.au](http://www.npaq.org.au)

**Tasmanian National Parks Association**  
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**National Parks Association of NSW**  
Visit [www.npansw.org.au](http://www.npansw.org.au)

**Nature Conservation Society of South Australia**  
Visit [www.ncssa.asn.au](http://www.ncssa.asn.au)

**National Parks Association of the ACT**  
Visit [www.npaact.org.au](http://www.npaact.org.au)