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Submission

Introduction

The Clarence Environment Centre (CEC) has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 27 years, and has a proud history of environmental advocacy. The conservation of Australia's natural environment, both terrestrial and and marine, has always been a priority for our members, and we believe the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and biodiversity is of paramount importance.

To that end we are making this submission to express major concerns with the proposed changes to Marine protection

Foreword

Over-fishing of the world's oceans has seen some dramatic crashes over the past century, consigning the Cod, Salmon, Herring, Pilchard and many other fish industries to the history books. Fishermen of third world countries like Somalia, once heavily involved in fishing to feed their under-nourished citizens, have famously resorted to piracy as an alternative way of making a living, simply because their waters have been fished out.

Acidity levels in the oceans is rising, as are temperatures, as a direct result of man-made climate change, bleaching coral reefs and mangroves thus reducing breeding grounds for many marine species. Again this is having a major negative impact on marine biodiversity, a fragile ecosystem where the loss of any species has flow-on effects that will directly impact humans.

The threats to marine diversity are growing, and yet over-fishing continues unabated across much of the world's oceans.

Australia, with its ocean surrounds and world-renowned network of marine parks, provides one glimmer of hope. While these sanctuaries are an envy to many countries around the world, here in Australia, the greedy self-interest of a noisy minority who wish to benefit commercially from raping our oceans, now sees the Federal Government look to open up protected areas to exploitation.

Australia has a proud history of leadership when it comes to ocean protection – from fighting to end whaling, protecting the whole of Antarctica from mining, mapping out Australia's entire ocean territory, and in 2012, declaring the world's most extensive network of marine protected areas.

Having made reference above to Australia's "world-renowned network of marine parks", we need to point out that the real protection, i.e. fishing exclusion zones, is still abysmally inadequate, and insufficient to protect much of our marine life from extinction.

As we see it, if a loss of a small number of jobs, and an increase in the price of seafood, is the price we have to pay to ensure that those jobs and a feed of fish will still be available to our grandchildren in 100 years from now, then so be it!

Recommendations

Overall, Australia needs to increase its marine park estate, targeting areas with the greatest potential for fish breeding; expanding sanctuary zones; banning trawling in sensitive habitats, and 'beefing up' compliance monitoring and enforcement. Specifically, we ask that:

1 - No oil drilling in the Great Australian Bight Marine Reserve – the restriction on oil and gas mining should be extended throughout the entire zone and expand protection from mining for other key coastal communities adjacent to reserves including at Kangaroo Island (Western Kangaroo Island reserve), Esperance (the SW Corner and Eastern Recherche reserves), Peaceful Bay (SW Corner reserve) and Perth (Perth Canyon reserve)

2 - No reduction in coral reef protection in the Coral Sea Marine Reserve – in particular around Marion, Osprey, and Bougainville Reefs.

3 - No reduction in total area that is highly protected (IUCN I & II) – in fact, this should be increased in line with global targets.

4 - No expansion of trawling and long-lining in the Coral Sea marine reserve

5 - Improved protection for blue whale foraging grounds around the Perth Canyons in the South West Marine Reserve.

6 - Better protection for Rowley Shoals and its surrounds, including removal of oil and gas mining permissions and no new trawl-fishing access.

7 - Increase the fully protected areas in the North West, including around Adele Island, the Northern Kimberley and Ningaloo Reef.

8 - Keep the fully protected area at Middleton Reef near Lord Howe Island Include new highly protected areas in the Temperate East as per CSIRO recommendations.

9 - No expansion of trawling and gill-netting within the North marine region's protected areas.

10 – Create new highly protected areas over the Timor Canyons, and in the Arnhem and Joseph Bonaparte Gulf protected areas.

To focus specifically on our own north coast off-shore marine reserves, taking note of the IUCN's recommendations at the World Parks Congress in 2014 in Sydney, we also make the following points and recommendations:

- Including only 0.005% of the continental shelf and slope in the Temperate East Marine Region in no-take Marine National Parks is pathetic when the IUCN World Parks Congress recommended that at least 30% should be protected.

- All of the Commonwealth Marine Reserves on the continental shelf and slope in the Temperate East Marine Region need to be included in no-take Marine National Parks as this is still only 5% of the slope and shelf.
- Trawling is the most destructive fishing practice and must be excluded from all marine reserves as it is incompatible with their goals and objectives.
- The Tasmanian Seamounts are underwater islands in the Abyssal depths with unique species assemblages about which we still know little, a precautionary approach demands that fishing be excluded from these areas.
- It is recognised that the marine reserves in the Temperate East Marine Region are the poorest reserved in Australia and need to be expanded. It is requested that within the first review period investigations be undertaken into expanding the reserves in the Temperate East, including:
 - * Extending the Central Eastern Coastal Marine Reserve (CMR) westwards to join the Solitary Islands CMR
 - * Creating a Marine National Park Zone extending eastwards from state waters along the southern border of the Hunter CMR.
 - * Creating the proposed Tweed-Byron CMR.

We thank the Minister for this opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to marine protection in Australia, and trust our comments will receive favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary