



CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

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SUBMISSION

to

Independent Scientific Audit of Marine Parks in NSW.

The Terms of Reference of the independent scientific audit are:

1. Review the domestic and international commitments to conserving marine biodiversity, current actions for meeting these commitments, and the effectiveness of these actions;
2. review the scientific data provided to the Panel by NSW Department of Primary Industries and the Office of Environment and Heritage;
3. review the degree to which all threats to the varying types of marine environments have been properly identified and prioritised. The Panel will then consider the degree to which the marine parks process is anticipated to address each significant threat.
4. review the specific science relating to the effectiveness of marine parks in protecting different habitat types and recommend further action and/or alternative management approaches if necessary;
5. recommend ways to increase the cost-effectiveness of marine park zoning arrangements;
6. recommend ways to improve inclusion of social and economic impacts into decision-making on marine parks, in particular the design and management of marine parks;
7. identify and recommend ways to address the most significant information gaps hindering robust, evidence-based decision-making on marine parks;
8. make recommendations on how all current potential threats to the marine environment could be effectively addressed and which bodies or agencies would be most appropriate to address them; and
9. make other recommendations as appropriate, related to achieving better management of the NSW marine environment.

The Submission had to be made “on line” and responses allowed only on the 9 terms of reference. Below is the Clarence Environment Centre's comments to the Audit.

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary

1. As a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Australia has an obligation to provide a representative system of marine protected areas, and to develop guidelines for the selection, establishment and management of those areas. The subsequent ANZECC “Guidelines for Establishing the National Representative System for Marine Protected Areas” were developed in 1998, thus there is an obligation for the NSW Government to provide a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of marine parks.

It is our understanding that the peak environment group in NSW, the Nature Conservation Council, has compiled an impressive list of more than 1000 peer reviewed papers, none of which concluded that marine parks did not function effectively as conservation tools. At the same time, we understand there is not a single peer reviewed paper indicating that marine parks are ineffectual.

The 'clarion call' from vested interests that there is no available science, or that which is available is, as was infamously referred to as “voodoo science” by one National Party parliamentarian, is clearly nonsensical, and an insult to all scientists involved.

The Australian Marine Sciences Association has clearly identified that marine parks, and associated sanctuary zones, are an essential management tool for conserving marine biodiversity, and NSW must have a reserve system that comprehensively represent the marine and estuarine biodiversity of each bioregion, and be large enough to meet their conservation objectives.

At the same time scientists, Dr Jon Nevill and Professor Hugh Possingham wrote to the Prime Minister and Leader of the Federal Opposition, co-signed by 142 marine scientists, calling for the establishment of networks of marine protected areas which would play a vital role in protecting marine ecosystems, and meet their long-standing international obligations.

There is no denying that the world's fisheries are in trouble, with some northern hemisphere fish species, including Salmon, Herring and Pilchards, declining to a point where they are never likely to recover. The science has been done, and overwhelmingly finds that if the world community wishes any sustainable fishing industry to survive into the future, areas have to be set aside and protected as breeding grounds.

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4. When determining the optimal siting for marine parks and refuge areas, it is critical that all marine ecosystems are protected, otherwise some marine species will be excluded for the protection marine parks provide. Therefore, a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative reserve system must be established.

However, as the recommended development of marine reserves in NSW waters has now been interrupted, certain habitat types and bioregions found within NSW are now severely underrepresented.

For example, a report (Winn 2009, pp.80-101) details the fact that only 0.5% of total 'wave dominated estuary ecosystems' (IUCN Category Ia Sanctuary Zones) are currently represented in NSW marine parks. As well 'Tide-dominated, drowned river valleys' are almost entirely unrepresented in the marine reserve system of the Hawkesbury shelf, one of only three bioregions in which these ecosystems occur. Eight of the eleven seagrass community types that have been identified and mapped in NSW are poorly represented in marine sanctuaries, with less than 6% of the mapped area protected. No 'Brackish Lake' communities are protected in the Tweed-Moreton bioregion, one of only two bioregions in which they occur. Only 3% of beach habitats, and less than 5% of mid-depth (20-60m) ocean ecosystems are protected.

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6. It is our observation, that we have been involved in the Marine Parks issue for years. Since 2007, the Clarence Environment Centre has responded to calls for input into the marine park debate. We have written letters, signed petitions, and compiled submissions, so the suggestion that the Coalition Government's reversal of previous marine park amendments was based on the premise that there was inadequate consultation clearly lacks support.

However, there was certainly no consultation when those reversals were made, and they were made before any review of the science, that supported the marine park extensions in the first instance, was undertaken.

That decision placed a number of threatened species, in particular the critically endangered Grey Nurse Shark, under immediate threat from activities that are known to be contributing to their declining numbers.

It is our belief therefore, that consultation, and plain common sense, rather than political expediency, should have taken precedence, and something that should never happen again.

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8. Over the past decade, the Clarence Environment Centre has continually tried to bring to the attention of government a plethora of pollution issues that directly impact on marine life. These include:

- i. Uncontrolled pesticide use in the timber plantations, including the use of some chemicals such as Atrazine, that are known to have negative environmental impacts which has led to its being banned in some overseas countries.
- ii. The logging of unmapped drainage lines in state forests and elsewhere, which contributes to erosion and siltation.
- iii. Illegal land clearing that also leads to erosion.
- iv. Clear-felling of plantations by Forests NSW, again with no erosion control in place.
- v. Poor sewerage treatment across the board.
- vi. Poor boat maintenance (all sea-going vessels), and adherence with maritime protocols.
- vii. Littering and illegal rubbish dumping.
- ix. Toxic run-off from mining activities.
- x. A failure to enforce the fencing off of livestock from streams and rivers.

It is critical that these issues be addressed, and adequate funding made available to force compliance. However, suggestions that addressing these predominately land-based issues should be funded at the expense of marine parks should not be contemplated, and are motivated by the purely selfish rapacity of a minority who believe they have an inalienable, unrestricted, right to fish as much as they want, when and where they want.

As already stated, fish stocks are in decline worldwide, and Australia is not immune to the threat of over-fishing, with limits (numbers or seasons) already placed on numerous species. These limits however, are largely ignored and virtually unenforcible, meaning that sufficient marine areas, representing the full range of ecosystems, must be protected from fishing to allow uninhibited breeding to occur.

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