

# **Consensus Statement on Marine Protected Areas in South Australia**

## **Scientists support marine park sanctuaries**

Nine of Australia's leading marine scientists and marine planners say they "strongly support" the South Australian Government's commitment to develop marine parks, or marine protected areas (MPAs), which feature "adequate" no-take sanctuary zones.

Among the key threats to Australia's marine biodiversity, the scientists identify climate change, invasive species and pest populations, habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, pollution and over-harvesting of species.

Calling for improved conservation efforts in Australia's seas and estuaries, the marine experts say: "MPAs should be used as a precautionary tool to assist with conserving biodiversity, and not delayed because of insufficient scientific knowledge."

Developing a connected network of MPAs, which includes ecosystems which are representative of Australia's marine environments, is a fundamental step in restoring and maintaining ecosystem resilience, they say.

"There is abundant evidence that marine protected areas have important effects on marine ecosystems, in particular, conserving biodiversity."

The marine scientists go on to "strongly support the inclusion within the proposed [South Australian] MPA network of 'no-take' sanctuary zones of adequate size.

"Without the inclusion of regional sanctuary zones, the MPA network cannot be regarded as comprehensive as it will lack ecological community types affected by fishing.

"It will also lack a scientific reference function for rigorously assessing ecological impacts of fishing, a necessity for informed management during a period when marine communities are changing in response to changing climate.

"Marine protected areas that include areas closed to fishing should be embraced as an important tool for marine management that needs to complement ... other strategies," say the nine scientists.

## **The Consensus Statement**

As Australian marine scientists and planners with experience researching our oceans extending over decades, we the undersigned see a need for improved conservation efforts in our seas and estuaries.

There is abundant evidence from overseas and within Australia that marine protected areas (MPAs) have important effects on marine ecosystems, in particular for conserving biodiversity. MPAs that include areas closed to fishing should be embraced as an important tool for marine management that needs to complement, and be complemented by, other strategies.

Furthermore, MPAs should be used as a precautionary tool to assist with conserving biodiversity and not delayed on the basis of insufficient scientific knowledge.

Biological diversity is fundamental to healthy and resilient ecosystems. Key threats to Australia's marine biodiversity include:

- Climate change;
- Invasive species and pest populations;
- Habitat loss and habitat fragmentation;
- Harvesting components of ecological systems that possess a habitat-forming or habitat-modifying role;
- Over-harvesting of species; and
- Pollution.

All of those processes can influence the integrity of our ecological systems. As recognised by ANZECC, developing a connected network of MPAs that includes all of the types of ecosystems that characterise Australia's marine environments in a representative way is a fundamental step in restoring and/or maintaining ecosystem resilience. Such a network of MPAs will help ensure our natural environments are able to retain their biodiversity values and ecological functions in the face of growing pressures.

We therefore strongly support the commitment by the State Government of South Australia to develop MPAs based on sound scientific principles as that State's contribution to the National Representative System of MPAs.

We also strongly support the inclusion within the proposed MPA network of 'no-take' sanctuary zones of adequate size. Without the inclusion of regional sanctuary zones, the MPA network cannot be regarded as comprehensive as it will lack ecological community types affected by fishing. It will also lack a scientific reference function for rigorously assessing ecological impacts of fishing, a necessity for informed management during a period when marine communities are changing in response to changing climate.

This consensus statement for SA MPAs is consistent with the scientists' consensus statement under development for national-scale issues of MPA design (<http://www.uq.edu.au/ecology/index.html?page=102441>)

(Note that the content of this consensus statement expresses the opinions of the signatories and not necessarily of their affiliated organisations)

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