



Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

24th March 2010

To whom it may concern,

Re: Senate inquiry on Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Bioregional Plans) Bill 2011

The Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) is the leading voice for the protection of Australia's ocean wildlife. We are an independent charity staffed by scientists, educators and advocates with over 20,000 supporters. We have defended Australia's oceans for over forty years.

AMCS believes the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Bioregional Plans) Bill 2011* proposes an unnecessary addition to the marine bioregional planning process – a process that has enjoyed a long history of bipartisan support. There are already effective checks and balances built into the process under the existing legislation, including review in Parliament. AMCS is not convinced why further parliamentary oversight or scrutiny is required.

The marine bioregional planning process also already provides for significant periods of public consultation in response to the thorough scientific investigation, careful socio-economic analysis and extensive stakeholder engagement on which the plans are based. Further parliamentary scrutiny would not necessarily enable further public consultation. In fact it may create increased uncertainty around the process for industry, coastal communities, conservation groups and the public.

Instead, the Bill will add unnecessary bureaucracy and delay to the implementation of much needed marine planning in this country. This will hinder Australia's ability to meet its international commitments to develop a National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas in our seas by 2012. The additional parliamentary scrutiny proposed by this Bill will only result in failure to meet these international commitments.

AMCS disagrees with the conclusion in the Explanatory Memorandum that there are no financial impacts of the Bill. Additional parliamentary review would lead to an increase in the financial costs of marine bioregional planning. This will further reduce the effectiveness of efforts to improve the protection and management of Australia's marine environment through this process. The current cost of the program is \$8m a

Australian Marine Conservation Society

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year. These funds should be spent on implementation of the plans, not further delays in their design.

AMCS believes marine reserves are a best practice management tool to protect our marine environment and a biodiversity conservation tool that is proven worldwide, with benefits strongly demonstrated by science. We believe this Bill seeks only to interfere with progress towards the delivery of the marine bioregional plans, including a network of marine reserves, for political purposes. It does not improve outcomes for the marine environment nor for the communities and industries that depend on the health of our seas and its resources.

AMCS does not, therefore, support the amendment to the EPBC Act proposed by this Bill. AMCS believes it has not been demonstrated how the amendment will improve the marine planning process nor the protection of Australia's marine environment. Instead, it appears this amendment seeks only to add a politicized final stage of the marine planning process despite a long history of bipartisan support.

Yours sincerely

Darren Kindleysides
Director, Australian Marine Conservation Society

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