

SUBMISSION NO. 21
Inquiry into the Role of Science
for Fisheries and Aquaculture

Australian Marine Alliance

Canberra
Sydney
South Australia
Victoria
Brisbane



*Proudly supporting the Australian
commercial and recreational sectors
simultaneously*

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by:

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The Hon Dick Adams MP
Chair
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House Canberra 2600

Dear Mr Adams

Inclusion of the Marine Bio-Regional Planning Process in upcoming inquiry

As you would be aware the Australian Marine Alliance (AMA) is one of Australia's largest and fastest growing national peak representative bodies for the commercial, recreational, outboard, marine, aqua culture and seafood sectors. Together the AMA represents and supports the following:

Aqua Culture Companies
Fish wholesalers
Seafood consumer groups
Boat manufacturers;
Dealers, Brokers and Syndicators;
Marina operators and developers;
User groups such as boating and fishing clubs;
Marine licensing trainers and educators;
Recreational & commercial fishers;
Marine tourism operators and event organizers;
Professional service providers.

The key focus of the AMA is to bridge the relationship between the recreational and commercial / professional sectors in Australia. This is immensely important if we are to develop sound policy over the longer term that is in the national interest in terms of resource and food security, access, industry development and growth, community engagement and importantly the protection of marine bio-diversity.

We do however have some very serious concerns with how the current Government is developing marine, fisheries and environmental policy in and around the Marine Bio-Regional Planning Process (MBPP). We believe the issue is so serious that the upcoming committee inquiry, that you will chair, should dedicate a significant amount of time to the matter. In fact we would implore the committee to incorporate the MBPP within it's terms of reference. More importantly, while the committee addresses and deliberates on concerns and associated recommendations, we would strongly urge that the Government be asked to place on hold any future marine / bio-regional declarations and or announcements.

At this stage we are gathering perhaps the largest cross-sector amalgamation of industry groups in Australia's history to bring this issue to the Government's attention. Alliances are being formed to address concerns in and around the MBPP that have never been formed before. In our view the MBPP has deteriorated so badly that it should be treated as a policy or issue of national significance.

Policy Context

Before stating our case in detail it is important to note that industry strongly supports the MBPP as initially developed. The MBPP framework and stated objectives at the outset are in fact not questioned. The South East Bio-Region is a perfect example of industry, community, science and Government working together. We can together in our view deliver both strong marine conservation measures whilst providing certainty and growth to industry and communities. The MBPP though has lost its way and is today as far removed from a fair scientific driven process as one can imagine. The influence of powerful, cashed-up and aggressive USA based environmental interests has no doubt developed a scenario where wedge politics is deemed an acceptable part of the policy space. Policy should not in our view be determined by the size of your bank balance and ability to corral the naive masses, but rather determined by what's in the national interest.

Concerns with the Marine Bio-regional Planning Process (MBPP) that warrant urgent attention include the following:

Structural Concerns

- The Stake Holder Advisory Group (SAG) – a group established to facilitate dialogue between industry and Federal Department of Environment - was decommissioned with no prior warning or consultation. This is evidenced by the fact that the SAG has not met since March 2010;
- The scientific reference group – a reference group that liaised effectively between Government and industry on scientific issues on the South East Bio-Region- was decommissioned even though it was widely viewed by industry as a resounding success and an effective conduit to raise and address scientific issues;
- The Federal Minister Peter Garrett engaged ANU academics to draft the so called 'Maximus report' to advise on displaced activity and associated compensation measures for displaced effort. Little if any input from industry occurred. Whilst the report reinforced that the Commonwealth had no obligation to pay compensation to key recreational sectors, industries and /or communities affected by large scale marine closures, the report was undertaken some 3 years prior to final maps being agreed upon and the true impact of decisions determined;
- The MBPP has unfortunately been plagued by so called 'confidential maps' and private meetings. Industry leaders are asked to shade in areas where they want access to remain even though the Minister argues that the process is 'scientifically driven', and;
- Final maps have just been issued and leaders provided 40 minutes to look over maps and comment accordingly. Many have not been privy to prior discussions and in most instances the 40 min briefing is consumed by Departmental officials leaving industry bewildered as the Minister walks out claiming consultation has occurred, When industry leaders ask if they can take the maps back to constituents for comment the answer is no.

Socio-Economic Assessment

- Industry statistics released this week indicate that some 28 recreational marine dealers have closed in South East Queensland alone in the last 4 years. The level of uncertainty in and around marine park planning is a major factor;
- Fishing harbours like Batemans Bay were once home to dozens of fishing boats - not one remains today;
- Two weeks ago the largest recreational marine dealer in QLD closed - Cunningham Marine;
- One of WA's largest recreational marine dealers - Challenger Marine – has also closed;
- Sales and overall turnover throughout the outboard engine sector is down by a minimum of 28 -35%;
- Some Australian boat manufacturers do not have a single new order on their books for this year alone;
- Output for other Australian boat manufacturers has declined from 15,500 units to around 6,000 or less;
- ABARE was recently commissioned by the Government to undertake an economic and social assessment of the Coral Sea decision in North Queensland.

Science

- The MBPP was designed to be a science driven process and yet according to key marine scientists the process is currently so flawed that it is impossible to deliver the very stated environmental outcomes espoused by the Government, Department and environmental groups;
- There is still not an effective and comprehensive Management Plan in place for the South East Bio-Region - established in 2007 - and yet industry is being asked to support additional large scale marine closures in 5 additional bio-regions;
- In fact, Minister Burke's own Departmental website states that: "A management plan for the south-east marine reserve network is being developed";
- Terrestrial paradigms, such as potential benefits of area closures in National Parks, should not be critically transported into marine environments as is occurring under the MBPP;
- The Coral Sea Proposal has not been preceded by the necessary and appropriate risk assessment. That is, the suite of threats to the conservation of the Coral Sea region has not been adequately identified and management prioritized in proportion to the magnitude of the threat;
- The strategy of closing areas and banning fishing is not based on rigorous scientific analysis of what biodiversity is actually threatened;
- The AMA rejects the assumption that Special Purpose Zones (SPZs) are an adequate 'trade-off' for appropriate marine conservation on the basis that fishing has not been identified as a serious or irreversible threat of environmental damage in any bio-region. In fact fishing is not an irreversible threat anywhere in Australia;
- The extreme restrictions by area and gear type that are to be imposed on commercial fishing will effectively eliminate the efficient harvest of most forms of seafood from the entire Australian Coral Sea and other bio-regions. No justification for this in terms of biodiversity conservation is given;
- Of great concern to us is the concentration of effort outside the Coral Sea that will exacerbate competition between commercial and recreational fishers and possibly result in 'localised depletion' to at least some extent in all other areas;
- 27 species of Australia's terrestrial mammals are already extinct. In stark contrast no Australian marine species has ever been fished to extinction and yet USA based environmental groups fund large bill boards at the Canberra airport asking the Prime Minister (via a whale) to Save the Coral Sea. This same group also funds environmental organisations to camp out at the Big Day Out concerts and ask young revelers to sign a petition to save Barry the Boofhead Wrasse and Nemo the Clown Fish by closing the Coral Sea. What they omit to tell young Australians is that Australian fishers do not catch whales and Barry and Nemo are already protected species, and;
- Contrary to the claims by advocates of 'sanctuary' zones areas closed to fishing do not provide benefits outside those areas to fish stocks that are already well managed.

Food security and foreign policy concerns

- Australia must not ignore the impact of closing large marine areas to fishing on Australia's food security;
- The Coral Sea proposal will effectively close 1 million square kilometres of Australian marine environment and yet Australia imports in excess of 70% of our seafood requirement. No solution to this problem is given by the Government;
- Unfortunately, the key issue of how to compensate Australian seafood consumers, particularly future generations of them, is completely neglected. Australia has no greater food security issue than that which relates to the future sustainable supply of seafood;
- Currently Australia imports in excess of 70% of our seafood requirement – policy makers have no solution to this issue except of course to close large areas of marine environment to extractive effort;
- For some reason environmental fringe groups are happy for Australian's to eat seafood from countries where fisheries management practices are poor and yet Australia is considered a world leader;
- If Minister Burke closes the Coral Sea - or large areas therein - we effectively abdicate our responsibility to shape and determine international marine, fisheries and environmental policy throughout the entire South Western Pacific;

- If Australia fails to exploit the Coral Sea in a sustainable way for our own food security purposes, the Indonesians, Americans, Taiwanese and Chinese will do so as they are projected to catch in-excess of 1 000 000 tonnes of tuna in the PNG EEZ this year alone – this is almost five times Australia’s total capture of fish across all species, and;

Summary

Industry will always support decisions based on strong independently peer reviewed science, but unfortunately the MBPP has been high jacked by the environmental agenda and treated as a political football for political currency. The MBPP is structurally flawed and needs urgent review. Industry will not and cannot support the current process. Structural concerns must be rectified and the process made more transparent. The MBPP must be a science driven process where access is monitored and fisheries management practices enforced.

The challenges associated with establishing a marine protection system for the Coral Sea (and other areas) is significant. These waters are vast, not well understood, and have many complex social, economic and environmental interdependencies. It is essential therefore that the processes associated with the development and implementation of this policy context is robust, transparent, evidence based where possible and deliver sustainable outcomes across process and content contexts.

We sincerely thank you for your time Mr. Adams and ask in the strongest of possible terms that your Committee thoroughly address the MBPP issue and ask the Government to place on hold any immediate decisions or declarations until the Committee has deliberated and handed down it’s report.

Kind regards
 Dean Logan
 Chief Executive
 Australian Marine Alliance

Partners



Industry Programs / Events

