

Dear Director of National Parks,

SUBMISSION ON THE DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR AUSTRALIA'S NETWORK OF MARINE PARKS IN FEDERAL WATERS

As former Chiefs of the Royal Australian Navy, we write to express our deep concerns about the significant reduction in high level IUCNII (National Park / no-take / green zone) protection in the newly released draft management plans for of Australia's National Network of Commonwealth Marine Parks.

The downgrading of 40 million hectares of high level green zones (almost 50% of the green zones) is an area equivalent to revoking half of Australia's national parks on land, and is unprecedented globally.

More than half of the green zones in the Coral Sea Marine Park – Australia's largest marine park in one of the most historically and ecologically iconic areas of the world – are proposed to be revoked. Further, only 7 of the over 40 Coral Sea reefs (many of which are unique in the world) would be left with any green zone protection.

Inexplicably, these reductions far exceed those proposed by the Government's own independent Review, released last year.

We spent our entire professional lives thinking about the role of the sea in Australia's future. Our oceans and coastline are of great importance to Australian identity, prosperity, lifestyle and security. The sea is a significant resource; it is the nation's major highway for trade, a magnet for recreation and tourism, and is Australia's last line of defence and border protection.

However, there is a lot more to the sea than science, commerce and national defence. Our oceans and marine life are critical to our collective future as responsible citizens.

We first became actively involved in the development of a long-term secure system of protection for Australia's oceans, particularly the Coral Sea, in 2008. A decade earlier, Prime Minister John Howard had moved Australia's marine protection along in earnest with the development of the ground-breaking *Oceans Policy*, establishing the policy foundations for securing Australia's oceans with the world's first comprehensive, science based system of protection.

The Coral Sea holds a special place as part of Australia's oceanic boundary. It lies adjacent and seaward of the Great Barrier Reef, and has a significant continuous impact on the health of the Reef and the Central Western Pacific oceanic systems. Its ecology, oceanic reefs, rich marine life and diversity of habitats make it a priceless treasure for Australians and those whose shores it reaches. Importantly, scientific study tells us that the Coral Sea is one of perhaps as few as five ocean areas throughout the world that, because of a coincidence of conditions, acts as a haven for large fish species. In turn, these havens have a significant impact on the size of fish stocks in adjacent sea areas, thereby multiplying its importance as a global source of marine life.

In the Second World War, Australia's fortunes were influenced greatly by the outcome of the Battle of the Coral Sea, the first major allied victory in the war of the Pacific, and an event that marked a realignment of Australia's international relationships. 2017 marks the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea, so it is fitting that this year the Australian Government finalises the management arrangements for the Coral Sea Marine Reserve, being simultaneously a symbolic and practical act which would demonstrate ongoing resolve in recognising its importance to the nation.

However, despite its ecological importance in a broader region beset by overuse and decline, the Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Park's protective zoning is suffering from a war of attrition, made possible by the almost five year delay in its finalisation. There is a need for decisive action.

An endeavour such as this must be evidence based to be justified and effective. In this regard, the science of marine reserves with adequate high level no-take protection is well established, as evidenced by the outcomes of the Howard Government's rezoning of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in 2004.

We believe that the decisions made this year on the Coral Sea and the other unique and important environments that the National Network of Commonwealth Marine Parks is charged with protecting, will determine the future of Australia's oceans, and the people, plants and animals that depend on them.

We reject the proposals to significantly reduce the level of protection in the Coral Sea Marine Park and the broader Network, and urge the Government to take every advantage of the opportunity which now exists to make a substantive and positive difference for the future by fully restoring the high level IUCNII protection.

Sincerely

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