

13th September 2017

Dear Director of National Parks,

Concern about proposed reduction in protection for Geographe Commonwealth Marine Park

As local Geographe Bay businesses whose livelihoods depend on tourism, we are deeply concerned about the Turnbull Government's draft plans for Geographe Marine Park which propose to downgrade the two small but important marine sanctuaries (National Park / IUCN II zones) to a point where all the additional benefits that sanctuaries could provide would be lost.

Marine parks with sanctuaries at their core are crucial for the health of our marine life, and the health of our South West community, businesses, regional economy, as well as our reputation as an iconic nature tourism destination. That's why thousands of members of the local community and 200 local businesses have been so vocal throughout the development and then review of our federal Marine Parks to ensure the best possible protection is in place in the South West.

The removal of these sanctuaries makes no sense and goes against the science recommendations from the Government's own Review of Geographe Marine Park*. Acknowledging the level of consultation, the science evidence and the 'intense community interest', the Review recommended retaining both sanctuaries, while reconfiguring them slightly to better align with immediately adjacent sanctuaries in the Ngari Capes Marine Park established by the Barnett Government, and to improve ease of navigation for fishers. These two sanctuaries would take up only about 4% of the Geographe Marine Park – a balanced approach that would deliver improved outcomes for everyone.

It's important that great fishing will be on offer. We know that some of WA's most revered recreational fishing destinations have long been marine parks protected with sanctuaries, including Shark Bay, Ningaloo reef, The Abrolhos islands, Rowley Shoals, and Rottnest Island. Thousands of fishers from the South West make fishing trips to these areas every year. Thinking of these places gives us great confidence for a bright future for a Geographe Bay also protected with these small sanctuaries.

A major study published by WA Fisheries department researchers in 2017 found that about 70% of fishers support sanctuaries in Geographe Bay[1] as part of the adjacent Capes marine park, including zones directly adjacent to those proposed in the federal waters marine park.

The sanctuaries in Geographe Bay are of vital importance for a range of environmental reasons, as described by the Government's own Review of Geographe Marine Park, but stand out for their benefit to the residents of the southwest. They are the only zones within the entire CMR network that are in a relatively sheltered environment, near significant population centres, and shallow enough to be safely dived. The opportunities they would create for tourism, recreation, education and research are obvious and well documented in the Review reports.

All of these opportunities would be foregone if the sanctuaries (National Park Zones / IUCNII) were replaced by Habitat Protection Zones (HPZ), which allows recreational fishing but also all the major commercial fishing methods, including midwater trawling and commercial wetline fishing, that currently take place in the zones. PO Box 1178, Bunbury WA 6231 Ph: 08 9791 3088 Fax: 08 9791 3420 Email: gm@dolphindiscovery.com.au Website: www.dolphindiscovery.com.au

The Government's own Review recommends HPZ only where socio-economic factors preclude sanctuary protection. It's clear from overwhelming local business support (200 businesses signed the Southwest Business Statement for Sanctuaries in 2015) and a clear majority support for marine parks from local recreational fishers [1], that the perceived socio-economic advantage in the southwest community is with sanctuaries in place, not without them. We urge the Turnbull Government to work with us to restore our important Geographe Bay sanctuaries so the South West community can reap the benefits. Please count this as our submission into the public consultation on the draft management plans for Geographe Marine Park.

Yours sincerely,

Phil Coulthard – Dolphin Discovery Centre

Paul Cross and Kirsty Alexander – Naturaliste Charters

Kurt Hanould – A B Sea Charters

Tracee Pickersgill – Cape Dive

Alecia Macdonald – Dive Shed

Tiffany and Torry Goodall – Coastal Water Dive

**Key findings from the Commonwealth Marine Reserves review 2016:*

“New information about Geographe Commonwealth Marine Reserve confirms that it contains important habitat and reveals that its seagrass beds extend further and deeper than previously thought. Protection of these extensive and potentially important seagrass beds extents should be maintained or improved.”

P147, Commonwealth Marine Reserve Review Expert Science Panel report

“The Bioregional Advisory Panel noted the intense community interest in the outcome of the review, specifically in relation to perceived conservation needs, including greater protection for migrating cetaceans, the impacts of demersal fishing on sensitive benthic habitats such as seagrass beds, and the impacts of demersal fishing on sensitive benthic habitats such as seagrass beds, and the impacts of commercial fishing on key recreational species such as dhufish, grouper and snapper ... Given the intensity of use of the CMR for recreation and some commercial harvesting, and the scientific interest and activity in the CMR, two modestly sized MNPZs offer the opportunity for replicated reference sites for future studies.”

P114, Commonwealth Marine Reserves Review Bioregional Advisory Panel report

¹ Kirrily Hastings, Karina L Ryan, Differences in perception of a newly created Marine Park in south-west Western Australia by boat-based recreational fishers and the broader community, Marine Policy, Volume 77, 2017, Pages 65-77