

Good morning

I understand that The Australian Government is considering cutting the area of ocean Australia protects **by 50%. This is madness!**

These changes will make Australia the world leader in winding back protection for the oceans, which is the exact opposite of what we need to be doing right now. As I understand it, in the Coral Sea alone, the area placed in Marine National Parks will be halved. The same goes for Marion Reef. Even Osprey Reef, one of the top dive sites in the world will have half its area removed from the Marine National Park. Shark and Vema Reefs will be taken out of the Marine National Park area altogether. No Government has ever taken this many hectares out of conservation before. This is the largest backward step in areas under conservation in history, and being done in the country which has some of the most extensive, diverse and important marine habitats in the world.

I worked for many years as a dive instructor and photographer in the tourism industry on the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). Most of the visitors I dealt with everyday came to the Queensland coast from all over the world specifically to see the GBR with the belief that it was the world's biggest, healthiest and most pristine coral environment. Now, even in those days, that was not entirely true. The GBR was already showing the severe adverse impacts of human activity on the adjacent land. Water quality was deteriorating, Crown of Thorns Starfish (COTS) population explosions were becoming more common and coral bleaching was occurring during increasingly hot summers. But still the GBR was worth visiting for both serious divers and casual snorkelers. Although I no longer work in Tourism, I do still live, sail, dive and snorkel on the GBR, so I am well aware of the condition it is in today. The picture is not good! In my own region, the Whitsundays, on top of the existing impacts mentioned above, we have had the deleterious effects of large cyclones (such as Debbie earlier on this year and Ului in 2010) and the insidious impact of just too many visitors and too much fishing. **In truth I could no longer recommend fellow serious divers and underwater photographers to visit the GBR anymore. They could spend their money more wisely elsewhere in the world.**

The GBR is in a bad way, but it isn't dead yet. There is the possibility of recovery, but for the Australian Government to massively reduce the area of our oceans which is protected in Marine Reserves makes it much less likely that this can occur. Right now we need the strongest possible protection against all possible impacts on the marine environment, not just land based, but also all forms of extractive activities such as fishing, oil and gas exploration and extraction, dredging and mineral recovery. This protection needs to be legislated and supported by all levels of Government in this country. The authorities which administer our oceans and marine reserves need to be properly funded and given powers and resources to enforce the regulations.

The tourism industry in Queensland is worth millions and provides a lot of jobs in areas where there wouldn't be many without it. I'm sure that the same applies to other sections of the Australian

coastline - I'm thinking here of northern WA and Southern NSW as well as the Tasmanian East coast. It's expensive to travel to Australia, we're a long way from most places. The motivation for tourists to come here needs to be strong and that's dependent on the impression people have of what they will see and be able to experience when they get here. **For the Australian Government to implement measures which will make it less likely that the marine environments which support tourism are in a healthy condition in the future is simply ridiculous - how much money will it cost the taxpayer when these industries collapse as the word gets out that Australian seas are a desert and not worth travelling half way round the world to see.**

I urge the Government to immediately drop plans to reduce the area of our surrounding oceans which we protect in marine reserves. Instead I want to see the years of research and consultation which went into the plans formulated by the Labor government in 2012 fully enacted in legislation and regularly reviewed with a view to extending marine reserves even further in the future.

**Regards**

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