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SUBMISSION TO THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT
REVIEW OF COMMONWEALTH MARINE PROTECTED AREAS, 2017

Rather than reduce the size of fully protected marine zones, a massive expansion is needed, and this expansion needs to take place through a framework of systematic conservation planning.

I am a retired conservation scientist. I make the above comment bearing in mind decades of scientific research which has demonstrated that, globally and in Australia, marine ecosystems are in serious decline, along with the fisheries which depend on these ecosystems. The two most important factors driving this decline are overfishing and increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels (see references below).

The scientific value of marine protected areas has been established.
http://www.onlyoneplanet.com/AMSA_MPA_PositionPaper2008.pdf

Around the globe, most nations are committed to the protection of biodiversity, but few nations are taking effective action. In the marine environment, *No Take Areas (NTAs) are the single most important tool in national conservation programs*. Prior to 2015, although Australia had largely failed to action its marine commitments under international biodiversity conventions, nevertheless in its marine protected area program Australia was amongst the best in the world (largely because most other nations had taken very little action). Even though Australia's actions to 2015 fell short of its international commitments, since 2015 Australia is moving backwards, driven by short-sighted pressures from both recreational and commercial fishing interests. (See references below).

The importance of marine protected areas, and the importance of NTAs within MPA systems has been established:

http://www.onlyoneplanet.com/marineNotesOnNTA_targets.pdf

Some marine scientists hold the view that a dramatic reversal of marine conservation policy is needed to halt the worldwide decline of marine ecosystems. Instead of allowing fishing over most areas, the bulk of the marine environment should be placed under a "no take" management regime, with fishing only allowed in specific areas at specific times. I concur with this view. It has been argued that such a regime would, in the long term, both stem the tide of destruction, AND increase long term fisheries production, driven by increased populations of harvestable fish.

While recognising that this is unlikely to occur in the short term, Australia needs to immediately implement a systematic approach to the expansion of marine protected areas, including greatly increased NTAs.

http://www.onlyoneplanet.com/Marine_CEED_MarineReservesReview_statement-2015-McGowan-Possingham.pdf

In my view, AT LEAST 50% of every habitat type, in every marine bioregion, NEEDS TO BE PROTECTED BY NO TAKE ZONES.

I have argued in a book published in 2010 that Australian fisheries management has had a long history of failure, largely due to the ease with which fisheries interests can "capture" government management agencies. In that book I made specific recommendations for the immediate improvement of fisheries management, and

(unfortunately) my recommendations are as relevant today as they were in 2010. However, in the long term, the best solution to Australian fisheries management failures would be to create a new management regime BASED ON CONSERVATION, with fisheries regulation carried out and policed BY THIS CONSERVATION AGENCY.
http://www.onlyoneplanet.com/marineOverfishingUnderRegulation_6mmOffset_withCitaton.pdf

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