

To whom it may concern,

As young scientists, we are deeply troubled by the proposed changes to Australia's Marine Parks Network. The draft management plan released in July 2017 is a clear step backward for Australian environmental policy at a time when our oceans need protection more than ever before. This plan goes against published scientific research and ignores crucial marine conservation principles.

The World Parks Congress 2015 in Sydney stated a target of protecting at least 30% of each marine habitat in terms of both biodiversity and ecosystem services. Under the new plans, high level protection (IUCN II or higher) has been drastically reduced, with many IUCN II zones (green zones) being downgraded to IUCN IV (yellow zones). This effectively means that instead of encompassing entire ecosystems, the new zones will be small and centred around individual habitats. If the goal is to protect biodiversity and ecosystem services, we need ecosystem level protection.

Having carried out research in the regions most affected by the draft management plan – the North, North-west, South-west and Coral Sea regions – we have experienced and studied first-hand the incredible marine life found there. In particular, opening up areas such as Geographe Bay to midwater trawling and longlines is incomprehensible. It is not scientifically defensible to protect the seabed without protecting the fish. In Perth Canyon and Bremer Bay, protection has been expanded but pushed further offshore, decreasing the protection on the shelf and, in the case of Bremer Bay, accommodating a scallop trawling fishery within a marine park.

If this draft management plan is implemented, Australia will become the first nation in the world to reduce its protection of the oceans, when the majority of nations are focused on expanding marine parks in their waters. Australia is damaging its position as a world leader in ocean conservation; at a time when others such as New Zealand, the US and Russia are creating no-take marine reserves, Australia would be reducing ours by almost half.

We encourage Minister Frydenburg and the Australian government to take note of the resistance to the draft management plan, both from the public and the scientific community, and use this opportunity to put Australia at the forefront of marine conservation by expanding our green zones rather than reducing them.

Sincerely,

Sean van Elden – PhD Candidate

David Tickler – PhD Candidate

Louis Masarei – Laboratory Technician

Hanna Christ – Laboratory Technician

Chris Thompson – PhD Candidate