

Feedback on Draft Management Plan – Norfolk Commonwealth Marine Reserve

Thank you for the invitation for feedback on the draft management plan for Norfolk Commonwealth Marine Reserve, part of the Temperate East Commonwealth Marine Reserves Network. I have reviewed the draft management plan for the Norfolk Commonwealth Marine Reserve and do not believe that the proposed zoning adequately provides for the level of protection required for the biodiversity values of these high conservation marine environments, nor does the proposed zoning align with current local sustainable management of the surrounding areas which offers cultural, social, environmental and economic values to the people of Norfolk Island.

Coastal bays and inlets of Norfolk Island

The coastal bays and inlets surrounding Norfolk Island, in particular Emily Bay, Slaughter Bay, Cemetery Bay, Bumboras, Ball Bay and Anson Bay contain active coral reef systems and provides critical habitat and protection for marine life including the Green Turtle which is listed as vulnerable under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and the Booth's Pipe fish, of Norfolk Island and Lord Howe are the only known habitats for this species under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

'The inshore waters of Norfolk, Phillip and Nepean Islands support one of the southern-most coral assemblages in the world. The coral reef ecosystem at Norfolk is one of the few known examples of a transitional algae and coral assemblage (an unusual mix of tropical and temperate marine fauna and flora due to the alternating influence of

warm and cool currents at the Islands). These coral communities form part of a chain of reefs that may be essential in maintaining a supply of larvae dispersed from source reefs to the west, probably Lord Howe Island, Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs' (Extract from the Norfolk Island Natural Resource Management Plan, 2009).

A report conducted by Aurecon in 2011 noted a diverse range of marine species and although the diversity was low compared with Eastern Australia and New Caledonian reefs (due to Norfolk Island's extreme isolation) the mix of species was unique and that the island supported both endemic species and subtropical and Tasman Sea endemics.

The uses in the Emily Bay and Slaughter Bay areas include recreational uses such as nature watching, swimming and snorkelling and non-fishing related tourism. In addition to those uses, recreational fishing occurs in Bumboras, Ball Bay, Cemetery Bay and Anson Bay.

The proposed zoning of Multiple Use Zone within these areas does not provide the level of protection required to protect plants, animals and habitats. In addition, these areas hold economical value to the island as the protection of these areas supports the tourism markets that are attracted to the island.

It is recommended that the zoning of Emily Bay and Slaughter Bay are at least to the level of protection offered by Recreational Use Zone. This zoning allows for the continuation of the non-fishing recreational activities and non-fishing related tourism, by application, that currently exist within the areas, without allowing for any activities that may have a negative impact to the high values these areas contain.

In addition, it is recommended that the shallow water habitats and ecosystems surrounding Norfolk Island, such as Bumboras, Ball Bay, Cemetery Bay and Anson Bay, and Phillip Island and Nepean Island are offered a higher level of protection. It would be expected that these zones would be provided with at least a Habitat Protection Zone.

Surrounding waters of Norfolk Island

The surrounding waters of Norfolk Island are highly productive with good biodiversity of marine life and are important waters for migratory birds, protected humpback whale and even sightings and footage of a whale shark which is listed as vulnerable under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Given the island's remote location, reliance on a reliable source of fish for human consumption is critical. Current commercial fishing operations on Norfolk Island are sustainable and the catch is only to meet local demands. No trawler based fishing occurs from Norfolk Island within these waters. The zoning should not restrict these activities however offer tighter protection for large-scale commercial fishing operations or other high impact activities.

The proposed zoning of Multiple Use Zone does not provide the level of protection required to protect the biodiversity values of these areas, nor does it provide for the protection of the fish stock resource for Norfolk Island to remain sustainable.

It is recommended that the zoning of the surrounding waters of Norfolk Island are at least to the level of Habitat Protection Zone. It is noted that a special zone, Habitat Protection Zone (Lord Howe) has been created to tailor to

the protection needs of Lord Howe Island. It is requested that a special zoning be given for Norfolk Island to allow for the continuation of current sustainable operations from the island however excluding any activities that may cause detrimental impacts environmentally, socially or economically, to the island.

2012 the fishing association signed a MOU with AFMA to keep our Norfolk Island waters protected from trawlers, and put in place a voluntary ban on the Trumpeter when spawning, and data catch cards. Trawlers in the passage, even their bi-catch alone would deplete or fish stocks rapidly.

Summary

Given the current legislative arrangements that govern Norfolk Island and its surrounding waters, there is no state level coastal protection available therefore, the Commonwealth Marine Park is the only legislative framework that provides direction as to what can and cannot occur within surrounding waters of Norfolk Island. The zoning needs to support commercial shipping given that shipping is our primary access to goods due to Norfolk Island's isolation, and allow for the construction of a wharf on the western side of the island, if required in the future. However, certain commercial fishing operations and mining operations would not contribute to the economic growth, employment and social wellbeing of the Norfolk Island community.

Before the final decision is made on the appropriate zoning for the Norfolk Commonwealth Marine Reserve it is encouraged that further discussions occur with relevant stakeholders on the island. In particular, community

environmental groups, local fishermen and commercial operators to assist in determining the most appropriate zoning for the coastal bays and inlets and the surrounding waters of Norfolk Island.

I look forward to a higher level of protection for these high conservation areas.

Kym Buffett

Sent from my iPhone