

# Mackay Local Marine Advisory Committee

20 September 2017

Australian Marine Parks Management Planning Comments  
Department of the Environment and Energy  
Reply Paid 787

Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Sir / Madam

## **Invitation to Comment – Commonwealth Marine Park Management Plan Draft – Coral Sea Marine Park Reference – EM/015/00002**

The Mackay Local Marine Advisory Committee (MLMAC) comprises members from a range of stakeholder groups, including not-for-profits, the regional NRM group, recreational fishers, North Queensland Bulk Ports Corporation, and member groups of the citizen science alliance, amongst others. As a diverse group representing a range of regional industries, we recognise the important function of LMACs to provide advice on Marine Park management issues. Within this overarching agenda, the MLMAC considers the recently released Draft Marine Park Management Plan, specifically the Coral Sea Marine Park Plan to be of key importance to the future management arrangement of the GBR within our local region and offer this submission to highlight concerns on aspects of these changed regulations.

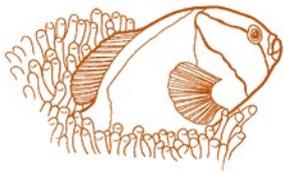
### **1. The reduction in Green Zones**

Green zones are the most important tool for the protection of marine wildlife with a variety of research supporting improved ecosystem health within these regions. The 9.3% reduction in their coverage in the Coral Sea will damage the environmental values of the Marine Park and fall below the internationally recognised threshold of 30% (O'Leary, et al. 2016). The MLMAC and our regional community is fortunate enough to have a Net Free Zone extending through Mackay. Members of our MLMAC have collected and reported on the data of these Net Free Zones since 2014, and have found that the exclusion of net fishing has hugely increased the abundance of fish present in the area, and iconic species such as turtles and dugongs are also returning to these areas. By converting areas from Green to Yellow zones, the Government will have the opposite effect on the Marine Park network. Furthermore, the significant reductions in Green Zone areas are directly in contradiction to the recommendations from the Ocean Science Council of Australia (OSCA) in their 2016 literature review; two of the four key findings being to:

- a) Prevent fishing, mining and other extractive activities on at least 30% of each marine habitat; and
- b) Improve representation of marine national parks in bioregions and key ecological features

The MLMAC consider that neither of these key findings are reflected in the Australian Government's proposed decision to reduce the levels of protection (if not the extent) of large areas of marine park area in the Coral Sea, leaving the smaller remaining no-take zones primarily in already little-utilised deep-sea ecosystems.

The best available estimates (scientific peer-reviewed articles) suggest that at least 30% of all marine ecosystems be fully protected from fishing and other resource extraction industries. For these reasons, the MLMAC is compelled to highlight significant concerns over the proposal to almost halve the extent of Green Zones throughout the Coral Sea Marine Park and, by extension, their reduction across all Marine Parks. This action will take Australia below the 30% highest protection threshold, and be in stark contradiction of our scientific and conservation communities, who have provided numerous and strong recommendations against this.



# Mackay Local Marine Advisory Committee

## 2. Increased commercial fishing

The dramatically increased Yellow Zones allow the use of pelagic longlines for commercial fishing operations. This practice has been shown to have significant impacts on non-target species and a 2010 report for the Australian Government (the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and Arts) found that these types of fishing lines are not neutral to conservation values, but rather constitutes an “unacceptable level of risk” for the environment, specifically for small cetaceans and some species of sharks (Shellack Pty Ltd 2010). It is estimated that (minimum) 160,000 seabirds are caught in longline fishing operations globally, with this catch rate unsustainable for many species (Anderson, et al. 2011). In fact, it has been estimated that more than 40% of longline marine catches are discarded back into the ocean as by-catch (Davies, et al. 2009).

By-catch losses are not restricted to longline fishing. Trawling and purse seine methods are also notorious for marine by-catch, including seabirds, turtles and marine mammals. It is likely that the by-catch associated with trawling is even more significant than longline fishing. Furthermore, demersal activities should be prohibited

Given these (and many more) scientific articles, publicly available statistics and Government reports, the MLMAC strongly recommends that industrial harvest methods including Purse Seine, trawling and pot trapping be excluded in at least 30% of our seascape (i.e. through the reinstatement of Green Zones or alteration of what activities are allowed in Yellow Zones) in line with the most reliable science.

### Summary

Conservation of marine environments is a global focus, and given Australia’s iconic marine environments, we should ensure regulation within our regions is maintained at the forefront of best practice as guided by world-leading science. The Government’s Draft Management Plans appears to provide an inadequate balance between conservation and economic priorities; priorities which appear to offer only marginal commercial fishing benefits as compared to the significant proposed conservation losses. This is despite conservation being the core reason behind the marine reserves.

The proposed changes to the Coral Sea and other Marine Parks in Australia contradict a global movement to fully protect at least 30% of marine ecosystem types against extractive industry. Australia has previously been considered a leader in the management of marine environments globally, especially through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. If the Draft Management Plan for the Coral Sea is implemented as it stands, this will strongly influence Australia’s standing as a global leader for effective implementation of conservation regulations. The Great Barrier Reef is not our only important marine asset, it is crucial to manage all marine ‘bioregions’ sustainably. The decrease in Green Zones and subsequent increase in commercial fishing activity in Marine Parks throughout Australia’s network will incur huge damage to our marine life. These activities have already been found to constitute an unacceptable level of risk our marine life. The MLMAC calls on the Australian Government to adequately protect our Marine Parks through increased Green Zone areas and limitation of commercial fishing operations in larger expanses of the protected area network.

Our recommendations are consistent across all Marine Parks. Similar reductions in Green Zones and increases in Yellow Zones are also proposed for Gascoyne Marine Park and others. The MLMAC holds a strong position against reducing the protection of our marine environments.

Once again, thankyou for the opportunity to provide feedback into this valuable process. If you have any queries regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact the MLMAC via the details provided below.

Yours sincerely

Nicki Stokes *Nicki Stokes*

Nicki Stokes

**Secretary of MLMAC, on behalf of MLMAC Members**

Enquiries: Nicki Stokes Ph: 07 4969 0700 Email: [nstokes@nqbp.com.au](mailto:nstokes@nqbp.com.au)