



**Magnetic  
Island  
Nature  
Care Assoc.**

PO Box 30  
Magnetic Island  
Queensland, 4819

**Australian Marine Parks Management Planning Comments  
Department of the Environment and Energy  
Canberra ACT 2601**

**RE: Proposed changes to the Australian Marine Parks network**

Magnetic Island Nature Care Association (MINCA) is an incorporated voluntary conservation group established to support and encourage the protection and sustainable use of Magnetic Island and the surrounding waters of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA). We have a strong interest in the sustainable protection and management of all marine ecosystems, and a particular interest in the future of the Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve (CMR).

The establishment of the CMR Network in 2012 was a huge step towards the establishment of a comprehensive and representative system of marine reserves around Australia, and the conservative management of other marine areas associated with them.

The review of this reserve network by the Bioregional Advisory Panel during 2014 and 2015 was extensive and comprehensive. MINCA strongly supports the recommendations of its 2016 Report. Implementing the advice of the BAP and its five regional panels, and of the associated Expert Scientific Panel, would establish a zoning and management framework with marine conservation outcomes, and outcomes for sustainable fishing, far superior to that of the plans currently offered for public comment.

The severity of the existing stresses on our marine ecosystems are indicated by declines in many habitats and fisheries, and these declines are amplified by the increasing impacts of climate change. These climatic impacts include shifts in species distributions, more frequent climatic extremes, ocean warming, and ocean acidity. The stressed state of most of our marine environments, and our limited understanding of many of them, all necessitate a conservative approach to marine park zoning and management.

The 2017 proposed zoning plans will almost halve the area currently protected in Green Zones and Sanctuaries, and will cover considerably fewer conservation

features than that recommended by the BAP in 2016. MINCA cannot support the proposed changes to zoning on these grounds alone. This is not the time to further increase the stresses on marine ecosystems around Australia.

In northern Australia in particular, coral bleaching and declines in water quality have reduced the resilience of many ecosystems, usually also resulting in a decline in their productivity. A reduction in the number of herbivorous fish has been linked to increasing algal cover on reefs. The associated decline in coral is further compounded by the effects of turbidity and silt pollution due to port activities and degraded catchments.

Nearby reservoirs of local and regional species are essential in assisting the recovery of degraded marine ecosystems. This is one of the major roles of the Green Zones. Reducing the currently limited extent of Green Zones is both counter-intuitive and counter-productive.

Climate impacts have been particularly destructive of reef areas throughout the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. With back to back bleaching in 2016 and 2017, and almost the entire WHA affected, the largely intact reefs and associated shallow benthic plains of the Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve are particularly critical for sustaining the regional biodiversity necessary for recovery and long-term sustainability of much of the GBRWHA.

The proposal to greatly reduce the extent of green zone in the Coral Sea CMR therefore cannot be supported. Although the extent of Habitat Protection Zones is increased, and the extent of Multiple Use Zone reduced, these changes do not compensate for the loss of extensive areas of habitat currently securely protected by Marine National Park. MINCA strongly opposes the proposed reduction in extent of Marine National Park. We prefer the compromise reached in the BAP (2016) report, including the Sanctuary Zone of the highly significant Lihou Reef.

MINCA also cannot support the extent of continental shelf left open for trawling. Pending an assessment of the condition of these shelf areas in the Marine Reserve, the area open for trawling should be no greater than that proposed by the 2016 BAP report.

MINCA strongly supports the total exclusion of all exploration and development for minerals, gas and oil from the Coral Sea CMR. This needs to be explicitly stated in the plan, with no avenues for exemptions or permitting. Parallel provisions in legislation should support this exclusion.

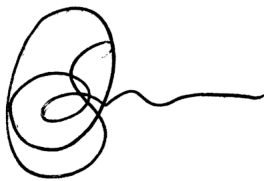
The Coral Sea CMA is nationally and internationally significant and requires a high degree of active management. This includes policing illegal use and undertaking strategic research to better know and manage it. As with terrestrial conservation reserves, adequate and sustained funding is essential and MINCA strongly supports the active implementation of a conservative management plan for this and the other CMAs.

MINCA strongly supports the conclusion of the BAP 2016 report that:

*“the ecological integrity of the CMR estate should be the primary consideration.....the goal should be the maintenance of a healthy marine environment that sustains a wide variety of uses and users and is valued, widely enjoyed and appreciated by current and future generations”.*

To this we would add for the Coral Sea CMA that the primary consideration in zoning and management should be to maintain a reservoir of diverse species, both to sustain the CMA into an uncertain future, and to complement and support the long-term conservation of the adjoining Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal tail extending to the right.

Gethin Morgan  
President  
Magnetic Island Nature Care Association Inc.

20<sup>th</sup> September 2017