



Australian Marine Parks Management Planning Comments  
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## **Comments on draft management plan for the Commonwealth Solitary Islands Marine Reserve, in the Temperate East.**

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition (CVCC) is a community group which was formed in Grafton in 1988. Its primary area of interest is the Clarence Valley and its near- and off-shore waters. This includes the Solitary Islands Marine Park in NSW waters and the neighbouring Commonwealth (Cwth) Solitary Islands Marine Reserve. These names need to remain distinctive as different laws and rules apply to each. It is unnecessarily confusing to consider renaming the Solitary Islands Marine Reserve as the Solitary Islands Marine Park too.

The CVCC's main area of interest lies to the north of One Tree Point, in the areas currently zoned as Habitat Protection Zone and Sanctuary Zone.

The CVCC objects to two aspects of the new zoning proposed for the Solitary Islands Marine Reserve:

### **1. The downgrading of Pimpernel Rock's current Sanctuary Zone (IUCN category Ia) to National Park (IUCN category II) is opposed.**

This zone currently protects the area within a 500 metre radius around the centre of Pimpernel Rock. It is managed as a 'no take' area to protect the pinnacle benthic communities, established ecological processes, and associated sensitive marine species. A change to 'National Park' IUCN category II has implications for far greater visitation, in an area where anchoring is prohibited. To maintain its the protected status of the Pinnacle's unique ecology and mix of temperate and tropical species, ballast water discharge and exchange, and discharge of industrial and domestic waste should be prohibited. And yet both activities are permissible in the new National Park zone. The Solitary Islands Marine

Reserve, is suitable for declaration as a "Particularly Sensitive Sea Area" and is threatened by the introduction of marine pests through the release of ballast water.

**2. The renaming and re-purposing of the current Habitat Protection Zone (IUCN category IV) north of One Tree Point to a Multi-Use Zone (IUCN category VI) is not justifiable.**

This Habitat Protection Zone protects a representative sample of whole reef complex, including soft substrate sediments and subtidal reef habitats, deep water biotic communities and predator-prey assemblages, mammals and seabirds. These elements require ongoing protection not exploitation. One of the activities that is currently prohibited in this part of the reserve and will continue to be prohibited in Habitat Protection Zones is mining operations including exploration. The Clarence Valley and the rest of the NSW part of the Clarence-Moreton basin is currently free of gas mining and exploration due to the concerted efforts of the local community. Any mining in our precious marine park/marine reserve would never be acceptable. We need the area kept as a Habitat Protection Zone to ensure this activity remains excluded.

The CVCC also **objects** to additional forms of **high-take commercial fishing** becoming permissible in this Marine Reserve.

The *Solitary Islands Marine Reserve (Commonwealth Waters) Management Plan*, released in 2001, prohibits demersal trawling and purse seining north of One Tree Point (i.e. in the Habitat Zone), and promises that trawling and purse seining will be phased out south of One Tree Point (i.e. in the General Use Zone) during the life of the plan. Under the new proposed plan for the Temperate East Network of Marine Reserves, however, there are substantial changes to this policy:

- Purse-seining would become permissible in all zones other than the National Park Zone and one specific Habitat Protection Zone around Lord Howe Island. There is no justification for introducing these high-take forms of fishing in other Habitat Protection Zones, nor in Multi-Use Zones and nor in Special Purpose Zones. Pelagic fish and the predator-prey assemblages they are part of deserve some protection in our marine reserves. It is noted that purse seining is currently banned in all zones in the the neighbouring Solitary Islands Marine Park, including in the General Use Zone. This ban should be seamless across the jurisdictional boundary, given the complexity of the marine park/ marine reserve boundaries.
- Demersal trawling would remain permissible in what will now be the majority of the marine reserve - a Special Purpose Zone (Trawl). The promised phase out has not eventuated. A review of the existing plan should be published to justify such a reversal in policy.

A prohibition on mid-water trawling is currently assumed to be in place in the Solitary Islands Marine Reserve as part of the ban on purse seining because the impacts of the two techniques on pelagic fish are similar. Mid-water trawlers have no place in a marine protected area. The Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications last year recommended factory freezer mid-water trawlers be banned from the Australian Small

Pelagic Fishery, with the operation of other mid-water trawlers restricted to daylight hours as visual identification was necessary to prevent the take of non-target species. They cited issues with the death of protected marine life and the populations of other non-quota species caused by mid-water trawlers. The Solitary Islands Marine Reserve lies within this Fishery, which extends from northern NSW around southern Australia to just north of Perth. In fact, the pelagic fish in this reserve are likely to be under significant pressure due to climate change and warming waters. They don't need the extra pressure from a mid-water trawler - particularly in a marine 'reserve' which is meant to be providing some protection!

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Hon Secretary