

MPA NEWS

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Australia Announces Final Proposal for MPA Network, Including Coral Sea MPA

On 14 June, the Australian Government announced its proposal for a national representative system of MPAs - a plan that, if implemented, will increase the nation's MPA system from 27 sites to 60 and cover more than 3 million km² in total.

The proposed sites have each been the focus of regional planning processes for months or years, stretching from the South-west Marine Region (["Australia Announces Plan For Large Network of MPAs off SW Coast"](#), MPA News 12:6) to the Coral Sea in the northeast (["Australian Government Releases Proposal for Large Coral Sea MPA"](#), MPA News 13:4), and regions in-between.

The proposal is now undergoing a final public consultation period, lasting until 10 September 2012. Although legally the maps could still change before the new MPAs are designated, Australian Environment Minister Tony Burke has indicated his intent to stick with the sites as proposed. "It's too late for people to say I want this line shifted or I want this zone painted a different color," he said in a press release. "The question now is very straightforward. Do we go ahead with the most comprehensive marine park network in the world or do we not?" He noted that in developing the final proposed network, the government has already consulted with thousands of people at more than 250 meetings.

The final MPAs are expected to be designated by the end of this year. The proposed plan, which includes new MPAs in all mainland-adjacent marine regions of the Commonwealth except the South-east, is at www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/reserves/index.html. (The South-east marine region designated a network of MPAs in 2007.)

Coral Sea MPA; assistance for fishers

The "jewel in the crown" of the national MPA system, in the words of the environment ministry, will be the Coral Sea Marine Reserve, a nearly 1 million-km² area of which roughly half will be no-take. Upon designation, it will be one of the largest individual MPAs in the world. The reserve will adjoin the seaward edge of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. A coalition of 15 conservation groups led by the Pew Environment Group campaigned for years for Australia's Coral Sea to be completely off-limits to fishing.

Anticipating impacts of the proposed national MPA system on fishermen, the Australian Government is instituting a financial assistance package of roughly AU \$100 million (US \$104 million). The package, to be developed in partnership with industry, is intended to meet case-by-case needs of fishermen and businesses, including through:

- Transitional business assistance to support changes to fishing business operations;
- Assistance for employees including payments;
- Investment in research and monitoring;
- Removal of commercial fishing effort from impacted fisheries through possible purchase of entitlements; and
- Targeted assistance to vertically integrated fishing businesses.

Fisheries Minister Joe Ludwig said, "Those who can change their business model, or who opt to leave the industry, will get the assistance they require."

The Australian Marine Alliance, which represents commercial and recreational fishing sectors, has calculated that the adverse impact of the new MPAs on business could be massive, including 36,000 jobs lost and a decline in fishing-related revenue of AU \$4 billion. The official government estimates of MPA impacts, however, are much lower: a potential loss of up to 125 jobs and \$23.2 million in decreased revenue across fishing-dependent communities. In the latter case, such losses would be readily covered by the \$100-million assistance package. The government estimates the new MPAs will displace 1-2% of the total annual value of wild catch fisheries production in Australia.

BOX: Australian Government press releases

- On the proposed national MPA network: www.environment.gov.au/minister/burke/2012/mr20120614.html
- On the assistance package: www.environment.gov.au/minister/burke/2012/mr20120614a.html
- On the final public consultation process: www.environment.gov.au/minister/burke/2012/mr20120711.html

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