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Australian government moves to reopen large areas of national marine park system to fishing

In a move that has been in the making for the past five years, the Australian government formally announced its plans in March 2018 to scale back protections for the nation's system of marine parks. Overall, 80% of Australia's marine park waters will now be open to commercial fishing, up from 63% under the system's original design. And 97% of Commonwealth waters within 100 km of the coast will be open to recreational fishing.

The new management plans are slated to take effect 1 July 2018. A media release on the plans [is here](#). The new plans [are here](#).

Most impacted is the 1-million-km² Coral Sea Marine Park. In the original design, half of it was to be no-take. Now just 24% of it will be.

A five-year review

The system of parks – planned and designated by the previously ruling Labor Government [in 2012](#), but for which management plans were not implemented before Labor lost power in 2013 – has been under review since then by a series of succeeding (Liberal-National) Coalition governments.

That review process reassessed the science and zoning of the parks, and involved two government-appointed review panels that [released their findings in 2016](#). This was followed by a public consultation period that ended [later that year](#). In the meantime, the parks' boundaries remained but their management plans were in limbo.

The current ruling Coalition government argues the new management plans will still protect important marine habitat while [reducing financial impacts](#) on fishers. But the new plans go even further than the review panels' recommendations: [the panels suggested](#), for example, that no-take coverage in the Coral Sea be reduced less significantly – to 41% as opposed to the new plans' 24%.

The Labor party, which considered the 2012 marine park system the most comprehensive network of its kind worldwide, has called the new plans [the largest removal of marine area from conservation ever](#). Labor and Green party politicians attempted to disallow the new plans with legal maneuvering [but were voted down](#). They have suggested they will [keep up the fight](#) to disallow the plans in coming weeks. Conservation groups and scientists have strongly criticized the new plans.

MPA News will examine the impacts of this decision in the coming months.

For more media coverage:

Sydney Morning Herald: [Government winds back marine protections to support fishing industry](#)

Sydney Morning Herald: [Scientists say parks plan guts protections around Ningaloo and beyond](#)

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The Guardian: [The 'best' outcome? How the marine park plans divided scientists and conservationists](#)

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