

MPA NEWS



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Australian MPA Plan Still Subject to Public Comment Period

By John B. Davis

There has been some confusion in the international media today regarding the Australian Government's announcement of its plan for a national MPA network, covering a total of 3.1 million km² of ocean. Around the world, media have suggested the plan is effectively a done deal and the network has been created. Granted, [the Government's own press release](#) may have fostered that impression. One must read 20 paragraphs into the release to learn that the plan is still subject to a 60-day public comment period before it can become law.

The question at this point is, how likely is it that any changes will be made to the plan following this final public comment period? Environment Minister Tony Burke has made it clear he does not want to hear about changing boundaries at this point. The press release quoted him as saying:

"We now go through one final 60 day consultation period. It's too late for people to say I want this line shifted or I want this zone painted a different color. The question now is very straightforward. Do we go ahead with the most comprehensive marine park network in the world or do we not?"

My sources suggest there is no legal basis for Minister Burke's restriction on boundary changes at this point. Legally, the maps could still change. Politically, however, the Minister wants to move ahead with the maps he now has.

It is safe to say that the Government wants this new comment period to be a formality. That likely won't stop opponents of the plan, including some in [the recreational and commercial fishing sectors](#), from voicing their displeasure and working to make changes to the plan before it is actually put in place. Stay tuned.

To submit your own comments on the plan: <http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/reserves/comments.html>

For maps and fact sheets on the proposed network: <http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/reserves/index.html>

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