

MPA NEWS



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Letter to the Editor: Well-Managed Trawl Fishery Would Be Disproportionately Impacted by SW Australian MPAs

Dear *MPA News*:

I am writing regarding your article on the Australian Government's proposal for a network of eight new MPAs for the country's South-west marine region ("Australia Announces Plan for Large Network of MPAs off SW Coast", *MPA News* 12:6).

Despite calls from some green groups that less than 1% of the South-west (SW) region is protected, it should be pointed out that the SW is actually largely prospective in nature, with huge areas untouched by any form of fishing. The Great Australian Bight trawl fishery (GABTF), for example, impacts less than 5% of the slope, 4% of the shelf, and 1% of the deepwater areas of the region based on spatial analysis undertaken by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Australia's national science agency. In addition, the current fisheries closures in the region - implemented by the GABTF in 2007, and including one that is 120nm wide and extends out to the limit of the EEZ - mean that the region is likely to be among the most pristine and well-managed in the world. This is especially when taking account of significant investment in science to support individual transferable quota (ITQ) management of key stocks and the CSIRO ecological risk assessment process, which uncovered that no species in the GABTF is at high risk from the impacts of the fishery.

Yet as proposed, the draft MPA network will mean that certain sectors of the commercial fishing industry - including the well-managed trawl fishery - will be disproportionately impacted. This is despite other users, such as oil and gas exploration and drilling, being allowed in the majority of the MPAs. The barrage of misinformation about the need for MPAs to effectively manage fisheries is upsetting. Although MPAs may play some largely unproven role in fisheries management for certain species, they are for the broader public good of biodiversity conservation and should be planned for and implemented in that context.

We will be working with Government to achieve balanced outcomes for biodiversity conservation, minimizing impacts on marine users and maintaining access to sustainable resources, in line with common sense and the goals and principles for Commonwealth marine bioregional planning. It is early days in the SW consultation process, so stakeholder positions, policy, and politics will all become clearer as the process unfolds. Our mission is to continue to supply Australian and overseas markets with high-quality, sustainable Australian seafood into the future.

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