

MPA NEWS



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Spotlight on surfing reserves: Protecting surf spots through local community engagement

In March 2016, a 16-km-long swath of the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia, will become the eighth World Surfing Reserve, joining other iconic surf spots in Australia, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, and the US.

The designation of a world surfing reserve - and similar national surfing reserves in Australia - is part ecolabel, part community organization. The designation aims to highlight and protect outstanding waves, surf zones, and their surrounding environments, including the economic and cultural attributes of those areas. A strong commitment to local involvement in a surf area's management, through a council, is required for designation.

The concept of surfing reserves first arose in Australia, where 18 national surfing reserves have been designated in the past 10 years. That effort, overseen by an independent group called National Surfing Reserves (<http://www.surfingreserves.org>), has since been exported. A US-based group called Saves the Waves Coalition now oversees the world surfing reserves (<https://oct.to/ZkH>).

Although national surfing reserves in Australia are generally gazetted under various state-level protected area laws, world surfing reserves are not designated by governments. Rather the designation process is similar to how the UNESCO World Heritage Programme designates World Heritage sites: a government nominates its surf area for designation, and the Save the Waves Coalition judges whether it merits the status. The adjudication involves extensive discussions with local communities and elected officials, and can be competitive. The Gold Coast outcompeted applications this year from Noosa, Australia, and Guarda do Embáio, Brazil.

The designation raises the profile of high-quality surf spots and fosters an environment of consideration for the area's ongoing wellbeing. "Surfing reserves here in Australia have vastly improved social, environmental, and cultural aspects of locations around the coast," says Chris Tola of National Surfing Reserves.

What surfing reserve management looks like on the ground

The Daly Head National Surfing Reserve in South Australia was designated in 2013. Ed Satanek heads its community-based management committee. Here he describes the committee's work and goals:

"The Daly Head National Surfing Reserve Committee is driven by a clear vision of what it wants the reserve to become. This was shaped from surfers realizing the impact our access to the surf was having on the narrow fragile coastal environment. We now promote respect for our pristine beaches through events like Cleanup Days, as well as everyday individual acts like surfers' taking their rubbish with them when climbing the hundreds of steps back up to their vehicles. We also re-vegetate coastline areas with provenance plantings, raised in our nursery by volunteers.

"Part of this vision is that we strive to develop a strong sense of community in the district. We believe in the ethos of developing stewardship amongst our young people. The next generation of young surfers are involved in our social and environmental focused events so they will one day carry on the traditions.

"We also believe in sustainable processes. Partnerships are integral to everything we do. We work cooperatively with the district council, associations, clubs, and other groups with aims similar to ours. We view raising awareness about coastline concerns with the non-surfing community and national resource management and coast protection bodies as our responsibility."

For more information:

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