



Australian Government

Department of the Environment,  
Water, Heritage and the Arts

## FACT SHEET - MARINE BIOREGIONAL PLANNING – THE PROCESS

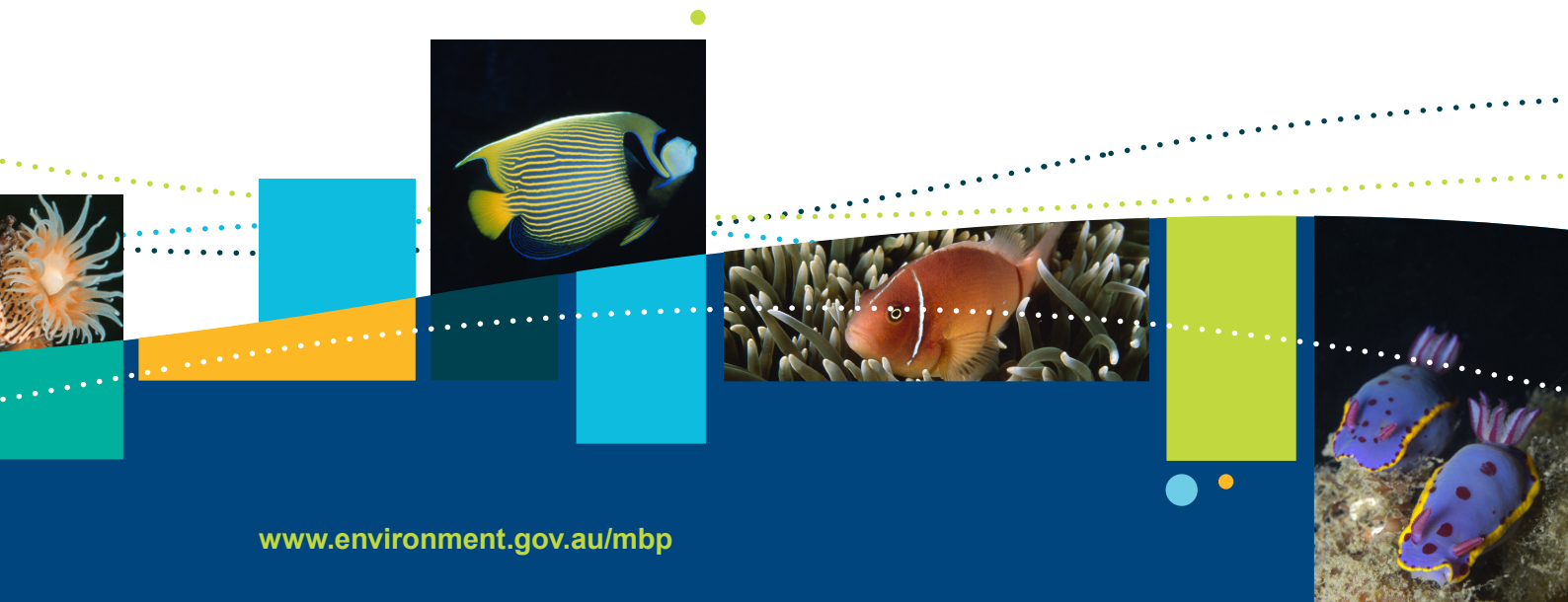
### WHAT IS MARINE BIOREGIONAL PLANNING?

Australia's marine bioregional planning program is designed to provide a clearer focus on the protection, conservation and sustainable use of Australia's marine environment. It is underpinned by the principles of ecologically sustainable development. The Bioregional Marine Plans will help underpin improved management of the marine environment and its biodiversity by taking what is known as an "ecosystem approach". This means that the Plans will not just look at a single marine species or habitat in isolation, but rather consider their linkages, the role they play within the marine environment and their relationships with human activities. The Plans will provide a framework for helping to ensure marine ecosystems are resilient and function effectively.

The marine bioregional planning process focuses on Commonwealth waters (the area of Australian jurisdiction that starts outside state/Northern Territory waters (usually 3 nautical miles from the coast) and extends to the outer limits of the Exclusive Economic Zone some 200 nautical miles from the shore).

Marine Bioregional Plans are being developed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (national environment law) and will fulfil the Australian Government's commitment to establishing a National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas as agreed by all Australian governments in 1998.

Marine Bioregional Plans will strengthen and improve the operation of national environmental law in the marine environment, delivering benefits for those people and industries who use the marine environment. This will be achieved by providing much clearer advice and guidance about regional conservation priorities in the Commonwealth Marine Area for decision-makers and industry.



## MARINE BIOREGIONAL PLANNING REGIONS

Marine bioregional planning is currently being implemented in five large Marine Regions – the South-west, North-west, North, East and South-east Marine Regions. For more information go to [www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp](http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp)

There are two major parts to the marine bioregional planning process: the identification of regional conservation priorities and the identification of marine reserves to be included in Australia's **National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas**.

Regional conservation priorities arise from an analysis of the threats to the conservation values of each Marine Region. The Marine Bioregional Plans will identify measures to address regional conservation priorities and facilitate better decision-making under national environment law.

Regional networks of new representative marine reserves will also be identified through the marine bioregional planning process. These regional networks will become part of Australia's National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA), which aims to protect representative examples of the biodiversity and ecosystems in the various marine regions of Australia. For more information on the NRSMPA go to [www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mpa/nrsmpa/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mpa/nrsmpa/index.html)

The marine bioregional planning process involves three key steps: preparation of a Bioregional Profile, development of a draft Marine Bioregional Plan, and completion of a final Marine Bioregional Plan.

Bioregional Profiles have been released for the East, North, North-west and South-west Marine Regions. The Bioregional Profiles describe the ecological and biophysical features and the conservation values of each Region and outline human activities that occur within each Region. The Goals and Principles that guide the identification of new marine reserves are also described in the profiles.

Draft Marine Bioregional Plans are being developed for each Marine Region. Each draft plan will outline a draft network of proposed marine reserves. The Plans will provide information on conservation values and the current and emerging pressures within each region, as well as describing conservation priorities and measures for the region. A minimum 90 day public consultation period will follow the public release of the draft Plans.

The final Marine Bioregional Plans will include any changes to the original proposals resulting from the public consultation, as well as the final proposed network of new marine reserves and their zoning arrangements.

## WHAT IS A MARINE RESERVE?

Marine reserves (sometimes also called marine protected areas or marine parks) are any area of the marine environment which has been reserved by law or other effective means for the purpose of protecting marine biodiversity. Commonwealth marine reserves are established under national environmental law.

## WHY ARE WE DEVELOPING NEW MARINE RESERVES?

Australia has national and international commitments to implement a National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA) by 2012. The primary goal of the NRSMPA is to establish and manage a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of marine reserves to contribute to the long-term conservation of marine ecosystems and to protect marine biological diversity at all levels. Like National

Parks on land, marine reserves represent an “insurance policy” that will benefit future generations. This is necessary because in most instances we do not know what the full consequences of human activities are for marine ecosystems. By setting aside examples of a variety of marine species and habitats, we will protect them into the future from the unintended consequences of human impacts. We also improve the resilience of our marine ecosystems so they are better able to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

### HOW ARE NEW MARINE RESERVES BEING IDENTIFIED?

In 1998 the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council released the ‘*Guidelines for establishing the national representative system of marine protected areas*’ (the Guidelines). The Guidelines provide a nationally consistent framework for identifying new marine reserves and they emphasise the strong role that science needs to play in the process. The Guidelines allow for each government in Australia to develop its own approach and policy for implementing the Guidelines.

The Australian Government policy for implementing the Guidelines and identifying suitable areas for inclusion in the NRSMPA is the *Goals and Principles for the Establishment of the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas in Commonwealth Waters* (the Goals and Principles). These are published in each Marine Bioregional Profile. Based on these Goals and Principles, the Australian Government is gathering relevant information, including socio-economic data, to ensure that the identification of new marine reserves is based on systematic and comprehensive analysis of all relevant considerations.

### WHAT ARE AREAS FOR FURTHER ASSESSMENT?

Areas for Further Assessment are an important step in refining information on human uses and socio-economic values in the marine environment in each Marine Region. They are large areas that encompass examples of the range of biodiversity and ecosystems within each Region. They are identified through assessment of information compiled using the *Goals and Principles for the Establishment of the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas in Commonwealth Waters*. For more information on the ‘goals and principles’ go to [www.environment.gov.au/mbp/publications](http://www.environment.gov.au/mbp/publications)

Areas for Further Assessment are not the proposed boundaries for new marine reserves. Instead, they are intended to aid further analysis of information at a more detailed scale and in so doing assist in narrowing down the areas of focus for the location of new marine reserves.

Based on ecological information and information obtained from key stakeholders on human activities within the areas for further assessment, the location and zoning arrangements of a new network of marine reserves will be developed. This process aims to ensure that conservation outcomes are maximised while socio-economic costs associated with establishing marine reserves are minimised.

### WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE ALLOWED IN MARINE RESERVES AND HOW WILL THEY BE MANAGED?

The network of new marine reserves will be designed to provide for a balance between multiple use and highly protected areas. Some areas within future marine reserves will be highly protected, or so-called “no take” areas. Other areas will be multiple use and allow for activities such as fishing, both recreational and commercial, as long as we can be confident that the activities can be done without having a significant impact on the marine environment.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO EXISTING ACTIVITIES THAT ARE NOT ALLOWED WITHIN NEW MARINE RESERVES?

A process to develop a policy for managing activities that are impacted through the declaration of new marine reserves is underway. The policy will establish the objectives, principles and directions for addressing the management of impacts arising from the declaration of new reserves, including displacement of existing activities.

## HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN THE MARINE BIOREGIONAL PLANNING PROCESS?

The Australian Government welcomes any contribution that will assist in developing Marine Bioregional Plans. While information from marine resource users, researchers and managers will be identified throughout the process, the Marine Bioregional Planning Program also involves key steps during which the public is invited to provide formal input. For more information on how to get involved in the Marine Bioregional Planning process go to [www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/stakeholders.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/stakeholders.html)

A formal public consultation period of at least 90 days will occur on the release of each draft Marine Bioregional Plan. Views expressed by stakeholders during the formal public consultation period will be considered before the final Marine Bioregional Plan is completed for each Region.

After the Government has adopted the final Marine Bioregional Plans, the proposed network of new marine reserves will be declared through a separate statutory process. This declaration process involves additional public consultation and another formal 60 day period for comment.

## REQUESTS FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, OR ANY QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS MAY BE DIRECTED TO:

South-west marine bioregional plan contact: [SW\\_Marine\\_Plan@environment.gov.au](mailto:SW_Marine_Plan@environment.gov.au)

North marine bioregional plan contact: [mbp.north@environment.gov.au](mailto:mbp.north@environment.gov.au)

North-west marine bioregional plan contact: [NW\\_Marine\\_Plan@environment.gov.au](mailto:NW_Marine_Plan@environment.gov.au)

East marine bioregional plan contact: [eastmarineplan@environment.gov.au](mailto:eastmarineplan@environment.gov.au)

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