

# MPAs

## *A useless solution to a non-problem*

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1. MPAs are an ill-considered and expensive idea which addresses no demonstrated problem. Bypassing full parliamentary scrutiny while permitting a single minister to exercise personal discretion in implementing a vast, costly, unneeded network of them is gross misgovernance.
2. The claim that international treaty obligations require establishment of the planned MPAs is untrue. Pandering for Green votes is the only real purpose.
3. The **UN Convention on Biological Diversity** deals primarily with sustainable development and the agricultural and bio-medical uses of natural resources. It imposes no demand for MPAs or obligation for any specific conservation measures. However, Article 10 (c) of this Convention does require signatories to, *"...protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation or sustainable use requirements...."* "Customary" and "traditional" in this context is not limited to indigenous peoples. Under this convention the obligation to protect and encourage the customary use of recreational and commercial fishing by non-indigenous Australians is in no way distinct from the obligation to protect such use by indigenous Australians.
4. The **Global Representative System of Marine Protected Areas** is an initiative of The World Conservation Union (IUCN). The IUCN is an NGO based in Switzerland. Their stated mission is to: *"influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable"*. One of their objectives is the establishment of a global representative system of MPAs. An objective by an NGO creates no obligation under international law or treaty. It should also be noted that even the IUCN has explicitly recognised that trivial increases in environmental protection should not be pursued using highly restrictive and economically expensive measures.
5. The **Law of the Sea Treaty**, under which we claim Exclusive Economic Zone rights to the areas outside 12 nautical miles from land, provides that exclusive rights to resources depends on utilisation. Provision is made that other nations may petition for access to unutilised resources. Huge MPA areas combined with a fisheries harvest rate at 1/30 of the global average and excessive demand for seafood imports set the stage for a successful future petition by Asian nations for access to our vast unutilised EEZ areas.
6. Australia already has about 25% of total global MPA area. The Coral Sea and other planned expansions will then comprise about 50% of the global total. Biodiversity protection obligations are already over-fulfilled.
7. MPAs in Australia are not really about preserving marine biodiversity at all. There is no known instance of any marine species in Australia which has been lost through human impacts and none that are now threatened by fishing.
8. At present, no need for or benefit from, extensive MPAs has been shown to exist and it would be prudent to await accumulation of further knowledge to establish them if and when indicated in accord with increasing knowledge. Current scientific understanding is simply not adequate for a soundly based large scale implementation of MPAs. The crash program of MPA implementation amounts to large scale environmental meddling with no proper assessment of need, efficacy or consequences. It is simply cheap pandering for green votes.
9. MPAs do nothing to address pollution or climate change. Their sole effect is to further restrict fishing when we already have the world's most highly restricted marine fisheries.
10. MPAs, closed seasons, size limits, bag limits, quotas, gear restrictions, limited licenses and access restrictions have been imposed willy-nilly on fishing with little or no evidence of any

problem and no consideration of socio-economic impacts. It seems that current management has never seen an additional restriction they find unnecessary or superfluous to those already in place.

11. Australia has the largest *per capita* fishing zone and lowest harvest rate in the world at about 1/30 of the global average. We also have the most restrictive and costly marine resource management in the world. Two-thirds of our seafood consumption is imported. All of these imports come from much more heavily exploited resources elsewhere. This is unconscionable.
12. Having most of the world's MPA area where it is unneeded does nothing to preserve global biodiversity.
13. Seafood imports cost \$1.7 billion annually and must be paid for by mineral exports or add to a chronic deficit. Selling off a non-renewable resource to buy a renewable one we have in abundance while adding to an unsustainable deficit is economically imbecilic.
14. Fisheries have the lowest detrimental impact on natural ecosystems of any food producing sector. Restrictions on fishing only increase the already higher impact of terrestrial food production.
15. Holders of fishing rights have committed to large investments in both money and years of their lives on the assurance that their rights were, secure, permanent and tradeable. Their licenses are in fact a contract with government and under contract law the terms and conditions of their rights cannot be legally changed without either their full knowledge and consent or fair and just compensation. Compensation for the fishing industry as a consequence of the expanded green zones on the GBR has cost over \$200 million and is still not completed. Similar compensation for the national MPA network may exceed this by an order of magnitude. All that is just to close down productive activity without even considering the ongoing long term economic loss.
16. Over recent years numerous large scale clinical and epidemiological studies published in the world's leading medical journals have found significant health benefits from increased seafood consumption for a broad range of neurological, cardio-vascular and immune related conditions. In particular it affords significant reduction in obesity, heart disease, depression, aggression and age related mental deterioration. It is also important in mental development and functioning in children. Translated into reduced health care costs, it could save Australia billions of dollars per year not to mention the improved quality of life for millions of Australians. We need to be looking at how to expand our underutilised fisheries and aquaculture potentials, not seeking to find more imaginary reasons to close them down. Imposing more and more restrictions on our fisheries is quite literally contributing to national stupidity and ill health.
17. The proposed Coral Sea MPA is the biggest and stupidest of all the proposed MPAs because:
  - a. Most Coral Sea islands and reefs are already protected as national parks.
  - b. All Coral Sea fisheries are already subject to highly restrictive AFMA management.
  - c. The GBR National Park already affords protection of all Coral Sea species and biotopes in the world's largest coral reef MPA.
  - d. The Coral Sea is one of the world's prime tuna fishing grounds. We now produce a few hundred tonnes from the Coral Sea where previously Japanese fishermen had sustainably produced around 30,000 tonnes annually for many years. Meanwhile PNG licenses Asian fishing companies to fish the same migratory stocks in their waters. They currently catch about 400,000 tonnes while all our tuna fisheries only catch about 15,000 tonnes. We then import some \$165 million in canned tuna. We "save" our fish for Asian fishermen to catch and then sell back to us.
18. Why, at a time when government is struggling with deficits and trying to stimulate economic activity, do we need to be taking on additional millions of dollars in expenditure to address a problem which does not exist and further curtail productive activity and employment?

19. All Australians are already paying a high price for gross resource mismanagement in our cost of living, our health, our freedom and in the broader wellbeing of the nation. The proposed MPAs will only contribute to these costs with no benefit to the environment at all.
20. In current economic conditions adding more and more ill-conceived restrictions onto our food producers is tantamount to treason in a time of war. It is time that positive outcomes be required, not just meaningless eco-waffle. It is also time for real evidence to be demanded for claims, not just unsupported opinions by a chorus of “experts” singing for their supper. Over the past year there is indication that the electorate has begun to realise that government has been blatantly lying about climate change and other environmental matters; and, that we are all paying a punishing price to buy the votes of a small minority of ill-informed urban Greens “concerned” about things they have never seen, know nothing about and have no investment.

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