



# The Coalition's Policy on Marine Protected Areas

**Stand up for Australia.  
Stand up for real action.**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coalition supports a balanced approach to marine conservation.

Marine Protected Areas are intended to protect and maintain biologically and culturally significant marine areas. The previous Coalition Government commenced the process of establishing Marine Protected Areas around Australia's coastline.

In 2006, the Coalition announced the establishment of eleven Marine Protected Areas along Australia's south-east coast. These eleven Marine Protected Areas were only created after careful consideration and consultation with the recreational and commercial fishing sectors and other stakeholders.

The Coalition engaged in an extensive and cooperative consultation process before Marine Protected Areas were declared. This consultation ensured an appropriate balance was struck between protecting marine biodiversity and minimising social and economic impact on fishers, businesses and their communities.

Labor has continued the Coalition's policy, but it has failed to adopt a balanced approach to Marine Protected Areas. Labor has also failed to engage in appropriate consultation with the fishing industry and the wider community.

Many communities that rely on fishing are directly threatened by Labor's inability to consult on whether a region should be declared a Marine Protected Area.

Unsurprisingly, recreational and commercial fishers, as well as the many related businesses and communities that rely on fishing, have raised substantial concerns about Labor's handling of Marine Protected Areas.

Appropriate and effective consultation is needed if Marine Protected Areas are to balance environmental concerns with the need to promote jobs and sustain communities that rely on commercial and recreational fishing.

Many communities will face enormous economic and social losses unless there is proper and effective consultation on potential Marine Protected Areas. Only proper and effective consultation will ensure that future Marine Protected Areas balance preservation of the environment with economic growth and strong coastal communities.

The Coalition is committed to returning balance and fairness to marine conservation.

The Coalition will take real action to ensure there is proper community and industry consultation regarding any proposed Marine Protected Areas.

Specifically, the Coalition will:

**1. Immediately put on hold the Marine Bioregional Planning process to allow for its restructure**

The Marine Bioregional Planning Process will be immediately restructured in order to address community and industry concerns about the Labor Government's mismanagement of the process for declaring Marine Protected Areas.

**2. Provide a fair and balanced Displaced Effort Policy**

Responsibility for the design, development and consultation of the displacement policy will be with a Ministerial panel to be joint-chaired by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and Arts.

**3. Base Marine Protected Areas on science**

The Coalition will require peer reviewed scientific evidence of threats to marine biodiversity to be made available to all stakeholders, including affected communities and industries, before any decision is made on future Marine Protected Areas (particularly any no-take zone).

**4. Establish sensible and balanced Marine Park boundaries and develop management plans in consultation with industry**

In establishing Marine Protected Areas, the Coalition will consult closely with those people and industries that use the marine environment, including the recreational and commercial fishing sectors, to determine Marine Protected Area management plans in accordance with relevant legislation and other regulatory frameworks. All Marine Protected Areas will be signed off by both the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and Arts.

# HOW LABOR HAS FAILED

There are substantial community and industry concerns with the way Labor has managed and implemented the Marine Bioregional Planning Process.

The recreational and commercial fishing sectors, and those businesses and communities reliant on these sectors, have all raised serious and ongoing concerns about the consultation process implemented by Labor.

Marine Queensland, representing the leisure and light commercial marine industry has stated:

*“Initially, the process was focused on determining the activities taking place in our oceans and the impact they had. Now, the shift has moved towards establishing Marine Parks with no accurate assessment of what is actually being protected – it is a two-dimensional solution for a 3-dimensional problem.”*<sup>1</sup>

Rather than seek genuine input on Marine Bioregional Planning decisions, Labor has used the process for declaring Marine Protected Areas to tell stakeholders what will happen. It is a process that has been borrowed from the disastrous implementation of state marine parks in New South Wales. The NSW fishing community, for example, has consistently raised concerns that information provided in good faith to the NSW State Government regarding types of fish caught was used against the community to declare the no-take marine parks. Fishers now believe the same process is being followed at Commonwealth level.

Labor’s failure to properly consult threatens jobs and the livelihood of many small businesses in coastal communities.

Labor’s Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has taken a hands-off approach to the Marine Protected Areas process thereby failing to represent the interests of the commercial and recreational fishing sectors.

Labor has failed to meet its own timeframes for declaring Marine Protected Areas. Timeframes have been altered due to Labor’s failure to adequately consult within unrealistic schedules that were politically, rather than practically, motivated.

Labor has also failed to rule out large no-take zones within Marine Protected Areas currently being established across Australia. No-take zones, established without appropriate assessment or consultation, have the potential to devastate businesses and communities reliant on recreational and/or fishing trade. The fear of no-take zones has caused great uncertainty for businesses directly and indirectly reliant on access to fishing resources.

Labor has also caused great uncertainty amongst stakeholders who will be adversely impacted by potential loss of access to resources within declared marine parks.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fishingworld.com.au/yaf-news/qld-boating-industry-opposes-marine-park>

A recent consultant's report commissioned by the Rudd-Gillard Government has recommended a minimum level of compensation for a limited group of displaced stakeholders including mining permit holders, indigenous communities and some commercial fishing businesses. This report has only increased the uncertainty across the fishing sector.

The Coalition believes the very real concerns of the recreational and commercial fishing sectors about the Marine Bioregional Planning process must be addressed immediately.

In order for the process to be cooperative and successful, it is critical that local communities and fishing industry have confidence that the Government is genuinely seeking their input - and is transparent in its decision making.

# THE COALITION'S PLAN FOR REAL ACTION ON MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

The Coalition will take real action to ensure there is proper community and industry consultation on any proposed Marine Protected Areas.

Specifically the Coalition will:

## **1. Immediately put on hold the marine bioregional planning process to allow for its restructure.**

The Coalition will take immediate action to restructure the Marine Bioregional Planning Process to address major community and industry concerns with Labor's mismanagement of the process.

During this restructure, a Bioregional Advisory Panel will be appointed for each of the four marine bioregions. These Advisory Panels will provide advice on potential Marine Protected Areas and the design of management plans (including consideration of no-take zones). The Bioregional Advisory Panels will also consult with the community and fishing industry on the restructure of the Marine Bioregional Planning Process.

While continuing a rigorous scientific assessment process, a Coalition Government will suspend consideration of currently published 'Areas for Further Assessment' and will refer the design and locations of proposed boundaries for proposed Marine Protected Areas and no-take zones to the Bioregional Advisory Panels.

Consideration will be given to staging the assessment and consultation process across the four marine bioregions currently under assessment. This will ensure that stakeholders with an interest in multiple marine bioregions are given reasonable opportunity to contribute to consultative processes.

## **2. Provide a fair and balanced displaced effort policy**

The Coalition will establish a Ministerial Panel tasked with oversight of the design, development and consultation of the displacement policy. The Panel will be jointly chaired by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and Arts.

The Coalition's displacement policy will be developed through the four Bioregional Advisory Panels, in consultation and negotiation with affected commercial and recreational industry representatives (including charter operators and onshore related businesses). The displaced effort policy will be informed by socio-economic modelling of the reach of the fishing sector into the community.

The consultation will examine options to reduce the negative economic impacts that would flow from implementation of the draft plan.

As a last resort, if such consultation and negotiation does not reduce impacts below levels that are reasonably compensable, then compensation, structural adjustment or other appropriate measures will be delivered before any constraints on fishing are implemented.

### **3. Base marine protected areas on science**

The Coalition will require peer-reviewed scientific evidence of threats to marine biodiversity to be made available to all stakeholders, including affected communities and industries, before any decision is made on future Marine Protected Areas.

The Coalition will work cooperatively with all impacted communities and industries through the Bioregional Advisory Panels to develop socio-economic impact statements for each proposed Marine Protected Area.

### **4. Establish sensible and balanced marine park boundaries and develop management plans in consultation with industry**

In establishing Marine Protected Areas, the Coalition will consult closely with those people and industries that use the marine environment, including the recreational and commercial fishing sectors, to determine Marine Protected Area management plans in accordance with relevant legislation and other regulatory frameworks.

World-leading and highly rigorous fisheries management regimes are already in place in Australian waters. Significant weight will be given to these existing and effective fisheries management plans when considering assessed areas.

The Marine Protected Areas management plans to be developed will have the central aim of maximising marine biodiversity protection while also minimising the social and economic impact on the local fishing sector and onshore businesses. A Coalition Government will also ensure that these management plans are implemented over a reasonable period of time to assist with transitional arrangements.

Under a Coalition Government, both the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and Arts will be jointly responsible for approving final boundaries and management plans for marine bioregions.

# COSTINGS

There are no additional costs to the budget.

Provision of funding for the Marine Bioregional Planning process is already made in the forward estimates through the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.