

# THE CORAL SEA – A REMOTE NATURAL TREASURE

The Coral Sea is recognised globally for its extensive network of coral reefs and cays. Australia's Coral Sea territory of nearly one million square kilometres is known for the pristine nature of an environment that is largely undisturbed.

The Coral Sea is recognised throughout the world for its unique physical, ecological and heritage values. It is situated adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef and covers an area of the ocean more than half the size of Queensland. The environmental significance of the Coral Sea lies in its diverse array of coral reefs, sandy cays, deep sea plains and canyons. It is a refuge for many iconic species under serious threat elsewhere in the world.

The Coral Sea contains more than twenty outstanding examples of isolated tropical reefs, sandy cays and islands. The extensive shallow reef systems in the area support tropical communities abundant in hard and soft corals, sponges, algae, and numerous invertebrate species (e.g. sea snails and sea stars). These are different from many of the Great Barrier Reef systems and the temperate reefs further south. These reefs are also thought to be important stepping-stones between the reefs of the central and south Pacific to the Great Barrier Reef.

While the isolation of each reef system has ensured a great diversity between the communities and populations at each site, it also means these systems can be particularly fragile. Depletion of individual

species (or whole links in the marine food chain) could have a catastrophic, long-term impact. Recovery is likely to be slow and uncertain.

In addition to the shallow reef systems, the Coral Sea also has deep cold water troughs and deep sea basins which support and provide habitat for distinctly different sea floor communities; many of which are unique to the Coral Sea region.

The Coral Sea supports important breeding and aggregation sites for marine turtles, seabirds and a range of other species including sharks, black marlin and nautilus.

Several important species found in the Coral Sea are under pressure elsewhere from over-harvesting and habitat degradation. This makes the Coral Sea an important global refuge for these species.

While this pristine marine environment appears resilient, it is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change – including rising sea temperatures.

Australia has a unique opportunity to protect this precious marine environment for future generations. That's why the Government is acting to protect the entirety of Australia's part of the Coral Sea by setting up the world's largest marine reserve.

## IMPORTANT SPECIES

- The Coral Sea provides important habitat for a range of threatened and migratory species including whales, sharks, marine turtles and a number of seabirds.
- The green turtle, an iconic species protected in many countries around the world, uses the Coral Sea as a breeding ground while other species, such as the dwarf minke whale, the hawksbill and leatherback turtles and the endangered herald petrel, forage in the area.
- Several species of seabird including frigatebirds, terns and boobies, use the islands within the Coral Sea as breeding grounds.
- The Coral Sea is also an important place for large pelagic fishes such as tunas and billfish.

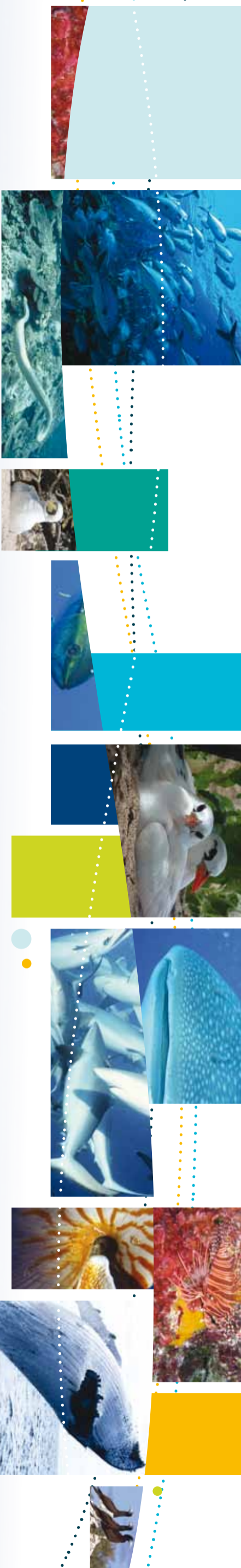


## HERITAGE VALUES

- The Coral Sea was a battle-ground during World War II. Between 4–8 May 1942, the Japanese navy battled the Allied naval and air forces from the United States and Australia. Three ships are known to have sunk in the north-eastern area of the Coral Sea—the USS Lexington, the USS Sims and the USS Neosho.
- The Coral Sea has a rich and tragic maritime history. Many vessels that traversed the Coral Sea to transport materials between Sydney and northern Australia and Asia were wrecked on the treacherous reefs that now bear the ships' names.
- While the locations of many shipwrecks remain unknown, two wrecked ships, the Cato and HMS Porpoise, are considered particularly significant in addition to a number of other historic shipwrecks.



Images: USS Lexington and USS Sims  
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**Australian Government**  
Department of Sustainability, Environment,  
Water, Population and Communities

# HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE PROPOSED CORAL SEA MARINE RESERVE

The proposed Commonwealth marine reserve for the Coral Sea has been released for public consultation. For more information visit the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities' website:  
[www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/coralsea](http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/coralsea)

People with an interest in the proposed Commonwealth marine reserve for the Coral Sea are encouraged to provide written feedback. The Department's website contains information about how to provide feedback by lodging a submission and closing dates of the public consultation process.

If you have any questions about how to make a submission or on any other aspects of the marine bioregional planning process please email [East.MarinePlan@environment.gov.au](mailto:East.MarinePlan@environment.gov.au) or phone 1800 069 352.

- A submission form is available at [www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/coralsea](http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/coralsea), and:
- can be completed and submitted online; or
- saved and emailed to [Submissions.CoralSea@environment.gov.au](mailto:Submissions.CoralSea@environment.gov.au)
- or printed and posted free of charge to:

Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water,  
Population and Communities  
MBP Submissions – Coral Sea  
Reply Paid 787  
Canberra ACT 2601

## Proposed Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve

### DRAFT FOR COMMENT / PUBLIC CONSULTATION

