

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Marine bioregional planning is designed to better protect marine environments, conserve biodiversity and deliver greater certainty to resource users and decision-makers about the marine conservation priorities of the Australian Government. Under section 176 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts must have regard to a Marine Bioregional Plan when making relevant decisions.

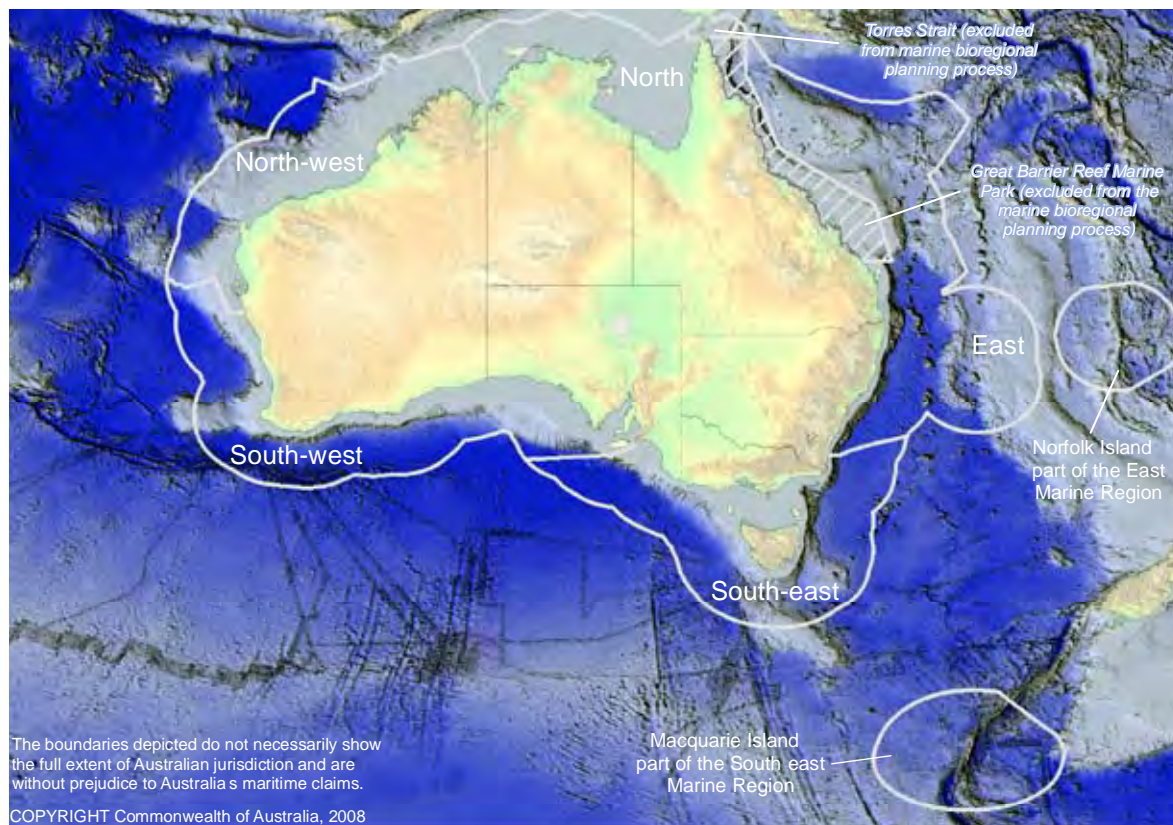
Marine bioregional planning is also the process through which the Australian Government identifies areas within Commonwealth waters for inclusion in the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas. Guidelines to develop the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas have been agreed with the States and the Northern Territory. See www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mpa/publications/nrsmpa-guidelines.

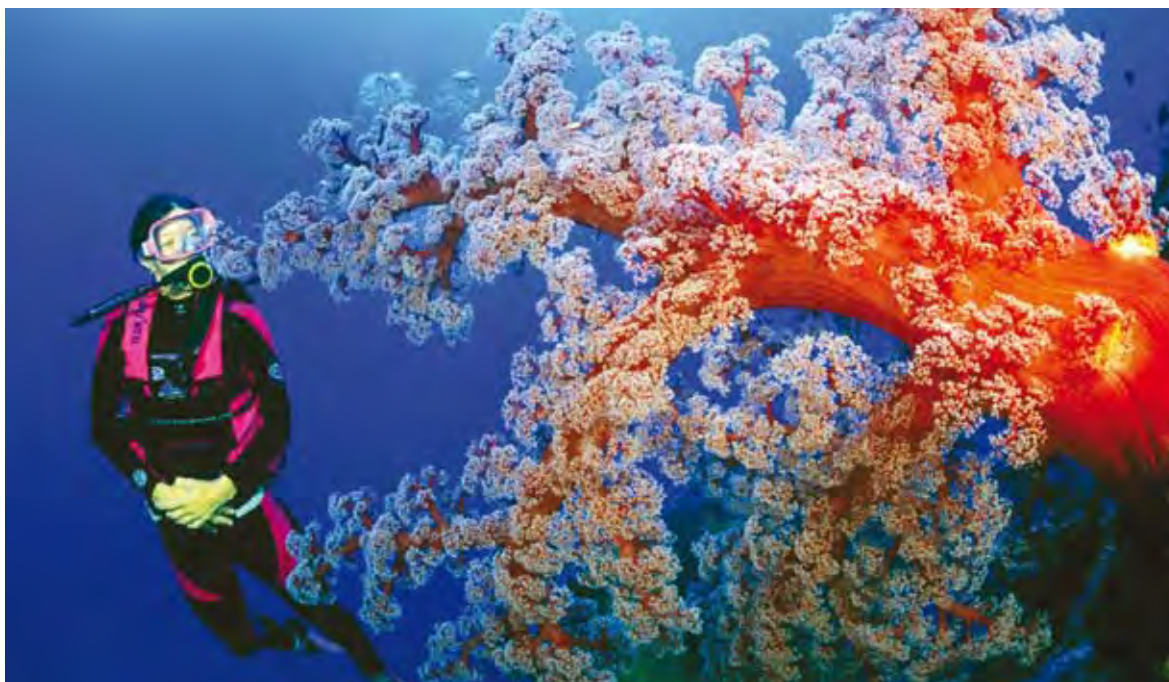
Marine Bioregional Plans guide Government decision-makers and marine users by:

- describing each Region's conservation values and ecological processes, including mapping sites of importance for protected species and communities;
- identifying priorities for action based on an assessment of threats to conservation values and long-term policy goals; and
- developing strategic guidance for proponents and decision-makers. For example, by providing a regional context for national guidelines to help proponents within a region consider whether their action might result in a significant impact (see appendix B). Plans may also include guidance on the types of information that should be included with referrals under the EPBC Act, or the monitoring that might be required for certain activities or locations within a Region.

There are five Marine Regions for planning, as shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Australia's Marine Regions





Soft coral and diver, Coral Sea. Photo: Mike Ball.

1.1 The Bioregional Profile of the East Marine Region

The East Marine Region encompasses Commonwealth waters offshore from the northern tip of Cape York to the southern New South Wales town of Bermagui. It includes the waters surrounding both Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands and the whole of the Coral Sea Islands Territory. For the purposes of marine bioregional planning, it does not include the waters within the boundary of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park or State waters. The East Marine Region, which is described in more detail in chapter 2, covers 2.4 million km² of ocean and also includes the airspace above and the seabed below. In this Bioregional Profile, the terms *the Region*, and *the East Marine Region* are used interchangeably to refer to the Commonwealth waters defined above.

The objectives of the East Marine Region Bioregional Profile are to describe:

- ecological and biophysical features of the Region including major ecosystems, marine species, communities and places already specifically protected under legislation and those identified through the planning process as key ecological features;
- considerations and information that will guide the identification of Marine Protected Areas; and
- human activities in the Region.

In addition to this Introduction, the East Marine Region Bioregional Profile includes five other chapters, and five appendices:

Chapter 2 – *The Marine Environment of the East Marine Region* describes the biophysical and ecological characteristics of the Region, with particular focus on ecosystem structure and functioning within provincial bioregions.

Chapter 3 – *Conservation Values of the East Marine Region* summarises and describes the biodiversity and heritage features of the Region.

Chapter 4 – *Establishing New Marine Protected Areas in the East Marine Region* introduces the goals and principles the Australian Government is using to establish the Commonwealth component of the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas and explains their application to the Region.

Chapter 5 – *Human Activities and the East Marine Region* outlines the human activities that take place in the Region. It also provides a short overview of the population and the historical development of the Queensland and New South Wales economies adjacent to the Region.

Chapter 6 – *Developing an East Marine Bioregional Plan: Next Steps* describes the stages of marine bioregional planning beyond the Bioregional Profile, and opportunities for stakeholder participation.

Appendix A – *International Conventions and Agreements on the Marine Environment* describes Australia's international commitments to manage the marine environment.

Appendix B – *An Overview of the Legislative Framework for Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation in Commonwealth Waters* explains Australia's national legislation for managing its marine areas.

Appendix C – *Nationally Protected Species in the East Marine Region* lists all the species known to occur and those which may occur in the Region that are protected under the EPBC Act.

Appendix D – *East Marine Region Protected Species Group Report Cards* provides detailed information about species protected under the EPBC Act. Report Cards on species groups outline their ecology, areas of particular importance, interactions with human activities, threats to their survival and mitigation measures currently being used.

Appendix E – *Technology and Equipment Used in Commercial Fishing Operations* provides a summary of some of the modern technology used in Australian commercial fisheries as well a description of some more traditional pieces of equipment still in use today.

1.2 Supporting information

A number of reports were commissioned to support the development of this Bioregional Profile. These reports consolidate available information and provide further details on the natural environment and human uses of the Region and are available online at <www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/east>.

Some key reports used in this Bioregional Profile include:

Sedimentology and Geomorphology of the East Marine Region of Australia – prepared by Geoscience Australia in 2008 to summarise all available information on the geology and sedimentology of the Region.

Ecosystems of the East Marine Region – a description of the eco-physical systems of the Region and how they function. This report gathers, reviews and summarises available information to identify and describe the ecosystems, sub-systems, functional groups and relationships, links across systems and large scale drivers of the Region.

Description of Key Species Groups in the East Marine Region – a description of the key marine species groups in the Region including their status, habitat and distribution, regional significance, threats and information gaps.

Description of Commercial, Recreational and Charter Fishing Activities in the East Marine Region – a high-level socio-economic overview of the role and value of commercial, recreational and charter fishing in the Region. This analysis includes the activities associated with both State and Commonwealth fisheries that operate within the Region.

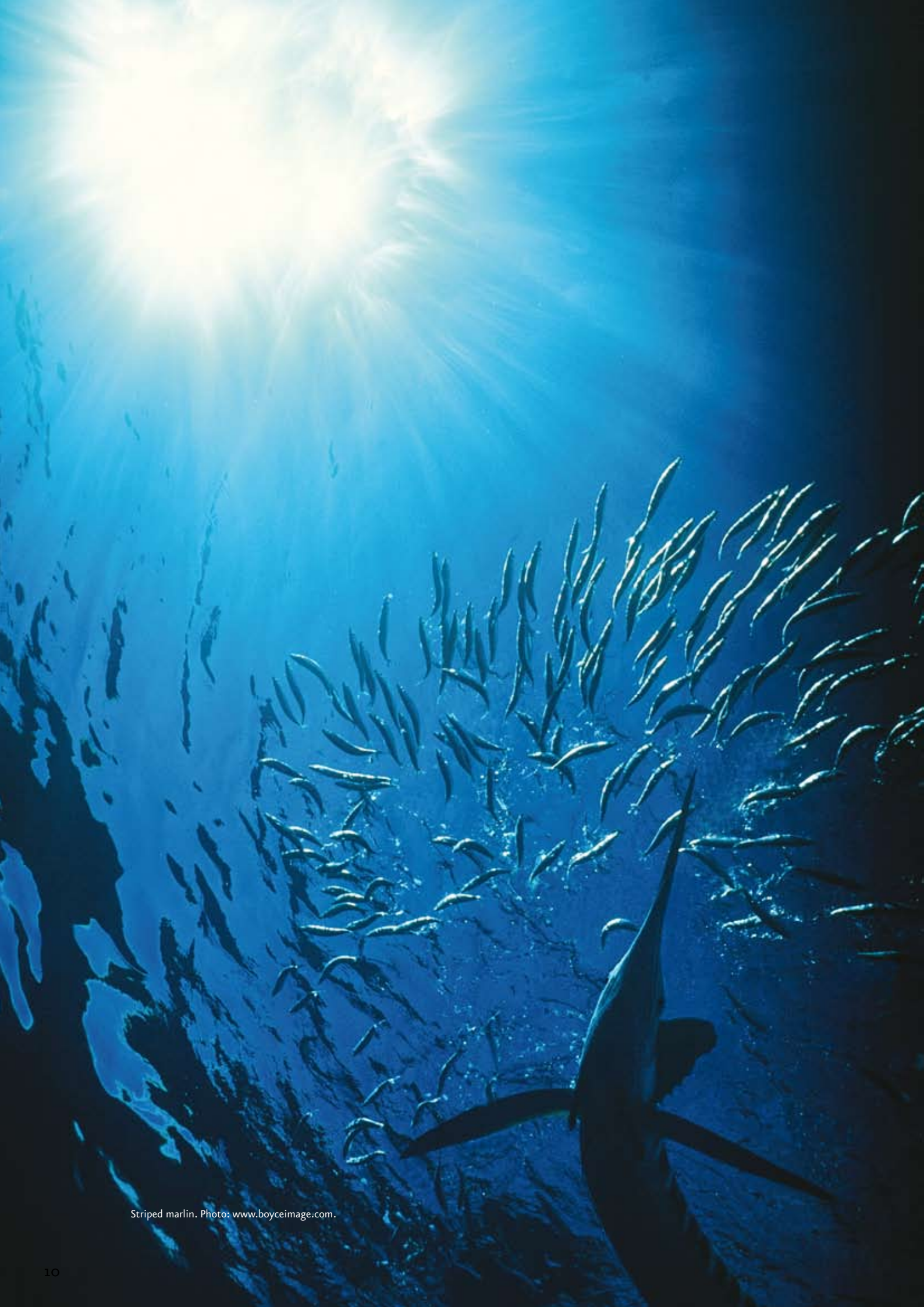
Non-fisheries Resource Use Activities in the East Marine Planning Region – examines non-fisheries marine resource use activities in the Region. The report focuses on the socio-economic values of the Region and the importance of these activities to the adjacent coastal areas and to the nation as a whole.

As Far as the Eye Can See: Indigenous Interests in the East Marine Planning Region – a summary of Aboriginal interests in the Region, pre- and post-European contact, including community identity, marine resource use, past and current associations with the Region, current issues, and aspirations of these communities.

Characterisation of the Marine Environment of the East Marine Region – a summary of the discussions and outcomes of an expert workshop convened in Brisbane on 28–29 November 2007. The objective of this workshop was to characterise the marine environment of the Region and understand how its natural systems work. The workshop took stock of current knowledge and theory about the ecosystems of the Region and will ensure that the Bioregional Profile and the next steps in the planning process are based on the best information possible, with an explicit recognition of uncertainties due to gaps in the regional knowledge base. The outcomes of the workshop are available online at <www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/east>.

This Bioregional Profile is intended to help stakeholders and the public participate in the development of the East Marine Bioregional Plan. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts welcomes information from the public that may be relevant to bioregional planning within the East Marine Region. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and the Arts will consult with stakeholders to discuss the contents of the Bioregional Profile and explain subsequent steps in the planning process.





Striped marlin. Photo: www.boyceimage.com.