



FACT SHEET 10 – Questions and answers

What is a marine bioregional plan?

Marine bioregional plans are being developed by the Australian Government under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the EPBC Act) to improve the way our oceans are managed and help them remain healthy and productive.

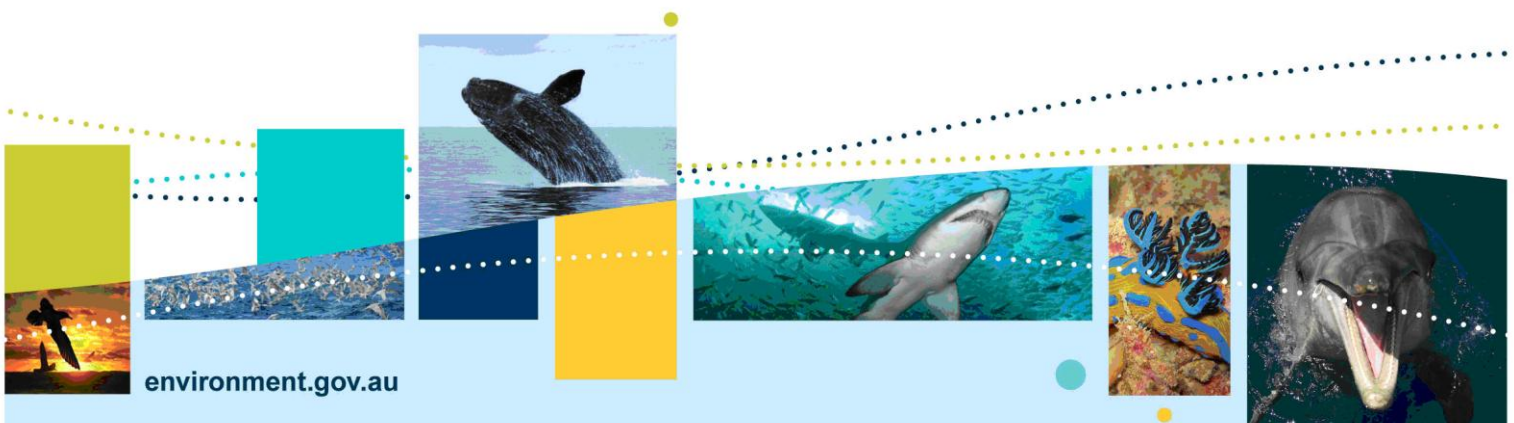
Marine bioregional plans describe the marine environment and conservation values of each marine region, set out broad biodiversity objectives, identify conservation priorities and outline strategies and actions to address these priorities.

By bringing together scientific knowledge and information from many sources on the biophysical characteristics and diversity of life in our oceans, marine bioregional plans will:

- assist the Commonwealth Environment Minister make strategic, consistent and informed decisions under the EPBC Act in relation to Commonwealth waters
- assist people planning to undertake activities within a marine region to determine how to mitigate the potential environmental impacts of their proposal
- clarify the Australian Government's marine environment protection and biodiversity conservation responsibilities, objectives and priorities.

Marine bioregional plans apply to Commonwealth waters - which start at the edge of state/ territory waters (usually 3 nautical miles or 5.5km from the coast) and extend to the outer limits of Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) some 200 nautical miles from shore.

There are five marine regions across Australia's Commonwealth waters - the South-west, North-west, North, East and South-east. A marine bioregional plan will be prepared for each of these regions.



When will marine bioregional plans be completed?

Marine bioregional plans for all regions will be completed after people have had an opportunity to provide feedback on drafts which will be released progressively during 2011 for consultation.

Marine bioregional plans are being prepared for the South-west, North-west, North, East and South east Marine Regions. Draft Plans will be released for public consultation. Anyone with an interest in the marine bioregional planning process is encouraged to make a written submission during the 90-day statutory consultation period for each region.

The draft Marine Bioregional Plan for the South-west marine region has been released.

Marine bioregional plans for all regions will be completed after the government has considered comments made by the public during the public consultation period.

What is a marine reserve?

Marine reserves (also known as marine protected areas or marine parks) are areas in the ocean that are managed with the main purpose of conserving the plants and animals that live within them.

Protecting areas that contain representative examples of different wildlife and habitats across linked networks is widely regarded, both nationally and internationally, as one of the most effective mechanisms for maintaining the long-term health and productivity of our oceans.

The Australian Government currently manages 27 marine reserves, including the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the representative network of marine reserves in Australia's South-east Marine Region. Australia's states and the Northern Territory manage around 170 existing marine parks across state waters.

In total, marine reserves currently cover around 1 million square kilometres or just over 11 percent of Australia's oceans (excluding Antarctic waters).

Why are new marine reserves being developed?

While Australia has an extensive system of marine reserves by global standards, there are still many different types of marine ecosystems in Australia's waters that are not represented within marine reserves. New marine reserves are being identified by the Australian Government through the marine bioregional planning process to help ensure that examples of all the different marine ecosystems, habitats and life they support are protected.

The Australian Government is developing new marine reserves in Commonwealth waters, which start at the edge of state/territory waters (usually 3 nautical miles or 5.5km from the coast) and extend to the outer limits of Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) some 200 nautical miles from shore.

The Australian states and the Northern Territory also have been developing marine reserves within their coastal waters under their own legislation and processes. Collectively, new marine reserves in Commonwealth and state waters will contribute to Australia's international and national commitments to establish a National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA) by 2012. The original agreement to create the NRSMPA was signed by all governments in 1998.

Where will new marine reserves be located?

New Commonwealth marine reserves will be located in Commonwealth waters, which start at the edge of state/ territory waters (usually 3 nautical miles or 5.5km from the coast) and extend to the outer limits of Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) some 200 nautical miles from shore.

The Australian Government is working to establish a network of marine reserves within which all the different types of marine biodiversity that are found in Commonwealth waters are represented and protected. At the same time, the government is seeking to ensure that it minimises the adverse socioeconomic impacts on users of the marine environment that can arise when new Commonwealth marine reserves are established.

Identification of new Commonwealth marine reserves is being guided by the Goals and Principles for Establishment of the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas in Commonwealth Waters. The Goals and Principles direct that, where possible, new Commonwealth marine reserves should be designed in such a way that they avoid areas that are highly valued by industry and recreational users while also ensuring good conservation outcomes.

What information is being used to identify where new marine reserves will be located?

Scientific information on marine biodiversity, habitats and ecosystems, as well information on human activities in the marine environment is being used to design proposed networks of new Commonwealth marine reserves.

The Australian Government guidelines for identifying where new marine reserves will be located are called the Goals and Principles for the Establishment of the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas in Commonwealth Waters. The Goals and Principles provide direction on how to ensure that all types of marine ecosystems and biodiversity are represented within the national network of marine reserves while minimising socioeconomic impacts on people who use the marine environment.

A range of information is being used to ensure that the network of new Commonwealth marine reserves is consistent with the Goals and Principles. Scientists, managers/regulators, industry representatives and the community have all contributed data and other information to the marine bioregional planning process. This information is helping to improve our understanding of Australia's marine biodiversity, how our marine ecosystems work and how people interact with marine environments and resources.

Some information that is used in the marine bioregional planning process (for example, some data on commercial fisheries activities and oil and gas prospectivity) is confidential and can not be shared publicly. However, most data are available either through the internet or by contacting the agency or group who owns the data (the data 'custodian') directly. The marine bioregional planning online data list

shows how you can access data used in marine bioregional planning and the design of Commonwealth marine reserves.

When will new Commonwealth marine reserves be in place?

New Commonwealth marine reserves will not take effect until they are declared under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

Commonwealth marine reserve network proposals for the South-west, North-west, North and East Marine Regions will be released for public consultation during 2011. The marine reserve network proposals for each marine region will be completed after public comments have been considered, as well as the results of socioeconomic impact assessments being conducted for the marine reserve proposals in each region, and any amendments made in response to them.

With the marine reserves network proposal finalised, a new round of statutory public consultation then will be conducted as part the process to formally establish the proposed networks of new Commonwealth marine reserves under the EPBC Act. This consultation period will be at least 60 days. Stakeholder feedback received during this consultation period will be considered before the Australian Government finally proclaims the marine reserve networks and they take effect.

After the marine reserves networks have been proclaimed, there will be two further formal consultation periods when people can submit feedback on the development of a management plan for each marine reserves network.

What activities will be permitted in new marine reserves?

New Commonwealth marine reserves will be managed through different zones which will determine which activities may occur where. Some activities will not be permitted within any reserve and some activities will not be permitted within certain zones within each reserve.

Large parts of the regional networks of Commonwealth marine reserve will be zoned to allow many activities to continue as long as those activities are consistent with the primary objective of protecting biodiversity.

Highly protected zones will be included within the network of new marine reserves. These zones will be managed to preserve the area in an undisturbed and unmodified condition, and where disturbance has occurred allow it to recover. Extractive activities such as mining, oil and gas exploration and development and fishing will not be permitted in highly protected zones.

Will the existing network of marine reserves in the South-east marine region change?

No. The boundaries and zones of the existing South-east marine reserve network will not be changed through the marine bioregional planning process.

