



MEDIA RELEASE

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World's Marine Scientists Endorse Large-Scale 'National Parks at Sea' *Scientific Statement Released for World Oceans Day*

SYDNEY—More than 245 marine scientists from 35 countries, including Australia, have endorsed a science statement calling for the establishment of a worldwide system of very large, highly protected marine reserves. The statement identifies these reserves as “an essential and long overdue contribution to improving stewardship of the global oceanic environment.”

While small marine reserves are known to protect some species, large reserves—comparable to large national parks on land—are necessary to better protect sea life in our oceans, which cover 71 percent of the planet.

The experts endorsed the statement's scientific case for designating very large, highly protected marine reserves and called on policymakers to take bolder action in establishing these areas.

“Marine scientists understand the immediate need to set aside more and larger marine reserves to give our oceans a chance to recover and replenish. Although some progress has been made, we hope that the public and world leaders pay attention to this message and act before it is too late,” said Dr. Sylvia Earle, world renowned oceanographer and Patron of the Protect Our Coral Sea campaign.

“The theory of conservation science shows that the most effective and efficient way of conserving marine biodiversity is to have systems of marine protected areas made up of individual reserves of different sizes, each catering to the needs of different sorts of species. Large marine reserves are needed for maintaining viable populations of the large marine predators that are invariably the key to the natural functioning of marine ecosystems,” said Professor Hugh Possingham, director of the Ecology Centre, University of Queensland.

Overfishing, pollution and climate change are adversely affecting the health of the world's oceans, and ultimately threatening the livelihoods, food security and economic development of millions of people. Very large reserves can help reduce these problems, according to a recently published book, *The Unnatural History of the Sea*, by Dr. Callum Roberts with the University of York.

Today, less than 0.5 percent of the world's oceans are fully protected from extractive or destructive activities. Large, no-take marine reserves can help minimise the effects of excessive commercial fishing by offering a refuge to sea life to breed and spawn, providing for healthier fisheries as the fish swim into surrounding areas, and thus ensuring more resilient coastal economies. Because the ecosystems in ocean reserves are healthier, they are also more resistant to the damage caused by pollution, climate change and a wide range of other development activities.

Australia led the world in ocean protection when it rezoned the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP) in 2004 so that a third of its 344,400 square kilometer (sq km) area was set aside as “green” zones (no-take areas). Since that time, a number of very large and highly protected marine reserves have been established. These reserves include the 362,000 sq km Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands, and three marine national monuments covering 505,000 sq km in the Pacific Ocean, of which 60 percent is no-take. More recently, the United Kingdom designated the 544,000 sq km Chagos Protected Area as the largest no-take reserve in the world in April 2010.

Australia has an opportunity to once again demonstrate its leadership in ocean protection by protecting the Coral Sea within Australia’s maritime area. The Coral Sea has a massive expanse of unspoiled reefs, seamounts and deep ocean waters, and is an area of historic significance to the nation due to the Battle of the Coral Sea in 1942.

The Coral Sea within Australian waters stretches from the eastern boundary of the GBRMP to Australia’s maritime boundary with Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia. It is one of the last remaining places on Earth where populations of large ocean fish, such as sharks, tuna and billfish, remain healthy. It is home to abundant wildlife, including whales, turtles and seabirds and a diverse range of corals and reef fish.

“Less than one per cent of the Coral Sea is protected from fishing and oil and gas extraction. A large, world-class fully protected marine reserve in the Coral Sea, next to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, would make an unparalleled contribution to marine science and conservation,” said Imogen Zethoven with Pew Environment Group-Australia.

Earlier this year, Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett reaffirmed the importance of the Coral Sea by including it as one area for assessment in the bioregional planning process for the East Marine Region. A Coral Sea Conservation Zone, declared by Minister Garrett in May 2009, has offered interim protection which allows existing uses to continue while its conservation values are being assessed.

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For a copy of the science statement, please visit: www.protectourcoralsea.org.au

Media interviews available; please contact:

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Protect our Coral Sea is a joint campaign supported by regional, national and international conservation organisations, including the Australian Conservation Foundation, Australian Marine Conservation Society, the Pew Environment Group - Australia, Project AWARE Foundation, Queensland Conservation Council and the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre. For more information about efforts to protect the Coral Sea, please visit: www.protectourcoralsea.org.au