



## **Conservation Groups Welcome Senate's Support for Coral Sea Conservation Zone**

BRISBANE, 17 November 2009 – Conservation groups today welcomed the Senate's support for the Federal Government's Coral Sea conservation zone. This support now gives a green light for assessing whether the Coral Sea should be protected as a marine park.

The motion by National Party Senator Ron Boswell and Liberal Party Senator Ian Macdonald today to disallow the Coral Sea conservation zone was voted down by the Australian Labor Party, the Australian Greens, and Senator Nick Xenophon.

"The Senate's rejection of this motion means that the government can now focus on determining the future of the Coral Sea," said Amy Hankinson, spokesperson for the Australian Conservation Foundation. "In all Commonwealth waters around Australia, the Federal Government is assessing what areas to include within marine parks, so that we can continue to have marine wildlife and beautiful coral reefs into the future."

"The Senate's decision is good news for Cairns," said Steve Ryan, marine campaigner, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre. "Cairns is a tourism economy, and tourism in this part of the world is suffering due to the effects of the global financial crisis. If the Coral Sea were to be permanently protected, it would provide a major economic boost for Cairns,"

In May 2009, Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett established a conservation zone over the entire Coral Sea within Australian waters. The conservation zone is an interim protection measure, which allows existing uses to continue while the area is assessed to determine whether it should be protected in a marine park.

Located east of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, the Coral Sea is part of the government's East Marine Region and extends from the tip of Cape York Peninsula to Bermagui off New South Wales, excluding the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The government is preparing a Marine Bioregional Plan for the entire East Marine Region as well as other regions around Australia.

The Coral Sea is one of the last remaining places on Earth where populations of large ocean fish, such as sharks, tuna, and billfish, remain healthy, and is home to abundant wildlife, including seabirds and a diverse range of corals and reef fish. In May 1942, the Coral Sea was the site of a naval engagement that turned the tide of World War II in the Pacific. A number of Allied and Japanese ships were sunk during the Battle of the Coral Sea and hundreds of sailors lost their lives.

"Despite its environmental and historical importance, less than one percent of Australia's Coral Sea is protected from extractive industries and its future is not secure," said Nicola Temple, spokesperson for the Australian Marine Conservation Society. "The extraordinary environmental value and historical significance of the Coral Sea offers the Federal Government an unparalleled opportunity to protect an amazing part of the world's threatened ocean, right next to the Great Barrier Reef."

###

### **Media Contacts:**

Amy Hankinson, Coral Sea Spokesperson, Australian Conservation Foundation Mobile: 0418 996 032

Nicola Temple, Coral Sea Campaigner, Australian Marine Conservation Society, Mobile: 0425 359 068

Steve Ryan, Marine Campaigner, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, Mobile: 0425 344 746