



MEDIA RELEASE: Federal policy is fair to fish and fishers alike

4 May 2011 – A policy to provide assistance to fisheries affected by Commonwealth marine reserves creates a ‘win-win’ opportunity to protect Australia’s oceans, say leading conservation groups.

The Fisheries Adjustment Policy, announced today by Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke, outlines options for commercial fishers displaced by the creation of reserves and paves the way for the release of a series of draft marine protection plans. The plans, starting with the South West Marine Region, will establish a network of marine reserves to safeguard Australia’s ocean life, the most diverse on Earth.

“Currently less than 1 per cent of Australia’s South-west, North-west, North, Coral Sea Conservation Zone and East marine regions are highly protected. A network of marine reserves, free from any extraction, is the most effective way to safeguard the special and important areas in our oceans and help maintain the health of our coastal economies and lifestyle,” said Chris Smyth of the Australian Conservation Foundation.

The Fisheries Adjustment Policy released today is largely the same as the statement released by the Howard government in January 2004 to address the short-term effects of the declaration of marine reserves on fishers and fishing-dependent communities.

“Although the Howard government policy was fair and equitable, its implementation through the Great Barrier Reef Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) has been widely criticised,” said Imogen Zethoven of the Pew Environment Group.

A government review^[1] found the program suffered from cost blowouts and widespread dissatisfaction amongst stakeholders. It also found that greater ecological benefits and a more economically sustainable fishing sector in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park could have been achieved if licence buyouts had been a higher priority within the package.

“In this next phase of marine planning, it is vital the majority of funds are dedicated to the ‘buyback’ of fishing licences at an appropriate price,” Ms Zethoven said. “This fair approach ensures that fishing boats are not simply squeezed into other areas outside the reserves, potentially leading to an unsustainable concentration of fishing efforts.”

“Although some fishers may need government assistance to transition from marine reserves, the long-term economic benefits of the reserves to regional communities are well-established,” said Darren Kindleysides of the Australian Marine Conservation Society.

A study by the Allen Consulting Group found the South-west’s eco-tourism industry, including whale, dolphin and seal watching, would receive a 20 per cent boost to generate \$55 million per year as a result of establishing large marine sanctuaries in the region.

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^[1] John Gunn et al., June 2010, *Review of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Structural Adjustment Package*.