



More Protection Needed in Government's Landmark Proposal for the Coral Sea

25 November 2011—The Protect Our Coral Sea coalition has called the federal government's draft Coral Sea plan a good start, but said it falls short of fully protecting the area's fragile coral reefs and spectacular marine life.

"We welcome the exclusion of oil and gas extraction and the ban on fishing gear that destroys seafloor habitats," said Imogen Zethoven of the Pew Environment Group. "However, protection levels need to be stronger—particularly in vulnerable areas—to ensure the Coral Sea's long-term protection."

"Only the eastern half of this ocean treasure has been set aside as a safe haven for marine life. The western half contains most of the species-rich coral reefs and critical spawning sites for black marlin and threatened tuna," said Darren Kindleysides of the Australian Marine Conservation Society.

"Many of the jewels in the crown of the Coral Sea remain unprotected—only two of about 25 unprotected reefs are given a high level of protection," said Steve Ryan of the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre.

"Full protection of the western half is consistent with the government's 2010 election commitment to secure the highest level of protection for important and special places in Australia's oceans," said Don Henry of the Australian Conservation Foundation.

A recent poll found that almost seven in ten Queenslanders said they supported the government making the entire Coral Sea a marine national park. More than 55,000 letters have been received by federal MPs in support of this goal.

The release of the draft plan kicks off a 90-day public comment period. Protect Our Coral Sea will be encouraging all Australians to send a submission to the government calling for stronger protection levels.

"The Coral Sea is our marine Serengeti. Large and spectacular ocean wildlife such as tuna, marlin, and sharks are still found in healthy numbers, making it a special place on a global scale," said David Roe of Project AWARE.

"Minister Burke has a rare opportunity to create a lasting ocean legacy and demonstrate global leadership in ocean conservation. Protecting special places in our oceans, like the Coral Sea, delivers long-term benefits for us all," said Isabel McCrea of the International Fund for Animal Welfare.





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Editors Notes:

- Newspoll conducted a poll in September and October 2011 by telephone among a representative sample of 602 people ages 18 and older in Queensland. It found that 69 percent of people said they favoured making the Coral Sea a marine national park.
- A study by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, *Marine Protected Areas Management Costs: an Analysis of Options for the Coral Sea*, released on 2 December 2009 found that a single, large, fully protected marine park is less expensive to manage than a multi-zoned plan. Full report link is: <http://bit.ly/tdDXpt>. The overview link is: <http://bit.ly/rSurH8>
- More than 270 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 in areas like the Coral Sea: <http://bit.ly/swXyUc>
- In the past 50 years, more than 90 percent of the world's large predatory oceangoing fish have disappeared because of overfishing. Source: R A Myers & B Worm, Nature, Vol 423, 15 May 2003.
- Less than 1 percent of the world's oceans are fully protected.
- Protect Our Coral Sea, a coalition of 13 Australian and international conservation groups, is calling on the federal government to establish a large, world-class, highly protected marine park in Australia's Coral Sea that will provide a haven for marine life and recognize its historic significance. www.ProtectOurCoralSea.org.au
- The Protect Our Coral Sea coalition comprises: the Australian Conservation Foundation, Australian Marine Conservation Society, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, Greenpeace, Humane Society International, International Fund for Animal Welfare, National Parks Association of Queensland, North Queensland Conservation Council, Pew Environment Group, Project AWARE, Queensland Conservation Council, Wildlife Queensland, and WWF-Australia.

