



# MEDIA RELEASE

**The Hon Peter Garrett MP**

*Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts*

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## **MAJOR MILESTONE FOR EAST MARINE REGION ASSESSMENT**

Environment Protection Minister, Peter Garrett, said the release today of the Areas for Further Assessment for the East Marine Region marks an important milestone in an unprecedented effort to assess the unique economic and environmental values of the Australian east coast marine environment.

Mr Garrett said the ongoing process would inform the development of a network of 'multiple use' and 'no-take' marine reserves in Commonwealth waters throughout the region, which covers 2.4 million square kilometres from the Torres Strait to southern New South Wales, and as far east as Norfolk Island.

"Today's identification of Areas for Further Assessment kicks off a new round of scientific assessment and consultation that will help ensure that any future decisions about protecting our marine environment are made taking into account the need to minimise the impacts on industry," Mr Garrett said.

"This ongoing consultation program is critical to ensure that we gain a comprehensive understanding about the areas that are important to both industry and to recreational fishers, as well as being environmentally significant so that we can ensure we get the balance right in our future planning.

"Better understanding Australia's waters so as to conserve our unique marine environment and sustain our marine based industries well into the future is a massive task, one we are strongly committed to." Mr Garrett said.

Seven areas, plus the Coral Sea Conservation Zone, have been identified for further assessment. The seven areas are the Fraser, Tweed, Clarence, Hunter, Batemans, Tasmanid-Lord Howe and Norfolk.

"These areas for further assessment are simply areas where more detailed information will be collected. Importantly, they do not have any regulatory impact on industries, recreational fishers, boating enthusiasts, tourism operators and other users," Mr Garrett said.

### **CORAL SEA**

The Minister made today's announcement on a visit to Cairns, a major departure point for the Coral Sea, where he met with representatives from the commercial fishing industry and the indigenous community.

"The work completed to date on the Coral Sea, shows that it is an area of unique environmental significance with an array of coral reefs, atolls, deep sea plains and canyons.

“It was those unique values that led to the Government putting in place an interim Conservation Zone last year, which will remain the subject of assessment as we continue the marine planning process.

“I want to make plain to everyone, that while my Department will continue to assess the whole of the Coral Sea, there is no plan to establish it as one large 'no take' marine park.

“As with other marine areas around the country, I expect that this process will lead to a balanced mix of both multiple use areas and no-take areas within the marine reserve network in which we work with stakeholders to secure a good conservation outcome while minimising social and economic impacts.”

## **NEXT STEPS**

Once consultation on the Areas for Further Assessment has concluded, the Government will finalise proposals for a network of marine reserves in the East Marine Region, which will be identified in the draft marine bioregional plan due out early next year. Stakeholders and the public will again be able to give the government feedback on the proposed marine protected areas during a statutory consultation period on the draft plan.

“Everyone with a stake in Australia’s marine environment will have the opportunity to provide detailed information and express their views on the draft bioregional plans,” Mr Garrett said.

Marine bioregional plans are being developed under national environment law and will fulfil the Australian Government’s 2002 commitment to establish a National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas by 2012.

For further information on the marine bioregional planning process go to [www.environment.gov.au/mbp](http://www.environment.gov.au/mbp)

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