



Queensland
Conservation



MEDIA RELEASE 3 MARCH, 2010

Scientific Case for Coral Sea Protection Water Tight

A coalition of Australia's leading conservation groups today strongly backed the scientific case for protection of the Coral Sea.

The groups were responding to an unsubstantiated attack on the science underpinning the declaration of the area as a Conservation Zone by Minister Peter Garrett. The unfounded criticism comes in an industry report prepared by Dr. Ben Diggles, a consultant who has worked for one of the charter fishing businesses that operates in the Coral Sea.

The scientific value of a marine park in the Coral Sea has been publicly supported by some of Australia's top scientists including Professors Terry Hughes, Ove Hoegh-Guldberg and Hugh Possingham.

The Coral Sea provides habitat to 108 threatened, protected and migratory species including turtles, whales, dolphins, sharks and seabirds. The reefs in the Coral Sea are more vulnerable than the reefs of the Great Barrier Reef because they are scattered across greater distances, making coral and fish replenishment less likely.

"Mr Diggles has written the report in his capacity as a consultant to Marine Queensland, the 'peak body' representing the leisure and light commercial marine industry" said Dr Gilly Llewellyn of WWF Australia. "His paper attacks several studies that have been published in some of the most prestigious peer reviewed scientific journals in the world."

The conservation groups are united in their call for the Coral Sea to be included in a marine park to protect its immense natural and heritage values. "The Coral Sea is of great historic importance as it was the site of the most important naval battle ever engaged in by Australia" said Toby Hutcheon of the Queensland Conservation Council said.

"The proposed marine park lies between the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and our maritime boundary with Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia. Due to its remoteness from land, the Coral Sea has remained relatively unspoiled," said Nicola Temple of the Australian Marine Conservation Society.

"The Coral Sea, within Australian waters, is about 1 million square kilometres," said Amy Hankinson of the Australian Conservation Foundation. "A single large marine park is the most appropriate way to protect it, in order to conserve the highly mobile ocean species found in the area."

Over 22,500 people have written to their federal MP or the Prime Minister in support of a marine park in the Coral Sea. "Minister Garrett has overwhelming public support for the Conservation Zone", said

Imogen Zethoven of the Pew Environment Group. “The public recognizes the need for long-term protection of this unique area¹.”

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¹ Newspoll results available on request.