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Your guide to making a detailed submission on the proposed Coral Sea marine park

Introduction

The Coral Sea is a tropical marine jewel. It's one of the last places on Earth where large marine animals can still be found in great numbers. Australia has a special opportunity to establish the world's largest marine national park in the Coral Sea that will provide a safe haven for marine life and recognise its historic significance.

In November 2011 the Commonwealth Government released a draft Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve and whilst the draft plan is a good start it falls short of the scale of protection needed to protect the Coral Sea's fragile coral reefs and spectacular marine life. It is now vital that the Environment Minister hears loud and clear from the community that the Coral Sea's iconic marine life deserves better. Please take the short amount of time it takes to make a submission on this once-in-a-lifetime proposal and help us convince the Government to establish the world's largest marine national park in the Coral Sea. We have provided the following submission guide to help you in making a submission, if you have any questions please contact us at info@protectourcoralsea.org.au with 'submission' in the subject line.

Why make a submission?

Your submission is vital to the protection of the Coral Sea. Conservation victories are never easy and they always require a lot of work by a lot of people. After many years of vigorous campaigning the protection of Australia's iconic Coral Sea is within reach, however the Government's proposal leaves abundant coral reefs, critical feeding and breeding areas, and mysterious underwater features like seamounts, canyons and troughs unprotected from exploitation. Only a strong show of support from those who believe our oceans deserve protection will give the Government the confidence they need to establish the world's largest marine national park in the Coral Sea and leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

More than 55 000 people have signed a petition urging the Commonwealth Government to protect our Coral Sea – now, at this critical stage we need to ensure these voices are heard loud and clear and the Coral Sea is given the protection it so desperately deserves.

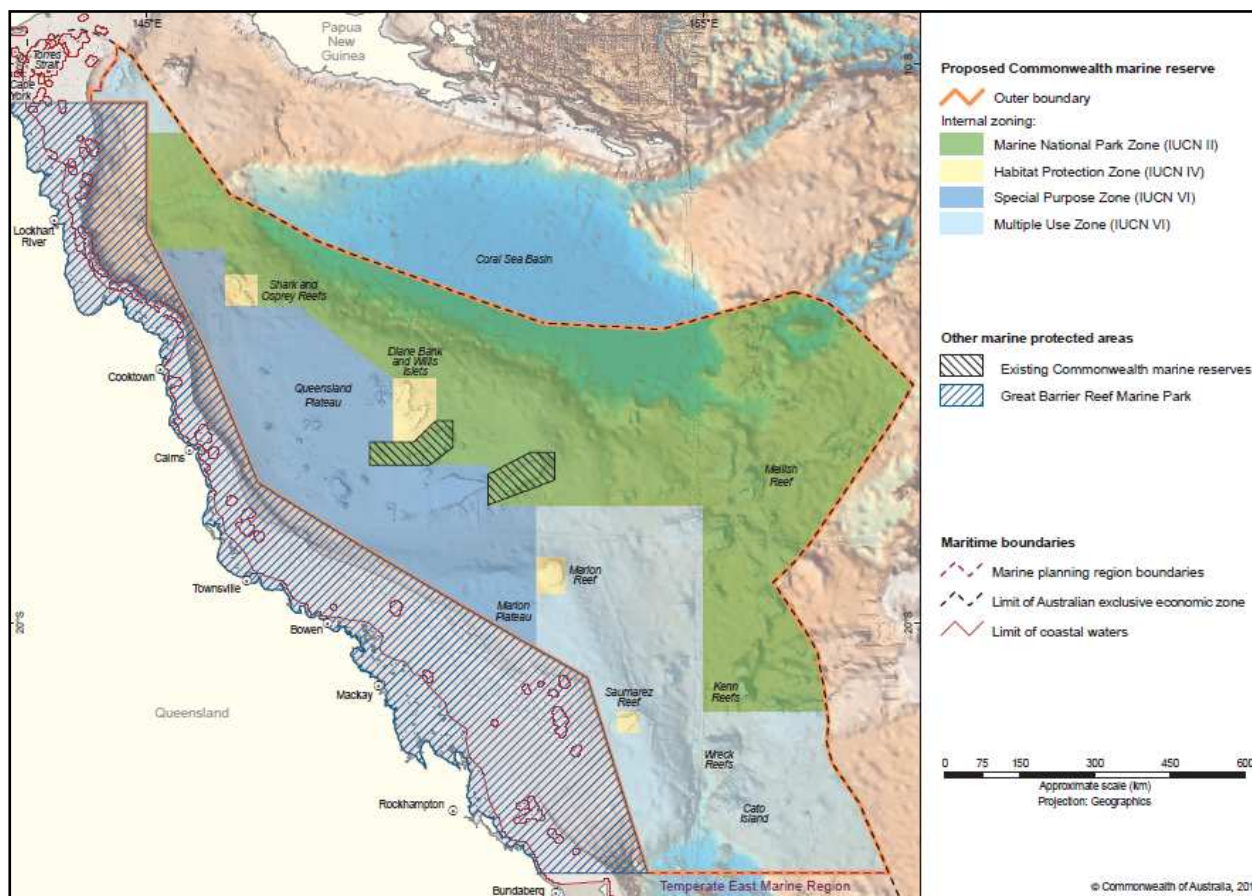
The deadline for submissions is the 24th of February so please make your voice count today!

What is the government proposing?

The Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve proposed by the government is a good start but falls short of the scale of protection needed for the Coral Sea's fragile coral reefs and spectacular marine life. The marine reserve proposed by the government leaves large areas of the Coral Sea open to exploitation and sadly many of these unprotected areas are home to the greatest diversity of life. The entire proposed marine reserve does exclude mining and oil and gas exploration which is a good outcome for our wildlife however greater protection from fishing is needed.

The proposed Coral Sea Marine Reserve includes four different types of zones which provide varying levels of protection from threats. Here is a map of the proposed Coral Sea Marine Reserve – only the areas shaded in green have a high level of protection.

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Below is a table showing the main activities allowed in each zone and the percentage of the total Coral Sea Marine Reserve *.

Zone	Multiple Use	Special Purpose	Habitat protection	National Park
Research and monitoring	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tourism (inc. dive, snorkel, boating, nature watching)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recreational fishing	✓	✓	✓	X
Charter Fishing	✓	✓	✓ ^a	X
Mining and oil drilling	X	X	X	X
Pelagic longline	✓	X	X	X
Hand collection (inc. aquarium)	✓	✓	✓ ^b	X
Bottom fishing (including trawling, gillnet, longline)	X	X	X	X
% of total marine reserve	26.3% (260 589 km ²)	20.4% (202 365 km ²)	2% (19 401 km ²)	51.3% (507 487 km ²)

a- Catch and release fishing. Take of fish for consumption for the duration of a trip is permitted.

b- Hand collection is not allowed in the Marion Reef Habitat Protection Zone.

*a full list of activities permitted within each zone is available at

www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/coralsea/index.html

What is missing from the proposed marine park?

The Coral Sea is one of the healthiest areas left in our global oceans. Its diverse array of near intact coral reefs, underwater seamounts, deep troughs, sand cays and enormous plateaus provide Australia with an opportunity to leave a lasting ocean legacy for future generations.

The proposed Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve fails to protect most of the important areas in the Coral Sea and the spectacular marine life they support. These features which are not fully protected include:

Coral Reefs

- Osprey Reef which is considered one of the world's top 10 shark dive sites. It is one of the very few areas in the Coral Sea to have been extensively researched and provides great opportunities for tourists wanting a truly unique diving experience. Osprey and neighbouring Shark and Vema Reefs should be included in the large marine national park.
- The majority of reefs in the blue heart of the Coral Sea which are breeding and feeding sites for a whole host of wildlife as well as a likely stepping stones between the Pacific ocean and the Great Barrier Reef. The current proposal leaves these vulnerable and often isolated reefs open to certain types of fishing. All the reefs on the Queensland Plateau should be included in the large marine national park.
- Marion Reef, which is a focal point for many large ocean fish will under this proposal remain open to charter fishing despite the likely isolated vulnerability of the reef to the impacts of limited fishing. Marion Reef and the broader Marion Plateau including Saumarez Reef, should be included in the large marine national park.

Vital Breeding Sites

- The only known spawning site in the world for black marlin will under this proposal still be available for recreational and charter fishing. Globally vulnerable bigeye tuna; and near threatened yellowfin tuna will continue to be caught commercially in a large area of the proposed Coral Sea Marine Reserve. These spawning aggregations occur in the Townsville Trough and Queensland Trough. These major trough systems should be included in the large marine national park.

Underwater Volcanoes

- The underwater volcanoes in the southern Coral Sea which are a globally significant hotspot for top ocean predators such as sharks, tuna and marlin. Sea mounts are widely understood to be treasure troves of biodiversity but here in the Coral Sea very little is known about these oceanic mountains. Under the existing proposal they will remain open to longline fishing and various other forms of fishing. All the underwater volcanoes and their associated reefs should be included in the large marine national park.

Submarine Canyons and other Amazing Formations

- Canyons and knolls in the deeper reaches of the Queensland Trough are known to host unique cold-water coral assemblages of high conservation significance. Geological features of the Townsville Trough, western Queensland Plateau and most of the Marion Plateau fall outside the highly protected national park zone in the current proposal. This should be rectified in the final plan.
- The Coral Sea is an iconic marine environment with a diversity of habitats, ranging from sand cays to cavernous basins over 4000m deep. It is the interconnected and near intact habitats that make the Coral Sea special yet the proposed Coral Sea Marine Reserve fails to adequately protect these features as one integrated ecosystem. At a time when there is so little known about the diversity and vulnerability of the Coral Sea this ocean treasure is deserving of our greatest protection.

How to make your submission

Making a submission doesn't have to be a daunting task; submissions can be highly technical or they can be very simple – the important thing is that you let the government know that our iconic Coral Sea deserves world-class protection. Submissions can be made by email, online, or posted letter. All submissions must be addressed to the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and state that you wish to make your comments as a formal submission.

Your submission can be made in a number of different ways:

- **Online** at <http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/coralsea/consultation/index.html> where you'll find an online form,
- **Email** your submission to Submissions.CoralSea@environment.gov.au Please also copy us at info@protectourcoralsea.org.au.
- **Post** your submission to (no stamp required):
 - o Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
MBP submissions – Coral Sea
Reply Paid 787
Canberra ACT 2601

FAQ

Where can I find more information on the government's proposal?

The Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve is being developed as part of the Marine Bioregional Planning Process by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities. More information on the Government's proposal is available at: www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/coralsea/index.html

What is the Protect our Coral Sea coalition?

The Protect our Coral Sea campaign is a coalition of 13 regional, national and international conservation organisations which is calling on the federal government to establish a very large, world-class, highly protected marine national park in Australia's Coral Sea. The 13 organisations which form the Protect our Coral Sea coalition are 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 Foundation, Queensland Conservation Council, Wildlife Queensland, and WWF-Australia.

Is there public support for the protection of the Coral Sea?

Yes, the protection of the Coral Sea is the most publically supported marine campaign in Australian history. More than 55 000 people have signed a petition in support of the establishment of the world's largest marine national park in the Coral Sea as well as notable Australians Tim Winton, John Williamson, Pat Rafter, Jesse Martin, Isabel Lucas, Kristy Hinze and Akira Isogawa. World-renowned oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle is the patron of the campaign. Please visit www.protectourcoralsea.org.au for more information.

What is a highly protected marine national park?

Marine national parks are a scientifically proven way to protect our oceans and their wildlife. Just as national parks protect our wildlife and special places on land, marine national parks protect important areas in our ocean from exploitation. Marine national parks are areas that are free from extractive uses including commercial and recreational fishing, and oil and gas mining and exploration. They encourage nature based tourism and maintain shipping, research and other non-extractive industries.

Isn't the Coral Sea a conservation zone already?

In 2009 the Coral Sea, east of the Great Barrier Reef and within Australia's waters was declared a temporary Conservation Zone. The conservation zone was established as an interim protection measure whilst the Coral Sea was to be assessed for permanent protection as part of the federal governments Marine Bioregional Planning Process. The Conservation Zone does not change any existing activities in the Coral Sea with extractive industries including commercial and recreational fishing continuing unaffected.

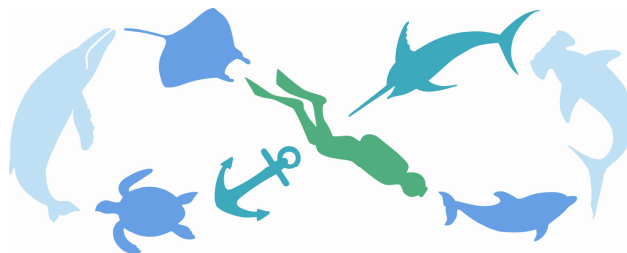
How can I do more to protect the Coral Sea?

Volunteers are the core to so many conservation victories in Australia and the protection of the Coral Sea is no different. We have active volunteer campaigns in Cairns, Brisbane and Sydney so please contact us on info@protectourcoralsea.org.au with 'volunteer' in the subject line to get involved or hear more. Writing a letter to the editor of your state newspaper or calling your MP are both very powerful ways to show you care about the protection of the Coral Sea.

Thank you for making a submission on the long term protection of the Coral Sea.

"The Coral Sea is a rare thing – a place where majestic ocean-going fish can still be found in great numbers. In the last 50 years, the world has lost 90% of these large ocean creatures due to overfishing. We need to do all we can to protect one of the world's last remaining refuges. That's why I support a fully protected marine park in the Coral Sea within Australia's waters. I call it a "hope spot" for the oceans. The Coral Sea would be the world's largest protected area, a beacon to all other countries, and a giant leap forward for humanity's custodianship of the sea"

- Dr Sylvia Earle, Patron of Protect our Coral Sea



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