



Oceans Action Bulletin

An Update from the Marine Division of the Department of the Environment and Heritage

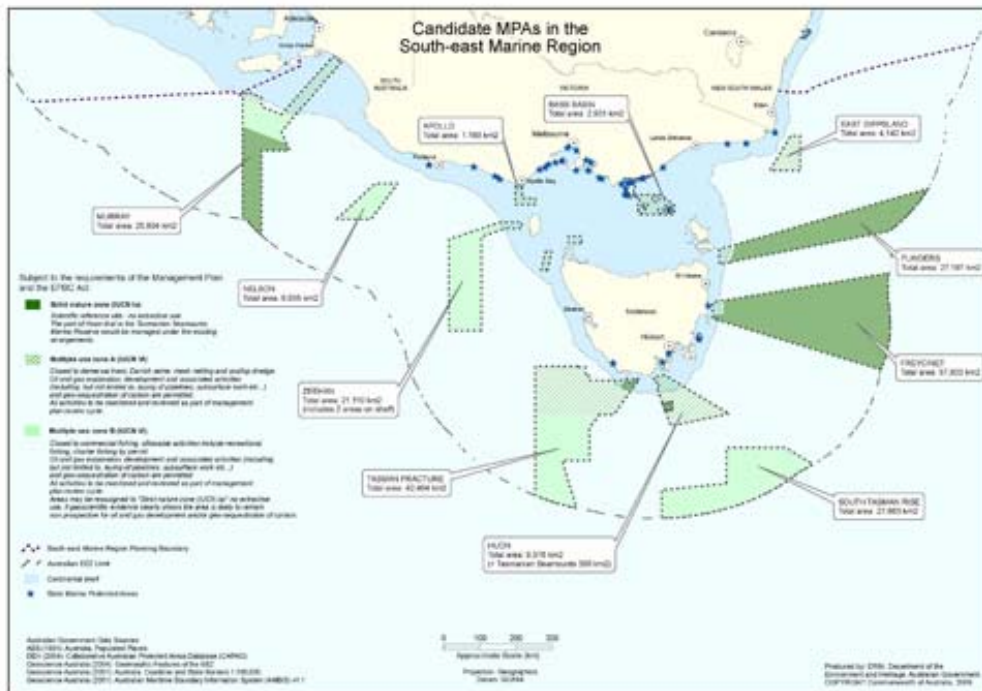
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This Bulletin updates you on Australian Government activities in the marine environment. Please forward to any interested parties. For further information or to unsubscribe from this Bulletin, please email samantha.meyer@oceans.gov.au

Australia leads world with new Marine Protected Areas

The Australian Government has acted to preserve the unique environment of Australia's south-eastern waters, with an area almost as big as the State of Victoria included in 13 new Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

Announcing the 226,000 square kilometres of new protected zones today, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, said the decision again confirmed Australia as a world leader in marine environment conservation.



The South-east MPA network

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About one-third of the world's marine protected areas were now in Australian waters.

The MPA network is the culmination of extensive discussions with stakeholders, with more than 120 days of consultation just since the release of the proposed network in December.

The new MPA network covers waters off Victoria, Tasmania, far south New South Wales and eastern South Australia and will pave the way for the creation of a national network of MPAs throughout Australia's vast ocean territory.

"This is a major advance for the protection of the unique marine life of the south-east marine region, and significantly, we have been able to deliver these new marine protected areas with minimal impact on industry," Senator Campbell said.

"Since I released the proposed network last December, we have made more than 20 adjustments to boundaries and zoning that will reduce the impact on commercial fishing by more than 90 per cent.

"We have also managed to design an MPA network which, through the use of multiple use areas, recognises that the South-east is a critical petroleum production area for Australia. The new MPA network will not prevent prospective oil and gas areas from being explored and developed."

The Minister also noted that for the first time the geological storage of carbon dioxide has been flagged as an allowable use in multiple use zones in MPAs, subject to meeting regulatory and other requirements. Carbon dioxide capture and storage involves capturing carbon dioxide emissions, compressing them into a liquid form and then injecting them under pressure into deep underground geological formations. The storage of carbon dioxide is one of a suite of measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions as part of Australia's climate change strategy.

While the independent Scientific Peer Review Panel, which was established to assess the MPA network, indicated it would like to see even greater environment protection provided, it concluded that the MPA network was a "*significant and important step towards a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of MPAs and represents a major advance in biodiversity conservation in the South-east region.*"

Senator Campbell said that in addition to the environmental protection afforded by the new MPA network, extensive fisheries closures being implemented by AFMA, such as the proposed closure of Bass Strait to bottom trawling, would also have a positive impact on the marine environment. The fisheries changes are included in the Australian Government's \$220 million *Securing Our Fishing Future* package.

"The new MPA network cannot be viewed in isolation from the significant steps this Government is taking to get our fisheries onto a truly sustainable basis and to inject a strong environmental protection ethos into fisheries management," he said. The development of the South-east MPAs started about three years ago and was accelerated in December 2005, when the Government released a candidate network of MPAs for consultation.

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Fishermen impacted by the creation of the MPA network may be able to obtain assistance under the *Securing Our Fishing Future* package - including those eligible to participate in the fishing concession buyout being conducted by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The Government will soon start a statutory process to have each MPA declared as a Commonwealth reserve. Further information on this process and the Australian Government's Marine Protected Areas program is available at www.deh.gov.au/coasts/mpa/index.html

Further background on Australia's Oceans Policy is available online at www.oceans.gov.au/the_oceans_policy_overview.jsp

Further information about the *Securing Our Fishing Future* package can also be obtained on the AFMA website at www.afma.gov.au/securing/direction.htm#management or by contacting the package hotline on 1800 617 866.

Reducing Wildlife Bycatch in Wild Fisheries

A project funded through the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) aims to reduce the level of bycatch in Australia's wild fisheries.

Bycatch has become one of the most significant issues affecting fisheries management both nationally and globally. The bycatch of marine mammals, seabirds, turtles and some sharks in fisheries is of particular concern.

The project is being run by the Bureau of Rural Science and administered by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. The Department of the Environment and Heritage and the Australian Fisheries Management Authority are also contributing to the project.



The project aims to review available information on techniques that exist, or are being developed, to reduce the incidental catch of non-target marine wildlife in Australia.

Shy Albatross © Mike Double

It focuses on bycatch concerns for mega-fauna (including whales and dolphins; seals and sea lions; dugongs; seabirds; turtles and sea snakes; and sharks); the modification of fishing gear and fishing practices; and actions to improve survival once a non-target species has been trapped in fishing gear.

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The project will identify wildlife mitigation techniques used in individual fisheries; undertake an extensive literature search of relevant on-line search engines; create a web-linked database comprising key findings and containing a search engine enabling users to search key terms (eg fishery, jurisdiction, gear type, mitigation measure).

Information will help with development of a regulatory framework for managing and administering commercial fisheries, notably the development of management plans to ensure ecologically sustainable development of fisheries.

The project will be completed by 30 June and its final report will be released after that date.

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