



# Marine park plan a win for all

## ■ Josh Frydenberg



The Commonwealth Director of National Parks has released draft plans to establish a world-class management program across 44 marine parks. Covering more than 3.3 million sqkm, an area bigger than the size of India, the draft plans are a vast improvement on those that were announced by the Gillard government in 2012.

Building on the recommendations of an independent expert scientific panel that received more than 13,000 submissions, the draft plans reflect a balanced, evidence-based approach.

The goal is to promote the highest standards of protection for our reefs, canyons and precious marine life, while also allowing for fishing, boating, diving, snorkelling and other related tourism activities where appropriate.

In 2012 Australia's five million recreational fishers were locked out of 1.3 million sqkm of Commonwealth waters without scientific justification. Now recreational fishers will have access to 97 per cent of waters within 100km of the coast and 80 per cent of the marine park network overall — up from 64 per cent previously. This includes well-known recreational fishing sites, like Geographe Bay, Cape Leveque in the Kimberley and Cato, Wreck, Shark and Vema reefs in the Coral Sea.

The right of Australians to throw a fishing line off the side of their boat, just as they have done for more than a century,

will be maintained.

The draft plans have also won plaudits from the commercial fishing industry with the WA Fishing Industry Council saying they were “heartened” by the plans and Tuna Australia praising the Turnbull Government for “listening and working with key stakeholders”.

Australia's commercial fishing industry is worth over \$1 billion per annum with the livelihoods of many coastal communities depending on its viability, not to mention that where possible the preference for consumers is always to Buy Australian.

By adopting a science-based approach, the draft plans allocate 20 per cent of the marine parks to green zones where no fishing is allowed, enabling the fish to spawn and feed.

At the same time, the number of yellow zones under these plans has doubled. This

ensures that features on the ocean floor are protected from disturbance, but fishing in the water column in accordance with strict Australian Fisheries Management Authority regulations are allowed.

As a result, the economic impact on the commercial fishing industry has been halved compared with 2012.

Where there is dislocation to the commercial fishing industry, the coalition Government has committed \$56 million over four years to provide appropriate assistance

and to implement the management plans.

In terms of the conservation benefits of these draft plans, there is a very positive story to tell. The number of ecological

features covered by habitat protection zones that protect the sea floor are increased from 192 to 265, almost 40 per cent, and there is an increase from 60 to 63 per cent of the areas where oil and gas extraction is prohibited. While the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority are the sole assessors of gas permits in Commonwealth waters, mining remains banned from national parks, recreational use and habitat protection zones.

Significantly, with 36 per cent of Australia's surrounding waters covered by marine

parks, Australia has not only easily surpassed the United Nations' target of 10 per cent, but now has the second largest area under marine management anywhere in the world, bar one: the US.

In sensitive areas like the Bremer Reserve off the south coast of WA where there are orcas, sperm whales and dolphins, as well as a strong ecotourism industry, oil and gas extraction under these new plans will now be curtailed.

In other iconic areas such as the Ningaloo, there has been no significant change from 2012 with all commercial fishing and mining operations excluded. Dive tourism will also be encouraged in many locations where fishing is not allowed, like Bougainville, Lihou and Kenn reefs in the Coral Sea.

In assessing the merits of these draft plans, it's important to point out what they are and what they are not.

These plans do not change the boundaries of the marine parks. They only establish the rules as to how they are managed.

These plans do not affect the



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Great Barrier Reef Marine Park as they have long-established plans that are managed by their own marine authority.

These plans do not cover all the waters from the shoreline. State and Territory governments are responsible for managing the first 5.5km from the shore and the Commonwealth is responsible for thereafter to the edge of the exclusive economic zone, 370km from the coast.

While extensive consultation has gone into preparing these plans with key stakeholders, including local indigenous landowners, it is clear not every stakeholder can ever be fully satisfied.

But overall what has been achieved is a balanced, scientifically evidence-based package which seeks to manage Australia's important conservation, economic and cultural interests.

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■ Josh Frydenberg is the Federal Minister for the Environment and Energy



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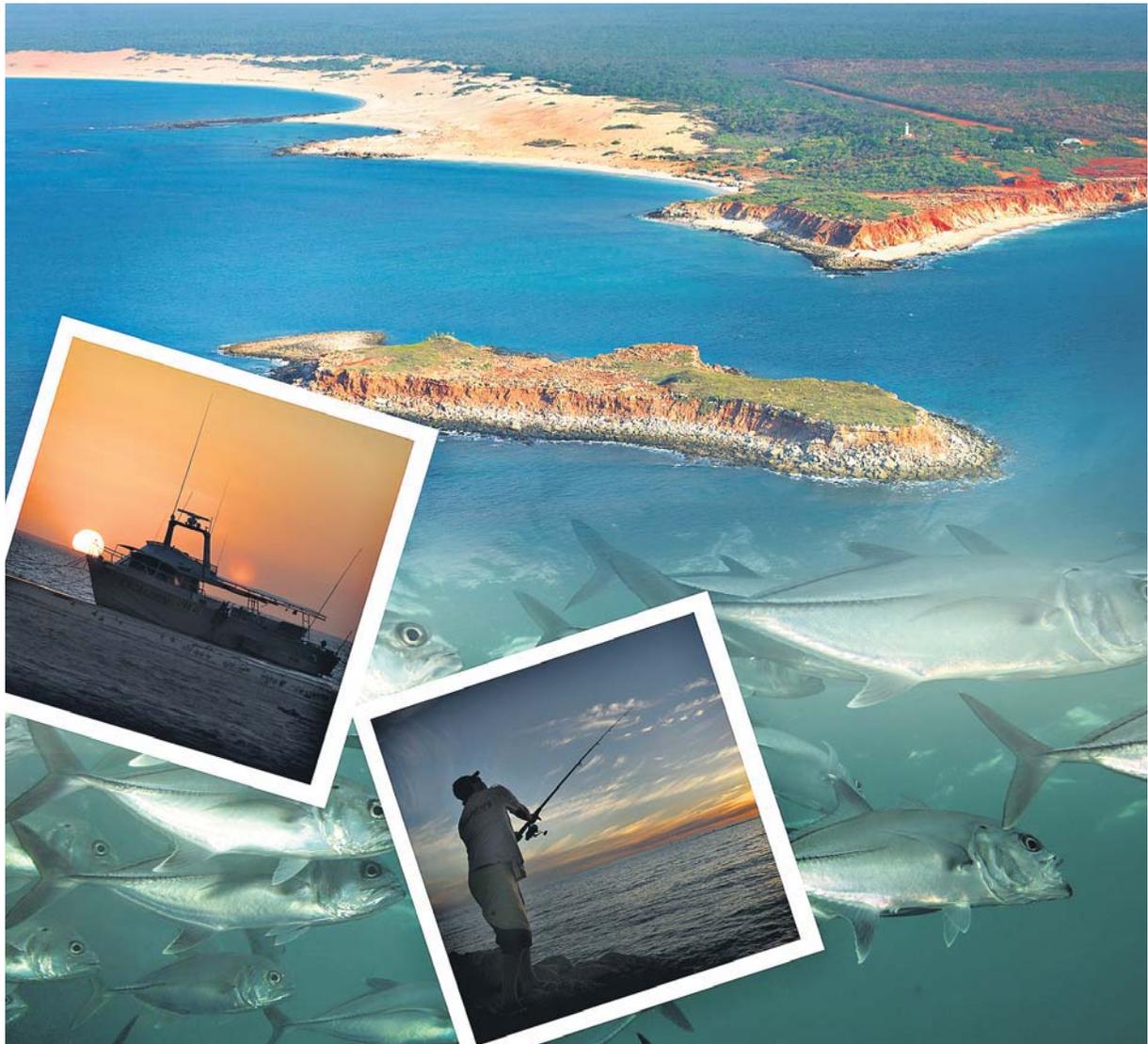


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