



An introduction to Marine Protected Areas

Marine protected areas including marine parks and aquatic reserves are important for protecting and maintaining the biodiversity of the marine environment. However some marine protected areas offer little real protection. It is the category of the marine protected area that determines whether or not they are effective conservation tools. The majority of areas classified as marine protected areas in NSW still allow fishing activities to occur and therefore provide limited protection of marine life. There are three main types of marine protected areas: Marine Parks, Aquatic Reserves and National Parks & Reserves.

Marine sanctuaries are the only marine protected areas that provide complete protection for our marine plants and animals. Currently less than 3% NSW marine waters are protected in marine sanctuaries. This falls far short of international recommendations for a minimum of 20-50% of all marine waters to be protected in marine sanctuaries.

Marine Parks

Declared under the *Marine Parks Act, 1997* marine parks aim to conserve marine wildlife while allowing for environmentally sustainable uses (including recreational and commercial fishing). Marine parks have four different management zones:

- **Sanctuary Zones** - areas in the sea that are strictly protected from extractive uses such as mining and fishing but allow for non-extractive uses including recreation – diving, snorkelling, boating, surfing, swimming - research, education and tourism.
- **Habitat Protection Zones** - meant to provide a high level of protection for marine plants and animals, while providing opportunities for “ecologically sustainable” recreational and commercial fishing.
- **General Use Zones** - designed to protect marine biodiversity while providing increased opportunities for “ecologically sustainable” recreational and commercial fishing
- **Special Purpose Zones**- Used for specific management purposes

National Parks and Reserves

Created under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974* these are areas adjacent to National Parks including estuaries and ocean fronts. In the reserve, general management can help conserve marine species but these areas cannot directly protect marine life from fishing.

Aquatic Reserves

Established under the *Fisheries Management Act, 1994*, these are generally small areas specifically designed to protect fish and their habitat. Controls on fishing and the removal of marine vegetation depend on the zoning of the reserve.

Intertidal Protected Areas

Also declared under the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* these areas are small, temporary fishing closures specially designed to protect rocky shore habitats and their associated intertidal invertebrates.

Importance of Marine Sanctuaries

The importance of marine sanctuaries within our marine parks system cannot be understated. Marine sanctuaries must be implemented globally in order to meet the needs of our generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

- Marine sanctuaries are the only form of marine protected areas that provide complete protection for our marine wildlife, such as sea horses, seagrasses and the endangered black cod.
- After considering both conservation goals and the risk from human threats and natural catastrophes, researchers recommend reserving 30-50% of all habitat types in each marine bioregion.
- The vast majority of studies done to date indicate that protecting 20-50% of fishing grounds will minimize the risk of fisheries collapse and maximize long term sustainable catches.
- Marine sanctuaries have been shown to improve number of fish by up to 90% and increasing the size of these fish by over 30%.
- Marine sanctuaries provide important sites for educational activities and increase community awareness of marine conservation issues.