

Coral Sea Marine Park Advisory Committee Meeting #10 Communiqué 10 April 2024, Townsville

Committee Meeting Overview

The Coral Sea Marine Park (CSMP) Advisory Committee met in Townsville and via video conference on Wednesday April 10 2024.

The Chair opened the meeting and provided an Acknowledgment of Country.

Key agenda items for the meeting included marine heatwaves in the CSMP, coral reef survey results, and a discussion about future management activity of reefs under a changing climate.

Updates on issues, management and research were provided by Members, and also Observers from the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), Fisheries Queensland and New Caledonia Government. Presentations were made by Grant Smith from the Bureau of Meteorology and Andrew Hoey from James Cook University (JCU).

Management Report

An update was provided on key activities since May 2023:

- **Authorisations** – 12 authorisations issued across commercial tourism, research and monitoring, and drone use.
- **Compliance** – 3 compliance incidents were recorded. Of these, one incident required no further action, one resulted in an advisory letter, and one incident resulted in the termination of an authorisation.

Member attendance

Russell Gueho (Chair), Craig Stephen, Clive Wilkinson, Andrew Hoey, Fiona Maxwell, Gareth Phillips, Maxine Newlands, Robert Pender, Samantha Tol

Observers

Brodie Macdonald, Rachel Downes, Lara Ainley (AFMA), Thomas Hatley (Fisheries Qld), François Leborgne and Maële Brisset (New Caledonia)

Apology

Doug Sanderson, Billie Roberts (Observer - TSRA), Mark Read (Observer - GBRMPA)

- **HPAI** - From late 2023, Parks Australia has been on alert in marine and terrestrial parks for signs of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) in wild birds, particularly migratory birds. The Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) have prepared a toolbox for wildlife managers that is publicly available through their website [here](#).
- The **Australian Marine Park Science Strategy** is nearing completion.

Marine Heatwaves in the CSMP

Grant Smith from the Bureau of Meteorology provided an overview of marine heatwaves in the CSMP. Key points included:

- Record high marine heatwave temperatures were recorded in the southern part of the CSMP this past summer. February experienced the highest sea surface temperatures on record.

- Higher than normal temperatures are predicted for the southern part of the CSMP in the coming months.

CSMP reef monitoring research work

Andrew Hoey from JCU provided an overview of the CSMP reef health survey work that his team have conducted since 2018. Key points included:

- In both 2020 and 2021, following major heat events, the CSMP experienced severe and widespread bleaching in shallow reef habitats.
- However, five standout or 'bright spot' reef areas have performed better than average during the heat waves: Ashmore, Boot, Bougainville, Moore and Mellish Reefs.
- Coral changes recorded over the 2023-2024 monitoring period include:
 - Small decline in coral cover in central CSMP and minimal change in the southern CSMP.
 - Coral cover has gone up in the northern part of the CSMP – where there has been less temperature stress.
- 2024 survey work occurred while marine temperatures were building. Persistently high or increased temperatures are likely to result in more heat stress on corals.

More information is available in the survey reports, located on the Parks Australia website:
www.parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/parks/coral-sea

Future CSMP reef states

The aim of this activity was to elicit insights, questions and advice from Members regarding future management of CSMP reefs under a changing climate. Members were divided into groups according to expertise to provide advice on scientific research and monitoring, and around park usage.

Members provided suggestions for future research and survey work, management opportunities and challenges, communication strategies and implications for park users such as fishing and tourism.

Coral Sea Natural Park New Caledonia

François Le Borgne and Maële Brisset from the management team of the adjacent New Caledonian Coral Sea Natural Park (Parc Naturel de la mer de Corail) joined the meeting as Observers. Key updates included:

- The government of New Caledonia has increased the Coral Sea Natural Park area with a level of protection classed as IUCN Ia or II from 2.4% to 10.6%.
- The results of over a decade of green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) monitoring in the d'Entrecasteaux Atolls and Chesterfield Islands have been released. 2023 appeared to be a strong year in terms of island visitation by green turtles.

A co-produced newsletter, which aims to share information on activities underway in Australia's Coral Sea Marine Park and the New Caledonian Coral Sea Natural Park, will soon be publicly available. It is in the final stages of production and will be available on our respective websites.

A new map has also been developed of our adjacent parks. It can be found on the Parks Australia website: [Coral Sea Marine Park | Australian Marine Parks \(parksaustralia.gov.au\)](http://parksaustralia.gov.au)

Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will occur later in 2024.

For more information about the Coral Sea Marine Park or the Committee:

Visit:
parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/parks/coral-sea

Email: marineparks@dcceew.gov.au