



Australian Marine Parks in the Indian Ocean Territories

Summary of initial community consultations on
marine environment values and considerations

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Australian Government
Director of National Parks



**Australian
Marine Parks**

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Executive summary

This report provides a summary of initial consultations and discussions held to explore the establishment of marine parks in Australia's Indian Ocean Territories (IOTs) at Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The summary of community views outlined in Section 4 of this report are those of the IOT community members and stakeholders and do not represent the views of the Government or Parks Australia.

Marine parks are one of the best ways to conserve and protect marine habitats and species, like coral reefs, seagrass and seamounts, while supporting sustainable social and economic uses of the marine environment, such as fishing and tourism. Parks Australia currently manages 58 Australian Marine Parks around the country to protect our marine environment. In the IOTs, two existing national parks – Christmas Island National Park and Pulu Keeling National Park - include small marine areas. However, most of the waters surrounding the IOTs are not currently included in the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA).

There is now an opportunity to improve protection of these marine environments by including them in marine parks, while supporting sustainable use of the marine environment by local communities and visitors, such as for fishing and tourism.

The first step in considering the establishment of new marine parks is gathering information about the region. This knowledge helps to shape the design of marine parks (including their location and zones within them) and how they might be managed in the future.

Between 16 February and 2 March 2021, Parks Australia met with local communities and stakeholders on Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands to talk about the potential to establish marine parks and begin the process of identifying the environmental, economic, cultural and social significance and uses of these waters.

The following is a summary of the main points raised by local government, community groups, business owners, industry and individuals during these initial consultations:

- Inshore waters are important to locals for fishing, recreation and tourism and the design of marine parks should continue to support these uses.
- Fish are an important source of food for many islanders, and fishing is also an important cultural activity and form of recreation.
- It is important to address future fishing rules for the IOTs, particularly if/how any proposed fishing rules and marine parks would interact.
- Protecting offshore waters in a marine park could benefit local fishers, protect fish stocks and promote the region's unique environmental values.
- It is very important to demonstrate the benefits of marine parks for locals.
- Locals want to be engaged in decision making on the design of any marine park, and closely involved in its ongoing management.
- Tourism opportunities from a marine park can benefit the community but should not bring additional regulation for tourism operators.

- Excluding active port areas from marine parks would help ensure their essential services and industries - such as freight and phosphate ship mooring and loading/unloading - are unaffected.
- IOT marine parks represent an opportunity to create a conservation area of global significance. They could help protect both threatened and iconic species in the region.
- Most people are interested in talking more about what a marine park design could look like for the IOTs.

This initial consultation with IOT communities is one of the first steps that Parks Australia is taking on behalf of the Director of National Parks to help establish marine parks in the Indian Ocean Territories.

Parks Australia will carefully consider the information shared through this phase of engagement. This knowledge will be used to inform more detailed discussions with IOT communities and other stakeholders about establishing IOT marine parks—including on their size, location and zoning of the parks.

Executive summary in Mandarin

执行概要

为探索在圣诞岛和科科斯（基林）群岛的澳大利亚印度洋领地（IOT）建立海洋公园的可能性，澳大利亚公园管理局（Parks Australia）进行了初步征求意见活动和讨论活动。本报告对此进行了概括介绍。本报告第4部分所概括的社区观点是IOT社区成员和利益相关方的观点，不代表澳大利亚政府和澳大利亚公园管理局的观点。

海洋公园不仅是保持和保护海洋栖息地和物种（例如珊瑚礁、海草和海山）的最佳方式之一，同时也支持对海洋环境进行可持续的社会和经济利用（例如开展捕鱼和旅游活动）。为保护我们的海洋环境，澳大利亚公园管理局目前管理着我国周边的58个澳大利亚海洋公园。在IOT内，现有的两个国家公园——圣诞岛国家公园和普鲁基林国家公园——包括了小片海洋区域。但是，IOT周围的大多数水域目前尚未纳入国家海洋保护区代表系统（NRSMPA）。

现在就有机会将它们纳入到海洋公园中，从而改善对这些海洋环境的保护，同时还可以支持当地社区和访客可持续利用海洋环境，比如开展捕鱼和旅游活动。

考虑建立新的海洋公园的第一步就是搜集有关该区域的信息。此类信息将有助于制定海洋公园（包括海洋公园的位置及其中的区划）的设计及其未来的管理。

2021年2月16日至3月2日，澳大利亚公园管理局与圣诞岛和科科斯（基林）群岛的当地社区居民和利益相关方会面讨论了建立海洋公园的可能性，并启动了确定这些水域的环境、经济、文化和社会意义及使用情况的流程。

以下是在上述初步征求意见期间，当地政府、社区团体、企业主、行业和个人提出的要点概要：

- 近海水域对于当地居民的捕鱼、娱乐和旅游业活动至关重要，海洋公园的设计应当继续支持这些用途。
- 捕鱼是很多岛民重要的食物来源，也是重要的文化活动和娱乐形式。
- 确立 IOT 的未来捕鱼规则非常重要，特别是提议的捕鱼规则是否/如何与海洋公园实现互动。
- 保护海洋公园内的近海水域可能会有利于当地渔民、保护鱼类资源和促进该区域独特的环境价值。

- 展示海洋公园对当地居民的益处非常重要。
- 当地居民希望参与海洋公园设计的所有环节，并密切参与海洋公园的持续管理。
-
- 海洋公园的旅游机会可能会令社区受益，但不应当对旅游业者增加额外的监管。
-
- 将活跃的港口区域排除在海洋公园之外，有助于确保各项基本服务和行业不受影响，比如说货轮和磷酸盐船舶的停泊和装货/卸货。
- IOT 海洋公园意味着打造具有国际意义的保护区的机会，有助于保护该地区的濒危和标志性物种。
- 大多数人都希望进一步讨论 IOT 海洋公园的设计。

此次向IOT社区初步征求意见是澳大利亚公园管理局代表国家公园主任（Director of National Parks）帮助在印度洋领地建立海洋公园的初步措施之一。

澳大利亚公园管理局将认真考虑通过这一阶段的征求意见活动所搜集的信息。这些信息将用于与IOT社区及其他利益相关方进一步详细讨论建立IOT海洋公园事宜，包括海洋公园的规模、位置和区划。

Executive summary in Bahasa Malay

Ringkasan eksekutif

Laporan ini menyediakan ringkasan hasil perundingan dan perbincangan awal yang diadakan untuk mengkaji penubuhan taman laut di Wilayah Lautan Hindi (IOT) Australia sekitar Pulau Christmas dan Kepulauan Cocos (Keeling). Ringkasan yang dibentangkan dalam Bahagian 4 laporan ini melahirkan pandangan anggota komuniti serta pihak-pihak yang terjejas di IOT dan tidak menggambarkan pandangan Kerajaan mahupun Parks Australia.

Taman laut adalah salah satu cara yang terbaik untuk memulihara dan melindungi habitat dan spesies hidupan laut, misalnya terumbu karang, rumpai laut dan gunung dasar laut, sambil melanjutkan kegunaannya dari segi sosial dan ekonomi, seperti penangkapan ikan dan pelancongan. Pada masa ini, Parks Australia menguruskan 58 buah Taman Laut Australia di sekitar negara ini untuk melindungi persekitaran laut kita. Dua taman negara yang ada sekarang di IOT, iaitu Taman Negara Pulau Christmas dan Taman Negara Pulu Keeling, juga merangkumi kawasan laut yang kecil. Walau bagaimanapun, kebanyakan perairan yang mengelilingi IOT tidak terangkum oleh Sistem Perwakilan Kawasan Laut Terlindung Kebangsaan (NRSMPA) pada masa ini.

Kini terdapat peluang meningkatkan tahap perlindungan persekitaran laut ini, iaitu memasukkannya ke dalam taman laut sambil melanjutkan penggunaan persekitaran laut itu oleh komuniti setempat dan pelawat, misalnya untuk tujuan menangkap ikan dan pelancongan.

Langkah pertama apabila mempertimbangkan penubuhan taman laut baharu ialah mengutip maklumat tentang kawasan yang terlibat. Pengetahuan ini berperanan membantu reka bentuk taman laut (termasuklah lokasinya dan zon-zonnya) dan pengurusannya pada masa depan.

Dari 16 Februari hingga 2 Mac 2021, Parks Australia bertemu dengan komuniti tempatan dan pihak-pihak yang terjejas di Pulau Christmas dan di Kepulauan Cocos (Keeling) untuk bercakap tentang kemungkinan menubuhkan taman laut dan memulakan proses mengenal pasti kepentingan dan penggunaan perairan ini dari segi persekitaran, ekonomi, budaya dan sosial.

Ringkasan yang berikut ialah perkara-perkara utama yang dibangkitkan oleh kerajaan tempatan, kumpulan komuniti, pemilik perniagaan, industri dan orang ramai di tempat itu semasa perundingan awal ini:

- Perairan pesisir penting bagi penduduk tempatan untuk tujuan menangkap ikan, rekreasi dan pelancongan. Reka bentuk taman laut hendaklah terus menyokong penggunaan ini.
- Ikan ialah sumber makanan yang penting bagi ramai penduduk pulau dan menangkap ikan ialah aktiviti budaya dan suatu bentuk rekreasi yang penting.
- Peraturan menangkap ikan bagi masa depan di IOT penting diberi perhatian, khususnya sama ada peraturan menangkap ikan yang dicadangkan ini akan bersaling tindak dengan taman laut dan bentuk saling tindakannya.

- Perlindungan perairan luar pesisir di taman laut mungkin bermanfaat untuk penangkap ikan tempatan, boleh melindungi stok ikan dan dapat meningkatkan nilai alam sekitar yang unik di kawasan ini.
- Kebaikan taman laut untuk penduduk tempatan penting ditunjukkan.
- Orang tempatan mahu dilibatkan dalam keputusan yang dibuat tentang reka bentuk taman laut dan mahu memegang peranan dalam pengurusannya yang berterusan.
- Peluang pelancongan taman laut mungkin bermanfaat untuk komuniti tetapi tidak sepatutnya mengenakan peraturan tambahan terhadap pengendali khidmat pelancongan.
- Supaya perkhidmatan asas dan industri pelabuhan tidak terjejas, misalnya menambat dan memuatkan/memunggah kapal muatan dan fosfat, kawasan pelabuhan yang aktif boleh dikecualikan daripada taman laut.
- Taman laut IOT membuka peluang menubuhkan kawasan pemuliharaan yang penting pada peringkat global. Taman laut mampu melindungi spesies-spesies yang terancam dan ikonik di kawasan ini.
- Kebanyakan orang berminat membincangkan selanjutnya rupa reka bentuk taman laut yang mungkin terhasil bagi IOT.

Perundingan awal dengan komuniti di IOT ini ialah salah satu langkah pertama yang diambil oleh Parks Australia bagi pihak Pengarah Taman Negara untuk menubuhkan taman laut di Wilayah Lautan Hindi.

Parks Australia akan mempertimbangkan dengan teliti maklumat yang diberikan melalui fasa libat urus ini. Pengetahuan ini akan digunakan sebagai maklumat dalam perbincangan yang lebih terperinci dengan komuniti di IOT dan dengan pihak-pihak lain yang terjejas tentang penubuhan taman laut, misalnya saiz, lokasi dan pembahagian zon.

Executive summary in Cocos Malay

Ringkasan eksekutif

Laporan ini memberikan ringkasan perundingan dan perbincangan awal yang diadakan untuk menyelidiki pembinaan taman lautan di Wilayah Lautan India Australia (IOT) di Pulu Christmas dan Pulu Cocos (Keeling). Ringkasan pandangan masyarakat dinyatakan dalam Bahagian 4 dalam laporan ini adalah daripada penduduk masyarakat dan pihak-pihak penting IOT dan tidak mewakili pandangan Kerajaan ataupun Parks Australia.

Taman lautan adalah salah satu jalan terbaik untuk memelihara dan melindungi tempat tinggal dan jenis-jenis di lautan, seperti batu-karang, lumut dan bukit dilaut, sambil menyokong penggunaan sosial dan ekonomi lautan yang berterusan, seperti memancing dan pelancongan. Parks Australia pada masa ini menguruskan 58 Taman Lautan Australia di seluruh negara untuk melindungi persekitaran laut kita. Dalam IOT, dua taman nasional yang ada - Taman Negara Pulu Christmas dan Taman Negara Pulu Keeling - mengandungi kawasan lautan kecil. Walau bagaimanapun, kebanyakan lautan di sekitar IOT saat ini tidak termasuk dalam Sistem Perwakilan Negara untuk Kawasan Perlindungan Laut (NRSMPA).

Sekarang ada peluang untuk meningkatkan penjagaan persekitaran lautan ini dengan memasukkannya ke dalam taman lautan, sambil menyokong penggunaan persekitaran lautan yang berterusan oleh masyarakat dan pendatang, seperti untuk memancing dan pelancongan.

Langkah pertama dalam mempertimbangkan pembangunan taman lautan baru adalah mengumpulkan informasi tentang wilayah tersebut. Pengetahuan ini membantu membentuk desain taman lautan (termasuk lokasi dan zone didalamnya) dan bagaimana mungkin dapat diuruskan di masa depan.

Diantara 16 Februari dan 2 March 2021, Parks Australia bertemu dengan masyarakat tempatan dan pihak-pihak penting di Pulu Christmas dan Pulu Cocos (Keeling) untuk membicarakan kemungkinan untuk membangunkan taman lautan dan mulailah proses penyataan persekitaran, ekonomik, kebudayaan dan sosial yang penting dan penggunaan lautan ini.

Berikutnya adalah ringkasan perkara-perkara terpenting yang dikemukakan oleh pemerintah tempatan, kumpulan masyarakat, pemilik perniagaan, perbidangan dan orang tersendiri dimasa perundingan awal ini:

- Lautan bagian dalam adalah penting bagi penduduk tempatan untuk memancing, rekreasi dan pelancongan dan desain taman lautan harus terus menyokong penggunaan ini.
- Ikan adalah sumber makanan penting bagi banyak penduduk pulu, dan memancing juga adalah kegiatan kebudayaan dan cara rekreasi yang penting.
- Penting untuk mengemukakan undang-undang pemancingan dimasa depan untuk IOT, terutama kalau/bagaimana undang-undang pemancingan yang dicadangkan dan taman lautan akan berkaitan.

- Menjaga lautan luaran dalam taman lautan dapat memanfaatkan pemancing tempatan, melindungi jumlah ikan, dan mengembangkan nilai persekitaran yang unik di kawasan ini.
- Sangat penting untuk mencontohkan kemanfaatan taman lautan kepada penduduk tempatan.
- Penduduk tempatan mau terlibat dalam perbuatan segala keputusan tentang desain taman lautan, dan terlibat dengan rapat dalam pengurusannya yang berterusan.
- Peluang pelancongan daripada taman lautan boleh memanfaatkan masyarakat tetapi harus tidak membawa perundangan tambahan untuk operator pelancongan.
- Mengecualikan kawasan ports yang aktif dari taman lautan akan membantu memastikan serbis dan perbidangan penting mereka - seperti freight dan pelabuhan kapal fosfat dan muat/turunkan - tidak terganggu.
- Taman lautan IOT merupakan peluang untuk membuat kawasan konservasi yang bermakna diseluruh dunia. Mereka mungkin dapat membantu menjaga jenis-jenis yang terancam dan ikonik dalam wilayah ini.
- Kebanyakan orang berminat untuk berbicara lebih banyak tentang bagaimana desain taman lautan untuk IOT kelihatannya.

Perundingan awal dengan masyarakat IOT ini adalah salah satu langkah pertama yang diambil oleh Parks Australia atas nama Direkta Taman Negara untuk membantu membangun taman lautan di Wilayah Lautan India.

Parks Australia akan mempertimbangkan dengan hati-hati informasi yang dibagikan melalui peringkat perhubungan ini. Pengetahuan ini akan digunakan untuk menasihati perbincangan yang lebih terperinci dengan masyarakat IOT dan pihak-pihak penting lainnya tentang pembangunan taman lautan IOT—termasuk ukuran, tempat, dan zoning taman-taman ini.

1. Why do we need marine parks?

Marine parks are one of the best ways to conserve and protect marine habitats and species (like coral reefs, seagrass and seamounts), while supporting sustainable social and economic uses of the marine environment, such as fishing and tourism. Marine parks can:

- Protect environments by helping conserve ecosystems, habitats and species
- increase the resilience of species and habitats to global and systemic environmental pressures, such as climate change
- accommodate important local commercial, recreational, and cultural activities, like fishing
- contribute to local tourism economies
- strengthen protection against international fishing pressures

The Australian, state and territory governments agreed in 1998 to establish the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA), an Australia-wide system of marine parks, to contribute to the long-term conservation of marine ecosystems and to protect biodiversity, while supporting the use of marine environments.

Parks Australia currently manages 58 Australian Marine Parks around the country.

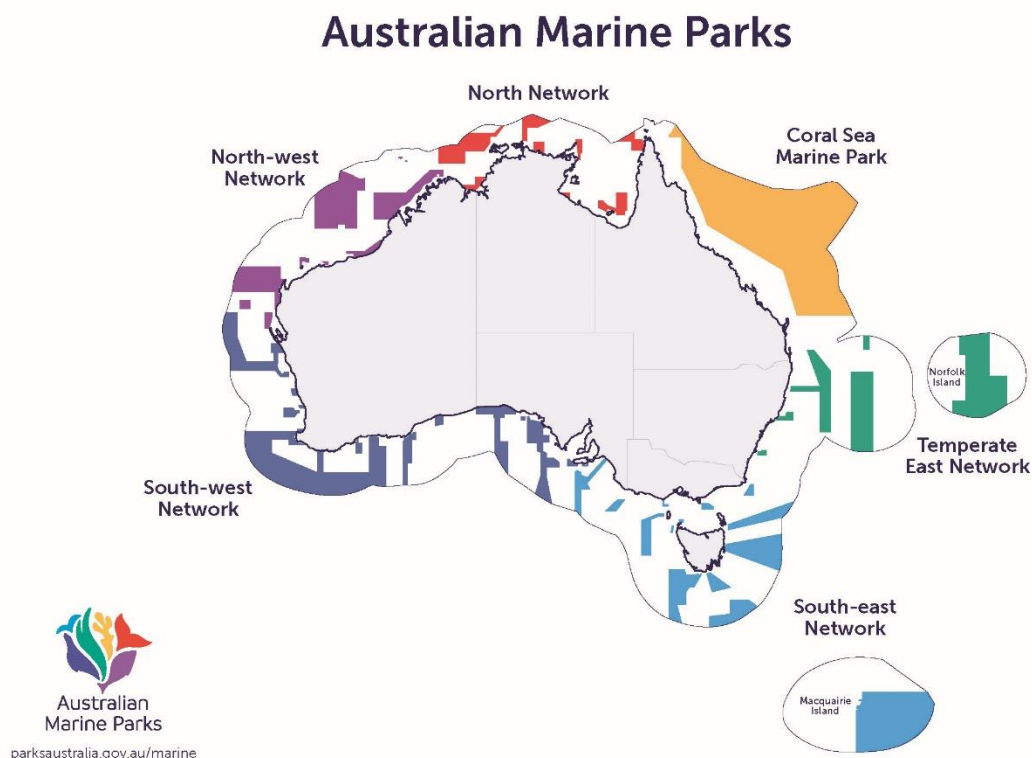


Figure 1. Australian Marine Parks managed by Parks Australia

The tropical waters surrounding Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands are important socially and economically for their local communities and support significant and unique species. They are also considered to generally be in good condition. Sustainably managing and protecting these waters in a marine park could help to maintain their condition for future generations.

In Australia’s IOTs, two existing national parks—Christmas Island National Park and Pulu Keeling National Park—include small marine areas. However, most of the waters surrounding the IOTs are not currently included in the NRSMPA. An independent Commonwealth Marine Reserves Review in 2015 identified this as a key gap and recommended that marine parks should be established in these waters to complete the NRSMPA.

Marine parks achieve the best conservation and sustainable use outcomes when park users and local communities are engaged and supportive, including through the design of the parks. We work alongside our stakeholders to deliver all aspects of management so that marine parks are places we can all enjoy and benefit from.

Parks Australia will continue to work with local communities to establish marine parks in the IOTs that will sustain the health of these rich waters and support economic and social uses.

2. Marine park zoning and fishing

Marine park zoning determines what activities can occur in different areas of marine parks.

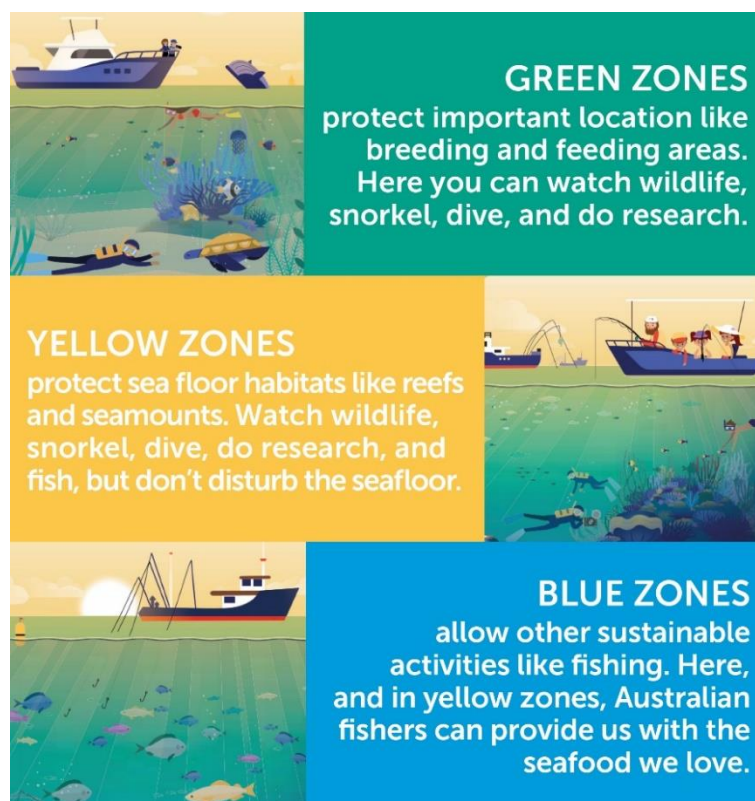


Figure 2. Australian Marine Park zoning

Green zones provide a high level of protection for habitats and don't allow fishing, while yellow and blue zones both allow fishing in some form. Given the importance of fishing to the IOT communities, Parks Australia has received feedback that establishing green zones close to shore would only be appropriate in selected areas that had the broad support of IOT communities.

For more information on Australian Marine Parks, visit www.parksaustralia.gov.au/marine

3. Consultation

Between 16 February and 2 March 2021, Parks Australia met with members of local communities and other stakeholders on Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands to talk about marine parks, learn how they use and enjoy the marine environment and hear their views on what is important to them about these waters.

In total we conducted 25 meetings with approximately 130 people from over 20 organisations and groups, including the Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands Shire Councils, local community and conservation groups, and island industry representatives from the commercial fishing, tourism, ports and mining sectors.

These discussions identified aspects of the marine environment in the IOTs that are valued for their environmental, social, cultural, or economic importance.

Appendix A provides a summary of the IOT-based individuals and organisations that met with Parks Australia. Parks Australia is grateful that people gave their time to discuss marine parks and acknowledges that not everyone with an interest in marine parks had the opportunity to put their views forward. There will be more opportunities to provide your views during the process to establish marine parks.

4. Summary of community views

The IOT community members and representatives that Parks Australia met with, provided a range of views about the Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands marine environments. The views described below are entirely those of the IOT communities and do not reflect the views of the Government or Parks Australia.

These views are grouped into categories for consideration: environmental, social, and cultural, economic, as well as general comments.

Environmental values

The waters of the IOTs are important and unique marine areas—locally, nationally and internationally.

The positioning of the IOTs where Pacific and Indian ocean waters meet has resulted in the evolution of significant and unique biodiversity, particularly hybrid varieties of reef fauna and endemic species, that is, species found nowhere else in the world.

Deep water drop-offs (walls and slopes) adjacent to the coral reefs are a unique habitat for marine species and a highly valued destination for dive tourism. Currently, deep water environments in the IOTs are relatively unknown and poorly studied. Marine parks could create opportunities for further research to be done into this area; while other potentially important environmental values, such as the link between whale shark feeding and red crab spawning, could become a research priority.

Establishing marine parks in this region would complete the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA).

Christmas Island

Christmas Island's marine environment is pristine, and seeing it protected for current and future generations is an important conservation objective. The island has healthy reef biodiversity (fish and invertebrate species) and the natural environment (terrestrial and marine) is one of the island's biggest assets. Its surrounding waters act as a cleaning station for marine species like sharks and manta rays, and the Christmas Island Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is an important southern bluefin tuna spawning area.

The linkages between terrestrial and marine environments on Christmas Island are ecologically important. Christmas Island's waters are critical as a breeding/spawning area for red crabs, as part of their annual breeding migration. The red crab is a keystone species that is important for maintaining the health of the forest and requires a healthy ocean to breed. The red crab migration is a key natural asset and tourism drawcard, considered one of the 'Ten natural wonders of the world'.

Like all islands, Christmas Island is vulnerable to marine invaders. If not well managed, discharged ballast water can be a threat to inshore environments, and there may be a need to set up ballast discharge zones within the proposed marine park. These may need to change seasonally, depending on the swell direction, to reduce the risk of invasive marine species entering the island.

The differences in swell and therefore fishing boat access around the island throughout the year creates, in effect, a natural regulatory system to reduce fishing pressures and protect fish nursery zones. The southern half of the island is effectively a fish sanctuary area, as high swells make access for fishing/boating difficult for most of the year.

Elsewhere around the island, there are anecdotal reports of some declining fish numbers. Fish such as batfish, which used to be more common, are an attraction for divers and there are some concerns that the declines may be related to spearfishing.

Cocos (Keeling) Islands

Lagoon access and use is critical to the Cocos community for subsistence fishing, recreation, and tourism. Natural weather and currents affect sand levels and seagrass in the lagoon – for example, recent north westerly systems have resulted in a build-up of sand in the north western area of the lagoon, covering seagrass. The lagoon is also a critical green turtle feeding habitat, but corals and seagrass also need to be protected. Locals are concerned about the loss of seagrass which appears to be impacting on fish stocks. Some believe that increasing numbers of turtles may be responsible for the decline in seagrass, while some people think that this is due to the build-up of sand. More research could improve understanding of changes to seagrass in the lagoon.

In isolated reef atolls, there is little external recruitment of species and local die-offs of species, which makes them more vulnerable. There is limited fishing data from Cocos

(Keeling) Islands to help make decisions about fishing. However, getting an environmental outcome may require fishing to be impacted in some way – for example, a marine park may need to have some no-take areas to protect breeding colonies of fish and other species. Over time, it will be important to demonstrate that the proposed marine park would work for the community and the environment.

There are many sharks in Cocos, especially at Pulu Keeling National Park. This is evidenced by the predation of the sharks on fishing catches. An abundance of sharks is seen by some island residents as proof of a healthy marine environment. There is a need to focus on protecting the marine environment and habitats, not a particular species (e.g. sharks, turtles).

Economic values

Ports and shipping

Excluding port areas from IOT marine parks seems sensible to ensure there are no unintended disruptions to port activities. However, there are some areas within the ports that may have high environmental value and could potentially be included in the marine parks without affecting port activities. While vessel transit is permitted in all zone types that would be considered for the marine parks, anchoring areas outside the current port zone on Cocos (Keeling) Islands need to be identified, either to exclude these areas from a marine park, or to ensure that the proposed zoning allows anchoring. Excluding port areas from marine parks would help ensure that essential services and industries, such as freight and phosphate ship mooring and loading/unloading are unaffected.

Tourism

Marine parks could help with promoting the IOTs as an iconic tourist destination globally. Commercial activities on Christmas Island are beginning to shift towards eco-tourism. Several new tourism resort proposals are being investigated or planned in the IOTs, with varying degrees of community support.

The ideal model for IOT tourism is thought to be high yield, low volume eco-tourism with quality environmentally and culturally sensitive visitor experiences. Regenerative tourism, where tourists leave a place better than when they arrived has great potential (e.g. though volunteer activities like beach clean ups). The warm clear tropical waters and associated coral reefs and deep slope and wall environments are key tourism drawcards. There is strong potential to promote other natural phenomena. While more activities are needed, the terrestrial and marine environments are key tourism attractions. Both should be promoted to attract visitors.

There are several barriers for locals who wish to establish tourism businesses. These include high insurance costs; the costs of having boats surveyed; and language barriers surrounding taxation and other regulatory requirements. While marine parks would be an asset for future tourism promotion, it is important that they do not impose additional regulatory burdens on tourism operators.

Commercial fishing

Currently, the only commercial fishing occurring in IOT waters is small-scale fishing by on-island operators. These operators mostly target pelagic species for local supply on Christmas Island. At Cocos (Keeling) Islands, there is some small-scale aquaculture and hand collection of reef species for the aquarium trade. There are other small-scale operators who catch and sell fish on the islands, but this occurs outside of the existing regulatory arrangements.

Licensed commercial fishers can currently operate within a maximum of 12 nautical miles from the shore, but fish much closer to shore. Any green zoning of a marine park within this area may require consideration of adjustment assistance for the affected operators.

Climate change impacts might require changes to the management of reef species and/or sites to help reef and species recovery. Research priorities for a marine park could include research on the distribution on the fish that are targeted by fishers and the fish diversity associated with the small in-shore sea mounts/pinnacles.

Social and cultural values

Marine parks can provide benefits to the community and the environment. To be embraced by the community, parks should include ongoing, active engagement and local 'ownership' such as through management committees and locally employed rangers. Any process to establish marine parks would need to factor in local knowledge and values. A 'one size fits all' process doesn't work with remote, culturally diverse communities. It is also important that the process to establish marine parks is transparent.

Establishing marine parks that avoid impacts on local fishers is a major priority for the Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Island communities. Fishing is a core part of the local culture and fish are an important part the diet, providing the primary source of protein for many local people in a high cost-of-living environment.

On Christmas Island, most fishing generally takes place within 2-3 nautical miles of the shore. There is generally strong support in the community for inshore waters to be zoned so that local fishers can continue to fish in the way they do now. Offshore areas could be zoned green without impacting the fishing or other marine activities of local communities. From twelve nautical miles to as close as 2-3 nautical miles off the coast could be an appropriate boundary line between inshore and offshore zoning, as there were different views about where this boundary line should be.

If there are inshore areas already customarily observed by the community as no-fishing areas (e.g. 'The Rip' at Cocos), these could potentially be designated as small inshore green zones.

There is broad concern about new fishing rules for the IOTs. Marine parks are seen as a potentially more appropriate framework within which to manage the marine environment in the IOTs, noting however that marine parks are not fisheries management tools. The community desires clarity on whether and how the processes for any proposed fishing rules

and proposed marine parks would intersect. Some community members would like more involvement in managing fisheries, including self-managed fisheries.

Spearfishing is increasing in popularity on the islands, particularly as a tourism activity associated with freediving on Christmas Island. It is also important to some community members to feed their families and some consider it the most sustainable form of fishing. Spearfishing is not allowed within the marine zone of the Christmas Island National Park (CINP) (50m from the highwater line). In practice, this regulation is extremely difficult to enforce, and there is some confusion and concern around spearfishing rules and their enforcement in local waters, including the no-spearfishing zone at Flying Fish Cove. Currently, there is no or limited signage or any readily available information about spearfishing rules for locals or tourists.

More broadly, there are questions about how the marine park would be managed, and any infringements enforced.

Some community members feel that permanent residents may be blamed for the impacts on the environment caused by tourists and/or temporary residents.

General comments

The community wants to be involved in consultation processes on issues that affect them, in ways that accurately reflect their views and provide good feedback. To address this issue, community members want to be involved in the design of the proposed marine parks and be informed during the entire process to establish them. The community also wants governance arrangements for marine parks to have strong community engagement and the community wants to also be involved in decision making on zoning design and ongoing management, particularly of the inshore waters.

Education about marine parks will be important in the establishment and management phases. Clarity about the objectives of marine parks and a strong scientific basis for managing marine parks into the future will be important.

It is generally felt that inshore marine parks should consist mainly of blue or yellow zones that don't impact local fishers. While offshore large green zones would generally be supported by the local community, there is some concern that zoning arrangements established during proclamation could be changed under future management plans. This could have the effect of reducing environmental protections.

There is a need to demonstrate the benefits of marine parks to the community. If marine parks can work for the community, they will have their support. To achieve this, there will need to be effective engagement throughout the process to ensure that the community is being heard and their views valued. Valuing the history, unique culture and the opinions of the community will be important for community support.

5. Responding to community views

The views of IOT communities described in section 4 will be used by Parks Australia to help establish IOT marine parks. In particular, Parks Australia will:

- liaise with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications about how any future fishing rules and the proposed marine parks might intersect.
- work with IOT communities and other key stakeholders to design (locate and zone) marine parks so that they protect seafloor habitats, while having minimal impacts on social and economic activities, such as subsistence and recreational fishing.
- continue to consult with and provide information for IOT communities and other key stakeholders during all major steps of the marine park design and establishment process.
- continue to discuss with IOT communities and other key stakeholders how they could be involved in the management of and benefit from marine parks.
- work with tourism and other commercial operators to develop a suitable approach to minimise and avoid duplication of any permit or licence requirements.

6. Frequently Asked Questions

How will marine parks affect local fishing?

Marine parks protect seafloor habitats like reefs, seagrass and seamounts. They can also support activities like local fishing through zoning that allows these activities to continue (yellow or blue zones) while protecting other areas important for the sustainability of the fishery into the future. Zoning of any marine parks at Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands will reflect the importance of fishing and other marine activities to local communities.

Are marine parks an alternative to fishing rules?

Marine parks are not fishery management tools: they don't make or change bag limits or size limits for fish as they focus on protecting seafloor habitats, like reefs, seagrass and seamounts. Where fishing rules exist, they still apply in marine parks and are managed by the relevant fisheries management agency.

Can fisheries be managed by locals instead of government?

This would need to be discussed by representatives of the community with the relevant fisheries management agency and other relevant government departments.

How are marine park boundaries and zoning decided?

For marine parks at Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands, proposed park boundaries and zoning are being co-designed with local communities. It is a legal requirement that the marine park proposal (which describes the location and broad zoning of the park) be released publicly for consultation, and anyone can provide comments. The proposed marine park and zoning can then be 'proclaimed' (made into law) to formally establish the parks and their zones.

A management plan will be developed with community input as soon as practicable after the marine parks are proclaimed. The management plan will set and 'lock in' the agreed zoning for 10 years.

How often does marine park zoning change? How does it change?

Management plans and zoning are reviewed and can be changed every 10 years. When management plans are prepared and for the 10-year review, there are two formal phases of public consultation. Members of the public/community can propose zoning changes during these consultations.

How can community members be involved in helping to manage the marine park?

Community involvement in marine park management is very important. Management of existing Australian Marine Parks is guided by advisory committees with representatives from diverse backgrounds. Advisory committees (or similar) with good representation from local communities are one way that Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islanders can guide the management of marine parks in their waters.

Additionally, community members and local organisations may have the opportunity to get involved through community projects, research and other activities.

Can we have rules that stop visitors to the islands doing the wrong thing?

Australian Marine Park rules apply to everyone. However, education and community engagement projects would be a big focus for the first years of new marine parks. This would include targeted visitor education to help ensure everyone helps to protect the natural and cultural values of the marine park. Local communities will have a key role in identifying the natural and cultural values.

Our waters are healthy and pristine—why is there a need for a marine park?

The Indian Ocean Territories are also the only regions in Australia where large-scale marine parks have not been established. Establishing marine parks now will help keep these waters healthy, pristine and productive into the future.

Will the marine park stop economic development?

No. Marine parks will be designed to ensure essential infrastructure and activities are not impacted—underwater communication cables and commercial shipping, for example. The marine park will also be designed to account for current and planned developments. Marine parks can be of great benefit for tourism activities and (in particular) for the growing eco-tourism sector, as they work as major visitor drawcards.

What are the benefits of marine parks?

Marine parks protect seafloor habitats like coral reefs, seagrass and deep-water seamounts and canyons, now and into the future. They can help ensure our children and grandchildren can enjoy pristine marine environments, just like we do now.

Marine parks can also help bring funding for community projects and scientific research and can help create employment opportunities for locals. Education, community engagement and science projects would be a big focus for the first years of any new marine park.

Can areas where people fish just be left out of the marine park?

There is no need to avoid areas where people fish because marine parks can be zoned to allow local fishing to continue, while protecting the seafloor habitats where fish live and breed from other pressures and attracting resources for research and community projects.

Who would enforce the rules of the marine park?

Communication and raising awareness are very important for marine parks, especially when they are first established. This encourages people to voluntarily help protect the natural and cultural values of the marine park area. Fortunately, this means that enforcement action is rarely required, especially in yellow or blue zones. When it is, responsibility for enforcement depends on the area of the marine park involved. For example, offshore marine park patrols are undertaken by the government authorities with capable vessels.

What will be the requirements for tourism operators to use the marine parks?

Commercial tourism can occur in all marine park zones, but different marine parks have different requirements for commercial operators. For most Australian Marine Parks, tourism operators obtain a fee-free licence to operate in the parks. Some other commercial industries are provided with a 'class approval' to continue operations in marine parks with no licence or permit requirements. We are aware that tourism operators at Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands face many unique challenges and costs due to the remote environment and will have further discussions with them about a suitable approach.

If marine parks affect the operations of local commercial fishers, will they be compensated?

We want to minimise or avoid impacts on local commercial fishers. To do this, we will be consulting closely with commercial fishers and aquaculture operators based on Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands about zoning arrangements for the marine parks.

What is the process to establish marine parks?

There are several steps to establish marine parks. Some steps are required by law. Others are designed to ensure that the views of local communities are reflected in the marine park proposal. Please see [Figure 3](#) below for more detail.

Christmas Island specific FAQs

Why is spearfishing not allowed in the marine zone of Christmas Island National Park? Can we change the spearfishing rules in the marine zone of Christmas Island National Park?

The 'no spearfishing' rule has been in place for many years under consecutive Christmas Island National Park management plans. A new management plan is due for the national park in 2024. The community will have the opportunity to provide input, including suggestions for changes to spearfishing rules (e.g. to keep or change the current rules).

Most existing Australian Marine Parks allow spearfishing in the same zones that allow line fishing.

Cocos (Keeling) Islands specific FAQs

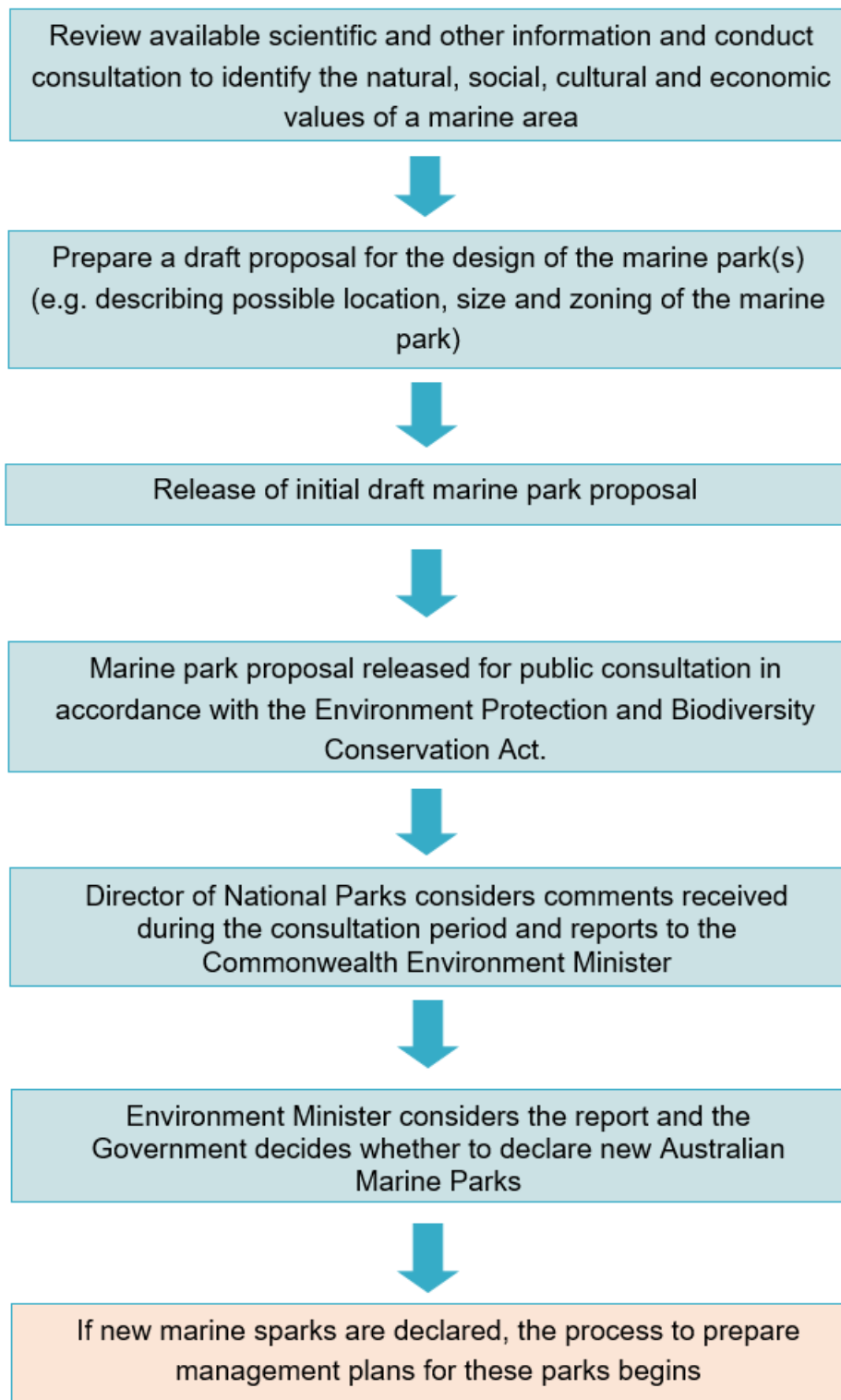
We already have a marine park at North Keeling—why do we need another one?

The marine zone around North Keeling island is part of the Pulu Keeling National Park. It protects the reef and other inshore features around the island. The offshore waters of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and other unique habitats at the southern atoll, like the lagoon, currently have no marine park protection. Including some of these areas in the new marine park will help ensure that parts of all the different habitats in the region are protected.

Why is the seagrass in the lagoon moving/declining?

Seagrass distribution in an area can change over time for any number of reasons, or combination of reasons. This is not something that only affects the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. A marine park may help to attract research funding to find out the reasons why the seagrass is changing in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands lagoon.

Figure 3: Key steps in establishing Australian Marine Parks



7. Next steps

Parks Australia will carefully consider the information shared through this phase of engagement, during the process to establish Indian Ocean Territories marine parks. Additional consultation with local communities and other stakeholders will occur during 2021. The information gathered will be used to inform a draft proposal for the design of the marine parks, which will outline the proposed area, location and shape of the parks and the zones within them. The draft marine park proposal will then be used as a basis for further community and stakeholder consultation on the design of the marine parks.

We look forward to working together with Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) islanders and other stakeholders to build marine parks that protect the environment and support the sustainable use of these areas for local communities.

Appendix A – stakeholder meetings

Organisation	Sector
Cocos (Keeling) Islands Harbourmaster	Shipping
Phosphate Resources Limited	Shore-based Industry
Shire of Christmas Island Consultative Committee	Community group
CI and CKI Harbourmaster	Shipping
Malay Club	Community group
Christmas Island Tourism Association	Tourism
Swell Lodge	Tourism
Marine conservation consultant	Conservation
Hidden Gardens	Shore-based Industry
Indian Ocean Experiences	Tourism
Extra Divers	Tourism
Tangaroa Blue Foundation	Conservation
Shire of Christmas Island	Government
Shorefire	Commercial fishing
Freedive CI	Tourism
Island Care	Conservation
Cocos (Keeling) Island's (CKI) Shire	Government
CKI Seniors Group	Community group
Pulu Keeling National Park Community Management Committee	Community group
Senior Imam CKI	Community group
Cocos community	General public
CKI Tourism Association	Tourism
CKI West Island Community	Community group