

Chapter 4—Recommended Commonwealth marine reserves zoning

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out at both network and reserve level the major issues and areas of contention raised in consultations and submissions and other inputs such as findings from the ESP. It includes the recommended zonings and description of their conservation and socio-economic consequences, together with a comparison with the proclaimed estate against the Goals and Principles.

Sections 4.1 to 4.4 describe in detail the North, North-west, South-west and Temperate East networks respectively, and the reserves for which zoning changes are recommended. Section 4.5 deals with the Coral Sea CMR. The background information provided for each of the CMRs with recommended changes was compiled from information publically available on the Department of the Environment's webpage⁹ including the detailed analysis documents for each marine region¹⁰.

Section 4.6 describes the three reserves for which the management remains the same but, for consistency of zoning across the CMR estate, there is a recommended change to the IUCN protected area category of a reserve or zone. Section 4.7 outlines the CMRs for which no changes are recommended, whether or not contentious issues were raised with respect to their zoning. Finally, Section 4.8 outlines the overall performance of the recommended zoning changes across the five regions.

Zoning is a key tool for implementing the management objectives for a protected area or part thereof. Zones provide for the spatial segregation of different uses and allowed or prohibited activities.

The IUCN Protected Area Category system classifies protected areas (and zones) according to their management objectives. These IUCN categories are recognised under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and by other international bodies and many national governments, including the Australian Government, as the global standard for defining and reporting protected area purpose and performance.¹¹

The EPBC Act (sections 346–8) requires that a reserve proclaimed under the Act must be assigned an IUCN category, and the proclamation may divide a reserve into different zones and assign each zone to an IUCN category. Similar provisions apply for management plans (section 367) that must assign a reserve, and each zone, to an IUCN category. A management plan may assign a reserve or zone to an IUCN category different to the one that it was assigned in its proclamation. This provides considerable flexibility in adapting to changing information and management objectives over time. If the

⁹ <http://www.environment.gov.au/marinereserves>

¹⁰ <http://www.environment.gov.au/archive/coasts/mbp/north/publications/pubs/north-detailed-analysis.pdf>
<http://www.environment.gov.au/archive/coasts/mbp/north-west/publications/pubs/northwest-detailed-analysis.pdf>
<http://www.environment.gov.au/archive/coasts/mbp/south-west/publications/pubs/detailed-analysis.pdf>
<http://www.environment.gov.au/archive/coasts/mbp/coralsea/publications/pubs/coralsea-detailed-analysis.pdf>
<http://www.environment.gov.au/archive/coasts/mbp/temperate-east/publications/pubs/te-detailed-analysis.pdf>

¹¹ Further information on the use of IUCN categories by Parks Australia is at <https://www.environment.gov.au/node/20957>.

Government accepts the recommended zoning changes in this report, it would put them into effect through network (or reserve) management plans.

The BAP continued the zoning approach taken by the Australian Government for the proclaimed estate (and the South-east CMR Network) of utilising the following six zone types: Sanctuary Zone, Marine National Park Zone, Habitat Protection Zone, Recreational Use Zone, Multiple Use Zone and Special Purpose Zone. The IUCN categories associated with each of these zones are:

- SZ (IUCN Ia)
- MNPZ (IUCN II)
- HPZ and RUZ (IUCN IV)
- MUZ and SPZ (IUCN VI).

The small number of zones assigned as GUZ in the proclaimed estate have been more precisely defined by the BAP as MUZ if their multiple use objectives have been retained or as SPZ to describe their special use circumstances. RUZ is retained in three reserves and, for consistency across the estate, two previously characterised as IUCN II are reassigned as IUCN IV.

The primary purpose of the CMR estate is to conserve representative samples of Australia's marine biodiversity. The primary objective of all zones and IUCN categories is the long-term protection and maintenance of biological diversity and natural values, while providing for uses and activities that do not compromise this objective.

Many regard MNPZ and SZ as the 'gold standard', providing the highest level of protection for biodiversity by excluding all commercial and recreational activities involving the taking or extracting of marine resources. The BAP considers that the use of HPZ to maintain, conserve and restore species and habitats also provides a high level of protection for many conservation values and features. The BAP has drawn on HPZ as a key tool to provide a high level of habitat protection while allowing for some economic extractive activities in the water column.

The ESP considered the relative merits of all major zone types (ESP report Section 3.3) and found that areas of high conservation value could be managed as HPZ where socio-economic factors prevent designation as MNPZ. The ESP found that there was a high conservation benefit from HPZs to protect benthic and demersal habitats by excluding damaging activities while allowing other activities that did not compromise conservation values.

The ESP also found that, while the strongest biodiversity and conservation benefits are delivered by excluding extractive activities from marine reserves, less restrictive management regimes also deliver biodiversity benefits, as long as the intensity, extent and impact of the activities are known and well managed.

Throughout its consideration and approach to rezoning the BAP has attempted to produce greater consistency between networks and with adjacent state and territory marine park zoning schemes.

BAP Recommendation 4.1: The Australian Government accepts the zoning changes to 26 new CMRs (plus reassignment of Ningaloo, Ashmore Reef and Mermaid Reef CMRs).