

Chapter 6—Ongoing engagement with regional stakeholders

This chapter focuses initially on stakeholder engagement with the CMR Review, and then provides some reflections and recommendations for the Government's consideration.

The importance of traditional owners and Indigenous communities and their responsibilities and connection to sea country is acknowledged, and their ongoing engagement is discussed below.

Engagement of regional stakeholders during the review

The engagement of stakeholders and communities is essential to the effective management of CMRs. The past consultation processes during the development of Marine Bioregional Plans, through to the proclamation of the reserve networks and the development of the set-aside management plans, had identified, and to a considerable degree had addressed, a wide range of stakeholder issues and concerns. It was clear from the BAP consultations that a diversity of disparate views remained on the appropriate design and management of individual marine reserves and zones. Often these views were in direct contrast to each other.

Across all sectors there was a high level of interest in the CMR estate. Users and user groups expressed strong interest in being involved in ongoing management, monitoring of and contributing to discussions on future management. Much of the input received in the course of the CMR Review reflected a good understanding of the purpose of the reserves, and of the processes and information used to design and zone the reserves. Disagreement centred around the extent to which scientific and socio-economic information was used, and how this affected the design and zoning of the reserves.

The experience of the BAP was that while often the initial stakeholder commentary suggested consultation fatigue or a cynicism with yet another consultation, once the opportunity presented by the CMR Review was clearly outlined and the commitment given that they would be heard, people were keen to present their issues and thoughts on how they might be addressed. The BAP greatly appreciated and valued the time and effort that many stakeholders put into the review. The level of stakeholder interest and engagement remained high throughout the review, with over 13 100 submissions and 1859 online surveys received, and over 260 BAP meetings held across 16 locations involving over 600 individuals.

A wide range of stakeholders engaged with the CMR Review including individuals; operators and representatives involved in tourism, fishing and diving businesses; local and Indigenous community groups and their representatives; non-government organisations; state and territory government agencies; science associations; natural resource management bodies; recreational fishing interests; and representatives from the oil and gas industry, ports and shipping and regional development bodies.

The national-level stakeholder meetings and multi-sector forums held throughout the review showed that stakeholders had an appetite for understanding the perspectives of others. Engagement in these meetings was cordial and respectful, and post-meeting feedback was positive and supported continuity at this level of engagement.

The five Regional Panels of the BAP were instrumental in facilitating discussion and stakeholder engagement at a regional level. Panel members' knowledge and networks were invaluable in helping the BAP to reach out widely to interested parties.

Time and logistical constraints meant very limited BAP engagement with local and Indigenous communities on country. This was unfortunate given the growing formal recognition of sea country and of Indigenous rights and responsibilities, and the existence and mapping of Indigenous cultural values in a number of the CMRs.

Stakeholders clearly want to be part of the decision-making process and want to contribute. This is fundamental to making informed decisions that will be widely accepted and robust over time. The additional benefit of broad stakeholder engagement in management decision-making is a greater awareness and understanding of other stakeholder perspectives. This should be a clear objective for ongoing management of the marine reserves and will be important in ensuring stakeholder and marine reserve user needs are considered and the socio-economic impacts of management actions are incorporated into decision-making.

Ongoing stakeholder engagement

In general stakeholders were keen and expected to remain engaged in the future management and management arrangements for the reserves. There was interest at the national level from representative bodies in ongoing dialogue on the future management of the estate, as there was at the regional level. For some reserves, there are local issues that specifically interest local communities and their representatives. This is particularly the case for Indigenous communities living near CMRs and for businesses with a local footprint.

While acknowledging these concerns and issues, as the estate is most likely to be managed at a network (that is, regional) level through network management plans, it makes most sense for formal stakeholder engagement processes to be established at the network level, recognising that some local issues will need more specific engagement at a local level.

The BAP had an opportunity to talk to some of the stakeholders involved in the South-east CMR Network and participating in the South-east CMR Network Stakeholder Forum. They saw it as an effective mechanism for engaging stakeholders in the management of CMRs. The forum brings together representatives from regional industry associations, conservation, marine science agencies and other community interest groups to discuss issues relevant to the management of the South-east network. These stakeholders advised the BAP that they appreciated being involved in the regional management process and, particularly, being able to provide advice on the implementation of the South-east CMR Network Management Plan. They mentioned the need for flexibility in the establishment and management of the forum, to account for different membership needs and interests that change over time. The fact they met periodically with scheduled meetings but with the flexibility not to meet if there were no issues to discuss, or to meet outside the scheduled meetings if the need arose, was seen as a valuable and mature aspect of their working relationship with reserve management. They acknowledged that they would expect regional differences in the engagement approaches that may best work nationally and for each network.

This approach could be applied across other networks. A similar structure, purpose and mode of operating may help to ensure a consistent approach is undertaken across networks, while allowing flexibility for regionally specific needs such as timing requirements, 'actual work' undertaken, shared experiences, and the frequency and format of meetings.

A number of stakeholders suggested that there could be efficiencies in tapping into existing groups, committees or community consultation bodies on an as needs basis and as appropriate. As each network has its own distinct geographic and demographic characteristics no simple model of stakeholder engagement is recommended; rather each network will need its own unique forum arrangement.

A desirable objective of encouraging and supporting broad-based and robust stakeholder engagement is the development of partnerships that assist, and in some cases could deliver, management tasks and services. Good stakeholder engagement will assist in initiating and co-designing these approaches, in consultation with those affected.

Working with Indigenous people and communities

During the consultations the BAP met with a number of Indigenous groups and individuals and many raised the CMR Indigenous Forum held in October 2012 in Darwin as a useful first step in engagement. They suggested that the DNP could build on this approach for the management of the marine reserves. In particular, the BAP acknowledges a finding of the forum that consultation be direct and at the local Indigenous group level wherever possible, noting that representatives of land councils and peak Indigenous organisations are not in a position to speak on behalf of Indigenous people and communities directly responsible for and managing sea country.

Engagement with Indigenous people and communities will be important, particularly at the level of the communities that hold land and sea country rights and responsibilities that extend into CMRs. This intersection of interests and responsibilities creates opportunities for collaboration on both the planning and management of these areas. The delivery of management services is one such opportunity. (see also Chapter 7)

Reflections

Overall, from feedback obtained during the consultations and from submissions and survey inputs, the relationships built with most stakeholder groups over a long period, and most recently through the CMR Review, appeared to be respectful and effective. Maintaining these relationships and the wide engagement of stakeholders established through the review will be important for the DNP to effectively and efficiently manage the marine reserves in the future.

Management and indeed compliance over such a vast CMR estate will present unique logistical challenges, but these challenges are also opportunities for stakeholder engagement in management and compliance tasks. Engagement of local people can help build local ownership of and support for CMR management.

Partnerships with other Commonwealth and state agencies will be vital, particularly those charged with regulating and monitoring activities that occur inside and outside CMRs, such as the AFMA, the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA), and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) at the Commonwealth level, and state parks and fisheries agencies. Each has

expertise and capabilities that contribute to effective reserve management and stakeholder engagement. Some of these contributions are likely to include developing the capability to respond to, or help coordinate responses to, issues and incidents.

Open regular communication and multi-sector dialogue are vital to increase understanding and build trust between stakeholders, particularly those with different priorities and perspectives. This will provide a foundation for more efficient and effective compliance and enforcement, especially if the relevant interests are engaged to help design and implement management programs.

Effective ongoing engagement and communication with such a diversity of interests will require a combination of approaches and tools, including:

- Network (regional) forums to deal with more strategic issues and the implementation of network management plans
- A national CMR forum of stakeholders if there are national-level issues to discuss
- Regular email contact including short updates from managers as well as input from stakeholders
- Use of social media—for example, network Facebook pages
- Twitter feeds to advise of new information, activities or consultations.

The feedback from the online survey showed the clear preference of respondents for email contact every several months as a way of staying in touch.

Collaboration with stakeholder groups and sectors on monitoring programs, including citizen science programs, is needed and will help to engender support and understanding of the use and the conservation values of the marine reserves. The combination of these activities should build understanding of and support for the conservation and management of the marine reserves and assist with the ongoing challenges of adaptively managing such a large multiple-use reserve estate.

The scientific and research community are another vital set of stakeholders. Encouraging, fostering and collaborating with research partnerships will be essential to help reserve managers build the knowledge and understanding necessary to manage the estate effectively, and to communicate its values and benefits to a broader range of stakeholders. This is discussed in more depth in the ESP report.

Regional Panel members of the BAP were invaluable in bringing knowledge, networks and different perspectives into the consultation process. Their engagement in the CMR Review represents a valuable resource to draw on in the future.

In summary, a wide range and great diversity of existing regional bodies, organisations, users and interested parties engaged in the review. Many are keen and have the potential to make valuable contributions to the design and implementation of reserve management programs. All these relationships need to be valued and nurtured.

BAP Recommendation 6.1: The model and experience of the stakeholder forum for the South-east CMR Network could form the basis for a regional consultative forum for each of the other networks and the Coral Sea CMR. Initially consideration could be given to drawing on the experience and involvement of BAP Regional Panel members in or as members of future forums for CMR consultation.

BAP Recommendation 6.2: The DNP should make continuing regional engagement a priority, using a variety of communication tools and approaches with users, user groups and regional communities as management plans are developed and implemented.

BAP Recommendation 6.3: Regional engagement models, including the South-east CMR Network Stakeholder Forum, should be evaluated to enable the implementation of robust, sustainable and effective mechanisms for engaging stakeholders.