



Australian Government

**Department of the Environment,
Water, Heritage and the Arts**

**Report
of the
East Marine Region
Strategic Regional Assessment Workshop - Central
28-29 July 2009
Brisbane**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian Government is developing a series of Marine Bioregional Plans that will cover all five of Australia's marine regions. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage, and the Arts (DEWHA) is taking a consultative approach to the development of the Bioregional Plan for the East Marine Region (EMR). This workshop was the last of three to be held in the Region and it provided experts and stakeholders with the opportunity to participate in the identification of: key conservation and heritage priorities for the area of the EMR between Coffs Harbour in the south to Fraser Island in the north; the activities and impacts that occur there; and tools to manage them under the proposed Plan. The workshop was attended by a wide range of stakeholders, although not all invited stakeholder groups were able to attend. This report reflects only the views of participants present at the workshop.

Drawing on the conservation values and activities identified in the East Bioregional Profile, released by DEWHA in May 2009, workshop participants identified a range of habitats, species and activities that they considered warrant specific consideration in the development of the EMR Bioregional Plan. These are summarised below.

Habitats	Species/Species Groups	Activities
Offshore seamounts and rises	Small pelagics (including squid)	Commercial fishing
Canyons – rocky type	Large pelagic species	Recreational fishing
Canyons – muddy type	Sharks	Charter fishing
Shelf rocky reef	Grey nurse shark	Marine-based tourism
Shelf edge rocky reef	Deepwater demersal finfish	Ports and shipping
Sandy shelf areas	Cetaceans	Offshore oil and gas
Temperate (reef) corals and sponges	Marine turtles	Sea dumping
Tropical coral reefs	Seabirds	Habitat enhancement and rehabilitation
Oceanic transition zone (tropical – temperate waters)	Sea snakes	Land based sources of pollution
Pelagic zone	Benthic crustaceans	Other eg. submarine cables
Macroalgae beds		

The workshop conducted a broad, qualitative assessment of the relative impact of each activity on each habitat and species group. While the workshop did not seek to achieve consensus on issues there were a number of strong themes that emerged:

- There is a need for the review of some of the data contained in the Bioregional Profile to ensure that it reflects the extent and value of activities in the EMR accurately, and that the document provides a sound basis for decision making.

- The relatively coarse assessment of impacts of activities on habitats and species, the background of participants present at the workshop and the nature of the process should be recognised in interpreting the outcomes of the workshop.
- The assessment did, nevertheless, highlight key issues and areas of uncertainty, and provided guidance on the broad activities and species warranting further consideration.
- Particular concern was expressed over the need to take into account the high level of human activity in the area of interest; balancing use of the marine environment for recreational and various forms of commercial use with the need for effective biodiversity conservation will be the major challenge.
- Generally, the impacts associated with most forms of recreational and commercial fishing, which made up most of the human impacts considered, were relatively low, and where impacts had been more severe, actions were generally being undertaken through a suite of measures/plans.
- Existing management/regulations, including existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) need to be taken into account when determining the nature and extent of new MPAs.
- There is a danger inherent in the current approach of considering the impacts of activities on species and habitats in isolation. In so doing, cumulative impacts on the marine environment, which may be serious, could be missed or under-estimated.
- There is a need for the marine planning process to be adaptive over time to large scale shifts resulting from climate change and to new information as it becomes available.
- Further studies, including accurate assessment of socio-economic considerations, need to be conducted when DEWHA announces the Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs).

In assessing the outcomes of the workshop, participants were of the view that their individual expectations had been met to quite a high degree. DEWHA acknowledged the success of the workshop and indicated that it has reinforced its view that early stakeholder consultation was a valuable addition to the marine planning process. DEWHA also emphasised that it was committed to providing opportunities for stakeholder engagement at each future step of the process towards developing a Bioregional Plan and MPAs for the EMR.

Disclaimer:

This report was prepared for the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts to assist in the marine bioregional planning process for the East Marine Region. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Commonwealth Government or the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts.

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