



**Australian Government**  

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

**Executive Summary**

**of the**

**East Marine Region**

**Strategic Regional Assessment Workshop - North**

**Cairns**

**15-16 June 2009**

## 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 development of the Bioregional Plan for the East Marine Region (the EMR). This workshop was the first of three to be held in the Region and it provided experts and stakeholders with the opportunity to provide input to inform the identification of key conservation and heritage priorities for the Coral Sea area of the EMR and 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 stakeholder groups were able to attend.

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

These are summarised below.

<b>Habitats</b>	<b>Species/Species Groups</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Seamounts	Small pelagic species	Commercial fishing
Reefs	Pelagic sharks	Recreational fishing
Cays	Reef sharks	Charter fishing
Canyons and shelf edge reefs	Tunas	Offshore oil and gas
Plateaus	Billfish	Cruising yachts
Water Column	Medium pelagic species	Shipping
	Herbivorous fish	Defence
	Demersal reef fish	Indigenous activities
	Cetaceans	Marine debris
	Marine turtles	Research
	Seabirds	
	Sea snakes	
	Invertebrates	

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

- There was some concern, particularly initially, that a decision on bioregional planning processes would be highly politicised and that decisions on areas for closure/marine protected areas (MPAs) had already been made. DEWHA stated this was not the case.
- 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 Coral Sea accurately provides a sound basis for decision making.

- The assessment of the impact of activities on habitats and species conducted at the workshop suggested that level of impact on conservation values in the Coral Sea is relatively low
- The relatively low impact was in large part due to the existing management/regulation of activities conducted in the area and to natural protection provided by the relative remoteness of the Coral Sea
- There is a need to ensure that management of the activities in the Coral Sea prevents significant increases in activity and impact
- Impacts appear to be highest on reefs, cays and seamount habitats and on demersal reef fish, reef sharks, marine turtles, pelagic sharks and medium pelagic species
- Targeted and comprehensive socio-economic studies need to be conducted when DEWHA announces the Areas for Further Assessment
- That consultation needs to be conducted with sectors not represented or under-represented at the workshop

In assessing the expected 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 acknowledged 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 East Region.

## **Acknowledgements**

The active participation of all attendees at the workshop is acknowledged with thanks. Particular acknowledgement is due to Peter Doherty, Julian Pepperell, Nic Bax and David Bellwood for taking on the roles of facilitator and rapporteur of the four working groups.

## **Disclaimer**

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