

Marine Bioregional Planning

A new focus for Australia's marine planning



In 2005 the Australian Government brought its programme of regional marine planning directly under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) – one of the most comprehensive pieces of environmental legislation in operation anywhere in the world. The plans will be known as Marine Bioregional Plans to reflect the part of the EPBC Act under which they will be established.

This initiative gives new impetus for the implementation of Australia's Oceans Policy by streamlining the planning process and providing greater guidance about marine environment conservation priorities. The process includes the identification and establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Commonwealth managed waters around Australia (which excludes the coastal waters managed by the States and Northern Territory).

How does the EPBC Act relate to marine planning?

Section 176 of the EPBC Act provides a general description of the provisions a Marine Bioregional Plan may include:

- descriptions of the biodiversity, economic, social and heritage values of the region;
- the objectives of the plan relating to biodiversity and other values;
- strategies and actions to give effect to the plan;
- how the community can be involved in the plan; and
- mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing the plan over time.

(Read more about the EPBC Act online at:
<http://www.deh.gov.au/epbc/about>)



A humpback whale breaches for a whale-watching charter



Weedy seadragon



Marine turtle





Whale shark

Why is marine planning now to be implemented under environment law?

The Commonwealth marine environment is identified as a “matter of national environmental significance” under the EPBC Act. Any action that will have, or is likely to have, a significant impact on the Commonwealth marine environment requires assessment and approval under this law.

Bringing regional marine planning under the EPBC Act provides a statutory link between the plans and the range of decisions the Minister for the Environment and Heritage must make under the EPBC Act.

Marine Bioregional Planning will assist in understanding the impacts of actions on the Commonwealth marine environment and determining the circumstances under which actions can take place.

This new approach to marine planning is an important development. It will allow everybody with an interest in the marine environment to understand the key marine conservation values in a marine region and the corresponding priorities for their protection. Armed with this knowledge, industry and decision-makers will be better equipped to plan, approve and undertake development activity in a way that ensures our unique marine environment is protected for the use and enjoyment of future generations.



Sols floating anemone



Dolphin



Southern reef squid



A Bass Strait petroleum rig



A conductivity, temperature and depth sampler



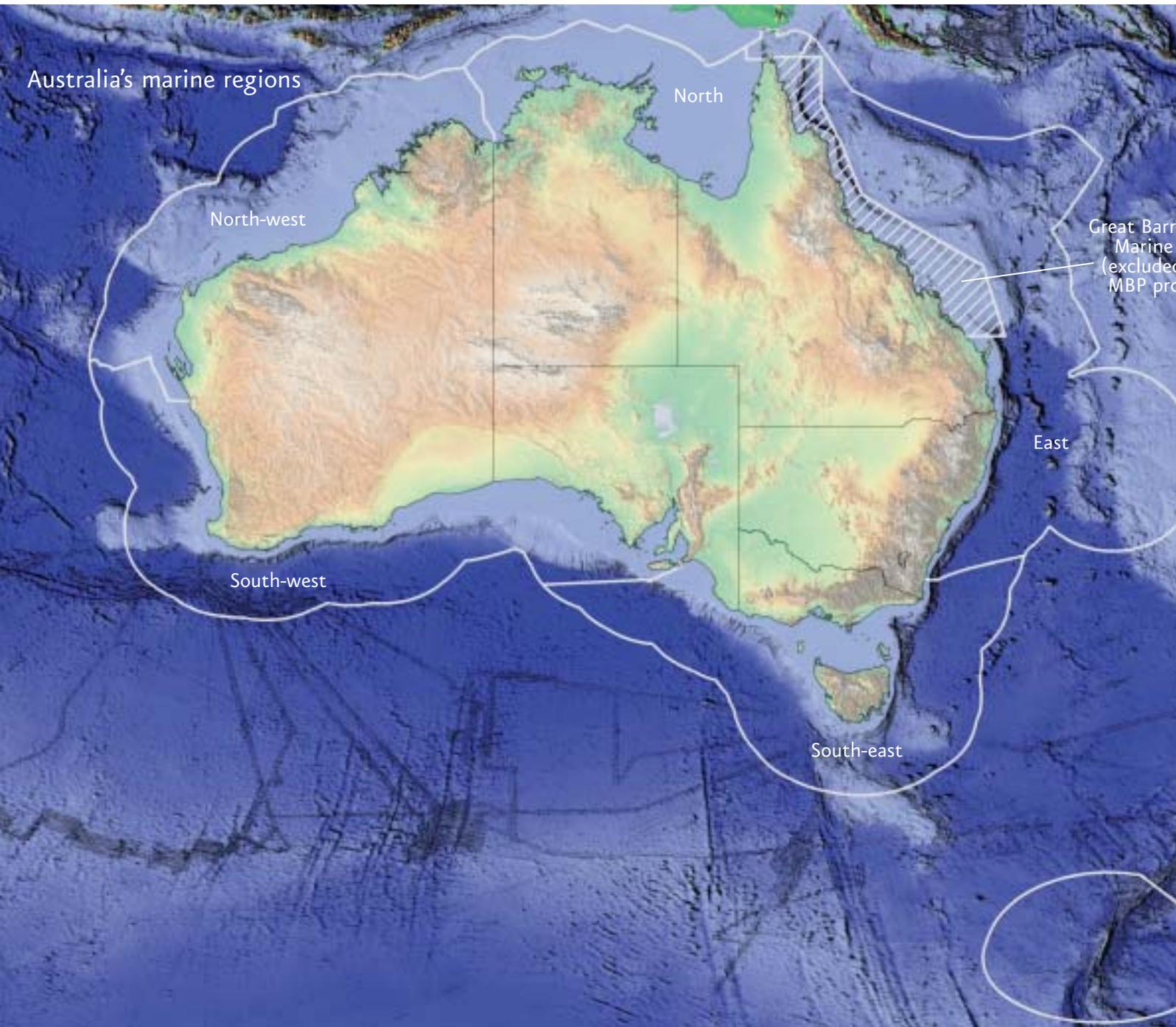
What does Marine Bioregional Planning involve?

Marine Bioregional Plans will be developed in each of Australia's five marine regions.

The first stage of the planning process involves developing a Regional Profile of each marine region. Regional Profiles are documents that describe each region's key habitats, species, natural processes, heritage values, human uses and benefits. The profiles will draw on Australia's growing marine science and socio-economic information base to provide a detailed picture of each marine region.

The Regional Profiles will give details about the various statutory obligations under the EPBC Act and other environmental legislation that applies in any region, as well as describing existing conservation measures and other marine spatial management measures such as area closures for fisheries.

The Regional Profiles will also set out the objectives for subsequent work to identify an MPA network for the marine region which, will form part of the National Representative System of MPAs.



Following the release of a Regional Profile, the Department of the Environment and Heritage will conduct a strategic regional assessment of conservation values and the current and emerging pressures on the marine environment. The results of this assessment, to be included in a draft Marine Bioregional Plan, will identify key conservation and heritage priorities for each marine region and the range of legislative and administrative tools available to the Government to manage them.

The strategic assessment will provide valuable input to the identification of MPAs. A candidate network of MPAs will be included in the draft Marine Bioregional Plan.

The draft Marine Bioregional Plan will be open for public consultation under regulations to be made under the EPBC Act.

The Marine Bioregional Plan will be finalised after the public consultation. It will identify conservation values in the region, priorities and measures for the protection of these values, a network of MPAs and a set of sustainability indicators that will be used to help tell us about the health of the marine environment into the future.

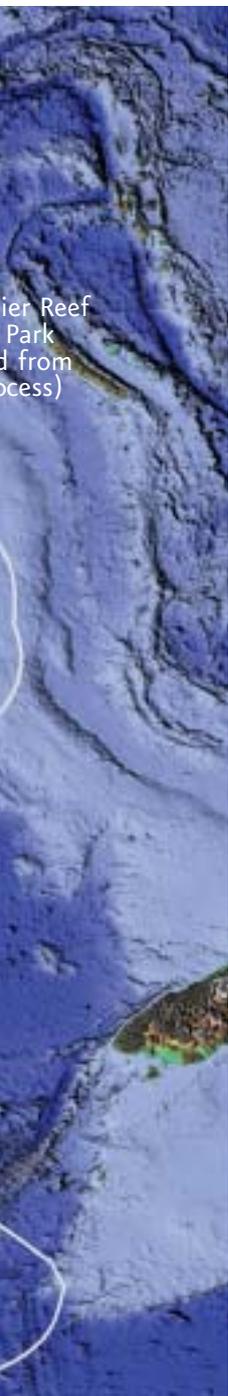
The development of Marine Bioregional Plans will include a greater focus than has occurred previously on the provision of information on each region. This will be done via the internet. The public will be able to view maps of a region representing different types of information (e.g. species distribution, location of conservation values, spread and intensity of industries) as well as being able to provide comments on information contained in Regional Profiles, draft and final Marine Bioregional Plans.

When will the new approach be completed?

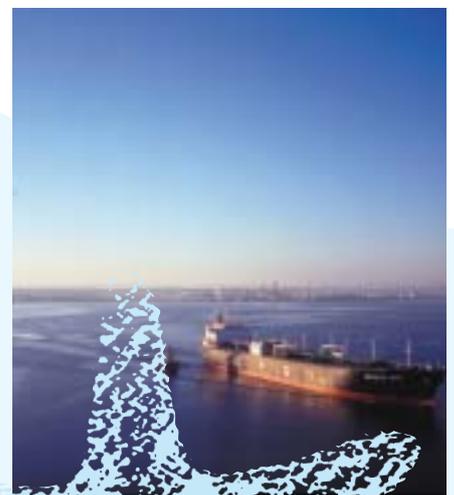
The Department of the Environment and Heritage has already begun Marine Bioregional Planning and the resultant plans will be progressively completed between 2006 and 2012.



A school of blowfish



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Park
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An LPG tanker is guided out of Fremantle Harbour



Coral sea gorgonian fan and diver



Rock lobster pots

What does this mean for industry?

Marine industries will benefit from this new approach. Once a Marine Bioregional Plan is in place, marine industry proponents will have a comprehensive information system to draw on to help them understand the obligations they have under the EPBC Act for that marine region. Guidelines will be developed at the regional level to help industry and decision-makers understand when an activity should be referred for assessment under the EPBC Act.

Industries have generally been supportive of the EPBC Act, because it focuses on achieving environmental outcomes rather than prescribing ways in which they must be achieved. This means that industry has more flexibility in how it meets obligations.

Are the State and Northern Territory Governments involved?

As States and the Northern Territory are responsible for the marine environment for the first three nautical miles from the shore and many ecological processes work across both the state and national waters, the Australian Government aims to work cooperatively with them in developing and implementing the plans. Like the Australian Government, the States and the Northern Territory are already working on their contribution to the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas.

What about stakeholders?

The Government recognises the importance of all ocean users and coastal communities in the planning process and will actively engage them. This will be done at key steps in the planning process, including through the formal statutory consultation on each draft plan.

What does this mean for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park?

This change will have no effect on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP), which is governed by its own legislation. There will be no Marine Bioregional Plan in the area covered by the GBRMP as it is already zoned and managed. However, a Marine Bioregional Plan will be developed for the Central East Marine Region that includes the Coral Sea, east of the Reef.

What does this mean for the South-east Regional Marine Plan?

The South-east Regional Marine Plan was released in May 2004. In 2006, a network of MPAs was announced for the Marine Region as part of this Plan. The Government will examine how the current plan will fit with the new approach, and will determine when to bring the South-east under the EPBC Act.



Oyster



A deep sea sediment core is recovered

Marine Bioregional Planning

Where can I go to get more information?

More information about Marine Bioregional Planning is available at:
www.deh.gov.au/mbp

More information about the EPBC Act is at:
www.deh.gov.au/epbc/index.html

For more copies of this brochure please contact:

COMMUNITY INFORMATION UNIT

Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage

Email: ciu@deh.gov.au

Freecall: 1800 803 772

For more information about Marine Bioregional Planning in any of the Australia's marine regions:

Email: oceans.office@deh.gov.au



Sail fish caught off Broome, WA

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Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Heritage