

Discussion Paper

High Priority Marine Parks for inshore Tasmanian waters



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Cover Photo: Goat Island, Jun Zhang

High Priority Marine Parks for inshore Tasmanian waters

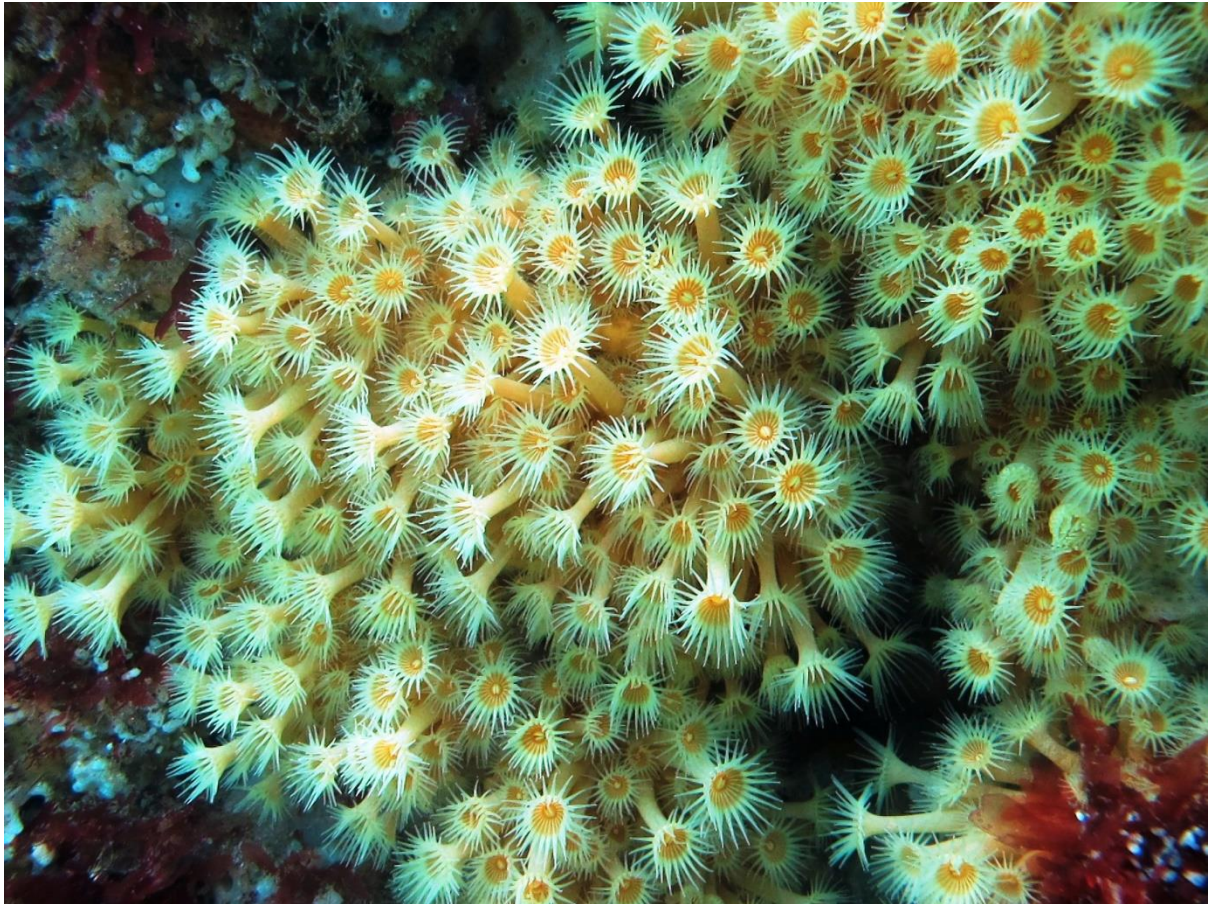


Figure 1 Sea Daisies, Photo: M.Jacques

Why Are Tasmanian Oceans so Special?

“Tasmania has a spectacular coastline and diverse marine environments which form an integral part of the lifestyle of many Tasmanians. Our coastal waters also have extraordinary natural values that are of global conservation significance on the basis of high biodiversity, unusually large numbers of unique species found nowhere else, and rare ecosystems within pristine underwater wilderness areas that rival World Heritage listed lands.”¹ Dr Karen Parsons

What do we Want?

Tasmanian marine scientists have asked that our State, “Establish a participatory process to fully protect 30% of ocean waters, including at least 10% of each ecosystem type in each bioregion, in a

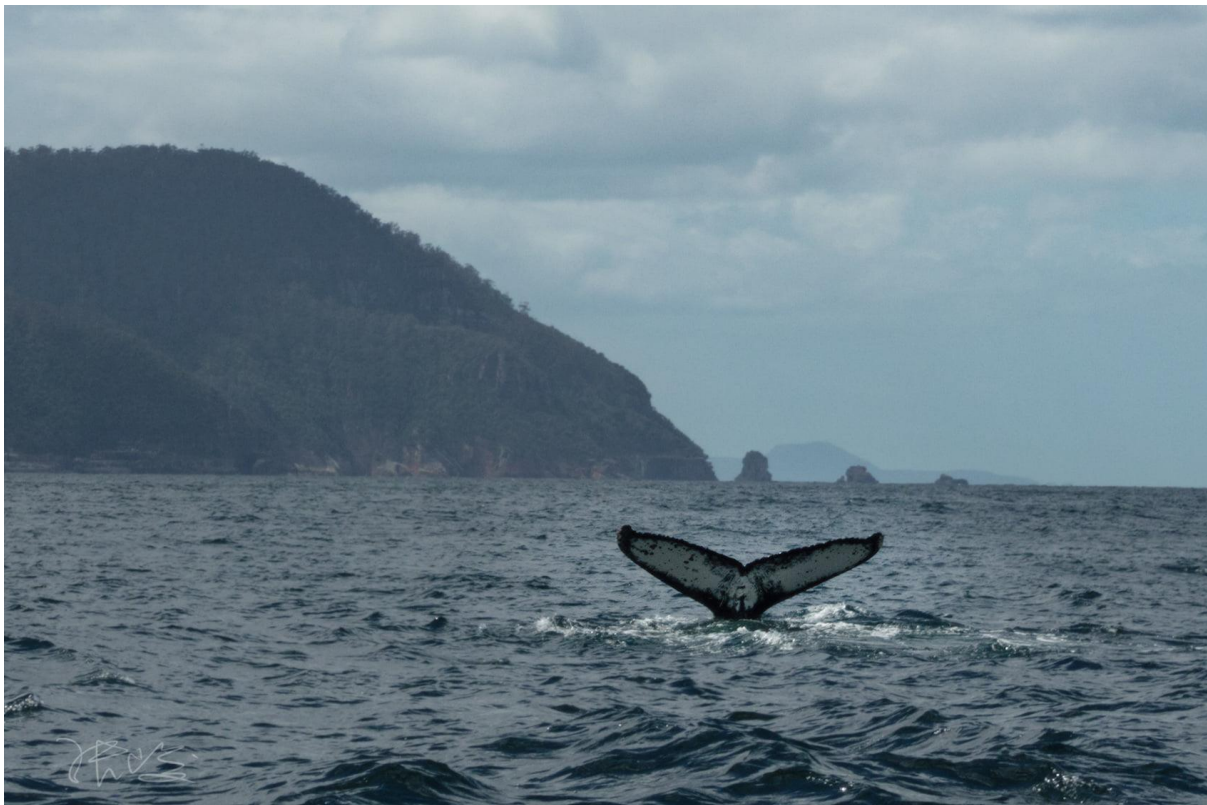
¹ *Nowhere Else on Earth: Tasmania’s Marine Natural Values 2 Prepared for Environment Tasmania by Dr Karen Parsons of Aquenal Pty Ltd. Report citation: Parsons, K. E. (2011) Nowhere Else on Earth: Tasmania’s Marine Natural Values. Report for Environment Tasmania. Aquenal, Tasmania.*

network of large marine protected areas (MPAs).” “More no-take MPAs are urgently needed in temperate inshore waters.”²

Why do we even need them?

The most recent Commonwealth Government’s State of the Environment Report painted a dire picture about the challenges facing Australia’s oceans:

“The pressures with the highest impact on the Australian marine environment remain climate change (affecting water temperature, salinity, acidification, circulation and ocean nutrients), fishing, pollution (especially plastics; debris; and land-based inputs of sediments, excess nutrients and chemicals), oil and gas industries, and marine noise. In many areas, the combination of pressures is having a cumulative negative effect. Substantial and widespread degradation of Australia’s marine environmental values is expected if these pressures are not addressed.”³ [our emphasis]



Humpback, Tasman Peninsula, Jun Zhang

Populations of numerous species of fish, algae (seaweeds) and invertebrates (marine animals like shells and sponges) are in steep decline⁴. Tasmania is already home to an exceptionally high number of threatened marine species, but there is little money for their recovery or to prevent further species from being listed. It is really important that Tasmania’s marine plants and animals have secure places

² Letter to the Commonwealth Environment Minister from 23 Tasmanian scientists dated 17/11/2022

³ 2021 report [Key findings | Australia state of the environment 2021 \(dcceew.gov.au\)](https://www.dcceew.gov.au/state-of-the-environment/2021/key-findings)

⁴ Letter to Tasmanian MPs from 7 Tasmanian marine scientists

to live, feed and breed. There they can be protected from human threats in secure insurance populations.

We are trying to save a few of the best areas of ocean wilderness in Tasmania, and minimise the risk from their main threats.

While 50.3% of the land area of Tasmania is reserved, only 1.7% of waters around Tasmania are protected in no-take marine reserves. This is the weakest protection of any Australian State and ignores the extreme threats to our marine species. It also doesn't meet Australia's treaty commitments.

Only four of Tasmania's nine marine bioregions (areas that have different kinds of marine communities) have a marine park. No marine parks are present off the northern or western (north of Port Davey) coastlines, or off King Island or Flinders Island.

Which ones are Urgent?

We are particularly worried about the future of the unique areas named in this report, they are the immediate priority.

The most obvious place to start is in the northern Tasmanian coastal waters, where there are virtually no high quality marine protected areas along the mainland coast or King or Flinders Islands.

As well as creating new MPAs, the status of some poorly-protected existing marine protected areas needs to be reconsidered and improved.

For the most part these are being proposed for high levels of protection.

What do we mean by marine parks?

This paper highlights some of the especially unique natural areas in Tasmanian coastal waters. These areas need to be protected from their principal threats. Where they can be damaged by hunting, pollution and exploitation they need to be protected in the same way as national parks on land.

The protection of these areas is urgent, as threats are increasing.

When the government last took action to create new marine protected areas (MPAs), most were so poorly protected that many people called them 'sham parks'.

We are using the word "marine park" to state that what Tasmanians really need for these particularly special areas are well-made marine national parks that are safe against their principal threats. Many of the areas in this paper that are particularly important to nature will be worthless if they remain open to exploitation, even if it is called "sustainable" in government statements.

Our current "marine conservation areas" aren't much better protected than hunting reserves on land and most people don't even know where they are.

What is a Marine Protected Area?

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) Guidelines identify four key things that separate proper marine protected areas from other managed marine areas. These characteristics are:

- the MPA has been established especially for the conservation of biodiversity;
- it is able to be classified into one or more of the six IUCN Protected Area Management Categories meeting the values and objectives of the proposed MPA;
- it must have secure status which can only be revoked by a parliamentary process; and
- it contributes to the representativeness, comprehensiveness or adequacy of the national MPA system.

The practice in Tasmania has been to declare marine parks that fit into two broad IUCN categories:

Category II “National Park”

“A large natural area containing a representative or outstanding sample of major natural regions, features or scenery; and which should be managed for the protection and maintenance of natural and cultural values of the area, while providing for ecologically sustainable recreation consistent with conserving those values.”

Cradle Mountain National Park on land, or the Governor Island MPA are examples of this kind of protected area.

They are a natural area of land and/or sea, designated to:

- “(a) protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations,
- (b) exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area and
- (c) provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible.”

Category VI “Marine Conservation Area”

They are a “protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems. An area containing predominantly unmodified natural systems, that will be managed to ensure long term protection and maintenance of biological diversity, while providing at the same time a sustainable flow of natural products and services to meet community needs”.

An example of this type of MPA is the Roberts Point marine conservation area. Never heard of it? Not many people have. It is not easy to even find out where the boundaries are. You can fish in it and do almost anything there. At the moment, there is little evidence that it has acted to deter any potentially damaging development activity.

Places like the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park can have more zones and more options for how they are managed. When we get the chance, Tasmania should update its marine park legislation.

The History of Tasmanian MPAs

Having national parks to protect nature is an idea that has been around for 150 years, but we only started to think seriously about parks in the ocean in the 1970s. In the 1990s Tasmanians agreed to have a comprehensive system of marine parks, but we have done nothing about it for the last 15 years.

In about 2008 things got too hard politically for the Government, so they announced a “moratorium” on new marine parks. That seems to have been interpreted as a moratorium on even talking about them.

Outside of Tasmania’s jurisdiction (3 nautical miles to seaward) the Commonwealth Government is taking action to create new marine protected areas. One was announced recently for Macquarie Island.

Its really important that Tasmania gets back on track soon. We are relying on you to help us.



Eric Woehler

Our International Obligations

The United Nations has asked countries to endorse global marine protection targets for 2030. Australia has ratified this “High Seas Treaty”.

“Effective conservation and management of at least 30% of the world’s lands, inland waters, coastal areas and oceans, with emphasis on areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functioning and services. The GBF prioritizes ecologically-representative, well-connected and equitably-governed systems of protected areas and other effective area based conservation, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories and practices.”

Currently 17% and 10% of the world's terrestrial and marine areas respectively are under protection."

This treaty goes further than just setting targets for marine protected areas including:

- Having restoration completed or underway on at least 30% of degraded terrestrial, inland waters, and coastal and marine ecosystems
- Reduce to near zero the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance, including ecosystems of high ecological integrity
- Mobilize by 2030 at least \$200 billion per year in domestic and international biodiversity-related funding from all sources – public and private.
- Prevent the introduction of priority invasive alien species, and reduce by at least half the introduction and establishment of other known or potential invasive alien species, and eradicate or control invasive alien species on islands and other priority sites.

Australia has committed as a global citizen to 'ecological representation' across its MPA network⁵ This is far from reality – MPAs are not evenly distributed around our coastline, leaving the majority of ecosystem types and bioregions without effective protection.

The UN warns, *"Without such action, there will be a further acceleration in the global rate of species extinction, which is already at least tens to hundreds of times higher than it has averaged over the past 10 million years."*⁶

By proposing a few new highly protected marine parks TMP is only suggesting one of many measures that are needed to protect the ocean. There is a lot more work to be done on many issues. However, targeted high-level protection ("marine parks") for areas of special inshore biodiversity is an easy, quick and inexpensive way to get started.

What about the Tasmanian Government?

At recent meetings with the Commonwealth, the Tasmanian Government has accepted these UN 30% by 2030 targets⁷ That doesn't mean anything is happening. The current Tasmanian Government is not proposing to take any active steps to make more marine protected areas. They have actually renewed an existing moratorium on declaring new marine parks. This has been expressed by Tasmanian fisheries Ministers as, *"The government has a policy of no more lockups that would see fishers excluded from areas."*⁸

The Government appears to think that their UN obligations are Australian targets and not Tasmanian obligations. *"The Tasmanian Government is not of the view that further inclusion of State waters into marine reserves is the best approach to increasing protection of Australia's marine areas"*⁹

While the Tasmanian Greens support the UN targets, the Tasmanian ALP opposition is currently in administration in Tasmania, and has not made any significant public statements on this issue.

It is a difficult political environment in Tasmania for talking about more marine parks. Any progress will rely on ordinary voters like you, demanding that your politicians take the issue more seriously.

⁵ Aichi Target 11, Convention of Biological Diversity)

⁶ [221219-CBD-PressRelease-COP15-Final_0.pdf](#)

⁷ Joint communique meeting of Australian environment ministers

⁸ Minister Jo Palmer, Hansard Legislative Council 8/6/2022

⁹ Letter to TMP from Minister Jaensch 29 March 2023.

How have the proposed marine parks been chosen?

We already know where these special inshore areas are, and have known about them for a long time. In past decades scientists did assessments of the special natural values of areas. There were several research papers and conferences prior to 2008 to arrive at a list of suitable sites for high value - highly protected marine parks.

We rely largely on the studies of Professor Graham Edgar, Dr Karen Parsons, and Dr Neville Barratt who have led research efforts in this area since the 1980s. Since then, there has been a broader appreciation of the Tasmanian coastal natural values, with a major study on estuaries adding more information. Comments from ornithologists like Dr Eric Woehler have also added information on seabird and shorebird habitat. We are also slowly learning more about where fish live, and how the ocean works. As scuba diving has spread in popularity we are also discovering more special underwater sites that are valuable for education and recreation, as well as for nature.

The incomplete mapping of coastal habitats carried out by underwater drones is now available to the public as "Seamap". It has improved our ability to identify 'clusters' of unique habitats that could be included within a highly protected area.

The Interim Marine and Coastal Regionalisation of Australia (IMCRA), is a system of mapping that can be used to identify parts of Australia where different communities of creatures live and ecosystems can be found. There are eight bioregions adjacent to the Tasmanian coastline. They are known as the Otway (basically King Island); Boags (Bass Strait); Twofold Shelf (Kent Group); Flinders (Flinders Island); Freycinet (East Coast); Bruny (SE coast); Davey (SW and South Coast); and Franklin (West Coast) Bioregions.

We can also refer to criteria adopted from previous processes, particularly the now defunct Resource Planning and Development (RPDC) processes used in Tasmania prior to 2008, and the still current (although now out of favour) Tasmanian Marine Protected Areas Strategy.

We have also talked with recreational users to further refine the proposed boundaries to maximise the recreational and educational benefits of the proposed areas, while trying to minimise any disruption new marine parks may cause. We are happy to talk more with people to make the park designs even better.

Where possible the design also contains a linkage to an important natural area on land, like an existing nature reserve or national park. This allows for easier management and recognises the linkages between land and coastal waters. It also enhances the image and attractiveness of the land reserve as a site for tourism and recreation.

In terms of appreciating social, cultural, economic and recreational values, there are no detailed studies specific to these proposed marine protected areas. Marine farming reports provided a lot of useful economic information on some regions. Even detailed government statistics, like commercial fishing statistics are usually only collected at a regional, or fishing block level. Not all fishermen are keen to share their favourite fishing spot although there is some internet chat. Other information such as popular beaches, navigation infrastructure and scenic recreational diving sites are reasonably well reported and easily identified.

It may be that other particularly important areas are still to be discovered. These currently proposed areas can be readily justified for immediate high level protection. They would also go a long way towards meeting our international commitments.

Lots of the marine animals that we are trying to protect have big ranges, especially things like seabirds. We should also be discussing how we can protect these other areas in different kinds of marine protected areas that also allow for sustainable resource use.

What about Fishing?

A lot of the coastal areas we need to protect are remote, or are in areas that don't include a lot of good fishing territory, like sea caves, tidal bird areas, or seal colonies. These days Tasmanian recreational fishermen are fishing further offshore and are using fewer nets. They like certain good eating table fish like flathead, rather than catching inshore reef fish like wrasse.

Many people prefer to fish for pelagic (ocean roaming) fish like Australian salmon or snapper. They don't stay long in coastal areas anyway and need to be protected by fisheries management regimes, more than by marine parks. There may be some minimal impact on professional cray and abalone fishing where the marine park includes rocky reef.

Ask yourself, how many times have I actually fished this proposed marine park area? For most people the answer is probably never, or rarely. Some overlap with your local fishing spot is possible, especially close to cities and popular boat ramps. We are happy to talk to people about how we can minimise those disruptions.

A few people might get angry and loud about it, but if it was on land, would most of us seriously argue for sustainable shooting at a place as important for nature as say Cradle Mountain, or Mt. Field National Park?

There needs to be 'no take' areas in a system of marine protected areas. It's pretty clear that when fishing is allowed in a marine protected area, it will greatly reduce the conservation value of the area¹⁰. We know that it's a tough thing to ask, but these restrictions are important and necessary. We are asking fishermen to help us protect these special natural places.

What we don't want?

Tasmanians don't need large marine parks that are badly designed and put in the wrong places. There is a common problem around the world with the way we sometimes make marine parks. A number of Tasmanian scientists have said that, *"The majority of Australian no-take MPAs have been located in areas to minimise their impacts on resource extraction and therefore are of little value for conservation"*¹¹.

They get proposed for special areas, but after a political protest, they are declared in nearby lifeless areas. Same as on the land, the seabed is not the same wherever you go, even if it looks that way from the surface. These proposed areas really are special!

¹⁰E.g. See 2019 Position Statement on Marine Protected Areas by the Australian Marine Sciences Association.

¹¹ Letter to the Commonwealth Environment Minister from 23 scientists dated 17/11/2022

Quantity is important, but quality is even more important.

Some Benefits of Marine Parks

Scientists have listed some of the benefits of marine parks as:

1. Conserving rare and representative plants and animals and the habitats they depend on.
2. Saving small sections of our coastline in their natural state to allow the marine life to live and breed free from human impacts. This encourages a healthy food web which has positive flow on effects in the surrounding waters.
3. Protect and promote unique spots for education, recreation and tourism.
4. Marine reserves act as a reference or baseline in scientific studies to assess the impact of other activities like fishing.
5. Marine reserves can act as a "seed" source, replenishing nearby areas.

How Big?

Where boundaries are indicated in previous studies they are used as the principal way of setting the proposed park size. Professor Edgar has suggested coastal parks should be as large as possible, across a linear coastline as much as 10 kilometres long in Tasmania. Studies indicate that very small parks are far less likely to be effective in protecting marine ecosystems.

TMPs suggestions work on the basis that, after a certain effective size is achieved, quality is better than a rough measure of quantity. We have tried to include the important features in one spot, then leave the rest of the area for other uses.

Some very large parks close to settled areas have the potential to clash with many other existing uses. Some larger proposals are unlikely to be accepted and thus may not be practical. The size of protected areas is a balance between a useful design and social acceptability¹². We accept that some proposals will be contentious in some areas, but we are willing to talk about it more.

¹² barratt



Everest deep reef, Bicheno, Jun Zhang

How well-protected?

As TMP's suggestions are particularly focussed on very unique coastal areas, it is directed at creating marine parks with high levels of protection (IUCN Class 2 national parks). Although this is still to be negotiated, most of these areas cannot be protected from their principal threats without significant restrictions on extractive uses.

To meet the UN percentage targets other areas would need to be considered, perhaps at differing levels of protection. Other areas important for migration, foraging or geoheritage could be added. They may still allow for sustainable extractive practices.

What makes these areas Special?

Plants, animals and ecosystems vary from place to place. Within Tasmania there are differences between ocean areas, scientists have mapped these and call them bioregions. These bioregions have different communities of marine animals, or different physical characteristics. Within these unique areas there are "stand out" sites, the ones we need to take special care of.

The suggested areas are based around 'hotspots' long recognised for their special environmental value. They are designed to include as many different kinds of habitat and diverse ecological communities that could be protected in one area, rather than proposing greater numbers of

fragmented sites. The proposed areas have a diverse range of marine animals and plants that are representative of the area.

The suggested areas ensure that each bioregion has at least two protected areas to provide some insurance, known as “replication”. In bioregions where there are a lot of unique features, more than two protected areas are suggested.

Lots of land animals also rely on the ocean, at least for some part of their lifecycle. We also have suggested places that help marine animals that breed on islands or in estuaries, like fish, birds and seals .

The proposed marine parks can also have geoheritage sites; rare or endangered species or habitats; nursery or juvenile areas; or feeding, breeding or rest areas for migratory species. These areas are generally still in good condition, or they could readily recover with higher levels of protection.

What was excluded?

All the areas proposed in this paper are chosen because of their ecological importance. Everyone loves the area near their holiday home, or might be motivated to ‘move’ parks away from areas where they have a personal or professional interest, like their favourite fishing spot. Where an area has been proposed in the past, without a justification being provided that identifies natural values, these areas have been excluded from the list of high priority proposals.

Some areas were special in the past but it might already be too late to save them. Global warming presents a real challenge to the marine environment and all reef habitat on the Tasmanian East Coast is at heightened risk. Shallower reefs around St. Helens from 15-45 metres are already severely damaged by *Centrostephanous rogersii*, the long-spined urchin. Other invasive species are altering the marine communities, but in a less dramatic way.

Levels of naturalness have shrunk to very low levels. It is hoped that marine park declaration in areas where it is not already too late, will add to the resilience of these remaining healthy areas and become a focus of research and corrective action.

Did we consider the interests of humans too, like jobs?

Yes. However, there is a tendency to see economic value in terms of current extractive industries we know, rather than what we could do with the marine estate in the future. Although any jobs in a regional area are of value, for example, commercial fishing is not an especially valuable industry in Australian macroeconomic terms and the wild fishery has been static or in decline for some time. Some sectors such as inshore scale fishing are of particularly low economic benefit in Tasmania. They have been quickly overtaken in value by other kinds of fishing like aquaculture. Some industries haven’t become common yet like offshore windfarms and seaweed harvesting.

Some of these new industries need guidance about where they should and shouldn’t set up activities that might be harmful to the ocean.

Some of these new industries may be non-extractive and even be of higher economic value, and have better growth potential. The economic uses of ocean areas in the future may well rely on businesses that are yet to be created like new wildlife encounter tourism. A tourism expansion in an area needs attractions and promotion, and a highly protected marine park adds focus to an area.

Managed tourism around marine parks would be a potentially significant and growing economic benefit over time, especially where the marine park is close to existing popular recreation and tourism areas, like Low Head and Rocky Cape.

A good example of the way our economic use of the ocean has changed is Bicheno, once a very significant Tasmanian fishing port. In 1991 a very small marine park was declared in the area. There were claims made that it would damage local jobs and damage fish stocks in areas outside the park. There is no evidence that this ever happened. Shortly after the park was declared life went on as normal and most people quickly accepted it as a fact of life, or even started to support it. This has been the experience in other places around the world too.

The decline in fishing jobs at Bicheno continued as before. This was being caused by declining stocks, new fishing quotas, and rising costs. There is probably more recreational fishing being done now around the edges of the park than was occurring in the area before it was protected, as it was already in a badly depleted region, especially as it was close to a good boat ramp.

While commercial fishing in Bicheno still employs a few people, fishing is now dwarfed by tourism, partly based on an image of Bicheno as a recreational and leisure centre with high natural values. That image is enhanced by the local marine park. Much of the recreational fishing activity is moving offshore, despite there still being inshore areas to fish, with the charter industry mostly serving deepwater game fishing, or trolling of the general area for pelagic fish. None of that is affected by the local marine park, or any of the likely future extensions to that park. There are still a handful of anglers occasionally fishing from artificial structures, although artificial structures tend not to be focal points of marine protection interest.

Protected areas won't impact on existing public infrastructure like navigation aids. One of the most affected areas would be the pilot station at Low Head. Where this occurs boundary adjustments or relaxed management restrictions can cater for these existing uses. The same goes for stormwater mains and other public infrastructure. It also doesn't need to change the current uses of mooring buoys, and doesn't stop people boating through protected areas, or anchoring there when they need shelter.

Marine national parks are recreation-friendly, and do not advocate for the exclusion of the public. We want open public access. Only one small area of the Port Davey marine park is an exclusion area for diving, put in place for scientific reasons. This is a remote area rarely visited anyway, and even then an identical area is still open nearby.

As many of the proposed marine park areas include rocky reef habitat, which is generally suitable for pot and dive fishing for cray and abalone, it will be difficult not to have an impact on this type of fishing in some small way. As a keystone predator it is important to leave large crayfish in a special natural area to maintain a normal ecological balance. Overfishing of large crayfish has contributed to a significant problem with urchin barrens in some fished areas. In the long-run, a healthy reef better protects fishing in the general area.

Although most proposed areas are remote, some areas are likely to be contentious because they are productive for fishing. In the case of a place like Rocky Cape, it is arguably the most productive recreational fishing area in the region, although a lot of activity has moved offshore in recent years. It is not especially productive for commercial fishing.

In the design of the proposed areas, attention has been given to moving boundaries to areas less likely to overlap with a significant known existing use or interests. Future discussions with stakeholders are likely to further refine the proposed boundaries and likely impacts.

Where there are remaining impacts, we would advocate for some kind of compensation. Such as artificial fishing reefs nearby, or compensation for commercial operators. This would need to be worked out in cooperation with the government.

The value of marine parks?

When a commercial fisherman lands a fish you can see the benefit returning as a pile of banknotes per kilo, but not everything can be valued that way. Although marine parks will interest tourists, we weren't planning to charge admission into marine parks like a tourist attraction. The benefits will be there in the nearby town, but they are harder to measure. Likewise a dollar value for recreational fishermen doesn't explain why they spend \$500 on fuel and broken boat gear, just to catch a \$25 fish (or sometimes come home empty handed). We all value things differently.

You also need a healthy environment for healthy jobs. Attempts to protect a fisheries species may not work if all we look at is their size, and forget to manage its prey, predators, competitors, nursery habitat, and all the other things that give it a healthy ecosystem to live in.

Healthy ecosystems also perform a number of unpaid services which improve our lives, such as water quality maintenance, nutrient cycling, defence against sea level rise, waste processing and erosion control.

There is also a difference between a value and values. Your family, your connection with your community, your spiritual views, are some of the many things central to who you are that you can't put a price on. Included in that is the knowledge that you have handed on a healthy world to your kids, protected its living things and preserved its beautiful places. That applies even if the areas aren't places you can easily see or visit like the South West wilderness on land, or the wilderness off your coast. Part of a good day of fishing, is the knowledge that its relaxing fun that isn't doing damage to something special. You might be told that these things aren't important, but they really are.

Indigenous Interests

All areas of Tasmania are of significance to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community including the oceans. Attitudes about how best to manage oceans are as diverse as the Aboriginal community itself. Marine park proposals adjacent to Aboriginal land are likely to be of particular interest, such as an area close to the "Kings Run" property on the West Coast. Some people might even be even concerned about marine parks, others think they are a great idea. At the present time the Aboriginal community is advocating for indigenous land use areas of sea country that do not currently overlap the current proposals.

TMP are eager to communicate with all stakeholders, to investigate ways that marine parks might work with their interests and concerns.



Great Egret, Eric Woehler

Do people support marine parks?

Marine park proposals already enjoy high levels of public support. All Australian surveys on the subject, which include a range of different questions, produce consistent results in the 80% support range¹³. There are indications from student studies that the same results are likely to be replicated in Tasmania. However, the public appears largely passive in terms of active and vocal support. Media interest is also up and down.

Tasmanian environmental debates tend to be dominated by intense campaigns based around a single issue, often framed towards a topical extractive commercial use. Tasmanian State Governments tend to support that commercial interest, often with public statements of support. The Government seems to take relatively little interest in playing the role of an impartial mediator in these topical debates about environmental problems.

This campaign has also been treated in the same manner. A request for a public process of dialogue was immediately answered by the State Government reissuing its moratorium policy. The Government did not engage in meaningful dialogue and has publicly stated that it will not agree to create new marine parks. It has even agreed to new Australian marine parks, but will not agree to any new parks in Tasmanian coastal waters. There appears to be little detailed analysis of any proposals with Ministers of the Government even using emotive and negative phrases, such as referring to the proposals as “lockouts”.

MPAs are mainly opposed by people who worry they have a personal interest that might be negatively affected if the status quo changes. A minority will hold very loud and extreme views about the issue and the people who are advocating change. Others just want the noise to stop and the issue to go away. In reality this isn't a difficult or disruptive change. The international experience is that once

marine parks are declared and initial anxiety subsides, marine parks as a concept enjoy wide support and have little impact on established industries or recreational activity¹⁴.

An Underappreciated Ocean Wilderness

The oceans of Tasmania are still largely wilderness. This isn't well appreciated. For many people it's just a place to fish. When we think of a wilderness, Tasmanians tend to think of the forested mountains of Mt. Field National Park or Cradle Mountain.

The ocean is just as spectacular. Instead of giant gum trees, there are kelp forests. There are jagged peaks and caves, but they are all underwater. There are even larger swarms of grazing animals both day and night. Every inch of hard seabed is covered in plants, or in deeper areas, fields of ancient and colourful sponges and other invertebrates.

The ocean can be hard to interact with, but not much harder than some of our more remote national parks on land. The biggest problem in ocean conservation is the thin surface layer on top of the ocean. We can't see into the ocean depths, and humans tend to care less about things they can't experience first hand. Despite this Australians love the ocean. Taking a walk along a beach is one of the most popular leisure activities in Australia.

Many of us enjoy fishing. Often, we tend not to see Tasmania's oceans as a special place other than what we can get from it. A noisy minority will get angry about any "loss" of even very small areas of fishing habitat. They don't look at the benefits the community might gain overall from setting aside some special areas. We often don't look at commercial and recreational fishing as a form of hunting, that might not be a suitable activity in some environmentally special areas. We wouldn't tolerate it in the same kind of places on land, like in Cradle Mountain.

Industrial use of the ocean such as fish farming and mining, tends to be carried out without much thought for the uniqueness of the environment where it is placed. This can sometimes just be due to ignorance about where those special areas might be. We don't talk about these areas much, tell people where they are, or mark them on maps.

This helps to explain why 40% of the Tasmanian land environment is now formally reserved, while only 1.7% of the marine environment around Tasmania is protected from its main threats in 'no take' marine parks. This is nothing like the amount of protection needed to meet international benchmarks, and Tasmania has the least protected ocean areas of any State in Australia. This is not because we have found a better way, but because we have avoided our responsibilities.

Tasmania's marine parks need to be well-designed and be put in the right areas, so that smaller parks can protect more diversity. The amounts that are being suggested for new highly-protected marine parks in Tasmania are very small in the scheme of things, and if you have a think about it, unlikely to have much real impact on your core interests.

Our attitudes are changing towards the ocean, even if we can't easily visit or see what happens under the waves. Several surveys asking people whether they support marine parks have returned 80% approval figures, that's basically everyone. The problem is that, while we like the idea, we don't do many things to make it happen.

Often politicians like things to remain settled and would prefer not to have to deal with another issue that could be controversial. Don't wait for them to drive change. If the oceans need to be protected, ordinary people like you will need to make it happen.

Further Information

Current and proposed parks by area – see our report [link]

Why are Tasmanian oceans so special? - see our report [link]

Contact Us

Facebook: At the “Tasmanians for Marine Parks” site.

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Mutton birds, Photo:Eric Woehler