



Community consultation starts for Solitary Islands Marine Park

A three-and-a-half month public consultation program starts on Friday 28th May seeking community views about proposed changes to the Solitary Islands Marine Park zoning plan.

Marine Parks Authority member and head of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sally Barnes encouraged the community to take part in the process to ensure government can consider all views before making a final decision.

"We will continue to manage Solitary Islands Marine Park based on the best available science and in response to how the community wants to use the park," Ms Barnes said.

"That's why we have the detailed review and consultation process in place for the zoning plan, which was first developed in 2002 and now needs refining."

Ms Barnes said the consultation would give the community an opportunity to see:

- The full report and recommendations prepared by the Marine Parks Authority following the 18 month review process
- The recommendations and proposed changes by the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment and the Minister for Primary Industry which are now on exhibition
- Maps and other documentation outlining the proposed changes – including updated seabed habitat maps

This information is being released now in advance of public exhibition of the regulation currently being drafted which will set out the zoning changes in more detailed regulatory terms. This regulation will be released in June for a full three month public consultation period.

"In order to maximize the opportunity for the community to understand and have its say about the proposed changes, we're releasing this public information package now in advance of the regulation. We want to hear what the community and industry think of the proposals and are encouraging people to make a submission after considering all of the information available, including the regulation that will be released in coming weeks."

Ms Barnes said under the key proposed changes:

- Sanctuary zones would increase from 12% to 20% of the park
- Habitat protection zones would decrease from 54% to 52% of the park
- General use zones would decrease from 34% to 28% of the park
- Special purpose zones will remain around 0.1% of the park.

Proposed changes reflect submissions from the community to the review process, such as fixing zoning to reduce the complexity of rounded boundaries, and improving access to key fishing spots near Bare Bluff, Groper Island and Minnie Water Back Beach.

Ms Barnes said around 75% of the more than 1000 submissions to the zoning plan review requested that trawling be prohibited in the marine park as it is recognised as the most damaging of fishing activities.

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“In response to this a two-year phase out of prawn trawling in the marine park has been recommended. Up to 15% of the annual king prawn catch for Coffs Harbour occurs in state waters either in or outside the Solitary Islands Marine Park.

“We want to work with industry to hear their views and concerns.”

Ms Barnes said, importantly, research conducted in the Solitary Islands Marine Park since 2004 has also contributed to the information used to underpin the proposed zoning changes.

“Specifically this research has involved seabed habitat mapping, biodiversity assessments, targeted studies on key fish species, assessments of pests and disease, cultural heritage investigation and research into social and economic issues.

“Intermediate and deep water reefs, which represent different habitat to shallow water reefs, have now been mapped and their protection is proposed under the zoning review report.

“These habitats contain a different range of species to those found in shallow reefs, which make up the bulk of reef habitats currently protected in the park.

“So the proposed changes to the sanctuary zone mean that we can protect important reef habitat and the reef fish supported by that habitat, now that we have new information.

“This new state of the art mapping has been recognised as one of the best mapping programs in Australia has been responsible for us discovering new and very valuable seabed habitats.

“Importantly, under the proposed changes, 80% of reef inside the park would still be outside the sanctuary zone and available for recreational fishing.

Further information on the proposed amendments to the zoning plan can be found:

- at the Marine Parks Authority website at www.mpa.nsw.gov.au
- by contacting the Environment Line on 1300 361 967
- from the Solitary Islands Marine Park office at 32 Marina Drive, Coffs Harbour Jetty
- from the Grafton National Parks and Wildlife Service visitor’s counter, Level 3, 49 Victoria Street, Grafton.

All written and online submissions on the draft zoning plan received by 5:00 pm on 17 September, 2010 will be considered in finalising the new zoning plan.

For further information please call (02) 6652 0900 or email: solitary.islands@mpa.nsw.gov.au

The closing date for submissions is 5:00 pm on 17 September 2010.