



Solitary Islands Marine Park: zoning plan review report

Appendix 2: Summary of stakeholder consultations and submissions

**Including comments on the review of the
Solitary Islands Marine Reserve
(Commonwealth waters) management plan**

Executive Summary

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Executive summary

Solitary Islands Marine Park on the mid-north coast of NSW and Jervis Bay Marine Park on the south coast of NSW were the first marine parks to be established in NSW. The zoning plan for the Solitary Islands Marine Park, which commenced in 2002, protects the important natural and cultural values of the marine park, while providing for a range of sustainable uses including commercial and recreational fishing, diving, water sports and other activities.

The NSW Government committed to a review of the zoning plan for Solitary Islands Marine Park after five years of operation, and a review has been undertaken in accordance with section 17D of the *Marine Park Act 1997*.

Public consultation for the zoning plan review ran for two months in April and May 2008. During this period 47 meetings were held with stakeholder groups, including information sessions with the community, presentations to local community groups and focus group meetings. Several meetings were also held in the month before the official public consultation phase to discuss the review with adjacent land managers and local community leaders. The Solitary Islands Marine Park Advisory Committee (SIMPAC) met twice during this period (see the end of Part A of this document for details).

Meetings	Approx. number of community attendees
Business community	50
Commercial fishers	34
Conservation community	16
Indigenous community	20
Marine science	17
Recreational fishers	54
Spearfishers	7
Aquaculture operators	4
Other	43
Community information days	285
TOTAL	530

In addition to focus group meetings, various mechanisms were used to advertise the zoning plan review and to encourage public comments on the current zoning plan. These included media releases, advertising, information displays and briefings conducted with individuals and groups. Over 280 community members attended information days on the review and provided feedback to staff or collected information. Information on the review was made available at local visitor information centres, council offices and other community outlets.

A total of 1,079 submissions were received during the review period: 1,039 from individuals and 40 on behalf of organisations. Of all submissions, 26% were from the local area, 26% from Sydney, 12% from other parts of NSW, 19.5% from Queensland, 10% from other states in Australia and 6% from overseas (0.5% did not provide a postcode).

On the submission form, respondents were asked to identify their main interests in the marine park and many indicated several interests:

Main interest	No. of responses
Conservation	851
Spearfishing	134
Recreational fishing	122
Beach activities	76
Swimming	73
Tourist/visitor	67
Scuba diving	65
Surfing	60
Snorkelling	55
Recreational boating	55
Wildlife observation	54
Scenic amenity	45
Kayaking/canoeing	33
Commercial fishers	15
Research	17
PWC/Watersports	9
Underwater photography	5
Tourism operator	5
Charter fishing	2
Local government	2
Sailing	2
Indigenous	1

Note: the total number of interests exceeds the number of submissions received because individuals were able to identify multiple interests.

Submission formats varied and included individual and group submissions, letters, emails, form letters, petitions, maps, reports and the marine park submission form in hardcopy or from the NSW Marine Parks Authority (MPA) website.

Five different form letters (81.6% of total submissions) were received. These form letters were prepared by the Australian Marine Conservation Society (469 submissions), Bellingen Environment Centre (99 submissions), Nature Conservation Council (31 submissions), National Parks Association (172 submissions) and spearfishers (110 submissions). Three individuals submitted more than one type of form letter. Two community petitions were received, one from Friends of Solitary Islands Marine Park with 225 signatures, and one from Moonee Creek residents and visitors with 220 signatures. The Marine Parks Authority did not give any particular weighting to the various formats of the submissions or the numbers received, and has reviewed all submissions and considered the issues raised regarding the zoning plan for Solitary Islands Marine Park.

The majority of the submissions originated from the environment/conservation sector.

The most commonly expressed opinions were as follows.

Zoning-related issues included the following comments and suggestions:

- The current area designated as sanctuary zone is inadequate, with many groups seeking a sanctuary zone increase to 20–50% of each habitat type:
 - there is a lack of representation of various habitat types in sanctuary zone, particularly estuaries, intermediate and deep reefs and island-fringing reefs
 - a lack of contiguous habitat protection in sanctuary zone was also identified.
- Specific locations that received the majority of comments were:
 - Minnie Water Back Beach (allow recreational fishing)
 - the southern sanctuary zone: Groper Island, Bare Bluff, Sandy Back Beach (allow fishing and spearfishing in specific areas), and
 - North and South Solitary Islands (various comments).
- Generally, extractive users reported they had learned to adjust to the current zoning plan but wanted no further increases in the area of sanctuary zone.

Activity-related issues included the following suggestions:

- ban or phase out prawn trawling
- ban or phase out vehicles on beaches
- differentiate between the requirements of spearfishers and recreational fishers
- use gear, method, bag and size restrictions to increase protection rather than sanctuary zones so recreational fishing can continue
- reduce commercial fishing effort and mud crab trapping in estuaries.

Species-related issues included the following suggestions and comments:

- increase protection for all shark species
- current levels of grey nurse shark protection are inadequate, and
- protect the critically endangered alga at Muttonbird Island.

The Solitary Islands Marine Reserve (SIMR) (Commonwealth waters) shares the same northern and southern boundaries as the state's Solitary Islands Marine Park, and extends seaward from the three nautical mile limit of state jurisdiction to the 50-metre depth contour. The reserve was declared in 1993. Its management plan commenced in 2001 and expired on 4 April 2008. The MPA manages the reserve on a day-to-day basis on behalf of the Commonwealth Government. The reserve's management plan is being reviewed concurrently with the state's marine park zoning plan, and so consultation and submissions also involved opportunities to comment on the reserve.

The managers of the reserve (SIMR) attended many of the focus group meetings and the SIMPAC meetings, and have been fully involved in the review to ascertain issues associated with the reserve's management plan. The Commonwealth Government contributed information to the Solitary Islands Marine Park review package as well as producing a Commonwealth-specific review package.

This report presents the results of the public consultation and submission components of the zoning plan review and is in two parts: Part A summarises the feedback received from focus group meetings and other public meetings held during the consultation phase of the review; Part B is a summary of the information provided in the submissions received during the review period.