

# A Coral Sea Marine Reserve

THE  
GREENS



***Australia's Coral Sea is one of the world's last flourishing tropical marine regions. At around 1 million square kilometres, the Coral Sea offers a diverse range of spectacular coral reefs and an abundance of marine wildlife, including many endangered species. Yet only around 1% of this vital area is adequately protected.***

The Australian Greens propose the Coral Sea be made into a Protected Marine Reserve. To ensure the Coral Sea and its unique and environmentally essential marine ecosystems are meaningfully protected, all oil and gas exploration and commercial fishing will be prohibited within the proposed Coral Sea Marine Reserve. Recreational fishing would be permitted only in limited areas on the western edge of the marine park north of Cairns to allow for game fishing around the Cairns Seamount and Linden Bank. The Marine Reserve will be managed by a Coral Sea Marine Park Authority, with initial funding of \$10m.

## **The importance of establishing a Coral Sea Marine Reserve**

The world's coral reefs are disappearing at a rate five times faster than that of the rainforests and 90 per cent of the world's big fish—such as shark, tuna, marlin, groper and snapper—have vanished in the last 50 years from overfishing.

The Coral Sea remains a thriving marine environment largely due to its remote location; however it is now facing the same devastating fate as a result of climate change, overfishing, potential oil and gas exploration, oil spills, pollution, and under-protection.

On the 8th June, 2010, more than 250 scientists from around the globe named the establishment of large marine reserves a top priority in protecting ocean ecosystems. These scientists identified the protection of marine reserves as essential in maintaining the health of the ocean and increasing the ocean's chance to recover and replenish its ecosystem. The establishment of large-scale marine reserves are essential if the damage to our oceans caused by overfishing, climate change and pollution is to be reduced.

Such large-scale marine reserves are not unprecedented. In 2006, President Bush created the world's largest marine protected area over a group of remote Hawaiian Islands that cover 84 million acres and are home to 7,000 species of birds, fish and marine mammals.

# A Coral Sea Marine Reserve



The Australian Greens supported the federal government proclaiming the Coral Sea Conservation Zone. Our votes were vital in the Senate when the opposition sought to disallow the Minister's proclamation; however the Government's approach does not provide adequate protection. The Conservation Zone still allows commercial and recreational fishing, oil and gas exploration and mining, as well as other activities that are detrimental to the Coral Sea. It is essential that the Coral Sea is established as a Marine Reserve to stop these dangerous activities from taking place in the ecologically important and sensitive area.

## THE GREENS PROPOSAL

Making the Coral Sea into a Protected Marine Reserve is the only way to effectively protect this largely untouched marine ecosystem. With the vast number of species on offer, many already overfished in other areas, the Coral Sea is becoming more attractive to fisheries. Climate change, pollution and fishing are the main dangers to marine environments which is why it is so important to protect against them.

### Danger of oil and gas

While there are currently no plans for oil and gas exploration in the Coral Sea, any future such activity could be disastrous for the region. An oil spill similar to the on-going catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico or the Montara spill off North West Australia last year would destroy one of the last great coral environments in the world, and could flow onto the Great Barrier Reef and even the coast of Queensland. The Coral Sea needs to be protected for the sake of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Greens propose that oil and gas exploration is completely prohibited in the Coral Sea to protect the Coral Sea and the Great Barrier Reef from any risk of damaging oil pollution.

### A 'No take' marine reserve

The Greens propose the entire Coral Sea Marine Reserve is "no take" with only two specific zones open to recreational fishing to ensure such fishing is sustainable and minimises damage to the marine ecosystems. A 'no take' area means there are no extractive uses in the area: that is, no fishing, no oil or gas exploration or production, and no harvesting of the

# A Coral Sea Marine Reserve



environment. These areas are essential for the protection of marine ecosystems; they protect biodiversity by ensuring essential species, habitats and breeding and nursery grounds are left intact.

'No take' areas help stop and potentially reverse the decline in fish populations, thereby helping the environment, recreational uses and the tourist industry, as can be seen in the Great Barrier Reef. A recent report on the Great Barrier Reef found that "the network of marine reserves on the GBR has brought major, sustained ecological benefits, including enhanced populations of target fish, sharks, and even corals, the foundation of the coral reef ecosystem."<sup>i</sup> Such areas protect against both natural and man-made disasters, as well provide opportunities for scientific research in areas largely free from human contact.

Our proposal will prohibit commercial fishing throughout the Coral Sea Marine Reserve. While there is very limited commercial fishing in the Coral Sea at present, we recognise the prohibition on commercial fishing will require negotiating a fair and equitable buy out of commercial fishing licences.

Given that recreational fishing in the Coral Sea is currently very limited<sup>ii</sup>, the Greens propose to restrict such fishing to two specific areas, the Cairns Seamount and Linden Bank, where the majority of recreational fishing currently occurs. Such an approach ensures that the unique ecosystems in the Coral Sea of the Coral Sea are given the greatest possible protection.

## Management of the Coral Sea Marine Reserve

The management of the proposed Coral Sea Marine Reserve would be best achieved through an extension of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority into a Coral Sea Marine Park Authority for the entire area.<sup>iii</sup> The management of the Great Barrier Reef by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is considered world class and is a model that can be extended for the Coral Sea. Initial funding of \$10m would be required for the Authority.<sup>iv</sup>

---

i Adaptive management of the Great Barrier Reef: A globally significant demonstration of the benefits of networks of marine reserves, <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2010/02/18/0909335107.full.pdf>.

ii Zethoven AO, I, 2009, An Australian Coral Sea Heritage Park, [http://www.globaloceanlegacy.org/resources/CoralSea\\_Web\\_100808.pdf](http://www.globaloceanlegacy.org/resources/CoralSea_Web_100808.pdf)

iii Zethoven AO, I, 2009, An Australian Coral Sea Heritage Park. [http://www.globaloceanlegacy.org/resources/CoralSea\\_Web\\_100808.pdf](http://www.globaloceanlegacy.org/resources/CoralSea_Web_100808.pdf)

iv Gibson, L, 10 Criteria for the World's Best Oceanic Marine Park, <http://wwf.org.au/coralsea/>