



**Biodiversity  
Council**

# Submission to South-east Marine Parks Network Draft Management Plan

14 November 2024

## ***About The Biodiversity Council***

The Biodiversity Council brings together leading experts including Indigenous knowledge holders to promote evidence-based solutions to Australia's biodiversity crisis. The Council was founded by 11 universities with the support of Australian philanthropists.



## Introduction

The Biodiversity Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the [South-east Marine Parks Network Draft Management Plan](#) (Draft Plan).

The Biodiversity Council supports the creation of 11 new sanctuaries across 10 marine parks and prohibiting several industrial activities, such as new oil and gas titles and seismic blasting, across all south-east marine parks. However, we are concerned that commercial fishing has been prioritised over biodiversity protection in Flinders Marine Park and Murray Marine Park resulting in reduced protections. We are also concerned that the Draft Plan does not sufficiently increase representativeness of the marine park estate.

It is our understanding that the Draft Plan is a key opportunity to address current shortcomings in marine protected areas in order to meet [Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#). Target 3 (the '30 by 30' target) aims to ensure that at least 30% of marine areas are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative protected areas by 2030. The [National Roadmap for protecting and conserving 30% of Australia's land by 2030](#) (the Land Roadmap) states that "opportunities for strengthening marine protection, consistent with the 30 by 30 target, are being explored through the Sustainable Ocean Plan and the 10-yearly reviews of Australian Marine Park Management Plans."

A long-running concern of the Council is that the focus of the Australian Government is on the total area of Australia's marine reserves, not their representativeness. Australia will only meet 30 by 30 when 30% of all mappable conservation features are conserved. This is not the same as 30% of Australia's entire [EEZ](#). Notably, yet again, protection of shelf waters is poor. The Land Roadmap makes several references to representativeness and notes that "the NRS seeks to protect the full range of regional ecosystems and other important environmental values across Australia." There does not seem to be an equivalent commitment to ensuring representativeness in marine protected areas. It appears that the Australian Government will not achieve the 30 by 30 target because it will only meet the area component.

The Biodiversity Council notes that many other points made in our [2023 submission](#) regarding the South-east Marine Parks Network Management Plan Review are still relevant. Our key concerns regarding the Draft Plan are outlined below.

## Key concerns

### 1. [Flinders Marine Park Sanctuary downgraded](#)

The Draft Plan proposes to downgrade 11,278 km<sup>2</sup> in Flinders Marine Park from National Park Zone to Habitat Protection Zone so that it can be available for commercial fishing. This is a significant roll-back of marine protections.

*Recommendation 1: The Biodiversity Council recommends that the area to be rezoned Habitat Protection Zone in Flinders Marine Park retain its National Park zoning.*

### 2. [Murray Marine Park zoning changes](#)

The Draft Plan proposes to change 3,678 km<sup>2</sup> of the Murray Marine Park from Special Protection Zone to Habitat Protection Zone to allow commercial fishing. This area has effectively been a marine

sanctuary for 17 years and includes important feeding grounds for pygmy blue whales and sperm whales.

*Recommendation 2: The Biodiversity Council recommends that the area to be rezoned Special Protection Zone in Murray Marine Park be rezoned to National Park Zone.*

3. There are significant gaps in sanctuary coverage

The Draft Plan continues to lack protection for high-value shelf habitats. These areas are often under the greatest pressure from commercial and recreational fisheries, have the highest biodiversity value, but are afforded the least protection in the draft plan. Only 5 of the 12 shelf bioregions have any protection within marine sanctuaries.

To achieve Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework (30 by 30), areas that are currently not well represented in marine parks should be prioritised for protection.

*Recommendation 3: The Biodiversity Council recommends that the Draft Plan be amended to protect shelf habitats, particularly where they intersect with areas currently subject to high human pressures, or expected to have high human pressures in the future. The Draft Plan should ensure that 30% of these areas are protected across the network.*

4. Lack of detail about First Nations connections and partnerships

The Biodiversity Council welcomes the desired outcome ‘First Nations people have increased opportunities to build connection to, and care for, Sea Country in Australian Marine Parks’, the intent of the First Nations connections and partnerships management program to ‘Respect and support the ongoing cultural responsibilities and connections of First Nations people to care for Sea Country in marine parks’. However, the Plan lacks detail on how this would be operationalised. The actions do not make reference to any framework, process or existing model for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is unclear if the intent is to follow the First Nations Engagement Standard, which is itself yet to be released for comment.

*Recommendation 4: The Biodiversity Council recommends that the Australian Government co-develop an engagement and decision making framework with Traditional Owners and other First Nations groups and Indigenous Knowledge Holders who have customary connection to the area covered by the the [South-east Marine Parks Network Draft Management Plan](#) (Draft Plan).*

5. Absence of monitoring and evaluation program

Our 2023 submission recommended the implementation of a well-resourced recurrent monitoring program and a comprehensive adaptive management framework, with indicators that reflect First Peoples’ objectives.

The Draft Plan includes a one page monitoring and evaluation section. It notes that periodic monitoring, reporting and evaluation will be undertaken and that the plan will be reviewed before the third management plan is prepared. However, it does not outline a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation program, nor commit to developing one.

The 30 by 30 target aims to ensure that at least 30% of marine areas are effectively conserved and managed. Without an explicit monitoring and management plan for protected areas, 'effective management' is unlikely to be achieved.

*Recommendation 5: The Biodiversity Council recommends that the Director of National Parks design, resource and implement a formal monitoring and evaluation program. This should include a comprehensive adaptive management framework, with indicators that reflect First Peoples' objectives.*

#### 6. Lack of detail about climate adaptation and response

Our 2023 submission recommended that the management plan incorporate explicit climate adaptation and response goals.

The Draft Plan mentions climate adaptation in two places - under the *Protection and Resilience* program on page 39 it states that "the program may include actions to support ecosystem adaptation and resilience," and on page 40 under actions it includes "explore novel and effective approaches to ecosystem restoration and adaptation." This detail is inadequate given the scale and severity of impacts that climate change is likely to have on the marine environment. The Draft Plan itself notes that these "may include longer lasting marine heatwaves, continued rise in sea level, further ocean acidification, changes to ocean currents and eddies, increased storm frequency, and species range extensions or local extinctions" and that "climate changes will interact with and amplify other non-climate pressures affecting marine park values" (page 32).

While climate change impacts and response are highly context-specific, the Draft Plan should provide overarching direction about climate adaptation. The management plan provides an opportunity to identify changes that are occurring now and that are likely to occur in the future within each of the south-east marine parks and propose actions that could be undertaken to respond to these changes.<sup>1</sup> It should outline how climate adaptation planning will be undertaken for each park. Methods like adaptation pathways<sup>2</sup> that take a futures approach and navigate uncertainty are recommended, but they should be undertaken in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, stakeholders and the community.

*Recommendation 6: The Biodiversity Council recommends that the Director make a commitment in the Plan to developing adaptation plans in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, stakeholders and the community for each of the marine parks using a common approach.*

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Prober, S. M., Doerr, V. A., Broadhurst, L. M., Williams, K. J. and Dickson, F. (2018) Shifting the conservation paradigm: a synthesis of options for renovation nature under climate change, *Ecological Monographs* 89(1): e01333.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: <https://research.csiro.au/tara/core-concepts/>, <https://coastadapt.com.au/pathways-approach>, [https://www.marineandcoasts.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0022/662503/Victorias-Resilient-Coast-Guide-lines-.pdf](https://www.marineandcoasts.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/662503/Victorias-Resilient-Coast-Guide-lines-.pdf), <https://research.csiro.au/eap/marine-iconic-species/>