

Blueprint to protect the future of Australia's oceans revealed

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What is believed to be the first science-based blueprint for managing Australia's oceans has been developed to safeguard marine life and protect economic and social interests.

The blueprint is the result of more than two years of analysis by The Ecology Centre at The University of Queensland and involves 44 of the country's leading marine and social scientists.

It is designed to provide the Federal Government with a detailed roadmap to make accurate decisions about its plans for new marine sanctuaries in the south-west of Australia later this year.

The Ecology Centre blueprint establishes that 50 per cent of the oceans in the south-west of the country will need to be protected in a network of marine sanctuaries to minimise risks to marine life, fish stocks and ecosystems.

The blueprint also ensures costs to industry are minimised and a balance is achieved to allow economic and social activities to continue.

“Implementing the blueprint will make Australia the world leader in marine conservation and marine resource management,” Professor Hugh Possingham from UQ's Ecology Centre, said.

“This blueprint for the south-west represents best scientific practice to achieve high quality cost-effective marine sanctuaries and conservation

outcomes in the face of vast uncertainties and ever-growing pressures for economic development.”

Commissioned by the Pew Environment Group, the Ecology Centre studied more than 3300 sources of biological and socio-economic data evidence using Marxan, software that is the global standard for designing marine protected area systems.

Marxan solves the puzzle of marine planning by targeting marine conservation priorities and minimising cost impacts on industry.

“The extensive analysis and research conducted in the south-west will plug a hole in our knowledge of our oceans and help government planners make much more accurate decisions when designing protected areas,” Professor Possingham said.

The Ecology Centre brought together 44 of Australia’s most experienced scientists in marine research and social science to develop a consensus statement on marine protected areas.

The scientists signed the Scientific Principles for Design of Marine Protected Areas in Australia, which provides peer-level, science based guidance on the selection, design and implementation of marine-protected areas.

Using the Marxan software, researchers were able to identify the location of a network of marine sanctuaries in the south-west that met the Scientific Principles endorsed by the 44 scientists and that also had the smallest impact on existing uses such as recreational fishing.

“What we have designed here for the oceans of south-west [Australia](#) can now be rolled out to help make more accurate decisions for managing and conserving the north-west, north and east marine regions of the

country,” Professor Possingham said.

More information: Report + Principles:
www.ecology.uq.edu.au/marine-blueprint

Provided by University of Queensland

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