



Media Release

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For immediate release: **Marine park haste, science and unscrambling eggs**

The process for the Port Stephens and Bateman's Bay marine parks have taken about 18 months from cradle to grave, whereas other parks have taken considerably longer. The rush to gazette these marine parks, according to Ministers Debus and Macdonald, is due to a previous Cabinet decision to have 6 marine parks in place by the end of 2006. The problem is, the use of science is one thing that suffers with an extreme implementation of the precautionary principle being applied in the creation and zoning of these parks.

Emeritus Professor of Fisheries at Canberra University, Robert Kearny, has noted "The anticipated specific benefits of the Bateman's Marine Park are not given in the Zoning Plan". He goes on to say that "The listing of benefits begins with a categorical statement that the NSW system of MPAs 'will have many benefits'. It then is less definitive by stating that MPA's 'can have positive effects on ecosystems, habitats and species under protection.'" But the benefits of marine parks should not be taken as "a given" as they are not necessarily the building blocks of responsible ocean management. There are examples where marine parks have resulted in the collapse of fisheries and this highlights large gaps in our knowledge of the marine ecosystem.

At a marine park symposium held in Brisbane in early November, renowned marine biologist Julian Pepperell discussed some of these knowledge gaps which include criteria for selecting representative areas, size of sanctuary zones, lack of data within and adjacent to the proposed MPA, within and outside the proposed zones, data on catch per unit effort, methods, target species, movement of fish species with spill over, pelagic species, baitfish all with short and long term studies, information on spawning and egg/larval transport, spawn/recruitment relationships, settlement rates, the ecological role of pelagic species in MPA's to name just a few. The claims made by the Marine Park Authority and others are being increasingly questioned by many eminent marine scientists, with the spill-over effect and egg/larval transport being just two examples.

AAG President Phil Ingram said "There is no science in the creation and zoning of these parks. Why do 62% inshore reefs require the full protection of sanctuary zones, what are the threats, what is being protected, what are the expected benefits and what is the cost to the community? As Julian Pepperell said at the Recfish Australia marine park symposium 'What's the rush? Good science takes time, and you can't unscramble the egg.'"

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