



Media Release

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For immediate release: **Consultation levels and process review of marine parks**

Senator Abetz's opening comments at Recfish Australia's symposium on marine parks in Brisbane were: "We are part of the ecosystem, not an addendum to it. But there needs to be a balance between the competing interests of fishing and the environment." This statement highlights the difference between the marine park process as implemented by the NSW Government and the Department of Environment and Heritage for the Commonwealth marine parks.

Also given at the symposium was a talk by Steve Sutton from James Cook University on the elements of effective stakeholder engagement in the marine parks planning process. He considers recreational fishers to be generally at the two lowest of 5 levels, being informational and consultational. These levels of engagement equate with various levels of a sense of ownership of marine parks, and it is becoming increasingly recognized that for a marine park to work the stakeholders need to have this "sense of ownership".

Following the inequities of the zoning plan of the Ningaloo marine park, the WA Government agreed to review the marine park process. This resulted in a recreational fisher representative on a new reference group that works at the macro level in the early stages of marine park development. It appears the Western Australian Government has learnt that you cannot expect acceptance and compliance by excluding anglers from the planning process. And the acceptance of recreational anglers to the draft zoning plans at the Margaret River and the Walpole/Nornalup marine parks bears testament to the success of this approach. Hopefully, the anglers of WA have reached the "Involvement" and Collaboration" levels of Sutton's stakeholder engagement.

Referring to the 4200 submissions regarding the Port Stephens marine park, shadow Fisheries Minister Duncan Gay asked DPI Minister Ian Macdonald in Parliament on 21/11/06 whether he will "agree to an independent review and audit of all submissions for this and all future marine parks conducted by the New South Wales Auditor General's Office?" Ian Macdonald's response: "The simple answer is no."

AAG President Phil Ingram commented "It appears the NSW Government is continuing down the path of the marine park process where the recreational fishers are only involved at the informational level and the consultation process is ignored. This results in no sense of ownership, and yet the Government expects acceptance and compliance. There needs to be a review of, and changes to, the marine parks process in NSW. We still wallow at the informational and consultational levels of stakeholder engagement. By using an extreme implementation of the precautionary principal as justification for the land grab of sanctuary zones, recreational fishers are treated as an addendum to the marine ecosystem and not part of it."

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