

New South Wales
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

In reply please quote: MOF23396, MOF22696

(stamped 16 Jun 2006)

Mr P Ingram
PO Box 630
NARRABEEN NSW 2101

Dear Mr Ingram

I refer to your letter regarding the Bateman Marine Park, addressed to the NSW Premier, the Hon Morris Iemma MP, who has referred the matter to me. I apologise for the delay in responding.

In 1992, the NSW and Australian Governments agreed that establishing a representative system of marine protected areas was an important conservation goal. Since then, both Governments have worked to establish new marine parks within the coastal waters for which they are responsible.

NSW currently has six marine parks, the most recent being the 85,000-hectare Batemans Marine Park declared on 7th April 2006. A month later, the Federal Government also declared new marine parks off south east Australia. These cover an area of 22,600,000 hectares (that is, an area 266 times greater than the Batemans Marine Park).

The NSW first indicated its intention to establish a new marine park on the State's far south coast in mid-2001. A detailed assessment followed, jointly funded by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments. This assessment helped inform where to locate the boundaries of the new park. The results of this scientific marine assessment have been published on the Marine Parks Authority (MPA) website at <http://www.mpa.nsw.gov.au/bmp/bmp.html>.

It is important to note that, unlike marine parks in some other States, NSW parks permit multiple uses, including recreational and commercial fishing. Recreational fishing is restricted mainly in certain areas called sanctuary zones, which may be established under a park's zoning plan to protect important marine habitats including those supporting threatened fish populations and vital fish breeding areas. I must stress that the zoning plan in each of our existing marine parks allows recreational fishing to occur in the overwhelming majority of the park. Indeed, in one case, recreational fishing can occur in 88 percent of the park.

Protecting even small areas within a sanctuary zone can have a positive effect on fishing. Indeed, our experience from the Solitary Islands Marine Park, near Coffs Harbour, shows that recreational fishers will directly benefit from the areas of sanctuary zone in that park.

Preliminary scientific findings indicate that fish numbers in the Solitary Islands Marine Park have increased since the new zoning plan and sanctuary zones were adopted in 2002. For example, the survey shows that snapper numbers have increased by six times in the sanctuary zones and by three times in the areas accessible to recreational fishers. This could be what scientists call the “spill over” effect and is consistent with outcomes being seen in many other marine parks around the world. The early evidence from the Jervis Bay Marine Park also indicates that fish and crayfish numbers are also increasing significantly.

However, the benefits of marine parks extend beyond recreational fishers to the towns and regional centres which surround them. Once again, we know this because of the experience with Solitary Islands. An independent study on the economic contribution of this marine park to the regional economy indicated that the park itself directly contributes around \$6 million every year to the Coffs Harbour economy. The expenditure by the MPA alone has directly created six new jobs and 18 additional jobs indirectly.

More generally, a survey of businesses in the Coffs area showed that turnover increased by 20 percent between 2001 and 2005 and that numbers of part-time staff in peak season increased from an average of three to an average of five per business. These results show collectively that marine parks are good for tourism and good for local business.

The local Batemans marine park community advisory committee – on which recreational and commercial fishers are well represented – is now helping to finalise a draft zoning plan for public exhibition. The MPA has held numerous meetings with representatives of recreational fishers, commercial fishers, the Aboriginal community, local councils and local conservation groups, to discuss the development of the draft zoning plan. I myself met only recently with dozens of local fishers and other community representatives in Moruya to discuss issues of concern surrounding the new marine park. I can assure you that this consultation process will continue. Once on public exhibition, there will be three months of community input before any final decision is made.

I am confident that the creation of the Batemans Marine Park will result in more fish, better fishing, a stronger tourism industry and more jobs for far south coast communities, all on a sustainable basis.

Yours sincerely

Bob Debus