

*Narooma Port Committee*

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The Narooma Port Committee informally represents the interests of the recreational and commercial line fishermen, Charter Boat operators and Tackle stores in Narooma, on the far south coast of New South Wales.

It was originally formed in 2003 to fight to protect firstly, Montague Island, and secondly, the prized fishing grounds of the Narooma district from the Green Conservation movements goal of declaring much of this area "No Take" in order to protect the Grey Nurse Shark.

Since 30th November 2005, when the creation of the Batemans Marine Park, off the Far South Coast of NSW was announced, we have taken on the job of obtaining the best outcome for the zoning within the Batemans Marine Park. We feel to fight the gazetting of the Park in April 2006 is futile, however we do strongly disagree with this gazettal.

In this submission we wish to address Item D. of the terms of reference specifically.

**The responsibilities of Government in the creation of marine protected areas.**

The issues in regard to the Batemans Marine Park, are a microcosm of a much broader problem in NSW, as regards the handling of Protected areas

**Background:**

The NSW Marine Parks Act (1997) means that Marine Parks in NSW are run by a conglomerate of Government departments.

The titular head is the Marine Park Authority, which is under the NSW Premier's department. Marine Parks were a "pet project" of former Premier Carr. The Marine Parks Authority does not have sufficient infrastructure within its own right so it absorbs staff from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, under the Department of Conservation (Mr. Debus), and NSW Fisheries, under the Department of Primary Industries (The Hon Ian McDonald)

Already, I am alluding to, at worst, a catastrophic waste of time, money and energy, at best just straight out incompetency and lack of regard for local communities.

The previous MPA's declared in NSW, at Coffs Harbour (Solitary Islands Marine Park), Jervis Bay (Jervis Bay Marine Park) and Byron Bay (Cape Byron Marine Park) have all involved a considerable period of time between gazettal and the declaration of the final zoning plan. In the case of Jervis Bay 4 years, in the case of Cape Byron 3 years.

In the case of the Batemans Marine Park, the NSW Government schedule is to gazette it in April 2006, and have final, enforceable zonings in place by late 2006, a period of about 8 months.

So from this time scale can we, the residents of Narooma, be confident that the NSW Government has "learnt" from the previous parks and can perform all the associated functions required to have a successfully zoned Marine Park that does not lead to failure of the objectives of an MPA as stated by Davey (1998).

It is the opinion of the Narooma Port Committee that this park will fail 5 of the 6 stakeholder input criteria (Davey, 1998), because of the incompetence and ineffectiveness of the "conglomerate" of Government departments that are handling this issue, namely:

**Point 1: They do not address key issues**

The key issue as far as this community is concerned is the financial effect on our key industry, the tourism industry. Recreational, trailer-boat fishermen who fish Montague Island and the surrounding waters for Kingfish, and other fish species as well as the once a year fisher who comes here for their holidays, have been unencumbered by rules and regulations, apart from sensible, and well supported bag-limits.

The financial and flow-on benefit to the Narooma and Bermagui community from recreational fishing was calculated at \$36million in 2004 (McIlgorm, 2005).

Independent economists have estimated that the Tourism income could suffer as much as a 20% decline in the Eurobodalla Shire (total income estimated at \$250mill.) by the imposition of essentially unscientific "no take" sanctuary zones that will appease the "Green conservation" movement.

A socio-economic study is taking place at the moment. However it has been suggested that this study is not as thorough and deep as the Socio-economic Impact Assessment

Toolkit, a guide to assessing the socio-economic impacts of Marine Protected Areas in Australia that is freely available on the Australian Government's Department of Environment and Heritage web-site.

At a meeting convened by the Eurobodalla Shire, the delegates from the NSW Government included Ms. Helen Muldoon, EO of the Marine Parks Authority, Dr Tony Fleming Director of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. As far as senior NSW government bureaucrats were concerned, that was it.

Despite being promised the presence of Dr. Col Gellatly Director General of the Premiers Department and Mr Barry Buffier Director General of the Department of Primary Industries, they did not attend this presentation.

Dr. Fleming, as the director of NPWS in NSW would be expected to be abreast of the issues involved. However his reliance on one document for all the "proof" that he needed to believe that complex issues such as spill-over effect, larval migration from one area to another was likely to occur in the Batemans Marine Park BY ANALOGY from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park studies concerned many of us, who were also scientists. We had a very strong feeling that many issues were already "decided".

One of the very strong criticisms in the southern part of NSW concerns the NPWS senior management's belief that the best way to "manage" terrestrial parks, such as Kosziusko NP, is by "benign neglect". Witness the problems with the subsequent fires and the neglected infrastructure that grossly hindered the fighting of those fires in 2003, that were brought out at the subsequent senate inquiry.

We are concerned that a similar attitude of benign neglect will pervade the management of the Batemans Marine Park..

**Point 2: They fail to involve stakeholders.**

The Executive Officer of the NSW Marine Parks Authority, Ms Helen Muldoon, informed me that they do not like to send senior staff to "public meetings" as they often turn into "shouting matches". Unfortunately for the MPA, many of us to be affected by this Marine Park, believe that in order to justify the high salaries that many of the staff get, they have to "feel the heat", so to speak.

At Batemans Bay and Narooma on 24th and 25th January 2006, public meetings were held to discuss the issues of the

Batemans Marine Park in Narooma and Batemans Bay. There were about 800 members of the public present. MPA sent along a couple of junior National Parks and Wildlife Service officers who were not fully abreast of the issues and could answer very few of the questions involved. Consequently the "stakeholders", as the public appear to be called nowadays, are kept quite clueless as to the processes involved.

I understand that this is a management decision on the part of the MPA, NPWS and the NSW Fisheries to avoid "unpleasantness" for their senior executive staff.

**They rely too much on external experts and fail to involve local people.**

The Batemans Marine Park meets the criteria in involving local people on the Batemans Marine Park Advisory Committee.

However:

Not one scientific paper has been produced from the South Coast of NSW on marine habitat.

Not one scientific paper has been produced from the South Coast on the state of any species of fish stock.

All the research, and hence zoning rules in this Marine Park, will be based on what has occurred in the GBRMP, Nabq in the Red Sea off the Sinai Peninsular and also the waters off Cape Kennedy in Florida USA.

The MPA, NPWS and NSW Fisheries seem to adopt an unscientific approach, that unchallenged, will end up with somewhere between 20 and 25% of the gross area of the Batemans Marine Park declared as "No take Marine sanctuary zones." This is scientific fraud and expediency.

**Point 4: They are weak on implementation**

We believe that this criteria is one of the few that are met adequately. However the methods used are quite draconian.

The Jervis Bay Marine Park has approximately 20% of area as "No take" zoning. Apparently the boundaries between "no take" and "Ok to fish" waters are quite indistinct through many fishermen having to rely on GPS and accurate land based "sightings to determine whether they are in a sanctuary zone or not. It has been reported several times that MPA officers are seen on land with binoculars

observing drifting fishing boats and if they drift into the "no take" zone, taking down their boat registration numbers and subsequently meet them back at the landing ramp. Locals are fined \$500 and tourists are generally let off with a warning.

It would be most interesting to find out the true rate of fines, as I believe that the locals have been so incensed at this, that MPA vehicles, generally, are unmarked.

**Points 5 and 6 : They fail to raise Political support for protected areas as a worthwhile concern, and they are poorly publicised.**

As I have mentioned previously the four established Marine Parks in NSW generally have taken 3 to 4 years from declaration to final enforceable zoning regulations being in place. However both the Batemans Marine Park and the Port Stevens marine Park will have this process condensed into 8 - 10 months.

Many "stakeholders" are curious as to why this can happen so quickly, and angry at what they perceive as a hidden agenda to rush the finalisation of both the Batemans Marine Park and the Port Stephens Marine Park through.

Especially when Ms Muldoon, EO of the MPA wrote a letter on 18th August 2005, less than 3 months before these Parks were announced, stating that "In the past it has been a minimum of 2 years before a draft zoning plan has been developed for a newly declared marine park".

Especially when at the first meeting of the Batemans Marine Park Advisory Committee the members who expressed concern at the haste, were told that "We have done 4 parks already, we have the system down pat and we don't want to subject the businesses to undue anxiety"

Especially when Minister McDonald stated on March 8th 2006 that the reason for haste is because "it was a Cabinet decision in 2002/3 to have 6 Marine Parks up and running by the end of 2006"

We have, as yet, not heard from Minister Debus, nor from Premier Iemma as to why the parks will be finalised with such indecent haste. However it goes without saying that it does not fill us with great confidence in the process that there can be such a diversity of reasons.

Of course many of the "stakeholders" are convinced that it is a purely political exercise and that it has more to do about

locking in Green party preference deals for the NSW State elections in March 2007, than about getting an equitable outcome for both the final zoning regulations and protecting the interests of the communities that stand to be savagely affected by this Marine Park.

Unlike the Federal Government's "open-ended" compensation offer to land based businesses and charter boat operators affected by the new zoning rules in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, the NSW Government does not intend to compensate any business, other than a paltry offer to commercial fishermen, affected by this Park.

Davey, A.G. 1998 National System Planning for Marine Protected Areas. IUCN, Switzerland.

McIlgorm, Alistair, McFarlane & Pepperell. The importance of recreational fishing expenditure to the economies of two coastal towns in Northern and Southern NSW: Port Macquarie and Narooma/Bermagui. ISBN 0 9577265 8 9.

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