

# Marine and coastal management

Environmental indicators reported in this section:

Environmental Indicator	
CO 7.4	Coastal care community groups
CO 7.11	Marine network participation
CO 7.12	Marine Protected Areas

Australia's three tiers of government (local, State and Commonwealth) are all involved in managing the coastal and marine environments. Government inquiries have long been advocating more integration in coastal zone planning and management (RAC 1993; Zann 1995). The management of the offshore marine environment includes both international dimensions and Commonwealth–State interactions.

This subsection seeks to summarise the management regimes and to highlight changes since 1996.

## International agreements

There are some 80 international agreements relevant to Australia's Oceans Policy, of which about one-half are related directly to marine environmental and fisheries issues.

The most important international agreement is The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS) that allows coastal states to claim territorial seas (which extend 12 nm from the coastal baseline), a 200 nm Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and a legally defined continental shelf (see page 27). On ratifying the UNCLOS Treaty, Australia took responsibility for one of the largest marine areas in the world: some 11 million km<sup>2</sup>, and potentially as much as 16 million km<sup>2</sup>, depending on the limits of claimable continental shelf that extends beyond the 200 nm EEZ.

The implications of Australia's proposal to extend its marine area on future marine management will be significant. UNCLOS requires coastal states to observe the following articles:

- Article 61, which imposes an obligation on member states to ensure that the living resources in their EEZs are not endangered by over-exploitation,
- Article 62, which requires states to promote optimum utilisation of the living resources of their EEZs,
- Article 192, which imposes a general obligation on states to protect and preserve the marine environment from pollution, and
- Article 193, which sets out the rights of states to exploit their natural resources pursuant to their environmental policies and in accordance with the duty of protection and preservation.

Australia is part-way through defining the limits of its extended seabed area beyond the EEZ (the extended continental shelf). There are at least eight separate areas requiring delimitation.

Some of the international agreements that influence the way in which Australia manages its marine environment are:

- the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources 1980 (CCAMLR),
- the Convention on Biological Diversity,
- the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships 1973/78 (MARPOL),
- the Convention on Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter 1972 (the London Convention) and its 1996 Protocol, and
- the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention) 1972.

An extensive list is provided in a background paper for the development of Australia's Oceans Policy (Herriman et al. 1997).

## Legislation and policies

At the Commonwealth level, new legislation enacted since 1996 includes the EPBC Act and the *Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1982*. The effects of these Acts are discussed in the Fisheries subsection (page 66).

The necessary cooperation for managing fish stocks which extend across Australia's marine zones is achieved through a council of Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers.

## Australia's Oceans Policy

Australia's response to the need for national coordination and consistency of policy following UNCLOS and other international commitments (Ward et al. 1997) was to develop Australia's Oceans Policy, released in 1998. The Policy recognises that ocean ecosystem health and integrity is fundamental to ecologically sustainable development, essentially a triple bottom line approach that recognises the environmental, economic and social dimensions of the oceans. The principles in Australia's Oceans Policy are being integrated into legislative and other Commonwealth management initiatives.

The Policy recognises ocean ecosystems as core national assets which, if managed well, can meet a wide range of economic and other aspirations. Some of the important environmental issues given priority and now under way are:

- development of the National Representative System of marine protected areas,
- development of regional marine plans,
- improved management of fisheries and aquaculture, including bycatch reduction,
- consistent management of ships' ballast water and marine pest incursions,
- phase-out of tributyl tin antifouling paints,
- national standards for marine and estuarine water quality and improved treatment of sewage and stormwater,
- promotion of environmentally sustainable tourism, and
- involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in decisions about marine resources.

One of the key responses for sustainable management of Australia's oceans under the Policy is the development of regional marine plans that will address marine conservation and management issues on the basis of ecosystem rather than jurisdictional boundaries. In 1998 the CSIRO identified a series of regional domains called Large Marine Ecosystems covering the entire EEZ. Regional marine planning will develop and implement management regimes appropriate for biogeographical regions that incorporate one or more of these domains. The National Oceans Office is developing these plans.

The first regional marine plan is for the South-East Region, which closely matches the south-east Large Marine Ecosystem and covers 2.5 million km<sup>2</sup> of ocean from southern New South Wales, around Tasmania and Victoria to Kangaroo Island in South Australia. The National Oceans Office released a scoping paper for the South-East Regional Marine Plan in January 2001. Although the Plan concentrates on activities that the Commonwealth manages in the Region, the respective State governments have been invited to take part. Development of the Plan will require finer scale regionalisations of the ecosystems in the South-East Region.

Wescott (2000) has commended Australia for acting rapidly in the development of an ocean policy following the UNCLOS ratification. There are, however, a number of challenges still to be met in the implementation of Australia's Oceans Policy. In particular, there is a need to develop and implement systems that are effective in integrating (as opposed to coordinating) across sectors to meet agreed environmental objectives, and define strategies and targets for sectors to implement.

## Coasts and Clean Seas Initiative

Another significant Commonwealth initiative since 1996 addresses major coastal and marine management problems identified in the Resource Assessment Commission's Coastal Zone Inquiry Final Report (RAC 1993) and the State of the Marine Environment Report (Zann 1995).

The Coasts and Clean Seas Initiative, funded from the Natural Heritage Trust, was established to combat pollution problems and threats to water quality and marine life in the coastal zone. Eight complementary programs are being supported under the Initiative; a number of these have been referred to in this report. Programs are funded at a community, regional, State/Territory or national level. The Commonwealth funding is \$125 million over five years. A mid-term assessment of the effectiveness the Natural Heritage Trust program found that it was having a

‘catalytic effect on investment in Australia’s natural heritage in coastal and marine areas, with, for example, the \$4.8 million approved from the Trust for Coastcare projects in 1997–98 and 1998–99 generating projects with a total value of \$28.4 million.’ (Natural Heritage Trust 1999).

## Indigenous involvement in marine management

Indigenous peoples’ connections with the sea occur all around Australia and they have used the sea for millennia. Much of the basis for contemporary Indigenous interest in coastal and ocean management is founded on continuing cultural traditions, rights and responsibilities which pre-date the arrival of Europeans. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ relationship to their sea country is associated with a complexity of rights and responsibilities, including the right to access, use and distribute resources through time from generation to generation (Smyth 1997).

Section 6 of the *Native Title Act 1993* provides a legislative basis for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to lodge claims over areas of sea where Australia asserts sovereign rights.

In May 1995, a claim was lodged in the Federal Court by the Northern Land Council on behalf of saltwater traditional owners in the Croker Island region of the Northern Territory. The claim includes the seas, reefs, seabeds and resources in waters surrounding Croker and adjacent islands. The 1998 Federal Court finding (*The Commonwealth of Australia v. Mary Yarmirr and Ors and Mary Yarmirr and Ors v. The Commonwealth of Australia* [1999] FCA 1668) was that ‘non-exclusive’ and ‘non-commercial’ native title rights existed. This decision was appealed both by the traditional owners and the Commonwealth Government. Following a majority reaffirmation of the original finding, both parties have appealed to the High Court. The High Court recognised native title rights in relation to the territorial sea. The decision also establishes the primacy of public rights to fish and navigate (*The Commonwealth v Yarmirr, Yarmirr v Northern Territory* (2001) HCA56).

A 1999 High Court decision (*Murrandoo Bulanyi Mungabayi Yanner v Graeme John Eaton* (1999) 201 CLR 351; (1999) 166 ALR 258) (the Yanner decision) confirmed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may claim a right under native title to hunt living resources according to local customary law. The outcome of the Yanner case has resulted in most jurisdictions recognising Indigenous rights to obtain and consume traditional marine foods.

This decision has implications for the recognition of Indigenous peoples’ rights and interest in fisheries management. This area of law is clearly an evolving one.

There is specific legislative recognition of the rights and interests of Torres Strait Islanders in the management of fisheries and the marine environment in Torres Strait, through the Torres Strait Treaty signed by the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments. However, from a local community perspective there are still a number of issues to resolve in regard to Indigenous fishing rights.

Coastal Indigenous groups are involved in projects and programs aimed at regaining self-management of their marine environments. A potentially promising model for Indigenous involvement is being proposed in the region between Cooktown and Bundaberg in Queensland. This is the Sea Forum, which is conducted in accordance with Indigenous peoples’ processes and priorities. Sea Forum discusses management issues related to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. It is an initiative of traditional owners of sea country in the Southern Great Barrier Reef region involving traditional owners from the area between Cairns and Hervey Bay/Fraser Island.

A second promising model being developed is the Cape York Partnerships for natural resource management, which seeks to integrate government efforts in organised regional service centres on Cape York.

Some of the initiatives taken by Indigenous people towards participation in marine management include:

- involvement of a number of coastal Indigenous communities in local coastal management projects through the Coastcare program (see below),
- the Yolngu people of north-east Arnhem Land, with the assistance of Commonwealth Government funding, developing strategies for co-management of their traditional marine estates off the coast and to the north of Nhulunbuy (Gove), and
- development of the Hope Vale Dugong and Turtle Hunting Management Plan.

## Community involvement [CO Indicator 7.11]

One of the outcomes of the development of Australia's Oceans Policy was a recognition that the Policy affects more than the identified key stakeholders, for example the tourism industry and the petroleum industry, and involves a constituency of communities around Australia.

Community involvement in marine and coastal management activities is a relatively recent phenomenon. There has been a high level of public support and awareness of the protection of the Great Barrier Reef and Antarctica, for example. However, public awareness and concern for the overall state of the marine and coastal environment and our ongoing impacts has not been so widespread.

Governments are encouraging more public participation in coastal and marine issues in a variety of ways: for example, through Fishcare, the Marine and Coastal Community Network (MCCN) and the Coastcare program.

### Marine and Coastal Community Network

The Marine and Coastal Community Network (MCCN) was established in 1993, with Commonwealth funding, to assist community involvement in caring for oceans and coasts. It is a non-government community-based organisation. The aim of the Network is to develop a more cooperative and coordinated approach to marine and coastal resources protection and management. The Network provides a range of services for organisations and individuals on a regional and a national basis. These include:

- maintaining and expanding a list of individuals and groups who have an interest in marine and coastal issues and to involve them in the Network,
- conducting workshops on marine and coastal issues,
- communicating issues through Newsletters and the Internet, and
- coordinating Ocean Care Day each year in early December

An indicator of public awareness of coastal and marine issues can be gauged by the numbers of people on the MCCN mailing list, which has effectively doubled since 1996. Some 49% of MCCN participants represent organisations and as such indicates a significant multiplier effect of the Network's ability to access key interest groups and individuals.

Table 9: Growth in the number of individuals and groups on the MCCN mailing list.

Date	Aug 1996	June 1997	June 1998	June 1999	June 2000	June 2001
Participants	4 226	5 520	6 175	7 594	7 939	8 456

Source: Marine and Coastal Community Network (2001).

### Coastcare [CO Indicator 7.4]

Coastcare is a national program that encourages community involvement in the protection, management and rehabilitation of Australia's coastal and marine environments. The program assists local communities to form partnerships with local managers.

Coastcare is a major component of Coasts and Clean Seas Initiative. It is delivered cooperatively by all three spheres of government: Commonwealth, States, the Northern Territory, and local government. The Commonwealth and State and the Northern Territory governments provide matching funding for Coastcare community grants while local government provides financial and in kind support for Coastcare projects.

Since the inception of Coastcare in 1995 and up to the year 2000, the program has funded over 1700 projects around Australia with approximately \$12 million of funding contributed by the Natural Heritage Trust. The focus of Coastcare is to assist on-ground work such as:

- protecting or rehabilitating dunes, estuaries and wetlands,
- monitoring beach conditions, and coastal flora and fauna,
- helping to develop and implement local management plans, and
- providing education and training activities that raise community awareness, knowledge or skills on coastal and marine conservation issues.

The number of Coastcare groups rose from about 700 in 1997 to 1950 in 2000, and the number of people involved in the program rose from about 20 000 to 60 000 in the same period.

About 58% of individuals participating in the year 2000 were members of an established Coastcare or similar type of group. Approximately 150 of the 1950 Coastcare groups operating in the year 2000 are Indigenous groups.

The effectiveness of the Coastcare program was assessed in the Mid-term Evaluation of the Coasts and Clean Seas Initiative (Natural Heritage Trust 1999). The review found that:

‘over 700 groups are involved in Coastcare projects and that coastal vegetation is being regenerated, coastal access is being improved and controlled, weeds and feral pests eradicated and important marine species such as sea dragons are being monitored’.

### Role of volunteers

Volunteers provide invaluable contributions to survey, monitoring and (to a smaller extent) research. For example, the Australasian Wader Studies Group is a non-government organisation formed to coordinate and focus studies on waders, or shorebirds. Their objectives include the development of and assistance with wader research plans, encouragement of scientific programs, promotion of conservation and management policies, and assistance with the publication of results. They are also active in promoting wetland conservation.

Volunteers have also helped in practical ways by, for example, removing more than 21 000 Northern Pacific Seastars from the Derwent River in May 2000. Two hundred volunteers and three scientists worked together on this project.

Fisheries research in Australia has relied on volunteers from the commercial fishing industry on many occasions. A recent example is the use of volunteer fishers in the Northern Prawn Fishery to record sea turtle captures, tag sea turtles, and trial resuscitation techniques.

The marine education community includes many volunteers who provide education to a variety of groups, including schools. The Marine Education Society of Australia (MESA) hosts a website (<http://www.mesa.edu.au/> [accessed 5 September 2001]) and has been active, for example, in the marine protected areas debate in promoting the importance of these areas for education.

### Integrated coastal zone management

Integrated coastal zone management has been advocated for a long time to improve the systemic hindrances to more effective land management and also more effective management of the coastal zone (Resource Assessment Commission 1993). The description of what is meant by integrated includes both integration of agencies, issues and sectors and tiers of government but also includes integration of an approach to the land-sea interface. Two major problems have been identified which inhibit the sustainable use of Australia’s coastal zone:

- fragmented management arrangements based on single issues or sectors, and
- the ‘tyranny of small decisions’, whereby over time a number of decisions that in themselves are not significant accumulate and interact to result in a significant impact on the coastal zone.

The number of agencies illustrates the challenge in coordination with some coastal responsibilities. In New South Wales, for example, there are 21 Councils and 31 other State agencies with responsibilities under the New South Wales Coastal Policy.

Both Victoria and New South Wales, for example, have established (or re-established) Coastal Councils to give effect to the Coastal Strategy (Victoria) and Coastal Policy (New South Wales). Queensland has recently released a draft State Coastal Management Plan. Tasmania has a State Coastal Policy. These approaches indicate the intended directions and identify the agencies responsible for achieving them, with a central agencies providing coordination.

Wescott (2001) has summarised the effectiveness of State and Territory institutional arrangements for integrated coastal zone management. The conclusion reached is that Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland (with the launch of its draft State Coastal Plan) have established statutory means to implement institutional arrangements including strategic plans and policies. There are still improvements that could be made, but progress is occurring. The other jurisdictions have a 'patchier' performance in their implementation of integrated coastal zone management.

Despite some concerns about the failure to implement all the Resource Assessment Commission recommendations, the Inquiry has certainly stimulated all States and the Northern Territory into action and given them a common objective—integrated coastal zone management—in the reform process over the last five years.

There is clearly still a need for a nationally applicable Coastal Zone Policy to be developed to further assist in reducing the fragmentation of effort to manage the coastal zone and associated coastal waters. This issue was highlighted by a House of Representatives report in 1991 (House of Representatives 1991) which said:

'The absence of a national perspective towards the entire Australian coastline could lead to national interests being undervalued or even lost for future generations, as the existing ad hoc, hodge-podge pattern of development slowly nibbles away at a precious and beautiful resource, the natural coastline.'

A key challenge for achieving integrated coastal zone management is the need for an institutional structure (and associated processes and procedures) to establish agreed outcome-based performance objectives for marine ecosystems.

The challenge is also for oceans management to identify the mechanisms and then design, implement and monitor performance by various ocean users to ensure they meet the agreed standards of ecologically sustainable use of ocean ecosystems. One important element of this strategy is the design and implementation of marine protected areas.

### The Australian Coastal Atlas [CO Indicator 7.12]

In May 1995 the Commonwealth Coastal Policy defined a need to establish an Australian Coastal Atlas (ACA) to help increase knowledge about Australia's coastal zone, and thus provide an accessible information base to support decision-making for coastal zone management.

The Atlas project commenced in 1997 in consultation with a wide forum of users and has resulted in a network of nodes delivering almost 900 data layers over the Internet. The Australian Coastal Atlas is a partnership arrangement between States, the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth. A diverse range of data is available at a variety of scales (1 : 25 000 to 1 : 1 000 000) to be mapped and queried, including: administrative boundaries, Indigenous sites, species distributions, aquaculture, bathymetry, marine habitats, cyclone tracks, beach safety and coastal regionalisations (see [http://www.environment.gov.au/marine/coastal\\_atlas/](http://www.environment.gov.au/marine/coastal_atlas/) [accessed 5 September 2001]).

### Marine Protected Areas [CO Indicator 7.12]

The State, Territory and Commonwealth governments committed themselves to developing a National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA) through the Australia New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council in the early 1990s. Australia's Oceans Policy includes an undertaking by the Commonwealth Government to accelerate the development of this system.

The primary goal of the NRSMPA is to establish and manage a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Australian waters. These Marine Protected Areas are to contribute to the long-term ecological viability of marine and estuarine systems and protect Australia's biodiversity (ANZECC 1999).

Marine Protected Areas can be declared under Commonwealth, State or Northern Territory legislation in each jurisdiction's waters. Australian governments are working cooperatively to establish the NRSMPA.

Because of the varying legislation in each jurisdiction, Australian Marine Protected Areas employ a range of naming conventions, subtypes and zones, including marine parks, marine

national parks, marine and intertidal habitat areas, coastal reserves, marine management areas, fish habitat protection areas, aquatic reserves, seaward extensions of national parks, marine nature reserves and marine reserves. However, they share a common intent to protect the marine and estuarine environment, particularly habitats such as reefs, seagrass beds, tidal lagoons, mangroves, rock platforms, coastal, deep ocean and underwater seabed areas and any marine cultural heritage.

Under the Australian IUCN Reserve Management Principles, Commonwealth Marine Protected Areas are zoned and classified according to the IUCN categories of protected area management, ranging from highly protected areas to sustainable multiple-use areas. A range of activities may be allowed in a Marine Protected Area, depending on the reason for declaration and management strategies. In some cases, virtually all human activity is excluded (as in strict nature reserve or 'no take' zones, corresponding to IUCN category 1a). Other areas have seasonal restrictions on activities; for example, closure to all activities during the whale breeding season. The States and the Northern Territory have agreed to apply IUCN categories to their Marine Protected Areas to ensure that the NRSMPA achieves its goals, and most also now require a management plan for the area prior to declaration.

A study of the effects of marine reserves on Tasmanian reef fish, invertebrates and algae (Edgar and Barrett 1999) found that their effectiveness appeared to correspond with reserve size. Many overseas studies indicate that highly protected and well-managed reserves protect species in proportion to reserve size.

The number and extent of Marine Protected Areas as at November 2000 are shown in Table 10. Marine Protected Areas declared for Commonwealth waters since 1996 are shown in Table 11.

A formal notice of intent to establish the waters around Heard Island and McDonald Islands as a marine reserve was announced in January 2001. The proposed reserve would cover 7.6 million hectares, making it the world's largest highly protected marine reserve.



Fraser Island, a World Heritage Area.

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Photo Library.

Table 10: Number and extent of Marine Protected Areas, November 2000.

Jurisdiction	Number of MPAs	Area in MPAs (ha)	Management Plans produced
Commonwealth (incl. GBRMP)	13	53 329 431	5
New South Wales	50	127 707	4
Victoria	12	50 312	7
Tasmania	5	77 110	0
South Australia	17	252 371	1
Western Australia	8	1,393 387	4
Northern Territory	7	230 426	0
Queensland	82	5 421 117	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>60 881 861</b>	<b>27</b>

Sources: CAPAD (1997) and recent survey for Environment Australia (2000).

Table 11: Marine Protected Areas declared for Commonwealth waters since 1996.

MPA and date of declaration	Area (ha)	Reason
Great Australian Bight Marine Park (Commonwealth waters) (April 1998)	19 769	Protect habitat for marine mammals and the diversity of benthic communities
Macquarie Island Marine Park (1999)	16 200 000	Habitat protection for threatened species
Tasmanian Seamounts Marine Protected Area (1999)	37 000	Protect unique benthic community
Twelve extensions to GBRMP into Queensland waters (2000)	520 000	Multiple use management
Cartier Island Marine Reserve (2000)	16 700	Protect biodiversity and representative area
Lord Howe Island Marine Reserve (Commonwealth waters) (2000)	300 510	Protect biodiversity and seamount habitats

Sources: CAPAD (1997) and recent survey for Environment Australia (2000).

**Table 12: Marine Protected Areas declared by States and Territories since 1996.**

Jurisdiction	MPA and date of declaration	Area (ha)	Reason
Western Australia	Albrolhos Islands Fish Habitat Protection Area (1999)	246 744	
Northern Territory	Charles Darwin National Park (marine component) (1998)	250	
Tasmania	Macquarie Island Nature Reserve (2000)	74 715	Protect biological diversity
New South Wales (13 in total)	Solitary Islands Marine Park (1997) (previously a Marine Reserve of 85,000 ha) Jervis Bay Marine Park (1998) Lord Howe Island Marine Park (State waters) (1998)	42 000 21 450 48 000	Protect biodiversity, sub-tidal reefs, soft substrates and open ocean ecosystems Conserve biological diversity and protect representative areas Conserve biodiversity and protect representative areas
Queensland	Kinkuna Fish Habitat Area Burdekin Fish Habitat Area	774 91 985	

Sources: CAPAD (1997) and recent survey for Environment Australia (2000).

The Commonwealth Government's Marine Protected Areas Program, a component of the Coasts and Clean Seas Initiative of the Natural Heritage Trust, provides funding to the State and Northern Territory governments to declare MPAs in their jurisdictions. States have established Marine Protected Areas since the 1970s. In 1971, for example South Australia introduced legislation to protect marine habitats. Western Australia commenced in the mid-1980s, and in 2000 issued a notice of intent for the Jurien Bay Marine Park.

In August 1999 the Tasmania released a draft Marine Protected Areas Strategy for the identification, selection and establishment of MPAs. The strategy is expected to be completed in 2001.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Queensland Government agencies are currently undertaking a major program to increase the protection of biodiversity through a new representative network of highly protected areas. It is envisaged that all major habitat types will be included within the next two years.

Marine protected areas declared by States and Territories since 1996 are shown in Table 12.

### Benefits of marine reserves

The Tasmanian Government declared the Maria Island Marine Nature Reserve in 1991. It extends seven kilometres along Maria Island and covers 1500 hectares. It was established to conserve a range of habitats typical of the Tasmanian east coast, including small areas of rocky reef with large underwater caves, sandstone reefs, kelp forests and seagrass beds.

A scientific monitoring program has been undertaken for this and other reserves (Edgar and Barrett 1999), entailing sampling from a number of sites both inside and outside the reserves immediately before declaration and then annually for five years.

After six years of protection in the Maria Island Marine Nature Reserve, the number of fish species has increased by 5%, while it fell by 23% in unprotected areas. The new species included Bastard Trumpeter, Ling and Draughtboard Shark, which are species targeted by fishers. The diversity of mobile invertebrates and algae has also increased within the marine reserve.

The numbers of large fish have increased by over 240% in the Reserve. Rock lobster abundance and size also increased.

A review of the global literature on reserves for use in fisheries management (Ward et al. 2001) concluded that, for many fisheries, and when integrated with the existing management practices, no-take sanctuaries would be highly likely to make an important contribution to modern fisheries management systems where environmental issues were also considered to be important. Sanctuaries were considered to offer a range of benefits to fully and over-exploited fisheries, as well as for biodiversity conservation more broadly.

### Summary

Marine management is clearly progressing with Australia's Oceans Policy in place and a number of initiatives flowing from it. The fragmented nature of coastal zone management still leads to the 'tyranny of small decisions'. There is now a need for a corresponding coastal and estuarine policy to further improve coastal zone management.

Australia has made good progress towards achieving conservation of biodiversity through establishing Marine Protected Areas since 1996, and with the introduction of new legislation to improve the sustainability of fisheries.

The establishment of an NRSMPA has been an important issue for Australia since 1992. Increased funding allocated in 1997 from the Natural Heritage Trust has resulted in greater progress in achieving the program's goal. However, there is still a need at all levels of government for collaboration to manage and conserve marine biodiversity to achieve national commitments for ecologically sustainable use of resources and the conservation of species and habitats.

While many elements of policy are in place, the next challenge is to implement and then monitor the outcomes of the policies to ensure the ecologically sustainable use of the marine environment actually occurs and results in maintained or improved conditions.