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***South-east Marine Parks Network Management Plan 2023-2033***  
**Submission by the**  
**Australian Marine Sciences Association Inc. ARBN 604 875 774**

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The Australian Marine Sciences Association (AMSA) is pleased to provide a submission on the South-east Marine Parks Network Management Plan 2023-2033.

AMSA is Australia's largest professional society of marine scientists with close to one thousand members nationwide. AMSA actively promotes the advancement of marine sciences in Australia and engages in public debate where our members have specialist knowledge. Our members work across research agencies, universities, museums, government departments, and the private sector, and have expertise spanning all disciplines related to marine sciences. AMSA provides science-based position papers and statements on marine issues and throughout its over 60-year history, has been influential in the development of marine science policy in Australia. AMSA is also a member of the National Marine Science Committee and Science & Technology Australia.

Australia's South-east Marine Parks Network is home to globally significant biodiversity, cultural and physical values. The context of historical impacts and contemporary change in Australia's South-East marine region also mean that spatial protections and capacity for adaptive management are particularly important in this region. The South-East marine region is a global marine warming hotspot, having experienced warming over the past several decades at almost 4 times the global average rate (Hobday & Pecl 2014). The South-East is also the region where benthic habitats are in the poorest condition nationally due to historical impacts and ongoing effects of climate change (Trebilco et al 2021). It is also a region where very significant biodiversity, cultural and physical natural values coincide with important economic activities as an area of rapid growth in both the Blue Economy and coastal populations (Commonwealth of Australia 2015, AIMS 2021). Indigenous people have been sustainably using and managing Australia's sea country for at least 60,000 years, and Indigenous communities of the South-east Marine Region continue to have a strong cultural and spiritual connection to the ocean, and to use ocean resources for food, traditional purposes and income.

As the primary tool for the conservation and management of the South-east Australian Marine Park Network (SE Network), the first iteration of the SE Management Plan has been a positive first step for innovative conservation management underpinned by and in partnership with scientific research. AMSA concurs with the assessment of the 2022 SE Network Management Plan Evaluation report (May et al 2022) that the 2013-2023 plan has provided a good start for an enduring and evolving science-based management approach.

Much has changed during the 10 years that the 2013-2023 Management Plan has been in effect, and recent research highlights that Australia's current marine park network is failing to arrest the decline in marine populations (Edgar et al, 2023). Around Australia, most shallow reef populations declined over the last decade, with declines particularly pronounced after heatwave years. Invertebrate populations in southern latitudes were found to be particularly vulnerable, with over 30% exhibiting high extinction risk. In southeast Australia, declines were generally observed over the last decade in fishes, invertebrates and algae.

While the development of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) framework has been a key enabling-step towards an enduring adaptive, integrated and place-based, management regime, the effectiveness of the network in achieving its biodiversity conservation goals is yet to be established. Adequately supporting the implementation of the MERI framework will be essential to enabling assessment of effectiveness of management and biodiversity outcomes and informing adaptive management into the future.

While AMSA views the Management Strategies outlined in the 2013-2023 Management Plan and generally sound and suitable for carrying over in the 2023-2033 Plan, a conspicuous absence in the 2013-2023 Plan that should be addressed in the 2023-2033 Plan is a lack of specific reference to cumulative impacts, risk management and adaptive management. As highlighted in the recommendations of the report of the Expert Scientific Panel from the Commonwealth Marine Reserves Review (Beeton et al 2015) and echoed in the report of the Auditor General on Management of Commonwealth National Parks (Auditor General 2019), developing and implementing science-based adaptive management supported a research, monitoring and evaluation framework is a key priority and this should be articulated explicitly in the Management Strategies.

In the context of ongoing adaptive management, AMSA urges that the philosophy should be first to identify what the key values are that need protection, then determine the required management to meet these needs. Designing MPAs based on CAR principles (Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative) is an essential early step, together with maintaining high proportions (>30%) under full protection, and effective management and monitoring. These and other key considerations are outlined in [AMSA's Position Statement on MPAs](#). Where monitoring of priorities reveals negative trends in the status of values or concerning impacts of pressures, clear actions. Consistent with the recommendations of the South-East Commonwealth Marine Reserves Network Management Plan Evaluation Report (May et al 2022), AMSA urges that the revised management plan will need to be progressive and proactive rather than settling into maintaining an observational status quo.

Another aspect of the Management Strategies from the 2013-2023 Management Plan that should be strengthened in the Strategies for the 2023-2033 Plan is the Strategy relating to engagement of Indigenous people in the Network's management. AMSA suggests that this Strategy should be

updated to reflect the need for more proactive, inclusive and empowering processes e.g. 'Prioritise and enable agency of Indigenous land and sea managers and strengthen partnerships for knowledge sharing in sea Country management that embraces Traditional Owners as rights holders.'

In summary, AMSA asserts that current levels of protection in Australia generally, including in the south-east, are inadequate to adequately protect our marine estate and require substantial upgrading. The inability to date to assess the effectiveness of the SE Marine Park Network in meeting its biodiversity conservation objectives underscores the critical importance of adequately resourced monitoring and observations to future ability to assess effectiveness and to update management in response to emerging risks, impacts and needs. The MERI framework, if adequately resourced, represents a significant enabling-step towards an adaptive, integrated and place-based, management regime for the SE Marine Park Network. Key needs for improving upon the 2013-2023 Plan in the 2023-2033 Plan include: (i) explicit consideration of cumulative impacts, risk management and adaptive management (ii) ensuring adequate resourcing of MERI activities, and (iii) developing stronger and more proactive partnerships with Indigenous land and sea managers.

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