

Batemans Marine Park

What is it?

On 29 November 2005 the Premier, Morris Iemma, announced that the State Government would create a new marine park in the Batemans Shelf Marine Bioregion in April 2006.

The Batemans Marine Park will occupy 85,000 hectares of coastal and estuarine waters from the northern end of Murramarang Beach to Wallaga Lake, including some of the South Coast's most outstanding natural features.

Marine parks form the centrepiece of NSW's representative system of marine protected areas. Five other marine parks have been established in NSW - Jervis Bay, Solitary Islands, Lord Howe Island, Cape Byron and Port Stephens-Great Lakes. The Marine Parks Authority (MPA) is responsible for establishing, zoning and managing marine parks.

How do NSW marine parks work?

NSW marine parks are multiple use and allow for a range of activities including fishing. NSW marine parks are large areas of coastal waters, bays, estuaries and coastal lakes divided into different zones. Zoning plans are developed based on the particular needs of each marine park.

The zones range from general use zones, where most commercial activities are permitted including trawling and other forms of commercial fishing, to sanctuary zones, where fishing and other forms of harvesting are banned. The largest proportion of NSW marine parks usually falls in habitat protection zones, where recreational fishing and some forms of commercial harvesting are allowed. There are also small special purpose zones set aside for various specific activities.

Zones are determined through extensive public consultation, including the appointment of local advisory committees to guide park planning and represent local interests. For current marine parks, sanctuary zones typically represent around a fifth of the area; general use zones a quarter; and habitat protection zones over a half. This means recreational fishing is typically allowed in around 70 to 80 per cent of marine park waters.

People can go anywhere in a marine park – including sanctuary zones, which are great places for swimming, diving, snorkelling and boating. Marine parks are a great tourist drawcard.

Why protect marine areas?

Marine parks in NSW conserve marine biological diversity, marine habitats and ecological processes. While meeting these goals, marine parks also provide for sustainable use, public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment. They help to conserve our state's marine biodiversity for present and future generations.

The new marine park helps meet the government's commitments to introduce a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of marine protected areas. All Australian governments – Commonwealth, state and territory – have agreed to such a system.

Where to from here?

For most people, the new marine park will mean no changes until the zoning plan is finalised in late 2006. In the meantime the MPA will establish a local advisory committee, and will consult interest groups and hold information days with the aim of producing a draft zoning plan.

As part of this process the MPA will talk to local Aboriginal people about their traditional use of the areas in the marine park. It will also take into account the findings of a socio-economic study, which will consider impacts on the region.

After the park is declared in April 2006, the MPA will collect additional information on the use and habitats of the marine park area to help develop the draft zoning plan, which will be placed on public exhibition for three months from mid 2006. People will have the opportunity to comment on the draft zoning plan, and at meetings held during the exhibition period.

Using the information provided by the community the MPA will work out final arrangements to ensure representation of habitats while allowing for sustainable use of the marine park. When the zoning plan is finalised in late 2006, the conservation and habitat management measures in the marine park will begin to take effect. This is when the locations of sanctuary zones and other arrangements will be finalised.

What's so special about the Batemans Coast?

While locals – and visitors – don't need to be told just how spectacular and beautiful their coast is, it contains natural features that are very important from a marine habitat conservation perspective. They include:

- the Murramarang coast, north of Batemans Bay, with large areas of rocky reefs and numerous islands that provide breeding areas for many seabird species;
- impressive coastal lagoons that are characteristic of the South Coast, including Durras, Coila, Brunderee, Tarourga and Brou - many of which have been recommended for protection;
- Tollgate Islands – an important site for the threatened grey nurse shark and noted for seaweed diversity;
- Clyde River and Batemans Bay – a drowned river valley with vitally important estuarine habitats, including mangrove and saltmarsh, flowing into one of the South Coast's largest bays; and
- the waters around Montague Island – a South Coast icon renowned for seals, grey nurse sharks, penguins and many other seabird species.

More information?

The MPA will keep stakeholders and the media closely informed about each stage of the establishment of the marine park. Additional information about marine parks can be found on the MPA website at

www.mpa.nsw.gov.au.

