



The Hon Gladys Berejiklian, MP
 Premier
 GPO Box 5341S
 SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Premier,

29 July 2020

Proposed wind-back of sanctuary zones in New South Wales marine parks

We write to express our grave concern about the NSW Government’s move to wind back what are long standing sanctuary protections across several marine parks in NSW, including Batemans and Port Stephens marine parks. As national, state and local conservation organisations, many with strong ties to the local south coast community, we strongly oppose any move to remove legislated sanctuary protections in NSW marine parks.

We write to urge you to:

- 1. Lift the amnesty on illegal fishing in five sanctuary zones in Batemans Marine Park, including the waters surrounding the heritage listed conservation reserve at Montague Island, and**
- 2. Commit to maintaining and strengthening sanctuary protections as part of the Government’s marine park management plan pilot process in Batemans and Port Stephens-Great Lakes Marine Parks.**

We are deeply concerned about Minister Marshall’s announcement in December last year to place an amnesty on recreational fishing controls in five sanctuary zones in Batemans Marine Park. The decision was made without consultation with either the local community or key stakeholders who are deeply involved in the planning and management of the marine park, including the Batemans Marine Park Advisory Committee, the Marine Estate Management Authority, scientific advisers, the Marine Estate Expert Knowledge Panel and local marine park officers. This lack of consultation and transparency is in direct contrast to public commitments by the Marine Estate Management Authority, and the well-meaning reform processes initiated by the former Environment Minister Rob Stokes.

The sudden decision to declare an amnesty on recreational fishing in sanctuaries was made outside of the formal review of the Marine Estate initiated by your Government in 2013, which was to be piloted with a review of the Batemans Marine Park management plan. The peremptory decision regarding sanctuary zones undermines the Government’s reform process and jeopardises community confidence around the future management of the marine park.

Marine parks are vital assets for coastal communities. A flourishing Batemans Marine Park directly supports many diving, fishing and boating businesses. Marine parks also support tourism, accommodation, hospitality and aquaculture industries. At a time when the South Coast community and local business are suffering from the devastating bushfires and COVID-19 lockdowns, nature-based tourism and a healthy marine park must be supported and promoted.

Sanctuaries have repeatedly been found to be the most effective method of restoring and preserving habitats and biodiversity in ecosystems all around the world. By acting as breeding zones they actually have flow-on benefits for recreational fishing in surrounding fishing areas. Weakening sanctuary zone protections will also impair the resilience of the South Coast marine environment to deal with the increasing impacts of climate change and urchin barrens.

Any proposed changes to marine park management, in particular the most environmentally sensitive parts of the marine park, must be based on both rigorous scientific evaluation and open and transparent stakeholder consultation. The use of methods that are inconsistent with the spirit of the Government's own legislation and that pre-empt the principle of transparent consultation has undermined the integrity and credibility of marine park reform across the state. Such actions will create more conflict at a time when calm discussion, consultation and science-based policy decision making could lead to lasting solutions supported by the whole community.

Community support for marine parks, and the sanctuary zones within them, is high across all sectors of the community, as shown in the Government's own research. Support for sanctuary zones in most marine parks is at 80% or higher. Healthy marine parks and sanctuary zones also support nature-based tourism, one of the biggest drawcards to the South Coast, which now needs government support and promotion more than ever.

Winding back established marine sanctuaries is the same as winding back national parks on land - a shocking move which could never be justified to the public and which has national implications. We urge you to immediately end the amnesty on illegal fishing in Batemans sanctuary zones, and to commit to maintaining and strengthening sanctuary protections as part of the Government's marine park management plan pilot process in Batemans and Port Stephens marine parks.

We would like to meet with you to discuss these issues further at the earliest opportunity possible. Sharnie Connell of the National Parks Association of NSW on 0449 193 993 or sharniec@npansw.org.au will be pleased to coordinate such a meeting.

Sincerely,



Sharnie Connell
Senior Campaigns Officer
National Parks Association of NSW

On behalf of: Nature Coast Marine Group, EcoNetwork Port Stephens, National Parks Association of NSW, Marine Parks Association, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Australian Marine Conservation Society, Save Our Marine Life, 350 Eurobodalla, Coastwatchers, Humane Society International, The Pew Charitable Trusts, Surfrider Foundation.

Cc. The Hon Rob Stokes MP, The Hon Andrew Constance MP, The Hon Matt Kean MP, The Hon Adam Marshall MP