

# **Proposed Dampier Archipelago/Cape Preston Marine Conservation Reserve Zoning Scheme Fourth and Final**

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Recfishwest is the peak body representing the interests of the estimated 645,000 recreational fishers in Western Australia. We are formally recognised and funded by the Government in that role and have regular meetings with the Minister for Fisheries and with the Minister for the Environment as well as interaction with other Ministers and Government agencies on a range of topics.

The habitat in which fishing is carried out and access to those areas are of particular importance to Recfishwest. Recfishwest nominated for a position on the review committee, as the recreational fishing sector will be impacted upon by the proposals to the greatest extent. However, our nomination was not supported even though a key consideration identified during preparation of the proposal was the future recreational uses within the areas concerned. While Recfishwest recognises the need for local community involvement, the Marine Park will be a resource for the entire community and the importance of a strategic, state-wide outlook should not be overlooked.

Recfishwest views with considerable concern the apparent inability in CALM/MPRA parks to impose zones that would impact on commercial fisheries or aquaculture. Recfishwest strongly believes that there should be a large recreational fishing zone in the southern islands encompassing the area inside West Lewis Island, Enderby Island, Goodwyn Island, Rosemary Island and the southern end of Malus Island.

During our discussions with the community, significant concerns were raised at the apparent lack of vision in the selection of the Sanctuary Zones, the selection of boundaries and several inconsistencies in the permitted activities in the various zones. For example, there is no mention that anchoring in delicate soft corals will be prohibited in sanctuary zones, yet fishing for highly transitory pelagic fish species will be banned. Similarly, jet skis will be permitted where there are high turtle and even dugong populations, yet fishing will be prohibited.

In spite of these serious concerns, Recfishwest supports the need for a marine park in the Dampier Archipelago. The rationale behind the proposals needs far more transparent exposure to assure recreational fishers that CALM is able to equitably implement a parks proposal that is able to meet clearly defined objectives. The recreational fishing community in the Pilbara is able to meet the challenge if it is treated in a manner that its importance to the proposal deserves.

## **1 Dampier Archipelago Marine Park - East**

### **1.1 Delambre Island sanctuary zone**

There is general agreement on the need for a sanctuary zone in this area. The northern edge of Delambre Island provides deepwater fishing adjacent to land and is an important recreational fishing area without significant sensitive habitats. Recfishwest is satisfied that the fourth and final draft acknowledges the importance of the area to recreational fishers.

However Recfishwest continues to be significantly concerned as to how the boundaries of this proposed zone would be marked so that the community would be aware of where the boundaries lie, given that the sanctuary extends several kilometres into open ocean. The rationale needs to be more carefully explained, especially in terms of the biodiversity benefits from the protection of many square kilometres of open sand bottom.

### **1.2 Dolphin Islands sanctuary zone**

There is general agreement from Recfishwest for making this area a sanctuary zone. While recreational fishing occurs to a reasonable extent in this area, especially when sheltered from prevailing winds, the importance of the habitat is recognised and some of the fish species are considered to be vulnerable.

### **1.3 Searipple Passage sanctuary zone**

There is strong support for making this area a sanctuary zone as a scientific reference point due to the uniqueness of the marine life and habitat. Recfishwest believes that a case can be made for enlarging this zone to include the entire passage, especially as a trade-off against some other areas where we believe that the biodiversity benefits are much less clearly defined.

One of the major environmental influences which contributes to the uniqueness of this area is the uniqueness of the waters of Nickol Bay. The passage itself contains a large variety of marine diversity in a very small area. These include but are not limited to mud flats and mangrove habitats, shallow coral reef, and sandy spits - the only place in the Dampier Archipelago with such characteristics.

### **1.4 Watering Cove sanctuary zone**

There is general agreement from Recfishwest to making this area a sanctuary zone or special purpose zone. Contrary to the rationale in the proposal, this area is relatively easily to access, and used by both shore based, and boating public - there are 4x4 tracks leading to it and a boat launching facility in the next bay, Cowrie Cove.

### **1.5 Nickol Bay Reef Flats special purpose (education and benthic protection) zone**

Recfishwest supports this proposal. We believe that this zoning type is particularly appropriate for the Dampier Archipelago where many of the benthic environments are vulnerable. There is also a clear need to ensure that anchoring is controlled in these areas.

### **1.6 Nickol Bay Special Purpose (Mangrove Protection) Zone**

Recfishwest recognises the importance of mangrove habitat as a nursery area for many important species in the region. As stated in the original draft proposal, the actual waterways (Nickol River, Fields Creek, and Cleaverville) should continue to allow recreational fishing as per activities permitted in special purpose (Mangrove Protection) zones. However, we would like to see jet skis and water skiing prohibited from the area to prevent wake damage and physical damage to mangroves. There are also concerns about transient/tourist population usage of the area (in particular Cleaverville area). We propose stricter controls for this area even if it's to be on a seasonal basis.

### **1.7 Legendre Island sanctuary zone**

While Recfishwest supports the recommendation to split this area into two separate areas and include special purpose zones, consideration could be given to a "catch and release" only fishing zone for the entire outer part of Legendre Island. This area contains diverse habitats that need special regulation. Catch and release fishing is consistent with the protection of all of the core biodiversity values for the Legendre Island area. The sanctuary zone is for protection of turtles etc, recreational fishing is proposed to be banned but other recreational activities permitted eg skiing, boat access etc. Restricted speed areas and anchorage controls must be defined. Provision of public moorings, especially in inner zones should be considered essential.

Recfishwest maintains that the western boundary of the South Legendre Island sanctuary zone must be revised to make it easier for recreational fishers to identify boundaries of the sanctuary zone, and also to help simplify compliance within the area. The revised boundary (Appendix I) should follow the edge of Gidley Island and then to Keast Island and to the tip of Legendre Island. Allowing beach based fishing on the western edge of Keast Island provides an important recreational fishing opportunity without impacting on the biodiversity objectives of the area. This is also an important family picnicking spot and the provision of public moorings adjacent to this beach will greatly foster community stewardship of the adjacent, inner sanctuary zone. As a trade-off for this change we suggest extending the eastern boundary of the South Legendre Island sanctuary zone to the southern part of inner North Legendre Island (Appendix I). Recfishwest regards this as an important amendment which should be incorporated before the public consultation process.

## **1.9 Conzinc Island recreation zone**

Recfishwest agrees with this zoning. We believe that there is a strong case for habitat enhancement in this area with artificial reefs. We further believe that this is required compensation for the significant loss of recreational amenity resulting from the adoption of the numerous sanctuary zones which have a disproportionate impact on the recreational fishing sector.

We are extremely disappointed that this type of zoning is used so frugally within the area. The failure to recognise and accommodate recreational fishing has serious consequences for the credibility of the planning process with what is the most significant stakeholder. Recreation zones must become a key part of CALM's plan for managing multiple use in marine parks and not seen as a last resort concession to recreational fishing lobbying.

## **2 Dampier Archipelago Marine Park - West**

### **2.1 Rosemary Island sanctuary zone**

There are very significant concerns about the rationale for this zone and the boundaries. Who will meet the cost of compliance for the boundary amendments made to accommodate commercial aquarium collecting, the collectors, CALM? Recfishwest believe the boundaries should either be a prescribed distance from the high water mark of the island, or revert back to the **Draft 2** version, i.e. boaters will be able to line-up points on both islands to ensure they are not fishing within a sanctuary zone. This would make judging the boundary much easier, unless CALM is willing to compensate the numerous small/medium sized boat owners who will have to purchase at minimum a GPS with chart plotter to ensure they are fishing outside these overly complicated right-angled boundaries in the ocean. Note an entry level GPS chart plotter costs in the vicinity of \$1400 without charts. Why should recreational boaters have to

outlay such an exorbitant amount simply to ensure they can identify the boundary to this sanctuary zone?

The North-west Game fishing club have advised Recfishwest of their concerns over this proposed zone. The definition of the boundary for the offshore component is still causing concern, particularly due to the proximity of the 'patches' which are extremely popular recreational fishing areas including boats anchoring to fish for demersal species.

## **2.2 Goodwyn Island sanctuary zone**

Recfishwest is aware of a fair degree of community opposition to this proposal. Distinguishing the boundaries of this sanctuary when on the water will be extremely difficult. This area needs to be carefully negotiated with local interests. A potential compromise is to protect say 400 metres around the island which would protect the majority of the sensitive habitats.

## **2.3 West Lewis Island special purpose (benthic protection) zone**

Recfishwest supports this zoning. Indeed a case can be made for making this zone larger. This important form of management which provides significant protection for sensitive benthic habitats is not used enough in the proposed marine park. In many instances it is a better tool than sanctuary zones.

## **2.4 Enderby Island sanctuary zone**

Recfishwest supports this zone. The possible inclusion of a recreational fishing buffer zone or a catch and release fishing zone should be investigated. Provision of recreational fishing zones provides an important buffer to any spill-over effects from the sanctuary zone.

## **2.5 West Enderby Island sanctuary zone**

Although Recfishwest supports this zone, the Draft 4 amendment to make it more practical for compliance does exactly the opposite. Recfishwest believes the boundary should be a prescribed distance from the high water mark of the island, not a 90o line in the ocean. Recfishwest commends the shore buffer for recreational fishing.

# **3 Cape Preston Marine Management Area**

## **3.1 South Eaglehawk Island sanctuary zone**

Recfishwest strongly opposes this zone. The basis for this zone is poorly defined and there are other representative areas proposed for the habitat types which have been described and observed in this area. Cod management is already properly the responsibility of the Department of Fisheries. This appears to reflect client capture by non-consumptive divers in this area. It also highlights the need for greater cooperation between CALM and Fisheries.

If there is a need for another sanctuary zone in this area, negotiations should be undertaken with all stakeholders and not just diving groups. We believe that a compromise can be reached and a suitable alternative area, if justified, can be found.

## **3.2 Southwest Regnard Island sanctuary zone**

Although Recfishwest supports this zoning, we do not agree with the boundary amendments of Draft 4 "...to make practical for compliance purposes, whilst retaining areas for recreational fishing". Distinguishing the boundaries of this sanctuary when on the water will be extremely difficult for boaters. It needs to be made easier to identify i.e. reference points

on the mainland and Regnard Island, not right angles and arbitrary lines in the ocean. (Appendix II).

We believe that shore fishing should be permitted. A special purpose recreational zone outside the proposed area should be implemented to provide a buffer to the sanctuary zone and ensure that any spill-over benefits are not removed through fish trapping adjacent to the reserve. As an alternative, "catch and release" fishing only may be allowed in the special purpose buffer zone. This is an important and significant zone within this marine park. It should be viewed as an important component to the plan.

### **3.3 Maitland special purpose (mangrove protection) zone**

Recfishwest agrees that recreational crabbing and recreational fishing should be allowed from boats only within this special purpose area. Commercial crabbing and other commercial fishing should not be permitted. Recreational crabbing from boats does not compromise the biodiversity objectives of this zone.

## **4 Conclusion**

Recfishwest strongly objects to the process involved in planning this marine park whereby areas of interest to commercial fishing, shipping and industry were excised entirely from the park. As a result the stakeholder group on which the park will have the greatest impact is recreational fishing. Recreational fishers were denied the benefit of the knowledge and organisation of their peak body, Recfishwest, on the preliminary advisory committee.

Recfishwest believes that the problem of managing the many complex boundaries of zones in the park will prove an expensive nightmare for compliance officers and users alike.

A number of specific comments have been made. We regard a change to the western boundary of the South Legendre Island sanctuary zone as an essential amendment to give reasonable equity to recreational fishers.

There is no recognition of fisheries management tools, the advances in recreational fisheries management or the proactive nature of recreational fishers as advocates of the sustainability of the resource. The lack of anchorage management plans is a significant concern.

To give this proposal credibility, more emphasis should be placed on how the park will be maintained and monitored, what resources will need to be provided and by whom. This should be made part of this draft.