

Submission on Biodiversity Conservation Act for Western Australia- Consultation Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comment on the above consultation draft.

Recfishwest is the peak body for recreational fishing in Western Australia. It represents the interests of more than 600,000 Western Australians who go fishing and is recognised by the Government of Western Australia, Fisheries WA and other government departments and authorities. Given our charter, we have a significant interest in the principles of biodiversity and the practical application of initiatives aimed at achieving the conservation of biological diversity in Western Australia's fisheries.

Bioregional Planning

One of the proposed provisions of the new Act is that it should provide for "Bio-regional Planning". This is also the basis of a recent Recfishwest proposal for marine conservation planning, which advocates a change in focus from establishing a series of marine parks and nature reserves to an overall marine planning system probably based on the proposed IMCRA regions.

Recfishwest believes that Western Australia needs a new approach to marine conservation. Pursuit of the establishment of marine parks and nature reserves, based upon the Wilson Report, would concentrate virtually all the resources available for marine conservation on a relatively small proportion of the marine and estuarine area ignoring the values, threats and management needs of the rest. Experience so far has also demonstrated that the process is hopelessly slow and it has elicited divisive attitudes from stakeholders, including those who might be expected to philosophically support further marine conservation.

Recfishwest has prepared a paper on the need for a different approach to marine conservation and a copy is attached. The process suggested by Recfishwest is to look at all the State's marine area on a regional basis and use a combination of tools including traditional fishery management as well as marine protected areas to achieve the objectives. In general terms this is the approach used by the Commonwealth (see www.oceans.gov.au).

Responsibilities of Government Agencies

Recfishwest has constantly drawn the Government's attention to the division of responsibilities between CALM and Fisheries in respect to management and conservation of marine biota. The Biodiversity Conservation Act could give explicit recognition in respect of the need for these two agencies of government (or the heirs or assigns of their current responsibilities) to act in concert in certain matters. It appears likely that the preparation of bioregional marine conservation plans would be an obvious function for these to agencies to carry out jointly.

The expected benefit from bioregional conservation planning under joint agency responsibility (and with stakeholder input) would be that there would have to be explicit discussion of the best ways to achieve required objectives. The Departments of Fisheries and CALM would have to liaise with each other and where necessary pool their resources to provide required research information. Also it may, hopefully, check the current trend to

place all icon sites in marine parks ignoring the easily achieved contributions to biodiversity from remote areas.

Summary

Recfishwest believes that the Biodiversity Conservation Act should provide for legislative recognition of bioregional marine planning.

Recfishwest believes that there should be a series of bioregional marine conservation plans prepared for Western Australia. These marine conservation plans would integrate a range of management measures to achieve their objectives. The preparation of these plans would be the joint responsibility of CALM and Fisheries. The planning process would involve advisory committees including stakeholder representation, formal public consultation and with the plans being approved by Ministers responsible for Fisheries and CALM.

Please do not hesitate contact me at the Recfishwest office should further clarification or information in respect to the issues we have raised be required.