

Fisheries Management Paper 178 - Draft Plan of Management for the Kalbarri Blue Holes Fish Habitat Protection Area

Recfishwest submission:-

This letter is forwarded in response to the Department's call for submissions to the proposals contained in the Draft MP as above and is provided further to our preliminary comments dated 11 July 2003.

As you would be aware from previous correspondence and from our joint participation on various marine planning forums, Recfishwest is very concerned at the gradual but accelerating cumulative erosion of access for recreational fishers to marine resources via creation of 'no-take' areas, whether under DoF or CALM planning mechanisms.

Recfishwest has become somewhat sceptical of the motivations of some proponents in putting forward places to be protected for conservation purposes, such as has previously been the case for the Cottesloe FHPA. In this regard we have a number of similar concerns with the proposal for a 'Blue Holes' FHPA and we are accordingly not prepared to lend it unqualified support.

At the outset we wish to acknowledge that the draft plan has met our concern that the northern boundary as originally proposed was inappropriately 'too far to the north.' The draft does not however, meet our other concern that sufficient argument had not been advanced in support of plan objectives, as articulated further below.

Also, as foreshadowed in our July 2003 letter, Recfishwest is not satisfied that the western boundary is fair to recreational fishers. We do not agree with the boundary extending to the high energy area beyond the reef platform edge as the edge is used by fishers casting for, overwhelmingly, pelagic fish. We are also not convinced (pp 19-20) that there are serious threats to territorial fish via demersal fishing or to the local environment due to "snagging" of gear etc.

Recfishwest would prefer that the western boundary be drawn in such a way as to provide between two and five meter buffers allowing for pelagic fishing, to be supported by a code of conduct advising against demersal fishing in the first instance. Fishing practice and effects could then be monitored over a reasonable period and appropriate remedies applied if demonstrable environmental effects, in conflict with FHPA objectives are evidenced.

Alternatively temporal access around sunset or sunrise for lure fishing only might also be considered, in association with a code.

Recfishwest is concerned that the draft plan objectives are, in principle, in conflict. We agree that the area proposed has merit in respect of objective (ii); "appreciation and observation of fish". We are however at a loss to understand how encouraging large numbers of visitors to trample over the reef platform in support of objective (ii) can be consistent with objective (i); "conservation of fish, fish breeding areas, fish fossils or the aquatic ecosystem".

It is particularly this inconsistency that leads us to be suspicious that, as for Cottesloe, this is just yet another attempt by a group of locals to somehow differentiate their 'patch of reef' from any other - probably as much for indirect local motivations (attract more tourists etc) than for a truly

intrinsic conservation or educational purposes motivation.

That the blue holes are visually appealing and provide a 'live' aquarium for observers is beyond doubt and it is clearly this characteristic that lends itself so well to objective (ii). The draft plan does not however provide any cogent information or argument in support of a proposition that the 'holes' in themselves, or indeed the reef platform as a whole, have any special conservation importance sufficient to providing a rationale for reservation for conservation purposes per se.

In conclusion, Recfishwest will support the proposed FHPA if our concerns with regard to access by anglers for the purposes of pelagic fishing can be met and if the purposes for which the proposed FHPA are created are limited to the arguments proposed to objective (ii). Recfishwest refutes the arguments in support of objective (i).

End of Recfishwest submission, June 2004.

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The following was added 23 December 2007

Clarification of the location of the FHPA.

Many recreational fishers have expressed concerned about this proposal due to the name "Blue Holes" which is the name also used for the popular tailor fishing area which is adjacent to but outside the new Fish Habitat Protection Area.

The updated and final plan of management for the Kalbarri Blue Holes FHPA, FMP188 is available from [Department of Fisheries website](#)⁵ (web page opens in a new window)

The map below shows the area involved and the location. The area used by most people for tailor fishing is actually outside the northern boundary of the FHPA.

On 20 December 2007, the Fisheries Minister announced the establishment of the FHPA in a media release, as below.

Minister's Media Release:- Kalbarri Blue Holes becomes a Fish Habitat Protection Area

Fisheries Minister Jon Ford has resolved a long-running community issue in Kalbarri by creating a Fish Habitat Protection Area at the well-known Blue Holes near the town.

The name Blue Holes refers to the inter-tidal pools within the limestone reef south-west of the town, which shelter marine life and provide a unique educational experience for the observation of aquatic life near to the shore. It is an easily accessible reef area almost half a kilometre long and between 130 and 140m wide.

"In the process of creating this Fish Habitat Protection Area, I have taken into account a lot of community feedback in considering the boundaries so that recreational fishing activities can continue at popular beach locations adjacent to the FHPA," Mr Ford said.

"The conservation area supports an interesting array of marine life and habitat types and marine surveys have shown the potential for fish populations to increase in size and diversity if we remove fishing activity at the Blue Holes."

All forms of fishing within the FHPA, including the collection of marine organisms and the use of motorised vessels, are now prohibited, effective from December 21.

The Minister said the local community had been involved in the process that led to the establishment of the protection area, and the success of its long-term management would depend on the continued stewardship of residents.

"A Kalbarri Blue Holes working group will be formed to oversee the implementation of management strategies, from the installation of educational signage to wider community education and monitoring of the area, to maintain and promote its environmental values," Mr Ford said.

Jamie Waite, from Friends of the Blue Holes, today welcomed the formal establishment of the Fish Habitat Protection Area at the Blue Holes.

Mr Waite said the conservation of the aquatic ecosystem offered a new dimension to enjoying the marine environment around Kalbarri.

"The enjoyment from simply observing fish and marine life in their natural environment can be breathtaking and we look forward to sharing that with many of the locals and tourists who come to Kalbarri each year," he said.

"Kalbarri's Blue Holes provide a wonderful and accessible window into a rich marine environment and it will be our goal to keep it healthy and protected for everyone to appreciate."

End of Minister's Media Release, December 2007.