



Benthic Nature Reserve Policy

Policy

Recfishwest supports Benthic Nature Reserves, which are specified areas that aim to fully protect benthic values while allowing recreational fishing for pelagic species.

Recfishwest believes there can be long-term benefits for recreational fishers and the community generally from establishing some of Western Australia's ocean areas as Benthic Nature Reserves, as used in other locations in Australia. Their primary function is to provide protected scientific reference zones for future generations.

Benthic Nature Reserves can have clearly defined objectives for benthic communities whilst at the same time permitting recreational fishing for pelagic species which are not constrained by the zoning.

The use of Benthic Nature Reserves as a buffer to Strict Nature Reserves can significantly reduce the size required to achieve the latter's objectives.

Benthic Nature Reserves are seen as compatible tool to be carefully used in conjunction with other IUCN Categories to meet conservation objectives while maintaining pelagic recreational fishing values in a given area.

Benthic Nature Reserves would be characterised by two principal features:

- 1.** That the populations of marine species would be very close to their natural state before human exploitation. This accords with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature description of "*largely complete set of expected native species in ecologically significant densities*" and meets IUCN Category 1a. They should also have "*a full set of expected native ecosystems, largely intact with intact ecological processes*".

In order to maintain sound populations of benthic species at near natural levels, mortality due to fishing in the lower 50% of the water depth must be zero. Regulations should therefore prevent fishing for demersal species which reside in the benthic zone.

- 2.** That Benthic Nature Reserves should be free of evidence of all human development and identified environmental impacts and there should be no anchoring or fishing for any benthic species in the area. Benthic Nature Reserves are primarily and principally areas for scientific reference and research.

Definitions

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in its definition of Protected Area Management Categories defines Benthic Nature Reserves in Category 1a (*Note: this is the highest level of protection listed by the IUCN*):-

Benthic Nature Reserves: A protected area to conserve regionally, nationally or globally outstanding ecosystems, species (occurrences or aggregations) and/or geodiversity features. Category 1a protected areas are strictly protected areas, generally with only limited human visitation. They are often (but not always) relatively small, in contrast to Category 1b.

Definition: Benthic Nature Reserves protect biodiversity and possibly some geological/geomorphological features, where human visitation, use and impacts are strictly controlled and limited to ensure protection of the conservation values. Such protected areas can serve as indispensable reference areas for scientific research and monitoring.

Recfishwest would consider the following characteristics before supporting or recommending Benthic Nature Reserves;

- Such areas have been clearly identified as being essential to the overall marine planning objectives of the MPA.
- Such areas should be adequate in size, but not excessive for the published scientifically supported objectives.
- Such areas will normally be remote from popular accessible recreational fishing locations, towns or tourist developments.
- Visitation levels in these areas should be restricted to scientific research and monitoring only.
- Adjacent terrestrial areas should be adequately managed to regulate any use which could impact on the integrity and objectives of the Benthic Nature Reserves.
- The visual amenity of the area must be maintained, placement of management devices such as signage and markers must consider Benthic Nature Reserve values.
- The establishment of such areas will require effective consultation with other stakeholders such as local communities, representatives of indigenous groups, conservationists and commercial fishers.
- Wherever possible, detrimental impacts adjacent on the environment contained within Benthic Nature Reserves should be strictly managed using the precautionary principle.