



Declaration of Intentions between France-New Caledonia and Australia on the Sustainable Management of the Coral Sea

The *Declaration of Intentions between France-New Caledonia and Australia on the Sustainable Management of the Coral Sea* (the Declaration), signed in 2010, confirms the intention for Australia and France-New Caledonia to work collaboratively to:

- Strengthen the scientific framework for collaboration on the conservation and management of the Coral Sea and its environs;
- Establish long term collaboration between the bodies and institutions responsible for the management of ocean, reef and lagoon areas of the Coral Sea; and
- Strengthen regional capacity building efforts to ensure a comprehensive trans-boundary approach to the conservation of biological diversity of the Coral Sea, including natural resources, in a cooperative and complementary manner.

This newsletter will be published periodically to provide an update on the progression of activities under the Declaration.

Australia's Review of Commonwealth Marine Reserves

The Australian Government is committed to protecting the marine environment and the national representative system of marine protected areas around Australia. All Commonwealth marine reserves (including the Coral Sea) remain in place.

In 2014 the Australian Government commissioned an independent review into Commonwealth marine reserves that were established in November 2012. The Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve was one of the reserves considered by the independent review.

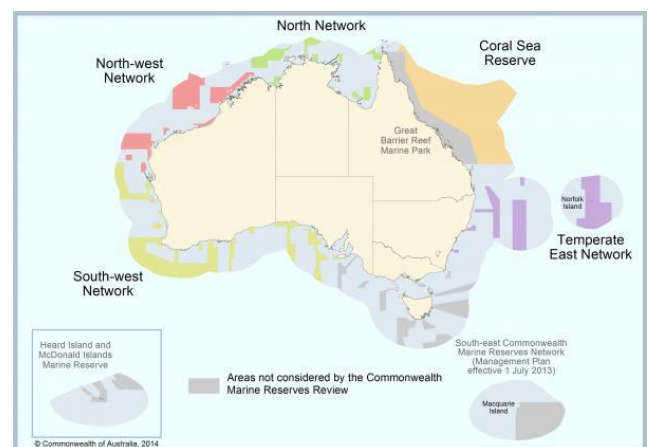
The Review was conducted to consider what management arrangements would best protect our marine environment and accommodate the many activities that Australians love to enjoy in our oceans.

There were two components to the Review; an Expert Scientific Panel to review the science supporting the marine reserves, and five Bioregional Advisory Panels to facilitate enhanced consultation with stakeholders on marine reserves.

The Review will inform the development of new management plans for the reserves. These

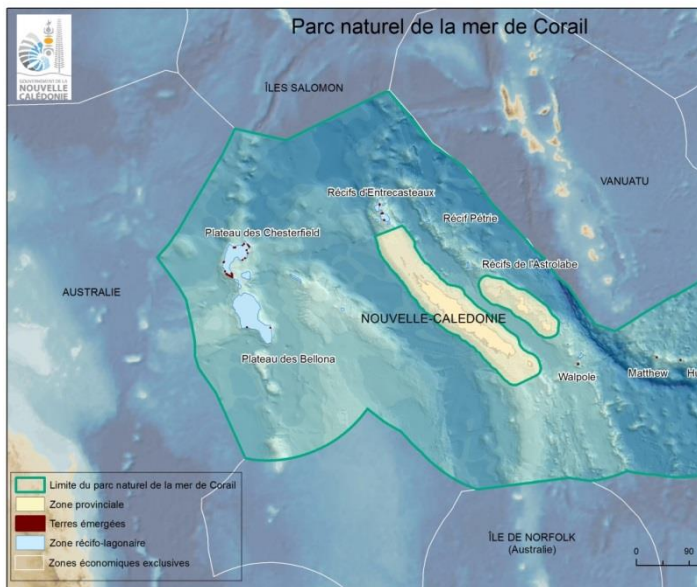
plans, prepared by the Director of National Parks, will maximise protection of the marine environment while minimising impacts on stakeholders. The public will have further opportunities to comment on the management arrangements for Commonwealth marine reserves during the preparation of new management plans.

Information about the scope of the Commonwealth Marine Reserves Review and its terms of reference can be found on the Review's website at: www.marinereservesreview.gov.au



The Coral Sea Nature Park: On the way to developing the management plan

Committed to the protection of its exceptional maritime natural and cultural heritage, New Caledonia created in 2014 the Coral Sea Nature Park. Covering all of the remote islands as well as the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the park covers an area of 1.3 million square kilometres.



The Coral Sea Nature Park aims both at protecting the rich fauna and flora and enhancing its economic value while improving the already existing bond between the Kanak community and the sea. The regional integration of the Park will build on increased cooperation with the border countries in the Coral Sea and a twinning with the future Cook Islands Park.

The Park now needs to develop a management plan defining the conservation and promotion objectives as well as the strategy to put in place.

A management committee, co-chaired by the New Caledonian Government and France shall deal with the development and monitoring of this management plan. It also advises on any activity carried out within the Park area. As both a shared and committed governance structure, this committee brings together, alongside with France, all the stakeholders from the New Caledonian society: Institutions (Government, Congress, Economic, Social and Environmental Council, Provinces, Customary Senate),

customary councils, representatives of professional activities (fishermen, ship-owners, oil executives, mining executives, leisure boating industry professionals) as well as the civil society represented by the environmental protection associations.

The French Marine Protected Areas Agency, as a French public body, and also non-governmental organisations, provide technical and methodological support. The management committee builds on the expertise of a scientific committee. The local communities in charge of managing the maritime space of New Caledonia are coordinated within a harmonisation committee. The Park Secretariat is in the hands of the Maritime Affairs Division.



The Management Committee met for the first time on 28 May 2015 under the co-chairmanship of Mr. Philippe Germain, President of the Government of New Caledonia, and Mr. Vincent Bouvier, the French High-Commissioner to New Caledonia. A board was established, its role being to direct the development of the management plan more closely. The board has since then met on a monthly basis. It also coordinates working groups on specific themes: aims, science, island and coral ecosystems, pelagic ecosystems, deep-sea ecosystems, connectivity, and communication. Cohesion days were organised to encourage the different actors to meet and exchange in a more informal surrounding.



The challenge for those who, aware of the Coral Sea Nature Park's exceptional rich heritage but also of its vulnerability, are today fully involved in this process lies in developing the Park Management Plan together, founded on mutual listening and respect, guided by culture, experience on the field and the expertise of each and every one.



Coral Sea Marine Debris and Microplastics Project

Parks Australia undertook fieldwork in the Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve in late November, early December 2015. Joining with the Bureau of Meteorology's (BoM) annual Automatic Weather Station maintenance trip, Parks staff used the opportunity to trial various methods to collect information on marine debris, and establish photo monitoring sites on selected cays and islands in the Coral Sea.

Parks staff gained expert advice and guidance for the project from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) and Queensland Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing. Data on marine debris and microplastics was collected through manta net tows in the waters surrounding Coral Sea islands, and through terrestrial line transects on islands and cays.



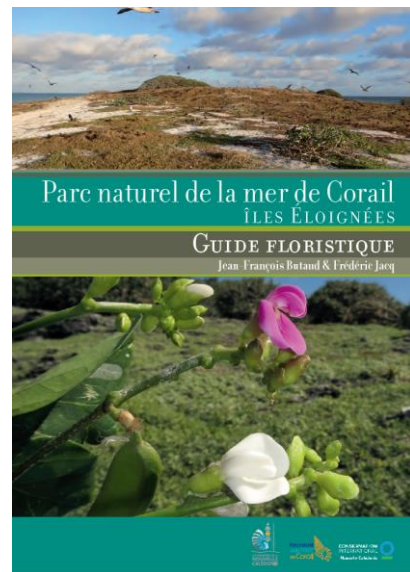
Parks Staff based in Hobart took some time out of the office to familiarise themselves with the methods to detect and record marine debris.

You can find out more about Australia's Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve on our website at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/marine/marine-reserves/coral-sea>

Guide Book on the Flowers in the Remote Islands

During its 2012 and 2013 missions in the islands located within the maritime area of New Caledonia, the Fisheries and Marine Environment Department was accompanied by a botanist.

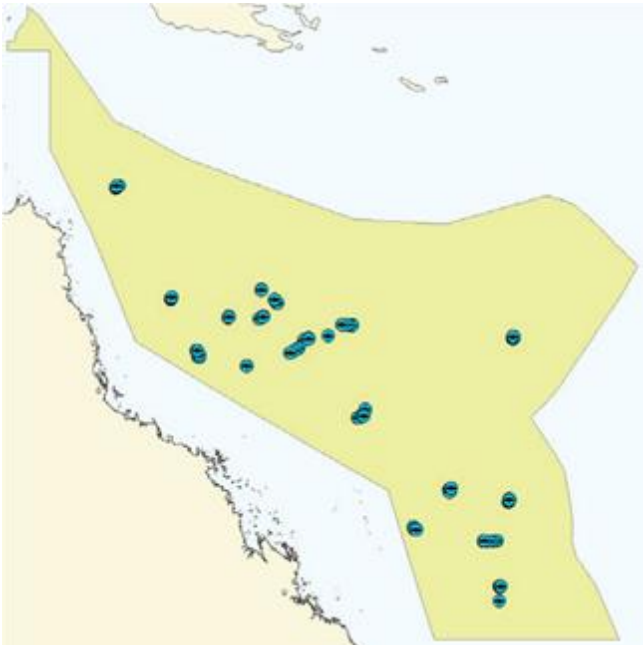


He studied the flora and plants on these remote islands and then released a Guide Book on the Flowers in the Remote Islands that you can download here:

http://www.affmar.gouv.nc/portal/page/portal/affmar/peche/presentation/projet_parc_marin_mer_coral

Reef Life Surveys of the Coral Sea

The Reef Life Survey Foundation (RLS) is a global community of volunteer divers who undertake scientific surveys to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of reef systems across the world. RLS divers surveyed 160 sites on 17 Coral Sea reefs during 2012 and 2013 (see Figure below). The surveys measured biodiversity on the reefs including fish communities, invertebrates such as sea urchins and habitat types such as coral, macroalgae and sponge. Nearly 600 species of fish were identified, counted and had length estimates made.



The surveys found that Coral Sea reefs are the only locations in Australia with collections of fishes, crustaceans and clams typical of those found on oceanic Pacific islands. Although only a few hundred kilometres from the Great Barrier Reef, Coral Sea reef animal communities are more similar to the oceanic islands and atolls of Tonga and Samoa, found more than 2,500 km away.

On southern Coral Sea reefs, such as Cato and Wreck Reefs, fragile branching corals are common and coral cover is relatively high at around 40%.

Travelling further north, coral cover declines. Central Coral Sea reefs, such as Holmes and Mellish, possess coral cover as low as 7% and tend to be dominated by different types of algae. Northern reefs have the most diverse reef fish communities, however, southern reefs have more of the coral-dependent species such as butterflyfish, due to their greater coral cover.

Southern Coral Sea reefs are a global stronghold for sea snakes, which are declining in many other parts of the world. From Marion Reef south, seasnakes approached divers on almost all dives. Seasnakes are largely absent from northern Coral Sea reefs.

Coral Seareefs are a hotspot for reef sharks, with higher numbers sighted here by RLS divers than at most locations worldwide. Sharks and large fishes are most abundant on central Coral Sea reefs, particularly those reefs protected from fishing. Large grazers such as parrotfish are also common on these reefs. The Marine National Park Zone that protects the Coringa-Herald and Lihou reef systems supports an estimated 58% higher biomass of large fishes than similar reefs that remain open to fishing.



Photo courtesy G. Edgar RLS

More information about Australia's Reef Life Survey partnerships is on the website:

<http://reeflifesurvey.com/reef-life-survey/rls-australia/>

News from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) – Coastal clean-up brings positive results for the Reef

Almost 1000 volunteers from across Queensland took part in the Great Barrier Reef Clean-up during October, collecting almost 15 tonnes of rubbish including 55,000 individual items of debris.

Over two weekends at more than 20 official and self-managed clean-up sites from Cape York to Bundaberg, volunteers collected more than 350 bags of rubbish from beaches, parks and waterways feeding into the Reef catchment.

The most frequent items collected were plastic lids, plastic bottles, aluminium cans, cigarette butts, broken glass and balloons.

The rubbish and litter collected during the clean-up will no longer pose a risk to marine life, won't smother coral and it won't become a navigational hazard. The clean-up has also raised awareness and reminded people not to let their litter impact on the Reef.

The series of local clean-up events were run by GBRMPA with support through Reef Trust and in partnership with the Australian Marine Debris Initiative, Tangaroa Blue Foundation, Eco Barge Clean Seas Inc. and Reef Guardian Councils. The Reef Guardian program recognises the good environmental work undertaken by communities and industries to protect the Great Barrier Reef and includes schools, farmers and graziers, fishers and councils in the region.

The Great Barrier Reef Clean-up forms part of a series of activities under the Marine Debris project supported through Reef Trust encouraging the community to not let their litter impact on the Reef. In 2015 GBRMPA partnered with Tangaroa Blue to remove 7 tonne of marine debris from the Yeppoon coast following Tropical Cyclone Marcia. Through the Great Barrier Reef Clean-up schools participating in the Reef Guardian Schools program also learnt about marine debris and helped remove more than a tonne of marine debris across from across the Reef catchment.

The data collected from the clean-ups will be analysed and entered into the Australian Marine Debris Initiative (AMDI) database. The AMDI promotes the use of standard methods to collect marine debris from the environment and supports the prevention of marine debris from occurring in the first place and tracks debris to the source where possible.

Adding data collected from the Great Barrier Reef Clean-up to the AMDI database will help create a comprehensive overview of the quantity and types of marine debris found along the Australian coastline and start to identify trends over time. It enables hot spots to be identified along the Great Barrier Reef as well as type and origin of the rubbish collected to help create source reduction plans with the local community and government.

For more news from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority visit their Reef in Brief newsletter.



Photo courtesy GBRMPA