

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.

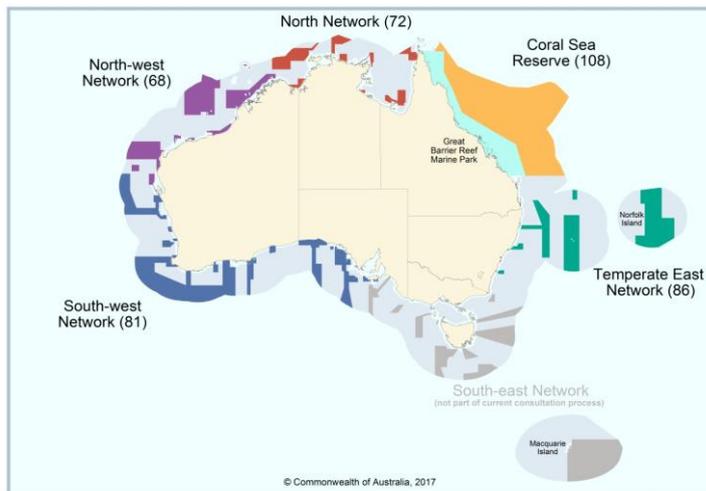
This newsletter will be published periodically to provide an update on the progression of activities under the *Declaration*.

Parks Australia : Managing Australia's Coral Sea Marine Park

In Australian waters, Parks Australia is developing a management plan that sets out the zones and rules for activities in the Coral Sea Marine Park.

Marine parks are recognised around the world as one of the most effective ways of protecting our marine environment.

The Australian Government is committed to a National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas.



Number of individual comments received during consultation

Australia has the second largest area of marine parks in the world, after the United States. This includes the Coral Sea Marine Park.

We're taking a balanced approach to managing our marine parks, one that protects the environment while supporting people's livelihoods.

To help us manage the Coral Sea Marine Park over the next 10 years, we're preparing a plan that will set out the zones and rules for activities within the park.

At the same time, we're also preparing plans for our other marine parks in Australian waters.

In developing these plans, we will carefully consider our international obligations for maritime safety and conservation throughout this process.

We are also asking for ideas from the public.

In 2016, when we let people know that we are preparing management plans for our marine parks, we received a total of 54,322 submissions.

Of these, 104 individual submissions and thousands of campaign submissions commented specifically on the Coral Sea Marine Park.

These submissions included requests for increased protection of reefs, increased access to the Coral Sea for commercial and recreational fishing, and highlighted the importance of tourism in marine parks as a major contributor to employment in regional economies.

On 21 July 2017, a [draft management plan](#) for the Coral Sea Marine Park was released by the Director of National Parks for public consultation. Until this plan is finalised there will be no change to the existing arrangements in the Coral Sea Marine Park.

Information about Australian Marine Parks and their management arrangements can be found on Parks Australia's website at www.parksaustralia.gov.au/marine

Australia monitoring and research : Coral bleaching, sea cucumbers and marine debris

The Australian Government is working to better understand and protect the species and ecosystems of the Coral sea.

In June 2016, Parks Australia undertook the Coral Sea Clean-up and Bio-discovery Voyage. Nobody expected the 12 day voyage to the Coral Sea to be plain sailing. High winds delayed departure and sea legs were tested on a very rough crossing, but despite the challenges, the trip was highly successful.



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The clean-up team visited 10 islands, filling the holds with about two tonnes of marine debris which ranged from thongs and plastic bottles to a bar fridge and toy piano. Removing such a large amount of debris, before it fragments and enters the sand and ocean, benefits the wildlife both in water and on land. The trip also provided an opportunity to get the word out about how important it is to reduce marine debris.



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Bush Blitz research scientists collected specimens both on land and at sea. The two teachers aboard shared their experiences with their students via blogs and Skype.

In April 2017, researchers set sail again to assess coral bleaching, sea cucumber abundance and marine debris in the Coral Sea. Surveys assessed if sites within the Coral Sea Marine Park were experiencing similar coral bleaching to the Great Barrier Reef. Researchers also assessed sites where illegal harvesting of sea cucumber has occurred over the last year.



© Gary Cranitch (Queensland Museum Network)

James Cook University scientists took the opportunity to continue work looking at the connectivity of Coral Sea reefs and resurveyed sites visited last year to quantify levels of marine debris accumulation.

Illegal fishing in the Australian Coral Sea Marine Park

The Coral is being targeted for sea cucumber (bêche de mer) by Vietnamese fishing vessels. The Australian Government is cooperating with foreign governments to detect and stop illegal fishing.

Over the past 12 months, there have been numerous apprehensions of Vietnamese fishing vessels and their crew in Australian waters, in the Coral Sea by Australian Border Force, working in cooperation with the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA). The vessels have been targeting bêche-de-mer (sea cucumber) illegally in the Australian Coral Sea Marine Park.

Commander Rear Admiral Peter Laver said the apprehensions were the result of Australian Government agencies' concerted efforts to detect and stop illegal fishing in Australian waters.

"The size of Australia's maritime domain may lead these fishers to believe that our seas are unmonitored and therefore freely available to theft," Rear Admiral Peter Laver said. *"Our resources, including personnel, water and air-based assets, as well as cutting-edge technology, allow us to monitor and promptly apprehend those in the business of illegal fishing in Australian waters."*

AFMA's General Manager Operations Peter Venslovas said that these apprehensions further demonstrate Australia's strong stance against illegal fishing in Australian waters. *"Foreign fishers seeking to take advantage and target our fish resources will be caught and run the risk of being prosecuted and having their boats confiscated and destroyed,"* Mr Venslovas said.

Parks Australia's Manager for Marine Park Compliance, Scott Clementz, said the plundering of Australian Marine Parks cannot be tolerated.

"Stopping illegal foreign fishing is essential for the protection of our marine life and marine parks," Mr Clementz said. *"Parks Australia welcomes the rapid and highly effective response by our partner agencies in responding to these damaging activities."*

In an effort to address the issue, we are working with foreign governments, implementing educational



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campaigns at the communities where the vessels originate, increasing monitoring surveillance and interception of vessels and pursuing court action and destruction of vessels to deter these activities.

The harvesting of species, such as bêche-de-mer by foreign fishers in Australian waters is an offence under Australian legislation.

To report any illegal and suspicious fishing activities please call the 24 hour CRIMFISH hotline on 1800 274 634, email intelligence@afma.gov.au or submit an [online form](#).

Management plan: citizens invited to make proposals !

"The Caledonians have the floor", the name of the operation that took place from February 2 to 28 in the three provinces of New Caledonia, was an opportunity for the public to announce their proposals for the future Management of the natural park.

A new stage has just been completed in the implementation of the draft management plan for the Coral Sea Natural Park. More than two years after the start of the drafting of the strategic document, it was time for the Caledonians to express their views on the management objectives of this maritime area managed by the Government of New Caledonia. With the organization of this public consultation operation, planned from the beginning, all Caledonian citizens could learn more about the nature park and share their ideas on the subject.



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Public meetings and debates

A total of 19 public meetings were held. For each of them, a film made by IFREMER unveiled the reefs of the park. Then, an explanation was given on what the park is, followed by a presentation of the management plan, a five-year strategic document. At the very end, the debate could begin with an exchange of questions and answers between the participants and Aurélie Fourdrain, in charge of the nature park. Before the meetings, and to help in the expression of the proposals, the participants had access via the Internet to the draft management plan detailing the 15 main objectives desired to best manage the natural park and to all documents published for the 'opportunity. A simplified version of

the management plan in the form of an illustrated booklet, a map of the park and its islands, and a dedicated questionnaire were downloadable or searchable online. These documents were also made available during the meetings.

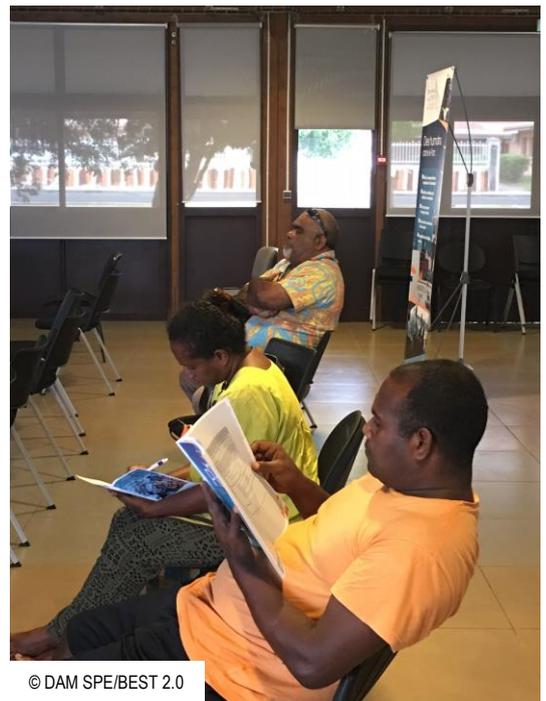
Hundreds of questionnaires

At the end of Operation "The Caledonians have the floor", approximately 250 questionnaires were counted and counted. Last March, a synthesis and analysis of the information gathered was proposed to the representatives of the members of the management committee of the Coral Sea Natural Park meeting within an office. The final step is to submit a draft management plan to the management committee. A date remains to be defined.



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See the public consultation in pictures on our Facebook page: [parcmecorail](#), and visit our website : mer-de-corail.gouv.nc



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The Cook Islands host large marine parks

A fifth meeting of managers of Pacific marine parks over 400,000 km² was held in Rarotonga from 20 to 24 February. Objective: to establish diplomatic ties and strengthen cooperation between countries in the region with the management of a marine park.

Exchanges of experiences and wills in terms of management of marine parks were at the heart of discussions during these 4 days in Rarotonga,



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the largest of the Cook Islands. Organized every year, for 5 years, this appointment encourages better acquaintance to consider fruitful collaborations. The presentation of the management plans of the invited countries revealed different wishes. New Caledonia (Coral Sea Natural Park), Australia (the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park or GBR), and the Cook Islands (future Marae Moana Park) are pursuing a

sustainable management goal where conservation is only part of the objectives. In this area, the GBR has the oldest experience. At its creation in 1970 and up to 2004, 5% of the park's surface area was classified as a non-harvest area. Today, this area is 33%. The United States (Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument), Kiribati (protected area of the Phoenix Islands) and the archipelago of Palau (marine sanctuary) opt instead for a conservation purpose. Other topics discussed during the meeting included :

Caledonia's goal of being fully active in international relations, the Twinning Agreement with the Cook Islands, and the financing arrangements for the parks. *"New Caledonia, like Australia and the USA, is mostly self-financed by governments"*, explained Christophe Fonfreyde, delegate of New Caledonia and Maritimes Affairs' one of managers *"Kiribati uses funds from the payment of*

fishing licenses of vessels active in their EEZ but outside their protected area of the Phoenix Islands. And Palau benefits from a tax on the departures of foreign tourists, paid by the customs".

For 2018, the US Embassy in Fiji should be approached by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to finance a new meeting.

Twinning Nc / Cook Islands

The actions planned in 2017 are: the realization, with the assistance of SPC, of a bibliographic study and possibly of a tuna tagging program to better understand the interactions between coastal and offshore fishing ; The comparison of biological data between parks (fish, sharks, turtles, whales, birds ...) with the help of researchers; The reception on board the Amborella of a person in charge of the Marae Moana natural park for a follow-up mission to the reefs of Entrecasteaux; And exchanges of experience between computer services in charge of geographic information systems (GIS).

Sharks under high surveillance

Improving the protection of sharks in New Caledonia and in particular in the Coral Sea Natural Park is at the heart of the APEX scientific mission supervised by Laurent Vigliola of the IRD, in close collaboration with an international research community. Several observation techniques are favored, including the submarine listening network between Caledonia and Australia.



Squale tag © JMB -IRD Projet APEX

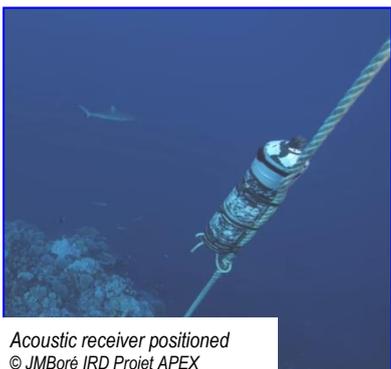
Tracking remote sharks in the South Pacific is organized in several ways. The method most deployed by researchers is the electronic chip, a real acoustic radio transmitter. Scientists insert it under the skin of the shark and then a signal is issued as soon as the fish passes near an underwater listening station. Thanks to this method, a real acoustic monitoring network (see map) now exists in Caledonia and Australia, and globally. Around Grande-Terre, at the Belep and the atolls of Entrecasteaux, 83 listening

stations serve to give the position of hundreds of sharks. On the Australian side, this regulated device reports more than 2,000 acoustic stations. The animal tracking database contains more than 65 million detections! A large Australian community of specialists collects and analyzes information through the National Ocean Monitoring Network.

Regular data reports

"The Australian government has maintained its network for several years in collaboration with Australian institutes and universities," explains Laurent Vigliola, a researcher at the IRD who, through the APEX program, collaborates with scientists from around the world. *"As a result, when animals tagged in New Caledonia go to Australia, they can be detected if they reach the Australian network before they are caught or caught."*

Thanks to a regular survey of the Australian listening stations, the Australian colleagues of Laurent Vigliola inform it as soon as fish marked by the scientist are detected. Another technique implemented with Australia: stereo baited cameras. A camera bait technique used to better understand predator diversity and size in a given location. Professor Jessica Meeuwig of the University of Western Australia and Dr. Tom Letessier of the Zoological Society of London are in charge of baited stereo camera measurements. Finally, tiny, long-range cameras can be attached to the shark's dorsal fin and record what the animal sees and does for 48 hours.



Acoustic receiver positioned
© JMBoré IRD Projet APEX



Map of acoustic monitoring network between New Caledonia and Australia in 2015 Projet APEX

"Aussie" video cameras !

This state-of-the-art science-based technology must ultimately provide a detailed follow-up of a shark's life and way of life. Dr. Fabrice Jaine and Nikolai Liebsch of the Australian company CATS (Customized Animal Tracking Solutions) developed these miniature multifunction devices. They integrate a camera capable of recording up to 8 hours of video in continuous and high resolution. The name of this technological jewel ? The Cats Cam which combines, including video images, 3D accelerometer, and depth gauge. In July 2016, a first deployment of 2 cameras attached to the dorsal fin of the sharks was carried out successfully. *"Unfortunately the cameras have surfaced away from the planned site, so they have been lost,"* says Laurent Vigliola. *"Since then, I have bought two."* Cost of the operation: 10,000 Australian dollars for a camera. *"Before retrying the manipulation, I have to carry out careful tests."* Beginning in July 2015, the APEX mission, with three campaigns per year, will continue until July 2019.

Humpback Whales: In Search of Perfect Song

The **WHERE** project, implemented in 2016, through the **MARINE mAminals of the CorAl Sea (or MARACAS)** scientific campaigns, aims to improve knowledge about the behavior and habits of humpback whales in the region. An international scientific collaboration has been established, notably with Australia.



An interdisciplinary approach (ecology, molecular biology, bioacoustics, satellite telemetry and spatial statistical modeling) was chosen for the WHD project of the IRD, conducted in partnership with WWF, DAFE and Operation Cetaceans. Final objective: to assist in the implementation of appropriate management and protection measures for marine mammals in the Coral Sea Natural Park. The use of photographic and / or genetic data helps to establish the connectivity of humpback whales, including the relationship between animals observed in remote areas of the natural park and those encountered near Grande-Terre or in Is Australian. During the missions that will be conducted this year additional data will be collected. Collaborations with the universities of Queensland (Australia) and Saint Andrews (Great Britain) will encourage the deployment of acoustic buoys on the Chesterfield-Bellona Plateau as well as on the southern submarine Pins. The use of satellite beacons will track the movement of animals within the park and identify key habitats.

More powerful acoustic recorder

During the MARACAS 1 and 2 campaigns conducted in August 2016, IRD researcher Claire Garrigue collected acoustic data from the former hunting areas of the Chesterfield and Bellona plateaus. In her report, the scientist confided that, unfortunately, the recordings were short and of average quality. That is why, for the 2017 season, stand-alone acoustic recorders will be deployed on the Antigonina submarine in the Coral Sea Natural Park. The information gathered will make it possible to evaluate the period of presence of male singers at this location. The songs collected at Chesterfield will also enable us to study the transmission of songs between the East Australian and New Caledonia. Other collaborations are underway with Oregon State University (USA), Auckland University or NOAA, the US Oceanic and Atmospheric Observing Agency.

Working for borderless cooperation against Blue boats

With 59 observations recorded, 18 blue boats intercepted, and 28 tons of sea cucumbers seized, New Caledonian resources and biodiversity are hard hit by this phenomenon of illegal fishing. Along with Australia, the countries of the region and the United States, New Caledonia was in Brisbane to reflect on a common strategy.

Each country concerned must be able to understand the situation of the other. This was the objective of the Forum for Defense Cooperation organized by the Fisheries Agency of the Pacific Islands Forum on 1 and 2 May in Brisbane. At the technical meeting, the 13 participating countries in the Pacific region had a unique opportunity to gain a clearer picture of the situation in the region and to reflect together on future actions.

Prepare an action plan

Our maritime border with Australia makes of Caledonia a privileged partner in the implementation

of a strategy of surveillance of the Coral Sea. First of all, because our two protected areas coexist there. But also because of reports by air surveillance, by fishermen and by coastal populations, which make New Caledonia and Australia, the first countries impacted by the intrusion of blue boats into their waters. In third place is Papua New Guinea followed by Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia. Thanks to the sharing of specific information held by each of them, the operation and organization of this fleet of vessels flying the Vietnamese flag, an action plan could be presented by next July.



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