

WAFIC calls on DBCA to sort out the South Coast marine park consultation fiasco



WAFIC Chief Executive, Darryl Hockey is calling for the South Coast Marine Park consultation process to be brought into line with government policy

One thing is absolutely clear: the consultation process for the proposed South Coast Marine Park is a complete shambles.

It has been corrupted by the infiltration of outsiders, while locals have been denied a say.

The Community Reference Committee (CRC) meeting in Esperance was shut down, when it didn't come up with the pre-determined outcomes set out by DBCA and its overseas advisers. And the local CRC was then discarded and permanently disbanded by DBCA.

In retrospect, the writing was on the wall in Bremer Bay, when the CRC passed a resolution supporting the importance of having a healthy local commercial fishing sector.

DBCA also ignored the input of the commercial sector itself, and didn't properly engage with relevant persons along the way.

They ignored the input of the fisheries scientists from DPIRD. They ignored the wishes of the Esperance Shire Council. Then the contract of the DBCA Community Liaison Officer was left to expire.

They then stacked the science Sector Advisory Group (SAG) with eco-happy-clappers and ensured that not a single DPIRD fisheries scientist was appointed. Ironically, DPIRD is the one source of reliable marine science.

The scientific basis of the latest draft maps is sadly missing, and DBCA's supposed planning partner, DPIRD, has unbelievably been completely shut out of the supposedly 'joint' sanctuary zone planning for many months on end. The door was simply slammed in their face.

The input of many indigenous people is being denied, there has been no consideration of cumulative impacts on fishing and no socio-economic studies have been undertaken to inform or guide the decision making.

In simple terms, the process is a total trainwreck.

DBCA has not engaged in good faith throughout this engagement process, and the serious emotional pressures, distress and anxieties imposed upon fishing families and coastal communities have come about from the reckless indifference of senior people in government.

It's just like Robodebt, where Canberra ignored the repeated warnings of the likely consequences, and yet still pushed ahead, despite an open awareness of the devastating impacts occurring upon innocent people.

Those who had influence over the process, including Ministers, are currently being held to account and their whole careers and legacies are on the line.

Adverse effects

It's now getting to a critical point in time. If the Indicative Management Plan and draft maps are released by DBCA for public consultation and these indicate 'adverse effects' on the commercial fishing industry, then it will mean that government commitments have openly been broken.

There is no budget allocation for compensation, and all WAFIC calls over the past two years for a safety net have been rejected.

The Ministers have explained this by making a rock-solid commitment to WAFIC, the CRC, indigenous representatives and sector advisory groups that the marine park sanctuaries will be designed in such a way as to avoid adverse impacts on commercial fishing, to the

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extent there would be 'little need' for compensation.

So, for DBCA to introduce 'adverse effects' after the Ministers have openly promised not to, would again demonstrate that the views of local people have been heartlessly swept aside and the process has been a con-job from the start.

WAFIC's view is that promises openly given in good faith must be honoured in good faith.

The Ministers asked us to trust them that a fair outcome would be delivered and commercial fishing would not be an unfair casualty.

As an industry, we are hopeful that government will recognise the risks of further pursuing this badly flawed process, as it has been patently unjust all along.

Nevertheless, we remain prepared to sit down and take a positive, constructive and collaborative approach to achieve a sensible balance which delivers valuable sanctuaries without wreaking savage impacts on fishing families and coastal communities.

But most certainly, we are not prepared to have the commercial fishing industry treated badly. Like many others we are thoroughly fed up with the disrespect being shown to primary producers.

It should be noted that 570 people attended the recent cultural heritage meeting in Esperance.

Keeping promises

To be clear: if the proposed marine park sanctuary zone percentage is 0%, it will have no impact on commercial fishing, coastal communities, local socio-economics and food supply.

If it is 10%, it will have a serious impact. If it is 20%, it will be nothing short of devastating. If it is over 25%, it will be catastrophic.

So, let's be straight. DBCA, working to the instructions of its overseas

advisers, and supported by the stacked science SAG, wants 25-30%, so it is currently totally focused on achieving a catastrophic outcome for commercial fishing.

Therefore WAFIC has absolutely no choice but to throw everything at this threat. There is simply no going back, and government will be openly held to account in the event of any unintended broken promises.

We simply have no other option. This is about the livelihoods of south coast families and communities. This is about the supply of fresh local fish to Western Australians.

This is about the Western Australian lifestyle and Western Australians making decisions about Western Australia.

This is about integrity, trust and fairness. It's about care. It's about heart. It's about humanity.

This is about the keeping of solemn Ministerial promises, the keeping of commitments.

It will be a challenge for the government, because if it happens to let DBCA get it wrong, and the sanctuary zones are over-reached, these 'adverse effects' will mean goodbye to the heart and soul of coastal communities.

Goodbye to jobs and opportunities. Goodbye to the maritime culture of towns like Eucla, Esperance, Hopetoun, Bremer Bay and Albany.

It will mean empty boat harbours and no local fresh fish. It'll all be gone. And regional WA won't sit quietly while this happens.

Darryl Hockey
Chief Executive Officer
WA Fishing Industry Council



Rivers of US dollars are influencing WA government policies

For months, WAFIC has been active in calling out the way the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) has outsourced its decision-making to rich overseas eco-lobbyists, who are funded by US billionaires that made their fortunes from fossil fuel and greenhouse gas.

Well, there's certainly no holding them back. Recently, the Pew Charitable Trusts and their mates placed a full-page advertisement in the Weekend Australian newspaper to thank the Federal Environment Minister for putting in a marine park.

We looked up the standard advertising rate and it is, wait for it, \$101,000 for a full page!

That's right, this lot can afford to splash huge licks of money on thank-you cards.

But wouldn't you think that if a Non-Government Organisation had \$100,000 of loose coin, that it might actually spend it on saving some whales, or dolphins?

No, this lot has bottomless pits of money, ready to spray about to try to buy political influence, ignoring the democratic input of local people.

This group brings no science to the marine park debate, just film nights about leafy sea dragons, social media posts, pro-forma petitions and feel-good messaging about marine waters, that are already rated as 96% sustainable, and not at risk!

WA communities can rightly ask, why is DBCA so closely aligned to this lobby group, and why it is allowing a US eco-lobby to set environmental policies for Western Australia, while ignoring local science?

It will make interesting reading when the fallout from this debacle clears and the truth is revealed.