

MEDIA RELEASE, EMBARGOED UNTIL 7 OCTOBER 2014

Australian fishing's competitive edge boosted by marine reserves

A new study has found Australia's fishing industry can gain a global competitive edge by embracing the benefits of marine reserves. The study follows the announcement on 11 September by Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt of a Review into the Commonwealth Marine Reserves Network.

The Centre for Policy Development study reveals the economic, reputational and ecosystem benefits offered by marine reserves present commercial fishing with a potential marketing advantage over competitors and an 'insurance policy' against the threats of rising fuel costs, volatile prices and stock depletion.

Net Advantage: securing our fisheries management concludes Commonwealth fisheries have limited scope to increase the total quantity of production sustainably, but that there is **an opportunity to increase the value of production**.

"Given the variety and quality of Australian seafood, sustainably certified products are an increasingly feasible sector of the market for Australian fisheries to target," study author Michael Hayman said.

Net advantage shows the Commonwealth marine reserves do not adversely impact commercial fishing in Australia, with 50 of the 62 fisheries unaffected, short-term economic losses of less than three per cent of annual catch and potential job losses below one per cent.

Marine reserves can increase fishery margins in the short term and insure fish stocks for the long term.

Mr Hayman said marine reserves benefit commercial fishing when combined with good fisheries management:

“ Although the status of Australia's Commonwealth fish stock is better than elsewhere in the world, 35 per cent of fish stocks in Commonwealth waters are either overfished or threatened by overfishing, or else have an uncertain classification. MPAs are not in conflict with commercial fishing - they can be complementary – and sustainable fisheries stand to benefit.

The main results of the study include:

- 1. Marine reserves can make it easier for commercial fisheries to gain and maintain sustainability certification.** Sustainability certification can improve profit margins for industries that specialise in high quality sustainable seafood, avoiding competition with inferior products that rely on low wages, fuel subsidies or short-term over-fishing.
- 2. Marine reserves can increase fish stock populations in surrounding areas, improving the economics of commercial fisheries.** MPAs include no-take zones, where no fishing is allowed at all. Spill-overs occur when fish from these areas increase stock populations in surrounding areas. This potentially benefits commercial fishers by increasing the amount of fish caught for the same level of effort, enabling harvests of larger and more highly valued fish.
- 3. Marine protection provides long-term insurance against population crashes.** Marine reserves can increase the diversity and density of marine species, improving the overall health and resilience of marine ecosystems. This allows for larger, more stable populations of commercial fish stocks.

Centre for Policy Development – making good ideas matter

cpd.org.au | PO Box K3, Haymarket 1240 | 02 9043 6815 | communications@cpd.org.au

Michael Hayman said,

“ *The ecological benefits of MPAs have been acknowledged by scientific consensus as early as 2001. An Australian-led study published in Nature this year argued the conservation benefits of MPAs are significant, drawing on 87 MPAs across 40 countries. The review will no doubt take this into account.*

Recommendations

- 1. Ensure the design of ‘no-take’ zones is informed by the latest science.** MPAs are a conservative investment in Australia’s key marine assets. Adequately sized and appropriately located ‘no-take’ zones will enable increasing dividends to flow from MPAs in the future. The Expert Scientific Panel announced should begin by accepting that scientific consensus on the benefits of MPAs dates back to 2001.
- 2. Find common ground between stakeholders by focusing on MPA benefits.** Well-planned marine protection generates a range of economic benefits, in addition to ecological benefits. The Bioregional Advisory Panels should seek to find common ground between stakeholders to increase community acceptance of final decisions on zoning. Fisheries and marine protection interests should not be constructed as two sides of a debate. A policy outcome based on the best science can be mutually beneficial.
- 3. Set aside sufficient funding for structural adjustment and ongoing management.** Australia has learned from previous adjustment packages. Now it has a more rational policy and rigorous assessment process for determining and targeting adjustment funding. There may be opportunities to achieve a double dividend from adjustment funding by identifying opportunities to buy out excess commercial fishing fleet capacity.

--ENDS--

Notes for editors

For more information, contact:

Matthew Jensen | CPD communications | matthew.jensen@cpd.org.au | 02 9043 6815 | 0405 068 761

Caroline Hoisington | CPD Marine Economy Fellow | hoisington@gmail.com

Travers McLeod | CPD Chief Executive Officer | 02 9043 6815 | 0487 302 927

About the author

Michael Hayman is the Centre for Policy Development’s Marine Economy Researcher, and part of CPD’s Sustainable Economy Program. He worked as a development economist prior to joining CPD. He has consulting experience spanning environmental, resource and agricultural economics issues across various industries and applications, as well as innovative public-private investment schemes. Michael has qualifications in environmental and resource economics, and in finance.

About the Centre for Policy Development

CPD is an independent and non-partisan public interest think tank, dedicated to seeking out creative, viable ideas based on rigorous research, to inject into Australia’s policy debates. CPD gives a diverse, cross-disciplinary community of thinkers space to generate ideas for a fair, sustainable and prosperous future for all Australians. CPD develops and promotes policy proposals to help Australia thrive and lead in a fast-changing global environment over the long-term, connecting ideas with policy makers, concerned stakeholders and the media. CPD is a non-profit organisation.

Centre for Policy Development – making good ideas matter

cpd.org.au | PO Box K3, Haymarket 1240 | 02 9043 6815 | communications@cpd.org.au