



12 January 2016

MEDIA RELEASE

EDS says Government's Marine Protected Areas proposals need more work

Today Ministers Dr Nick Smith, Nathan Guy and Maggie Barry released a consultation document on a new Marine Protected Areas Act.

"EDS welcomes this progress towards new marine protected areas legislation for New Zealand," said EDS Policy Director Raewyn Peart.

"New Zealand was a world leader in marine protection during the 1970s with the passing of the Marine Reserves Act 1971. But we have since fallen well behind the international community. New legislation is long overdue.

"There are some excellent elements in the government's proposals including expanding the range of marine protection tools which can be deployed and providing for a more inclusive and robust decision-making process. This should help reduce the high levels of conflict that has characterised many marine reserve proposals.

"The really disappointing aspect is that the proposals only apply to a small fraction of New Zealand's marine realm - the 12 nautical mile strip of sea around the coastline. The legislation won't apply to the bulk of our marine environment, which lies within the Exclusive Economic Zone, from 12-200 nautical miles, and contains much of our marine biodiversity.

"This is a grossly inadequate approach to marine conservation in the 21st century. It puts us well behind other developed nations and it is something that needs to be rectified during the consultation process," says Ms Peart.

"The proposals to create recreational fishing parks in the Hauraki Gulf and Marlborough Sounds could have positive outcomes if they encourage recreational fishers to engage in more robust fisheries monitoring and management. In particular, it would be good to see recreational fishers reporting their catch within the parks on phone apps or similar.

"On the other hand, there are some design issues which require further consideration to reduce the likelihood of unintended consequences from the creation of the parks.

"The current proposal is that no marine reserves can be created within the parks. As the marine environment in these areas has already degraded due to high fishing pressure, and marine reserves are the only proven tool we currently have to address this issue, they need to be on the table.

“Another unfortunate consequence of recreational fishing parks could be to shift commercial fishing from low-scale, low-impact inshore methods such as long-lining to bulk methods such as trawling which impact the seabed and damage juvenile fish habitat.

“It is now 45 years since the Marine Reserves Act was passed. This is possibly the one chance we will have in a generation to get the legislative framing for marine protection right. And to do so is essential if we are to enjoy marine places which are healthy, abundant and diverse.

These proposals are a step in the right direction but will need improving to put New Zealand back in the vanguard of marine management. In particular the scope of the Act needs widening to embrace our entire oceans environment,” concluded Ms Peart.

EDS urges everyone with an interest on the marine environment to obtain a copy of the consultation document (available at <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/consultation/mpa>) and to make a submission. Submissions close on 11 March 2016.

More: Raewyn Peart 021 613 379 or 09 815 6082