

Coral Sea Marine Park Advisory Committee

Meeting #9 Communiqué

12 April 2023, Cairns

Committee Meeting Overview

The ninth meeting of the Coral Sea Marine Park Advisory Committee was held in Cairns on Wednesday 12 April 2023.

Key agenda items for the meeting included presentations from recipients of Our Marine Park Grants funding, and updates on management activity in the Coral Sea Marine Park.

Management Report

An update was provided on key activities carried out since Meeting 8, November 2022:

Authorisations – Twelve authorisations have been issued since Meeting 8. A list of authorisations issued are available at: <https://parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/activities/authorisations-issued/>

Compliance – three compliance incidents were recorded in the CSMP between Jan- March 2023. Quarterly compliance reports can be viewed at: <https://parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/management/programs/compliance/>

Science – the Australian Marine Parks Science Strategy is nearing completion. Parks Australia is also working with CSIRO to develop a roadmap for using environmental DNA (eDNA) techniques to help inform AMP management.

Indigenous engagement – On 4 February 2023 at the fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5), Parks Australia and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority hosted a joint knowledge sharing titled *Working together to understand, protect and manage Sea Country in partnership with Traditional Owners*. This was attended by First Nations Australians from WA, NT, and QLD.

Parks Protection and Management – The Minister for the Environment and Water has

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Member attendance

Russel Gueho (Chair), Michelle Grady, Clive Wilkinson, Doug Sanderson, Russell Babcock, Andrew Hoey, Col McKenzie.

Observers

Jeremy Smith (AFMA), Mark Read (GBRMPA), Sue Helmke (Fisheries Queensland), Yves Lafoy, François Leborgne and Mäele Brisset (New Caledonian Government representatives).

Apology

Cristabel Warren, Craig Stephen.
Moni Carlisle (Torres Strait Regional Authority) – Observer.

announced a proposal to expand the Macquarie Island Marine Park and commence the statutory review of the South-east Marine Parks Network. Public consultation on the announcement will close on 22 May 2023: www.parksaustralia.gov.au/marine.

Grants – The fourth round of Our Marine Parks Grants (OMPG) will open in mid-2023. The purpose of the grant program is to create opportunities for organisations and Indigenous communities to further engage and connect with the management of Australian Marine Parks.

Branch Head Update

The Branch Head of the Marine and Island Parks Branch, Barbara Musso, recapped outcomes of the round table meeting between New Caledonia and CSMP representatives as part of the Far in the Deep Blue event. Held on 22-24 March 2023, the event brought together French, New Caledonian and Australian organisations to discuss ocean protection, biodiversity, governance, coastal ecosystems management and blue economy. The round table meeting identified areas of collaboration between the adjacent marine parks.

Observer Reports

- Jeremy Smith, Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), updated the Committee on fishery management in the CSMP.
- Sue Helmke, Fisheries Queensland (FQ), provided an update on FQ's use of electronic monitoring to detect interactions with protected species during commercial fishing activity, and on vessel tracking.
- Mark Read, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), gave an update on key management activities.
- François Leborgne, Mäele Brisset and Yves Lafoy, representatives from New Caledonia, joined as observers and noted the management and research links between the CSMP and New Caledonian Marine Parks (particularly the connection between the two areas).

Presentations from OMP Grant Recipients

Diving into the deep: the unique habitats of the Coral Sea. Recipient of OMPG-2 round, Andrew Hoey from James Cook University (JCU), provided insight into the unique deep reef and lagoon habitats within the CSMP, and the organisms they support. Detailed surveys were undertaken of benthic and fish communities in deep habitats using baited underwater cameras (BRUVs) and an underwater robot (ROV) at 16 CSMP reefs. Project work is now complete and ongoing surveys have been incorporated into reef health survey design.

The Jewel in the Coral Sea: Ashmore and Boot Reefs. Recipient of OMPG-3 round, JCU, undertook extensive surveys of habitats and ecological communities on Ashmore and Boot Reefs. JCU researchers and 8 Mer Island Traditional Owners together undertook surveys, used BRUVs to count predatory fish, and operated an ROV to explore the deep reefs.

Reducing and recording data on marine debris. As a recipient of the OPMG-3 round, the Tangaroa Blue Foundation have undertaken clean-up and data collection activities at 21 islands in the CSMP to help fill existing marine debris data gaps. Collected debris has now been recorded and entered into the Australian Marine Debris Initiative Database and all microplastic data samples have been submitted to AUSMAP for testing. Results so far suggest that the second half of

2022 saw an increase in marine debris loads on CSMP islands.

Reef lagoon benthic habitat mapping. Samantha Tol from JCU, recipient of OMPG-3, provided an overview of work undertaken in underexplored reef lagoon habitats in the CSMP and how these benthic habitats are used by marine creatures. Sea grass and other important fish nursery habitats have been discovered, however results suggest the meadows are highly variable, potentially disappearing and shifting seasonally.

Blue Bottle Compliance Program

The Parks Australia Authorisations and Compliance section in presented the results of a trial undertaken with uncrewed marine vessels known as 'bluebottles'. The trial took place in the waters of Western Australia's Two Rocks and Jurien Marine Parks in January 2023. The trial proved successful and complementary to existing compliance monitoring capability.

Bright spot reef surveys

Parks Australia contracted JCU to undertake the Coral Sea Bright Spot Reef Health and Resilience Survey. The project entailed a series of in-water surveys across the eleven vast reefs within the CSMP. Matching sites and survey methodology with those of previous surveys (2018–22) allow changes in coral and fish assemblages to be noted. 'Bright Spots' – where coral cover remains high or has increased – include Ashmore and Boot Reefs, Bougainville Reef and Mellish Reefs.

Island Turtle Track Aerial Surveys

As part of the Island Health Project, Parks Australia contracted Aeroglobe to conduct a trial of aerial photogrammetry of sea turtle nesting activity on CSMP cays and islands. 44 islands and cays have been surveyed, with results indicating the central islands have higher turtle nesting activity than southern islands. Numbers of deceased turtles have been recorded, bird counts have been attempted and large pieces of marine debris can be located.

The next Committee meeting will be held in held in September 2023. For more information about the Coral Sea Marine Parks Network or the Committee:

Visit [Coral Sea Marine Park \(parksaustralia.gov.au\)](https://parksaustralia.gov.au)

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