

# Coasts and Oceans

---

## AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN COASTS AND OCEANS ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

*Australia's coasts and oceans are of vital importance to our community and economy. Approximately 83% of Australians live within 50km of the coast and the number of people living on or near the coast continues to increase. Although the coastline of mainland Australia extends for almost 36,000 km, the overwhelming majority of human settlement is focused in a number of areas in the eastern, south-eastern, and south-western coastal zones. The concentration of settlement and economic activity in these areas has had an enormous impact on our environment.*

### Democrats Action Agenda

*“Australia's marine environment covers twice the area of our terrestrial environment, but receives one tenth of the attention”*

**Senator Andrew Bartlett**  
**Democrat Environment**  
**Spokesperson**

1. **Initiate an inquiry** into the need for, and design of, a National Oceans Act, which will establish a National Oceans Authority. The Act will:
  - (a) ensure there is a legislatively backed regional marine planning process;
  - (b) ensure all regional marine plans include target areas for marine protected areas and timelines for their proclamation;
  - (c) ensure that all decisions concerning fisheries management, shipping and mining are consistent with approved regional marine plans
2. **Expand the National Reserve System** program to ensure Australia has a comprehensive, adequate and representative coastal and marine protected area system.
3. **Reduce effort levels in Australian fisheries to sustainable levels** and ensure that effort and catch data is publicly available for all Australian fisheries.
4. **Support** the maintaining of expanded no-take (or green zones) in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.
5. **Increase resources available for research** into the conservation status of marine and estuarine species.
6. **Ensure** the greater involvement of Indigenous communities in the management of marine and coastal areas.
7. Where possible, **reduce or eliminate sewage, stormwater, industrial discharges** (including discharges from ships) and ensure there are strict environmental regulations concerning discharges to marine and estuarine areas including through aquaculture.



Other ACTION PLANS are available online at  
[www.democrats.org.au](http://www.democrats.org.au)

Last updated 17/08/2007

# Coasts and Oceans

---

8. **Increase the resources** available under the Natural Heritage Trust for the protection and conservation of coastal and marine areas, including programs to improve water quality in rivers that discharge into coastal and marine areas.
9. **Establish national guidelines** for aquaculture developments in coastal and marine areas.
10. **Address the threat to our coasts and oceans** from:
  - (a) climate change (see Greenhouse and Energy Issue Sheet); and
  - (b) introduced species (see Introduced Species Issue Sheet).

## The Issues

### Marine assets

Our oceans cover over 16 million square kilometres, an area that is over twice the size of the Australian continent. Our oceans support a vast array of biodiversity, including around 4,100 marine and estuarine fish species, and contain the world's largest area of coral reefs. However, overfishing, habitat degradation and the introduction of aquatic pests have taken their toll on marine environments. Almost 60% of Australia's fisheries are overfished and a significant number of marine and estuarine species are threatened with extinction, including several species of marine mammals and turtles.

### Marine protection

Despite the condition of our oceans, marine protected areas cover less than 4% of our ocean area. In the majority of these areas, high impact uses such as fishing and petroleum exploration and development are allowed to occur.

In 1998, the Federal Government released a National Oceans Policy that was meant to develop ecosystem-based management of marine areas using a system of regional marine plans. It also required all management plans and policies for Commonwealth fisheries to undergo strategic environmental assessments.

However, these changes have had little or no impact on existing management regimes. The regional marine plans that are being prepared lack any legislative force and have little or no impact on the management of our fisheries, shipping practices or mining. Consequently, fisheries management continues to concentrate on target species, rather than on the health of the overall ecosystem. Similarly, there has been no attempt to integrate the marine planning process with the regulation of mining or shipping.