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Submission: South Australia's Marine Parks Network

The State Government's proclaiming 45% of state waters to be within the outer boundaries of the Marine Parks is questionable because the present marine parks plan and documentation does nothing to address the real threats to marine habitat and biodiversity. The government has admitted that up to 70% of the outer boundary area will contain waters where no explicit threats to the marine habitat have even been identified. Eyre Peninsula, where 10 of the 19 marine parks are proposed, cannot fail to be adversely impacted.

The seafood industry is critical to Eyre Peninsula's and the whole state's economy, producing 65 percent of the State's \$500 million plus retail seafood industry income. Over the last 15 years, with the introduction of aquaculture, the industry has provided vital employment security and attracted investment which underpins many of the region's coastal communities.

Maintaining profitability in the commercial fishing sector is a constant struggle. The lack of economic return is not because of over fishing. The volatility of the Australian dollar compared to trading nations is an issue however the incessant impact of increasing costs placed on the sector by government regulations and compliance costs is the biggest concern. I was told that scientists were astounded at the variety and quantities of sea creatures discovered during recent exploration dives in the Ceduna area and there are already restrictions in place so this is unlikely to change or deteriorate.

Clarification and certainty about future changes to alter zones and boundaries is needed to ensure long term financial commitment to the industry.

Rewording of Section 14 of the Act is necessary to ensure any alterations to zones and boundaries in the future are legislated and not regulated.

Subsequent ministers and their bureaucracies should not be able to exclude recreational and commercial fishers from any or all water contained within the marine park's outer boundary without going back to the community and parliament.

The Government also needs to clarify whether displacement compensation will carry forward should there be changes to the zones after the initial structure has been established.

Park No 2 (Nuyts Archipelago Marine Park) takes in all the state waters off Ceduna. Combined with Park 1 (Far West Coast Marine Park) these two parks make up approximately 22% of the total 19 Marine Parks area. Therefore due to the large area involved in this instance, a significant area will be annexed should sanctuary zones be determined by a percentage.

The Encounter Marine Park draft zoning plan, sanctuary and restrict access zones officially make up only 13 per cent of the park's total area but I understand more like 30% of the actual fishing grounds are within these zones, with no compensation indicated. It has been suggested that the real percentage of actual fishing area closed in Park No 2 would be similar.

'No take' or sanctuary zones should not be expressed as a percentage because what may not sound like much will actually result in a large area no longer being accessible.

During an ABC Radio Interview on 29 January 2009 Minister Jay Weatherill was recorded stating that *"by having the larger area it gives us the capacity to, in a sense, shift that existing commercial effort into a different area so that somebody doesn't necessarily lose the commercial benefit of their fishing..."*. However this is only practical if there are other suitable fishing areas not in the sanctuary zones. In most circumstances other suitable areas may not be available.

If current fishing grounds or sections of them are included in the sanctuary or 'no take' zones, the actual percentage of prime fishing areas becoming inaccessible will be much greater because much of the area left available for fishing is 'dead water' as far as fishing is concerned.

Minister Weatherill has stated in the media and in a letter to Ceduna's Mayor Alan Suter that there will be no fees associated with Marine Parks however according to the Act, Part 2 – Objects of the Act 8(3)(f) costs can be recovered from people who obtain benefits from the marine environment.

I am concerned that this has not been fully clarified or understood by the community.

I question the 'logic' of Chris Thomas, Marine Parks manager comments *"the logic of multi use marine parks provides a cheaper option for the State Government, both in compensation and is a cheaper option in management than compared to isolated sanctuary areas"* as quoted in the Eyre Peninsula Tribune on 12th March 2009. Cheaper for who?

The 22,000 people who are responsible for the NRM levy and the volunteer work expected for the 10 marine parks proposed for Eyre Peninsula are not anticipating that the parks will result in a cheaper option for them.

On 29 January 2009 during an interview on the ABC in response to a question regarding enforcement costs the Minister replied *“if we get good community support for this we hope that a couple of things will happen – one is we’ll be able to get marine park rangers ... sea based equivalent of our park rangers ... there won’t be many of those sorts of people, it will be largely down to the community to police this, just as we have with existing provisions when people actually accept that they’re a good idea”*

Chris Thomas, Marine Parks manager, was quoted in The Advertiser on 9th March 2009, stating that *“nobody would be charged to operate in the parks, which would be funded by the government. Most of the management and policing will be done by community volunteers”*.

The government is surely not relying on volunteers to monitor and police 45% of the State’s waters? Once again it is local regional people who are going to be shut out of their favourite fishing spot or have their income reduced and who are being expected to volunteer as a ‘Clayton’s fisheries officer (as well as being the local school bus driver, ambulance volunteer, CFS and SES volunteer, deliver meals on wheels, support their local football and netball team and their children’s activities, schools, hospitals and churches!!)

It should also be noted that local volunteers are expected to assist with the control of pest plants and animals and maintenance within the 46% of native vegetation that covers Eyre Peninsula.

If the people of South Australia want a pristine environment on Eyre Peninsula then everyone in the State, not just regional and coastal dwellers who live closest to the 10 marine parks, must pay for it.

On 12 March 2009 the Eyre Peninsula Tribune reported Chris Thomas as stating *“Marine Park establishment provides the incentive for the state NRM Boards to invest in the future management and conservation. NRM Boards have the ‘funding support’ to implement their obligations and motivation for both landside developments and planning and the conservation of marine parks.”*

The introduction of the Natural Resource Management Act saw the beginning of mass cost shifting from the government to individuals by way of the levy. If management or research projects relating to marine parks are added - it will be the people in the areas where the marine parks are located who will end up paying, not their city counterparts whose coastal waters are so degraded they go elsewhere to enjoy the natural beauty and catch a fish.

Who is going to pay for the compliance, management and ongoing monitoring? Are regional communities going to be asked to pay for the future management, research and conservation via the NRM Levy? The Marine Parks are there for *everyone* therefore *everyone* in the State, not just local communities, should be paying.

Minister Weatherill in his response to Mayor of Ceduna Alan Suter wrote *'he reaffirmed that in setting up marine parks, the Government has no intention of establishing a new levy or entry fee, and likewise has no intention to pass on management costs or responsibilities to either local councils or regional natural resources management Boards. In short, the Government has made a solid commitment to fund any marine parks establishment and ongoing management costs from general revenue.'*

However the Minister then went on to state that *"DEH will, however, continue to explore partnership opportunities with NRM Boards, local councils and other Government departments where there are mutually beneficial outcomes."*

Past experience demonstrates that Government partnerships generally lead to cost shifting or the project disappears – two such examples are Ark on Eyre and Threatened Species program. Both projects instigated by DEH, shuffled to EPNRM to fund and then because of lack of funding and higher priorities no longer exist.

The Department of Environment and Heritage funding has been slashed in the last couple of budgets with resultant cuts to program and projects, hence the transfer of programs.

An increasing number of responsibilities have been and are being transferred to Natural Resource Management Boards. After reading the three EPNRM Management Plans and State of the Region Report that were recently released for public comment I am very concerned about the depth and breadth of issues that the government is expecting the Board, which consists of community volunteers, to manage. Many of which were previously State Government responsibilities.

The EPNRM is already under resourced for its area of responsibility. The added responsibility of providing financial resources and 'partnerships' to manage 10 marine parks clearly highlights that the regional areas of the State will be burdened, particularly Eyre Peninsula, with increases in levies and charges to cover marine park management and compliance costs unless city people are made to cover their share.

The current arrangements are inequitable as the levy is a population based levy within individual regions and there is no correlation with the actual tasks, responsibilities and resources or who uses the facilities or visits the area.

Eyre Peninsula has a small population compared to the size and variety of issues the Board is expected to deal with. 46% of EP is covered by native vegetation, has a coast line bigger than Tasmania's but only about 30,000 people. In 2006/07 the EPNRM levy varied from \$2.31 per assessment in Whyalla and \$32.51 in Port Lincoln to \$76.10 per assessment in the District Council of Wudinna. The EPNRM 2008 'Investing in Our

Resources' documents that the 2009/2010 levy for Pt Lincoln and Whyalla residents levy will be \$45 and the rural council areas will pay \$55 and \$60. In comparison, ratepayers in the Adelaide Hills and Mt Lofty NRM Region in 2008/2009 paid from \$10 to \$49.

The greatest threat to the marine environment is from land outflows as is the case off metropolitan Adelaide where a marine park has not been proposed, despite 4000 ha of seagrass having been destroyed.

An anecdotal report from the community meetings held on Eyre Peninsula advised that when questioned why there wasn't a marine park off Adelaide where there is recorded loss of seagrass the departmental response was that "*it is cheaper to protect an undamaged area rather than rehabilitate*".

However millions of dollars are spent each year to replenish Adelaide's beaches because the loss of seagrass has increased sand erosion along Adelaide beaches.

A 1998 EPA study "Changes in Seagrass Coverage" and the recent 'Adelaide Coastal Waters Study' reported that 'the effects of loss of seagrasses along the Adelaide metropolitan coastline include increased sand erosion of Adelaide beaches'.

The Coastal Protection Board's annual beach sand replenishment programme has been in place since 1975. Sand carting, combined with biennial offshore dredging costs in recent years, has been over \$2 million each year. 'Adelaide Living Beaches' report advised that the annualized cost of continuing the current strategy over 20 years would be \$6.6 million per year and the pumping method \$5.3 million per year. Surely it is time for a marine park to be designated off metropolitan beaches and a seagrass planting program commenced if this government is serious about benthic, marine diversity and longevity.

A Marine Park would provide the necessary protection and framework to ensure that the many different management systems and remedial action is undertaken. Particularly as the study stated that it may take at least 20 years for seagrasses to regrow and large scale recovery of seagrass meadows requires continued protection and replanting effort.

However the intent of the Department of Environment appears to be to stick the parks where the least number of people will be affected. This was made perfectly clear in a radio interview on the ABC with Michelle Dawe on 6 December 2006 Chris Thomas stated that "*19 new marine parks will be located where they will inconvenience the least number of people*".

The marine parks debate currently being led by the fishing sector is not being given sufficient attention by other groups who will be affected by the significant changes that are being proposed for development, stormwater planning, mining and other shore based activities.

I am concerned the proposal gives the Minister of the day the power to restrict beach access to much of our coastline and that increased regulation and compliance will have an adverse impact on future development and restrict the growth of Eyre Peninsula and our regional communities.

The increased cost of compliance regulations is already making this State a place to avoid. I am aware of a number of businesses that were interested in investing South Australia who have now gone interstate due to lack of interest, lack of support and the ever increasing red tape and compliance concerns.

Coastal infrastructure such as wharves, jetties, boat ramps and such clearly need to be excluded from the impending restrictions. It is vital an assurance is given by the State Government to guarantee existing and new coastal infrastructure (including commercial ports) in regional areas will still be possible.

There have been studies undertaken to deepen the harbour at Thevenard. I have been advocating for a purpose-built, deep sea port to be built on Eyre Peninsula to cater for future mining needs. The majority of the marine environment off Eyre Peninsula is in pristine condition. However with most of Eyre Peninsula's waters included in the Marine Parks, the future is grim if vital infrastructure is overruled due to Marine Park legislation. Even a further threat of more drawn out expensive reports is a major disincentive to developers.

The marine park plan states that the success of the marine parks network will ultimately depend on ownership of the network by the community.

This will not happen unless the Act is amended to ensure public consultation and parliamentary debate are legislated and not regulated.

Reassurances must be given by the State Government that regional coastal communities will not be disadvantaged through loss of work, business and access to the coast and costs must be borne equally by all South Australians.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Liz Penfold". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mrs. Liz Penfold MP
Member for Flinders