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Plan for MPA System in Victoria (Australia) Faces Impasse on Issue of Fisher Compensation

The government of the Australian state of Victoria has put on hold its plan to establish a representative marine parks system for the state, due to arguments with the opposition over how to compensate fishers for reduced catches.

The ruling Labor government favors providing roughly AU \$1 million in "transitional assistance" to fishers, but wants to prevent fishers from seeking additional compensation through the Supreme Court. The opposition Liberal party objects to compensation limits on this issue. Labor has withdrawn the bill from parliamentary consideration, pending negotiations with the opposition.

"Unlimited compensation through the courts would expose taxpayers to large compensation claims, which would not be in the government's interest," said a spokesperson for the Victorian environment minister. "The Victorian government has a policy commitment to the creation of marine national parks, and is presently considering options for the bill's reintroduction."

The government's plan, announced in May, would feature the designation of 12 new marine national parks [see Editor's note] and 10 smaller marine sanctuaries, all of which would prohibit commercial and recreational fishing. The largest of the new marine national parks would measure roughly 160 sq. km in area. In total, the new MPAs would set aside 5.2% of the state's waters as no-take areas, compared to 0.05% currently.

The plan, which came in response to the recommendations of an advisory council, represents the rare instance of a government moving to establish an entire representative system of no-take reserves at one time. The plan must gain the support of the opposition to pass the state parliament.

Easing the burden on fishers

Prior to the legislative impasse, the government anticipated implementing the new marine parks system on November 16, 2001, although no-take status for some of the parks would be delayed intentionally until mid-2003, allowing fishers time to adapt to the new system.

The government's plan is noteworthy for its inclusion of several such measures to provide assistance to fishers. Individual fishers in the finfish and rock lobster fisheries who could demonstrate an income loss directly related to reduced catch as a result of the new parks would be eligible for short-term compensation from the government. The compensation, capped at AU \$1.2 million (US \$612,000) in total, would be available during a transitional period as new fishing areas were investigated. For the abalone fishery, the government would provide scientific and technical support to identify and survey areas of currently under-utilized resource, working reef by reef in close consultation with individual fishers.

Furthermore, the government decided against proceeding with one recommended marine national park in particular to reduce the overall impact on commercial fishers. Recommended borders of other parks were reduced in size for the same reason.

The government aims simultaneously to boost enforcement to protect the new parks. Under the government plan, the state fisheries compliance budget would be raised by AU \$3 million (US \$1.53 million) per year -- a 75% increase -- to hire new park managers, fisheries officers, and investigators, and purchase a new fisheries patrol vessel.

The government's plan comes in response to a report released last year by the Environment Conservation Council (ECC) of Victoria, which recommended that more than 6% of the state's waters be set aside as no-take ([MPA News 2:5](#)). The ECC advises the Victorian government on the use of public lands, with the goal of balancing the competing needs of resource users and the environment. The ECC report drew upon almost 10 years of community and industry consultation, carried out by the ECC and its predecessor, the Land Conservation Council.

[Editor's note: In Australia, state and territorial governments may designate national parks on their own without federal approval. The term "national park" in Australia implies a protected area managed principally for ecosystem protection and recreation, rather than a protected area established specifically by the national-level government. The IUCN shares this

terminology ([MPA News 1:4](#).)]

For more information:

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Box: Victorian government's proposal is online

The Victorian government's plan for a representative system of marine parks is online at <http://www.nre.vic.gov.au>.

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