



SAVE OUR MARINE LIFE

Unique and Unprotected

Is the *End of the Line* relevant to Australia?

“Marine sanctuaries are vital for the future of fish. Please help Save Our Marine Life,”

Charles Clover, writer of *The End of the Line*

The *End of the Line* film (www.endoftheline.com) reveals the impact of overfishing of the world's oceans. The documentary lays out three key steps to manage this enormous problem – reducing fishing, protecting large areas of the ocean from fishing through networks of marine reserves, and educating consumers to purchase fish from sustainable fisheries.

There are a number of alarming signs that Australia's oceans are headed in the same direction as those exploited seas highlighted in *End of the Line*. There is, however, something that can be done to stop this happening.

Australia lies at the margin of three oceans, hosting what is thought to be the world's greatest diversity of marine species and habitats within a single nation, spanning tropical through to sub-Antarctic ecosystems. Over 4000 species of fish are found in Australian waters, and in our southern oceans over 80% of fish species are found nowhere else in the world.

A number of Australian species are already subject to overfishing or have been fished beyond capacity including eastern gemfish; school shark; orange roughy; yellowfin and southern bluefin tuna; pink ling; and swordfish¹. Other alarming facts about our oceans include:

- 1-in-6 of our federally managed fish stocks are overfished; the status of more than half is unknown.²
- Australia's first Marine Stewardship Council certified fishery, and until recently Australia's most lucrative, the Western Rock Lobster recently had quotas dramatically cut and its certification re-assessed because reproduction reached record lows.
- In WA, the pink snapper and red snapper, Western Australian dhufish, baldchin groper and breaksea cod are in serious decline and are referred to as the 'Vulnerable 5' by the WA Government's Department of Fisheries.
- Southern bluefin tuna have been fished to the brink of extinction, with less than 5% of its population remaining.
- Less than 5% of Australian waters offer effective protection for marine life in the form of marine sanctuaries.

Australia still has the chance to avoid the fate of overfished fisheries seen overseas, and other threats such as disturbance by oil and gas development, climate change and pollution by establishing networks of large marine sanctuaries to protect fish and other marine life.

Recent scientific evidence clearly demonstrates that the establishment of marine sanctuaries have had major benefits for targeted fish and shark numbers, with potential benefits for fisheries as well as biodiversity conservation. Recovery has been very fast and sustained, with up to two-fold increases in both numbers and size of fish on many no-take reefs.³

10 leading conservation groups have formed the *Save Our Marine Life* alliance, calling on the Australian Government to set up large marine sanctuaries in Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone, starting with the globally significant waters of the South West marine region.

Less than 1% of the South West marine region, stretching from Geraldton in WA to Kangaroo Island in SA, is protected but up to 90% of the marine life there is unique, particularly the fish. This is a far greater proportion of unique marine life than is found even on the Great Barrier Reef.

Large marine sanctuaries help regenerate marine life and protect species from extinction.⁴ They also bring benefits to coastal communities through opportunities for eco-tourism and higher fish stocks outside as well as inside sanctuary zones.

Go to www.saveourmarinelife.org.au for more information and to make your views known

¹ You can find more information on what fish to eat at www.amcs.org.au, www.acfonline.org.au, <http://www.greenpeace.org/australia/>

² There are 98 federally managed fish stocks. Australia's Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS), 2007

³ McCook LJ, Ayling T, Cappel M, Choat JH, Evans RD, De Freitas DM, Heupel M, Hughes TP, Jones GP, Mapstone B, Marsh H, Mills M, Molloy FJ, Pitcher CR, Pressey RL, Russ GR, Sutton S, Sweatman H, Tobin R, Wachenfeld DR, Williamson DH. (2010) *Adaptive management of the Great Barrier Reef: A globally significant demonstration of the benefits of networks of marine reserves*, Published in PNAS, the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* – www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.0909335107

⁴ ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies and James Cook University, January 2009