

Hawkesbury Shelf Marine Bioregion Assessment

Frequently asked questions

Where is the Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion?

The Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion includes the whole of the marine estate from Stockton (32°54'S) near Newcastle in the north to Shellharbour (34°35'S) near Wollongong in the south and includes the coastline, estuaries to highest astronomical tide, coastal lakes and lagoons, headlands, beaches, and ocean waters out to the edge of the continental shelf (at the 200m depth contour). The Assessment covers NSW state waters of the bioregion extending to the 3 nautical mile (nm) [limit](#).

The bioregion includes 24 estuaries, including the Hunter River, Lake Macquarie, Tuggerah Lakes, Brisbane Water, Narrabeen Lake, Dee Why Lagoon, Hawkesbury River, Sydney Harbour, Botany Bay, Port Hacking, Port Kembla and Lake Illawarra. About 2000 km² of oceanic and estuarine waters occur within NSW state waters of the bioregion. Ocean water depths typically reach 40 to 60 m within the 3 nm limit of state waters although depths of almost 120 m are reached off Botany Bay.

All of the state's major commercial ports are located within the bioregion's waters including Newcastle Port, Port Jackson, Port Botany and Port Kembla.

What is the purpose of the assessment?

The Assessment aims to enhance marine biodiversity in the Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion while achieving balanced community outcomes, including opportunities for a wide range of recreational and commercial uses, including boating, fishing, shipping, and passive uses such as picnicking, swimming, diving, education and research.

Who is undertaking the Hawkesbury Shelf bioregional assessment?

The assessment is being overseen by the [Marine Estate Management Authority](#), which comprises an independent chair, the chair of the [Marine Estate Expert Knowledge Panel](#) and the heads of the four NSW state agencies involved in managing the NSW marine estate. Input from the Marine Estate Expert Knowledge Panel, other relevant experts, stakeholders and the community is informing the project.

Why do an assessment in the Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion?

The NSW Government's response to the Independent Scientific Audit of Marine Parks in NSW (2013) included a commitment to explore ways of enhancing marine biodiversity conservation in the key gaps identified by the audit, namely the Hawkesbury and Twofold Shelf marine bioregions. Consistent with this commitment, the Government has tasked the [Marine Estate Management Authority](#) (the Authority) with developing options to enhance marine biodiversity conservation in the Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion by early 2016.

When did the assessment start?

The assessment was launched in December 2014.

What is being assessed?

The whole of the NSW marine estate within the Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion is being assessed with focussed assessment on 15 sites of importance to the community. [These sites](#) are:

- Barrenjoey Head (existing aquatic reserve)
- Bronte-Coogee (existing aquatic reserve)
- Cape Banks (existing aquatic reserve)
- Chowder Bay
- Long Reef (existing aquatic reserve)
- Narrabeen Head (existing aquatic reserve)
- North Harbour (existing aquatic reserve)
- North Harbour aquatic extension – Manly Wharf and Cove
- Magic Point Malabar (grey nurse shark critical habitat)
- Wybung Head
- Bouddi National Park Marine extension (existing fishing closure)
- Shiprock (existing aquatic reserve)
- Towra Point (existing aquatic reserve)
- Boat Harbor (existing aquatic reserve)
- Cabbage Tree Bay (existing aquatic reserve)

In addition, the NSW community nominated [44 additional sites](#) in 2015 during the assessment. These sites are being further assessed.

Why have these pre-identified sites been chosen?

Existing aquatic reserves and Bouddi National Park Marine extension were created to conserve marine biodiversity, so evaluation of their current management arrangements is important. Additional sites are places where the community has requested increased protection due to their perception that these sites are highly valued and are subject to significant social, economic and/or environmental threats.

Do the current management arrangements still apply in aquatic reserves?

Yes the current management arrangements still apply and there will be no change to the existing management arrangements for aquatic reserves until the assessment is completed and the NSW Government has considered the Authority's final advice on suggested management initiatives.

Where did the additional 44 sites come from? Where are they located?

The additional [44 sites](#) were identified via community engagement through an interactive web portal, submissions and meetings. Nominations for additional sites were grouped by their proximity and similar environmental features. These sites are representative of a range of requests for protection including no extraction (e.g. sanctuary zones) or removal of commercial or recreational fishing. They are 'additional' to the 15 pre-identified sites.

The web portal was an interactive mapping system developed to spatially identify sites within the bioregion that the community wanted considered in the Assessment. The web portal was open for a two-month period from 25 June to 28 August 2015.

How many of the 44 additional sites might be subject to new spatial management proposals such as protected areas?

Further assessment is required to determine if applying spatial management measures at these sites will be effective and efficient in enhancing marine biodiversity and maximising community benefits. If threats are most effectively dealt with by another management approach, additional spatial management will not necessarily be recommended at these sites. Further community engagement will be required before any proposals for spatial management are adopted.

How can I have my say and how will that information be used? How has the information I have already provided been used?

An essential component of the project is community input which has been gathered during Step 1 of the Authority's 5-step decision-making process for marine estate management in NSW.

Step 1

A range of community engagement opportunities were provided in Step 1 of the assessment during 2014-2015 including:

- the [Marine Estate Community Survey](#) (2014)
- an interactive web portal in mid-2015 where the community was asked to comment on:
 - their favourite or priority sites and what they did there,
 - what threats they think affect the sites,
 - potential opportunities to reduce the threats, and
 - the bioregion in general.

A variety of peak community groups, and state and local government agencies participated in workshops and meetings to further explore threats, benefits and opportunities in mid-2015.

This engagement along with individual submissions identified:

- benefits derived from the bioregion
- threats to these benefits that could be used in the TARA process
- opportunities that were considered in developing suggested management initiatives.

Step 2

The outcomes from community engagement at Step 1 fed into Step 2 – an evidence-based threat and risk assessment. This step involved independent and agency expert workshops to determine a risk rating of high, moderate, low or minimal for threats to the environmental assets within the bioregion, such as its clean waters, threatened species, seagrass, rocky reefs, and to the social and economic benefits we as a community derive from the bioregion.

Step 3

The government has been evaluating current management initiatives. Your feedback has been considered within this evaluation.

Step 4 – We are here!

The Authority is currently engaging with stakeholders and the community on the eight suggested management initiatives.

Have your say during the public exhibition period. A [Discussion Paper](#) outlines the process so far, the threat and risk assessment outcomes and the suggested management initiatives.

Your feedback is requested via an online [Submission Form](#) including any additional evidence for the threat and risk assessment (TARA), and feedback on the eight suggested management initiatives and/or suggestions for any additional initiatives. The public exhibition period will close on Sunday 24 April 2016.

Alternatively, you can post your submission to:

Submission—Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion initiatives

NSW Department of Primary Industries

Locked Bag 1

Nelson Bay NSW 2315

Your feedback will be considered as the eight suggested management initiatives are further evaluated by the Authority. The Authority will provide final advice on suggested management initiatives to the NSW Government later in 2016. The Minister for Primary Industries and the Minister for the Environment will publicly announce the final management initiatives that are to be implemented.

When will the assessment be completed?

The Marine Estate Management Authority will provide final advice on the outcomes of the assessment to Government later in 2016.

How does this Hawkesbury Shelf Assessment relate to the statewide threat and risk assessment?

A bioregion scale threat and risk assessment was completed as part of the Hawkesbury Shelf Assessment. As some threats operate at both a bioregion and a statewide scale, information from the Hawkesbury Shelf will inform the broader statewide process. Given this, some of these threats may be best managed at a statewide scale. Statewide threats will be further considered as the Authority develops the 10-year Marine Estate Management Strategy later in 2016.

How does the commercial fisheries business adjustment program address the priority threats identified in the Hawkesbury Assessment?

The proposed Commercial Fisheries Business Adjustment Program (which includes \$16 million in adjustment funding) aims to deliver more certainty and security for individual commercial fishers through stronger property rights, greater viability for the industry by linking shares to access (catch or effort levels), and improving the long-term sustainability for fisheries in NSW.

Under current fisheries management arrangements, in most cases the value of fishing rights (shares) is not proportional to catch or effort. The reforms will remove or reduce existing overcapacity and deliver further improved control over commercial catches and fishing effort, which will help to address several risks identified through the threat and risk assessment associated with commercial fishing activities in the bioregion.

How does the assessment relate to coastal zone management planning?

The NSW Government is currently undertaking reforms to coastal management, which will include a new *Coastal Management Act* to replace the current legislation, a new coastal management manual to support council decision-making and a toolkit for identifying and assessing coastal hazards and risks.

The new coastal management framework will better equip coastal communities to respond effectively to existing and emerging coastal challenges and opportunities. It will also provide an opportunity for better integration of coastal zone and marine estate management. The objects of the *Marine Estate Management Act 2014* under which the Hawkesbury Shelf assessment is occurring, are to be supported under the proposed new legislation.

Protection and enhancement of coastal environmental values and natural processes of coastal waters, estuaries, coastal lakes and coastal lagoons is a key objective across the coastal zone and marine estate. Under proposed legislation, risk assessment methodologies recommended for use by local councils in the new coastal management manual will be consistent with the threat and risk assessment approach used within the marine estate.

Councils will also be required to prepare Coastal Management Programs (CMP) that consider State and regional policies such as the new 10-year statewide [Marine Estate Management Strategy](#) required under the *Marine Estate Management Act 2014*. In this way, the new reforms will provide an opportunity to integrate and operationalise shared objectives and help to address issues identified through projects such as the Hawkesbury Shelf assessment and Marine Estate Management Strategy.

The new framework will recognise and support work done by councils under the current arrangements. More information on the coastal reforms is available from www.environment.nsw.gov.au/coasts/coastreforms.htm.

Where can I find more information?

More information is available at www.marine.nsw.gov.au and will be updated as the project continues.

Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion assessment: www.marine.nsw.gov.au/key-initiatives/hawkesbury-shelf-marine-assessment

If you would like to receive updates on the Hawkesbury Shelf assessment or other marine estate initiatives please advise us via contact.us@marine.nsw.gov.au and provide your name, email address and postcode.

Feedback requested

We would appreciate feedback on these Frequently Asked Questions: Was it useful information? Was it easy to understand? What other questions would you like answered? Please email your comments to contact.us@marine.nsw.gov.au

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (February 2016). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the Secretariat of the marine estate or the user's independent adviser.

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