**Marine Spatial Planning: What is it?**

Marine spatial planning is a well-recognised methodology to incorporate best available science into decision-making. It is also an effective way to incorporate social, cultural and economic information. Many scientists agree that spatial management is a core component of good marine resource management.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is a key tool used to implement integrated ecosystem based management.

Single sector spatial planning, which only includes information relevant to one individual industry or sector, is not marine spatial planning by its usual and well recognised definition. Marine spatial planning normally includes all sectors and values. Done well, it’s an excellent tool to plan for the various uses of our ocean’s resources as they continue to expand and compete with one another in the future.

**How does it work?**

Marine spatial planning is similar to electronic mapping, or Geographic Information Systems (GIS). It uses spatial information, represented visually in multiple layers, to show scientific, social, cultural and economic information in a spatial format.

These layers overlap to show a heat map-type image, highlighting different planning scenarios, depending on what questions are being asked.

Marine spatial planning can be used to identify areas for marine conservation, such as in the Great Barrier Reef, or to simply improve the way all the different activities are managed in our ocean, such as in Victoria and elsewhere.

**Why does Tasmania need it?**

Tasmania’s coastal waters are globally significant, and our island way of life is deeply embedded in our psyche. But our coastal waters are under threat from a range of pressures, including fishing, aquaculture, climate change and pollution.

Our east coast waters are warming four times faster than the global average. We have depleted fish stocks, ignored flow-on effects, excess nutrient loading, threatened species and paltry habitat protection. Land-based activities including the expansion and intensification of agriculture, pollution from runoff from industry, along with changes to freshwater and sediment flows, are also impacting the health of our marine environment. This all calls for fundamental improvement to our ocean management.

The top recommendation of the May 2022 Report on the Parliamentary Inquiry into [Fin Fish Farming](https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Council/GovAdminA_Fin.html) is to develop a comprehensive state-wide Marine Plan for Tasmania, as well as a revised Salmon Industry Growth Plan. These are recommended to be developed through a process that considers all uses and users, is evidence based and includes environmental, social and recreational values assessments. The Report recommends this integrated approach should be achieved through marine spatial planning.

With the first review of Tasmania’s main marine law currently underway, the *Living Marine Resource Management Act 1995*, now is the ideal time to implement comprehensive marine planning.

**Where is it used?**

Victoria’s Marine and Coastal Act 2018 requires scientific evidence and data, along with the views of rights-holders and stakeholders as input to their state-wide Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Framework. The Victorian MSP Framework has three primary functions:[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. To support integration and coordination of planning and management across marine sectors, the land-sea interface and jurisdictional boundaries,

2. To support Traditional Owners, marine sectors, marine users and the community participate in marine planning and management, and

3. To provide a process for initiating, approving and undertaking marine spatial planning.

The Great Barrier Reef and Australia’s national waters (from 3-200nm) are managed using marine spatial planning. Different socio-economic objectives are included with natural values to try to avoid areas of highest value to fishers, aquaculture or with proximity to ports or marinas when identifying areas for protection.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Tasmania’s Marine Atlas Project will provide useful data for marine spatial planning.[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. Little LR, Day J, Haddon M, et al. *Comments on the evidence for the recent claim on the state of Australian fish stocks*. Aquatic Conserv: Mar Freshw Ecosyst.2019;29:329-330. https://doi.org/10.1002/aqc.2992330COMMENTARY AND CORRESPONDENCE ARTICLE [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. State of Victoria. (2020) *Marine and Coastal Policy*. https://www.marineandcoasts.vic.gov.au/coastal-management/marine-and-coastal-policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wescott, G. & Fitzsimons, J. (2016) *Big, Bold and Blue: Lessons from Australia’s Marine Protected Areas*. CSIRO Publishing, [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. IMAS (2022) *Tasmania’s marine Atlas Project*, https://www.imas.utas.edu.au/research/fisheries-and-aquaculture/projects/projects/tasmanias-marine-atlas-project [↑](#footnote-ref-4)