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Fishers

In the last month we have witnessed a truly organic uprising against a series of over reaching Marine Protected Areas in the Sydney Bio Region. Fishers in NSW are finding their political legs and this can only bode well for us all going forward. This is the third time I personally have fought a similar proposal, initially in 92-93 against the Sydney Coastal Council Group, then in 2009 against the "Torn Blue Fringe" and now against the Marine Estate Management Authority (MEMA). The irony in all this is that we do have a very strong conservation ethic, want healthy and productive oceans, are low risk in regards to threats, yet are continually scapegoated and demonised as the villains. Even if we win this it wont be the end, we will need to continually be vigilant and prepared into the future.

It should be clear to USFA members, all spearo's and fishers that we won't be compromising or trading off one location against another. We are however, happy to talk to the Government about workable solutions going forward. We see MEMA as the main protagonists and want to see MEMA replaced with an advisory committee made up of elected stakeholders with its Chair reporting directly to the Minister. We would like independent and transparent scientific reviews into the key risks of the proposed and existing marine protected areas with the view to improving the access to low risk activities. The advisory committee should oversee these scientific reviews.

The USFA is supporting a ten-year moratorium on any new marine protected areas. Whilst in principle multi-use marine protected areas appear nice on the surface, once in place the "use" can be changed with the stroke of a pen by regulators with out going through the legislative process. We through experience have a lack of faith and trust in the regulatory process. Marine protected areas have existed in this state for several decades yet we have seen little in the way of measurable outcomes particularly concerning water quality, abundance in biodiversity, biomass or research. Although we are calling for increases access for low risk activities in established MPA's we are not yet calling for their abolishment. We feel ten years to improve the outcomes and performance of the managers of these areas before establishing more or demolishing the existing as fair.





Being fully aware that this will historically be remembered as only one in a long series of battles for fishing rights and access, it is important that we build our resilience. Our opponents are well organised and well funded often out of public funds. I believe that we all should now be pushing for funding and premises for a fishing museum and an adjunct research foundation, so as to have a centre for education and training. We need to be supporting and developing our future leaders, improving environmental awareness, improving safety for ourselves and also valuing our unique and diverse fishing culture and traditions. It is hard to believe that there are over a million of us, yet we receive nothing in the way of this like the arts or other sports.

The events of this past month, whilst unpleasant, have really galvanised the fishing community. We should be proud in ourselves. We have seen many alliances between stakeholders strengthened, new and future leaders emerge and a political awakening of the fishing lobby, let's continue the momentum and use this new found power constructively and wisely.

Thank you,

[Bob McComb](#)
President USFA

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