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COMMENT - Jervis Bay MP Rezoning: Room For Improvement

By Jim Harnwell | 22 April 2010

7 Comments

As you'll note from the accompanying news item, the various zones in the Jervis Bay Marine Park, along with those in the Solitary Islands Marine Park, have been reviewed and various changes have been presented for public comment.

Long-term readers will remember that I was a member of the original JBMP advisory council when the park was established about a decade ago. I was very heavily involved in discussions on various zones - I've lived and fished around JB for nigh on 40 years now and, from a personal perspective, obviously wanted the park to have a minimal impact on sensible recreational fishing. From a journalistic angle, I was interested in the whole marine parks process. That interest has continued to the present day.

As far as marine parks go, the JBMP is a pretty good example of how compromise and discussion can produce a reasonable outcome for all concerned. I won't say the current JBMP zone plan is perfect - It obviously isn't as there are large swathes of productive fishing ground now denied to anglers - but it certainly could have been a lot worse if the various anti-fishing groups and extremist greens had got their way.

It's hard to comment on the zoning processes of other marine parks as I wasn't involved with them but I'd suggest that anti-fishing groups got their way in the Byron Bay park and politics played a big role in the disappointing outcome that eventuated further south at the Batemans park.

Jervis bay map

The JBMP rezoning that should now be on display - I had a sneak peek earlier this week - basically fiddles with the edges of the park. On paper, the area closed to fishing (about 20 per cent) remains unchanged. However, one major change being proposed should be firmly rejected by anglers. Unless the JBMP managers have taken heed of advice given to them by myself and several other local anglers and altered the proposed plan in the past day or so, the change slated for discussion involves moving the Steamers Beach/Cape St George sanctuary zone to the south of the bay some miles north to encompass the St Georges Head/Stony Creek/Moes Rock area. The reason JBMP wants to do this is to "protect" deep reef. Under the new proposal, land-based rock fishing would be allowed for (Stony creek and Moes Rock are very popular areas for rock fishing) but boat fishing would be banned.



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This, in my view, is unacceptable. Putting a whopping big no fishing zone here would mean that small boat anglers launching at the Murrays Beach Boat Ramp inside the bay would need to drive several miles further south to wet a line. This poses obvious safety issues, especially when you consider that these small boats need to bash back home against the 25-30 knot nor-easters that blow up in this region during summer. Fishing is the second most popular activity in the JBMP, according to a JBMP survey, and the park authorities need to realise that and balance the environmental aspects of the park with the requirements of local and visiting anglers.

The fact is, the reef ledges and drop-offs out from Moes Rock and Stony Creek are excellent areas for kings and snapper. Anglers would have to travel miles north or south to find similarly productive grounds. Fishos have already lost huge amounts of fishing ground in the JBMP - it is vital this area be kept open.

A compromise solution is to leave the current St Georges Head sanctuary zone in place (it is a big drive away from the closest ramp in JB and was originally suggested as a no-fishing zone due to the fact that it was fairly remote and hard to access) and instead move the sanctuary zone at Point Perpendicular on the northern side of the bay further northwards to end 500m before the Drum & Drum Sticks. This would enable the park to "protect" deep reef in this area - it is the same sort of reef as off Stony Creek/Moes Rock) and would also provide easy and safe access for small boats wanting to fish the deep waters around JB's towering cliffs. As it stands now, if you poke your nose out around Point Perp, you have to drive some miles up to Crocodile Head before you can start fishing. Again, this is a big ask in a small boat, especially in the strong nor-esters and southerlies that we get down here on the NSW South Coast.

The Point Perp sanctuary zone was originally imposed so that LBG anglers could retain access to several important ledges. Access to prime fishing spots is hard out of small boats but it's doubly hard when fishing off the rocks and it was deemed important to try and provide the LBG boys with at least some access to traditional ledges. However, the Navy stymied this plan when it introduced a blanket ban on angler access in its bombing range on Beecroft Peninsula. Moving the zone further north now no longer affects LBG fishos as they are banned anyway (which, by the way, is totally unfair).

Other aspects of the park which should be changed to further improve fishing include:

- * A 100m habitat protection zone on the beach in the Warrain Beach sanctuary zone to allow for beach fishing. Marine park experts agree that stopping beach fishing has bugger-all environmental benefits so why ban it?

- * The declaration of special purpose zones so that artificial reefs can be introduced into the bay (especially in the middle section, which is basically a vast sandy desert).

- * Declaration of the Hare Bay Sanctuary Zone as a catch & release area where local sport fishing clubs can carry out valuable tagging research.

- * Moving the sanctuary zone inside Currumbene Creek further up the creek to around the Myola area so anglers can access the nipper bait grounds east of the main ramp. This area has been closed for some years now and the only other bait ground further up the creek has been put under significant pressure. As with many other anglers, I can't understand the environmental benefit of closing one area and then forcing people to crowd into the areas left. Saving one spot while potentially destroying another doesn't seem to make much sense. Our population is growing, fishing is becoming increasingly popular - the Marine Parks Authority really should be developing and opening up new areas for fishing or, instead, coming up with proactive ideas to alleviate pressure on fish stocks and the environment. This is where artificial reefs and even areas where bait species can be produced via aquaculture should be encouraged. JB is a perfect location for a system of low-impact, translocatable artificial reefs and could quite easily become an area where various bait species could be commercially grown and sold. This is positive, proactive management - why aren't ideas such as this being embraced by the MPS and the NSW Environment Minister Frank Sartor?

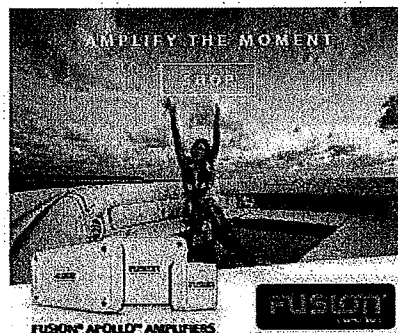
- * In my view, there should also be further restrictions on the various whale/dolphin boats and the dive operations that work in the bay. These businesses exploit the bay for profit and seem to think they own the entire place. I'm personally sick of bloody great dive boats loaded with wetsuited bubble heads roaring up to me while I'm quietly fishing at Bowen Island and then gesturing for me to "move away". Arrogant bastards! And for Christ's sake, can't they leave the poor bloody dolphins alone? Flipper and his mates only have to poke up their heads and then there's some enormous big cat loaded with camera wielding tourists chasing them around. It's all a bit over the top. And the business owners running these boats are making a motza.

Apart from that wishlist of things that should - but probably won't - be enacted by the JBMP managers, one of the positives to come out of the rezoning is that commercial fishing, particularly trawling, is set to be further restricted in the park. Beach hauling and bait gathering should be next on the list to ban. Imagine the fish that will be in the bay if the nets are fully removed!

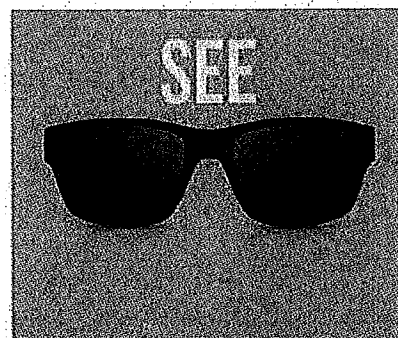
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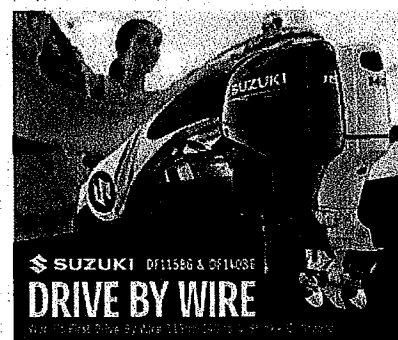
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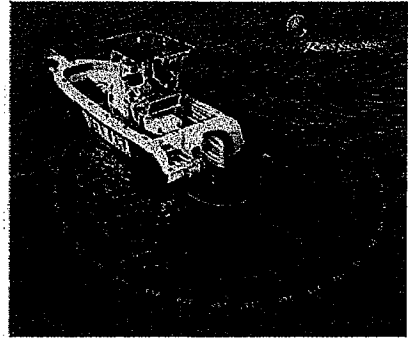
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Now is the time to have your say about the rezoning plans being put forward for the Jervis Bay Marine Park (and the Solitary Islands park). If you don't make comments and put forward your ideas and plans, then you have no-one but yourself to blame if you lose your favourite fishing spot.

Check out www.mpa.nsw.gov.au (<http://www.mpa.nsw.gov.au>) for more details.



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well done jim for bringing this out to everyones attention. i fish in the bay often and can see that the affect of the JBMP has played a roll in protecting habitat areas from fishos that part of the job is certainly happening!! but as for the spill over affect that was surpoused to have happened of which parts of the reasoning behind these mp&apos starting i am yet to see. the only thing i see is a

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