



Sustainable Oceans and Coasts

New South Wales and
Australian Capital Territory
Perspectives



Sustainable oceans and coasts

In 2020, the United Nation declared this coming decade as the 'United Nations Decade for Ocean Science for Sustainability'. Their vision for the coming decade is underpinned by participative and transformative values:

"The Decade is embracing a participative and transformative process so that scientists, policy makers, managers, and service users can work together to ensure that ocean science delivers greater benefits for both the ocean ecosystem and for society.

This Decade will be designed to facilitate global communication and mutual learning across research and stakeholder communities. It will work to meet the needs of scientists, policy makers, industry, civil society and the wider public, but it will also support new, collaborative partnerships that can deliver more effective science-based management of our ocean space and resources."

Critically, the UN vision and activities that underpin it recognise the interconnectedness of land and sea. For Australia, explicit recognition and appreciation of this connectedness of our oceans and coasts is essential for our future prosperity. The oceans surrounding Australia are vast and comprise a multitude of economic, social, environmental, and cultural interests, and a majority of our population lives in coastal zones. Indeed, what we do on inland Australia has consequences for our coasts and oceans; our waterways flow into our coastal and ocean space and are important connectors of land and sea.

In light of this, in May 2018 the Future Earth Australia Steering Committee elected that the 2020 focus for the Future Earth Australia secretariat and Future Earth network be a ten-year national strategy for Australia's sustainable oceans and coasts.

The strategy will outline the steps we need to transform how we think about, govern, and protect

oceans and coasts across Australia. Importantly, we take a systems approach to transforming oceans and coasts, as many sectors will need to work together to achieve our goal: social services, tourism, industry, land use experts, ocean and coastal researchers, and decision makers from all levels of government. This Outcomes Paper reports on the deliberations of a broad cross section of sectors in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

The importance of a national strategy

Australian oceans and coasts are threatened by the fragmented way we manage and govern the ecological and social processes that connect them; we do not have a clear path forward to ensure that these areas are healthy and resilient. The national strategy will outline clear, actionable pathways for achieving healthy and resilient oceans and coasts for all of Australia, incorporating common themes from the series of consultative workshops held by Future Earth Australia throughout 2020.

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Context setting

Prior to the online workshop, an introductory video was circulated to all participants. This video set the scene for the workshop, providing local perspectives on New South Wales and the ACT's oceans and coasts from experts in the field. Speakers were asked to reflect upon their vision for sustainable oceans and coasts in New South Wales and the ACT, the unique features of New South Wales and the ACT's oceans and coasts, and how their expertise guides their visions and goals for the future of oceans and coasts in Australia. The speakers were Dr. Katie Dafforn of Macquarie University and Professor Barbara Norman of the University of Canberra, and we thank them for their thoughtful contributions.

New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory workshop

On 21 September 2020, Future Earth Australia hosted the fourth in a series of online consultation workshops in each state and territory across the nation, for its Oceans and Coastal Sustainability initiative.

36 attendees in New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) contributed to the discussion, representing:

- the research sector, from CSIRO and a range of universities,
- all levels of government working across environmental reporting, regional planning, agriculture, water and environment, coastal planning, and primary industry,

- industry and business, particularly in tourism, offshore energy, blue economy, and consulting,
- civil society and community, namely philanthropy, surfing collectives, sustainable industry advocates, and policy advocates.

This document summarises discussions held around the fundamental elements, both from a NSW/ACT perspective and pertaining to Australia more broadly, which will define the National Strategy: vision, knowledge, institutional design and governance, community engagement, and implementation.



Vision

Vision for New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory

NSW and ACT participants discussed their aspirations for a long-term strategy to involve greater integration, shared management, and recognition of diverse values associated with oceans and coasts.

‘Integrated’ was a popular term used, intended to mean that ocean and coastal sustainability involves work across sectors, based on the idea of a ‘triple bottom line’ (incorporating social, economic, and environmental values as interwoven). Additionally, integration can also refer to the inherent ties between coasts and oceans, and therefore the need to treat and manage marine and terrestrial ecosystems as interconnected parts of a whole.

‘Engagement’ referred to the need to get the public more involved, in part by taking stock of their perceptions of oceans and coasts. Without public support and understanding of the importance of research and expertise in enabling ocean and coastal stewardship, there will not be adequate political support for the knowledge and practice sector.

On a broader level, engagement is a function of good management. ‘Co-management’ was suggested as a term that embodies the need to respect the varied

values people have for the marine environment. NSW has a high degree of urbanisation on the coast, which can lead to conflict about how the land and sea should be treated. Yet often underlying these conflicts, the vision and values people hold are not that different. It was highlighted that without respectful management of these views, it will be difficult to build consensus to achieve sustainable oceans and coasts.

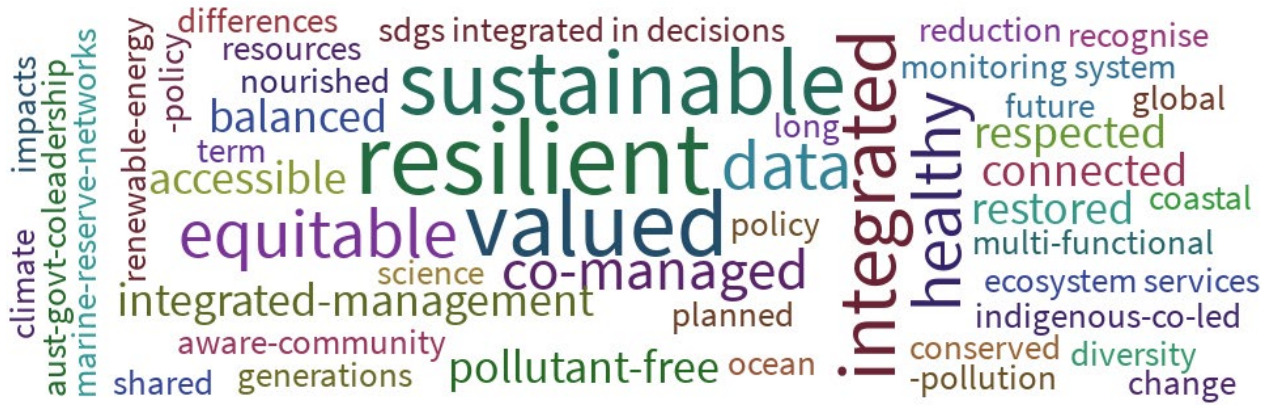
Co-management, which accounts for different needs across groups, is important and needs to be paired with co-design of initiatives from the beginning. In particular, Indigenous groups were highlighted as a key stakeholder group that should be at the forefront of decision making. Indigenous sovereignty should be a high-order priority, not part of a preamble.

Another participant pointed out that there is a need to pay careful attention to how public and private uses are negotiated on Crown Lands on the coast. For example, surf life saving clubs are often on public land for community benefit but are increasingly becoming commercialised, seeing a profit motive overtake community service. If these entities are intended to be accessible for all, then these kinds of issues need to be addressed proactively.

What is your vision for the future of oceans and coasts in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory by 2030?



What is your vision for the future of oceans and coasts in Australia by 2030?



National vision

Participants worked through priority issues that need to be addressed, and expressed the need for a nested approach that incorporates local, state, national, and international scales.

NSW and ACT participants advanced the idea that a national approach to oceans and coasts requires governance at nested scales, working on a systems-based understanding of oceans and coasts. Political divides were seen as major barriers to working on a systems basis. One participant was frustrated by decommissioning of the National Reserve System Programme, which had been underpinned by extensive research and relationship building.

One participant spoke to the Australian Government's unique and important role to play as the primary funder of research, as well as its potential to drive a nationally integrated approach with state and local governments to work across ecological and social realities. They also suggested that a nested governance approach must have an international scope, given that oceans connect the world. The Sustainable Development Goals were suggested as a useful framework for integrated decision making.

A range of ocean and coastal issues were raised as priorities to be addressed within a national strategy and framework. 'Adaptation' and 'green infrastructure' were offered as suggestions for addressing climate adaptation and planning, while 'resilience' referred to creating strategies for managing issues like coastal inundation. A national approach to pollution, from marine debris to wastewater management, was also considered important. Estuaries, mangroves, marshes, and their catchments were all considered critical infrastructure that should be a national priority.

On a different track, one participant spoke to 'economic resilience' and the many emerging opportunities for sustainable development associated with the ocean, particularly for isolated communities, such as the offshore energy industry.

Participants also identified data and science for a more systematic understanding of oceans and coasts as a national priority. At a national scale, it was asserted that we require a better understanding of the ways the ocean supports and benefits people, allowing these benefits to be properly accounted for in decision making.

Knowledge

Key points

- We need to develop holistic frameworks for oceans and coasts that enable us to build knowledge, strategise, and act in an integrated manner
- Those working on the ground, such as local Councils and community groups, need improved accessibility to the wealth of existing knowledge on oceans and coasts
- The standardisation of data and key metrics between jurisdictions would be very valuable for monitoring how well we are succeeding in stewarding healthy oceans and coasts and enabling the community to better understand the state of these systems.

NSW and ACT attendees discussed a range of issues pertaining to knowledge needs for oceans and coasts, both pinpointing specific topical gaps and identifying changes to the ways that we organise, coordinate, and use knowledge.

In acknowledging the interconnectedness of oceans and coasts, participants expressed a desire to establish more holistic frameworks and approaches to working with these systems, rather than the current piecemeal, siloed approach. To be able to work on a systemic basis, this integrated system must be mapped and better defined. It was asserted that creating a holistic framework requires a collaborative and inclusive approach, as no one perspective can encapsulate the many facets of oceans, coasts, and our relationship to them. It would be valuable to identify the critical knowledge gaps we would need to address to achieve this integrated model.

In practical terms, several participants pointed to knowledge and information accessibility as key barriers to achieving sustainable outcomes at the local level. For example, local councils and community organisations could benefit greatly by accessing the latest research and expertise but often struggle to find this information or even know if it exists. Part of the accessibility picture is putting greater emphasis on communicating new information in a clear, consistent manner. On a

broader scale, attendees emphasised that the latest information should not only be shared with decision makers, but also with the broader Australian public to shape their awareness of ongoing issues and opportunities for oceans and coasts.

In the quest for clear, consistent communication, NSW and ACT participants pointed to the standardisation of data and success metrics across jurisdictions as being critical for the public and decision makers to understand how oceans and coasts are changing. Standardisation would also help with the credibility of science in the public eye, as it would tell a clearer story. Some participants also stated that a national monitoring system of marine ecology and biology would be valuable in tracking the state of oceans.

Many participants stressed that efforts should be put towards the strategic knowledge gaps that can make the biggest positive impact if addressed. Risk frameworks were put forward as a useful model, given that they are action- and future-oriented and are well suited to integrating a range of knowledge systems in a systemic way. For example, a risk framework can incorporate both natural risks (for example, the impact of sea level rise on assets) and human issues (for example, conflict management in coastal governance).

Planning and navigating coastal retreat were seen as critical in New South Wales. Attendees were enthusiastic to learn from successful examples in other areas of the world and determine how they might be scaled for broader application. They also were interested to learn more about enabling the phasing of coastal retreat by buying time, for instance, by using sand nourishment practices.

Some attendees believed that we have enough knowledge about ocean systems and should focus on coastal dynamics, though many others asserted that there is still an absence of basic knowledge about oceans, particularly when compared to the amount known about terrestrial systems. This lack of basic information was considered a fundamental barrier to being able to make decisions for sustainable futures. For example, it is difficult to negotiate balancing social, economic, and

environmental needs without a clearer picture of the state of oceans. Similarly, it will be easy to miss opportunities, such as developing new exports like seaweed, without this information. It was noted that data and information gathering at sea is particularly difficult given the character of sea landscapes. The Australian Ocean Data Network was highlighted as a great resource; however, it requires long term stability and resourcing to be deeply effective.

Lastly, many participants stated that our knowledge building across the board must be more inclusive and engage as early as possible with Traditional Owners and communities. This is important not only in capturing a wider range of values and expertise, but also in building the credibility and trustworthiness of information.

NSW and ACT attendees described a wide range of emerging topics in ocean and coastal sustainability for further research, including:

- novel means and instruments for financing the protection of oceans and coasts, such as how to use blue green bonds to protect mangroves and estuaries, or how biodiversity and water quality credits could be incentivised to be stacked to protect entire ecosystems

- connectivity of coastal systems (for example, sediment dynamics) and from land to sea (for example, nutrient and chemical run off)
- cumulative impacts of multiple stressors, including natural disasters, climate change, and urban development
- feasible investments in coastal areas in the context of sea level change
- long-term scenario planning, including mapping of industries and their dependence on marine resources, to understand the economic impacts of decisions
- drivers of systemic behaviour and change on oceans and coasts, including international drivers, changing patterns (such as coastal inundation) and forecasting (for example, in coastal erosion and sea level rise)
- analysis of how legal and governance frameworks are changing to respond to climate change
- social and cultural knowledge of oceans and coasts



Institutional design and governance

Key points

- **Current systems prevent institutions and key stakeholders from working together coherently; leadership, perhaps through a national agency, could be useful for drawing efforts together**
- **The co-design and co-management of oceans and coasts, in which a cross-section of communities are involved early in the process in a deliberative manner, are critical**
- **All decision making across government, communities, and sectors would benefit greatly from improved communication of the latest and most relevant knowledge; institutions must formalise incentives for this communication.**

NSW and ACT participants spoke to a need for improvement in connectivity in the governance of oceans and coasts. This pertained to connecting institutions working across these areas and in different levels of government so they might work more efficiently together, as well as forging a governance regime that recognises oceans and coasts as connected parts of the same system. In institutional terms, some participants suggested the establishment of an Oceans Agency that could be a table at which other government entities and critical stakeholders could communicate and work together, as well as serving as the foremost entity to undertake consultation and champion the best evidence to guide decision making.

Participants suggested that better collaboration between industry, research, and government could be incentivised through national funding mechanisms, such as the National Environmental Science Program. However, such incentives would need to be designed to avoid locking out grassroots actors from collaborating in large and important developments.

Across governance activities, numerous attendees emphasised the need to centralise co-design and co-management of oceans and coasts by a broader cross section of interests and voices through a

deliberative process. The existing consultation framework in which people are engaged mid-way through developing governance priorities and actions, investing their time without seeing substantive impact, is seen as ineffective and even destructive to maintaining relationships with communities and Traditional Owners. Deliberative processes engage a cross section of important stakeholders and communities in the early stages of governance and maintain the connection throughout. NSW and ACT attendees noted that special care would need to be taken to ensure equal opportunity to influence governance through deliberation, in the context of a number of powerful interests having influence over defining governance directions.

Given the range of interests in oceans and coasts, attendees suggested that a deliberative and inclusive process for defining and executing management would serve as proactive conflict resolution and active recognition of the multiple coexisting values embedded in these places. Seizing on points of common interest can build a shared set of priorities. These shared interests are not always obvious, as some attendees asserted that a small group of vocal people often dominate discussions in the media.

A critical part of good governance was thought to be improved communication of the most up to date information on the state of oceans and coasts, the ways in which they are changing, and potential future trajectories, which would ground decisions in sound evidence. This communication would focus on improved awareness in the general public, while decision makers would receive more pointed, technical knowledge. Some pointed out that the current system in research institutions and universities does not incentivise communication of knowledge to the public and decision makers, and this barrier must be addressed.

Workshop attendees pointed to a number of different tools and arrangements that could be used to govern oceans and coasts on a systematic basis, while also

negotiating multiple natural, social, economic, and cultural values. Environmental markets and common law tenure schemes (for example, small scale fisheries) were given as examples.

Additionally, attendees expressed a desire for more proactive governance. For instance, the implications of choosing a 'no action' option must be mainstreamed in best practice. Risk and threat assessments are also useful for looking ahead to scenarios that balance a range of values and are a useful tool for communicating and engaging with the public. Participants also desired good quality

national data to make these projections possible. This data should be easily accessible and shared between stakeholders, and regulation should ensure that these processes are stable and secure.

Lastly, several participants expressed the belief that governance activities are most effective when they are founded on a place-basis (often at the local government level) and are then nested into larger government scales. Such a nested, national framework would need a shared vision and set of objectives.



Community engagement

Key points

- **Communication around engagement is vitally important for its success, in terms of raising the public's awareness of the health of oceans and coasts, and ensuring transparency in how community input affects decision making**
- **The engagement of community and stakeholders must be equitable and representative to ensure that diverse voices influence decisions**
- **A co-design approach that consults over the long term on the various pathways forward is far preferable to short-term consultation that seeks feedback on choices already made.**

Attendees to the NSW and ACT workshop focused on the practical and political elements of engaging the community and stakeholders in ocean and coastal issues.

Participants pointed to the need for a clear strategy, purpose, objective, and scope for engaging the community to ultimately answer the question, 'why are we engaging?'. As a complex, expansive topic area, proper scoping and purpose are important for defining what is and is not relevant to a national vision and strategy for oceans and coasts and subsequently, who should be at the table. This can help to avoid the consultation burnout that can sometimes be attributed to engagement without a clear pathway or rationale for how that input will affect decision making or investment.

Careful and consistent communication was seen by many as an imperative within community engagement, whether it be for improving awareness of issues, increasing the transparency of decision making processes, or improving the effectiveness of disseminating information. Researchers asserted that communities are not always aware of how relevant and important their priorities and values are to research projects. Some suggested that an independent body or group that could communicate clear, verifiable information about oceans and coasts from research to the public would be useful. Others proposed that an advocacy group to champion evidence in public debate, like the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, could be a useful

contribution. Some attendees felt that quality community engagement can be let down when it is not followed by transparent feedback on how community input has been considered and affected decision making. Consistent and clear messaging was considered by many to be vitally important for public discussion. This can be advanced through channels that the public already trusts and should be communicated in a way that is engaging, including for example interactive media and data visualisations.

In considering institutions that can facilitate long-term relationships, community organisations and local councils were considered to be useful channels for engaging and communicating. Local governments in particular have an important role, given that their decisions on land have a direct impact on the sea, and that they are most directly involved with balancing different interests within the community. As such, it is common for local councils to encounter trust issues with the public when decision making processes are not transparent or well communicated, or when people do not have enough information about the issue or the decision being made. Conflict over decisions between groups can delay management decisions and implementation and must be treated carefully.

Many NSW and ACT participants preferred a co-design approach that is embedded in long-term relationships. Coastcare was highlighted as an effective model for building long term engagement and relationships.

Many participants felt that equity and representativeness are important principles that should underpin community engagement, because they enable diverse voices to be heard. Stakeholders should undertake processes to find shared visions and goals for oceans and coasts across the community. Attendees spoke to the need to understand the complex and multifaceted views of some stakeholder groups, rather than assuming their preferences. For instance, many assume that fishers are likely to take an anti-conservation stance, but this is not always the case. Vested interests were seen by many to be overly influential in setting

agendas and should be managed accordingly. Lastly, some participants pointed out that a stakeholder's electorate can have a significant influence on whether their voice is considered relevant to a debate.

Attendees suggested that a range of modes of engagement should be made available, to encourage participation by people in different circumstances. For example, anonymous methods should be available for those concerned about reputational

risks. Other useful methods include participatory modelling, aggregative democracy, social network analysis, and social media analysis. Deliberative democracy approaches, such as a national network of standing citizen juries, were touted as having the potential to be highly effective.

Lastly, some participants saw engaging with younger generations and children as an important part of embedding awareness and a culture of care into ocean and coastal work over the long term.



Implementation

Key points

- **Successful implementation will involve undertaking multiple priorities simultaneously; these include communicating well, developing public awareness and culture of stewardship of oceans and coasts, harmonising governance arrangements, and understanding the diversity of stakeholders in this space**
- **A national vision and framework that can draw these imperatives together is required.**

Discussions revolved around the many elements required to make real a shared vision for sustainable oceans and coasts. These elements included building quality dialogue into governance, developing public awareness and a sense of collective stewardship of oceans and coasts, harmonising governance arrangements between and within jurisdiction, and gaining a solid working knowledge of key stakeholders that will influence the future of ocean and coasts. While there are many actions to be taken across the community, private, and not-profit sectors, these can be maximised in the context of a national framework for oceans and coasts.

Implementing quality communication was seen by many as fundamental to both inviting broad behavioural and cultural change by the public, and better informing decision making across government and the private sector. Communication was thought to be critical for encouraging behavioural change and adoption of marine stewardship as a cultural norm and a way of life. Participants stressed the need to create a sense of shared responsibility for oceans and coasts in the public, to dissuade the pursuit of private interest to the detriment of the broader community. By adopting stewardship as a cultural norm, people will be able to see the bigger picture of how their actions affect the broader system.

Ocean and coastal health should be communicated to much larger audiences, while keeping in mind that different groups might need targeted and tailored messages. Researchers noted that the extent, pace, and scale of change in ocean and coastal systems

can seem unbelievable, so scientists must take care to ensure that people don't disbelieve the science. Private companies and universities are central in knowledge brokering, but need to be incentivised to communicate more broadly.

In terms of accounting for private interest in governance more broadly, there was a prevailing desire to improve trust in the public institutions charged with defining an agenda and making decisions for the public good. There was a view that private interests have considerable interest in defining how oceans and coasts are used. Attendees advocated for transparency in the decision making process, along with explicit demonstration of the extent to which science and evidence inform decisions.

Oceans and coasts are governed by a network of a great number of stakeholders and interests. Attendees suggested that social network analysis would be a useful way to understand the diversity of players, their relationships, and the important roles each fill in the system. More broadly, engagement and consultation activities should be undertaken mindfully as integrated with existing activities, such as those done by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Participants spoke to the many benefits of harmonising governance arrangements between and within states and territories. Harmonisation covers a range of issues, including broad concepts like operating on similar rules across space, as well as specific issues like creating a standardised legal framework for quantifying climate risks for investing in natural capital. Harmonisation is particularly important for advancing economic opportunities at a broad scale that cross a range of jurisdictions. Economic frameworks and analyses can reflect the opportunities associated with sustainable oceans and coasts, such as investment in blue economy initiatives.

Finally, attendees spoke to the urgent need for a national vision and framework that embodies the principles and approaches discussed throughout the workshop. A long-term plan, based on collaborative, inclusive visioning, can assist in making decisions

about the trajectory to be pursued for oceans and coasts. Any national framework must take stock of the wealth of plans already made, and keep a keen eye on implementation when it is completed; the most perfect plan has little value if there isn't adequate appetite or resources to put it into action.

Attendees suggested that this national vision and framework could incorporate work streams for the central principles discussed in this workshop: knowledge needs, community engagement, and institutions and governance.



New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory

New South Wales (NSW) and the Australia Capital Territory (ACT), if combined, are the fifth largest state/territory in Australia with NSW covering 801,150 km² and the ACT spanning 2,358 km².² NSW has 128 islands, including Lord Howe Island. While the vast majority of the ACT is an inland territory, the Jervis Bay Territory located on the south coast of NSW falls into the jurisdiction of the ACT. There are around 50 Indigenous language groups in the New South Wales area.

The NSW coastline covers 1460 km³ from Tweed Heads in the subtropical northern rivers area, to just south of the town of Eden. The coast runs adjacent to the length of the mountainous Great Dividing Range, one of the oldest mountains on earth, and home to the Blue Mountains area west of Sydney and the Snowy Mountains to the south. Further west, the central plains hosts a range of agricultural industries while the western plains are arid.⁴

NSW is Australia's most populous state with 8,157,700 residents in 2020⁵. The ACT is a city-territory as home to Canberra which has a population of 429,800. In the 2016 Census, 4.8 million people lived in the Greater Sydney region⁶ which was 64% of the total state population⁷. Other medium size cities on the coast are relatively large population centres, including Newcastle and surrounding areas, Gosford and Wyong to Sydney's north, and Wollongong to Sydney's south. Outside of these major centres, the NSW coast is moderately urbanised by smaller cities and townships interspersed with national parks and other reserves.

The NSW Government is responsible for a network of marine protected areas, which includes 6 marine parks (covering 345,000 hectares and a third of the NSW marine estate) and 12 aquatic areas (covering 2,000 hectares).⁸ Four Australian Marine Parks extend from NSW and ACT waters, including Jervis Marine Park (ACT), Hunter Marine Park, Central-Eastern Marine Park and Lord Howe Marine Park, with Norfolk Marine Park yet further east.

Marine industry plays a significant role in local and regional economies for coastal communities, and the whole coastline experiences high tourist numbers. On the north and mid-north coast, ports, wharves, commercial fishing, aquaculture and marine services are established, with a view to develop boatbuilding into the future⁹. On the south coast, tourism is particularly important and is bolstered by the 'unspoilt' nature of the region. The south coast is a major visiting area for Canberra residents in particular. Associated industries include the cruise sector, recreational boating, adventure and nature guiding, fishing, arts and heritage, and the food and drink sector¹⁰.

[Explore Aboriginal language groups in Australia](#)

[See more information and maps on New South Wales Marine Protected Areas](#)

[See more information and maps on Australian Marine Parks](#)

Endnotes

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- 2 Geoscience Australia, 2020. *Area of Australia – States and Territories*. Available at: <https://www.ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/national-location-information/dimensions/area-of-australia-states-and-territories>
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