

Comments sought NSW submarine protection zones

ACMA is seeking public comment on its proposals to declare protection zones for submarine cables of national significance off the New South Wales coast.



The proposed protection zones extend one nautical mile (1,852 metres) either side of the Southern Cross Cable and one nautical mile either side of the Australia Japan Cable. The proposed zones extend from the shore out to a water depth of 2,000 metres to ensure an appropriate level of protection for the cables, while minimising the impact on other marine users.

ACMA is proposing two separate protection zones:

- the northern protection zone extends from Narrabeen Beach out to around 40 nautical miles (75 kilometres) from shore, covering the northern branches of the Australia Japan Cable and the Southern Cross Cable
- the southern protection zone extends from Tamarama and Clovelly Beaches out to approximately 30 nautical miles (56 kilometres) from shore, covering the southern branches of the Australia Japan Cable and the Southern Cross Cable.

PROPOSED PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE PROTECTION ZONES

Within the protection zones, ACMA proposes to prohibit marine activities that could

damage a submarine cable, including:

- trawl fishing or scallop dredging
- commercial demersal line-fishing (i.e. targeting bottom-dwelling fish)
- installing a fish aggregating device
- dumping materials at sea, and
- using underwater explosives

PROPOSED RESTRICTED ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE PROTECTION ZONES

ACMA also proposes to restrict certain activities in a way that minimises the impact on marine users while still providing protection to the submarine cables. For instance, some activities cannot damage a cable if they are conducted close to shore where the cables are buried several metres below the seabed and housed in metal conduit.

Some examples of the proposed restrictions include:

- pots, traps, or gillnets cannot be set in waters beyond 500 metres from shore
- anchors cannot be set in waters beyond 500 metres from shore, except around two popular fishing and diving spots—The Peak (off Maroubra) and the SS

- Duckenfield Wreck (off Narrabeen)
- recreational fishers targeting bottom-dwelling fish cannot use wire line or J-hooks above size 4/0 in waters beyond 500 metres from shore
- grapnels can be used only by cable owners for cable maintenance
- gas, oil and mineral reserves lying under a protection zone can only be accessed by drilling into the seabed from outside the protection zone
- seismic surveys cannot be conducted in waters less than 200 metres deep without first consulting with the cable owners
- installing a navigational aid or any construction work cannot be conducted without first consulting with the cable owners and
- electricity cables or gas pipelines can only be installed across (not parallel to) a protection zone.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

ACMA has liaised closely with key stakeholder groups to inform marine users about the proposals and gain a better understanding of stakeholder

issues and sensitivities. Information sessions were held at its Sydney central office for the commercial fishing, and recreational and commercial diving sectors. ACMA has also met with representatives of the oil and gas exploration, and recreational fishing sectors. A protection zone advisory committee, comprising key stakeholder representatives, met for the second time in October.

Public comments on the proposed New South Wales protection zones close on 10 November 2006.

ACMA will soon be releasing a proposal for a protection zone off City Beach, Perth, in Western Australia to protect the SEA-ME-WE3 cable.

Full details of the proposed zones, including maps and a discussion paper, are on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au/subcables or contact ACMA by email to subcablesenquiries@acma.gov.au, mail PO Box 13112 Law Courts, Melbourne Vic 8010, telephone 1300 856 337 or +61 3 9963 6859, fax +61 3 9963 6979.