

# Protection zone proposed for submarine cable off WA coast

ACMA is seeking public comments on a proposal for a protection zone over a key submarine telecommunications cable near Perth in Western Australia. On 23 October, ACMA released a proposal to declare a protection zone over the SEA-ME-WE3 Cable off City Beach, near Perth. This proposal follows closely ACMA's recent proposals for protection zones over the submarine cables off NSW.

Approximately 99 per cent of Australia's international voice and data traffic is carried by submarine cable. The importance of these cables to Australia's economic and social interests is increasing rapidly, with use of international bandwidth growing by 69 per cent this year, up from 64 gigabytes per second (GB/s) to 157 GB/s and effectively tripling since 2004. These cables are worth more than \$5 billion a year to the national economy.

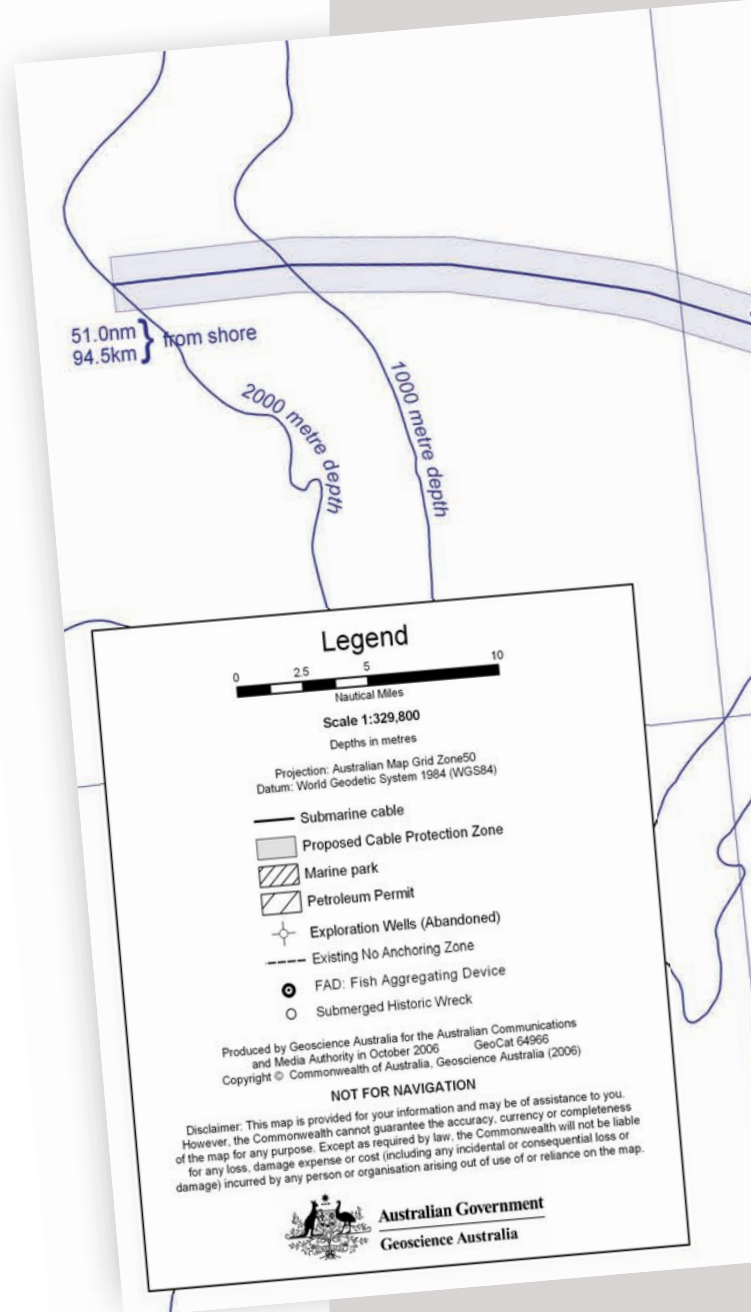
Three submarine cables currently carry the bulk of our international traffic:

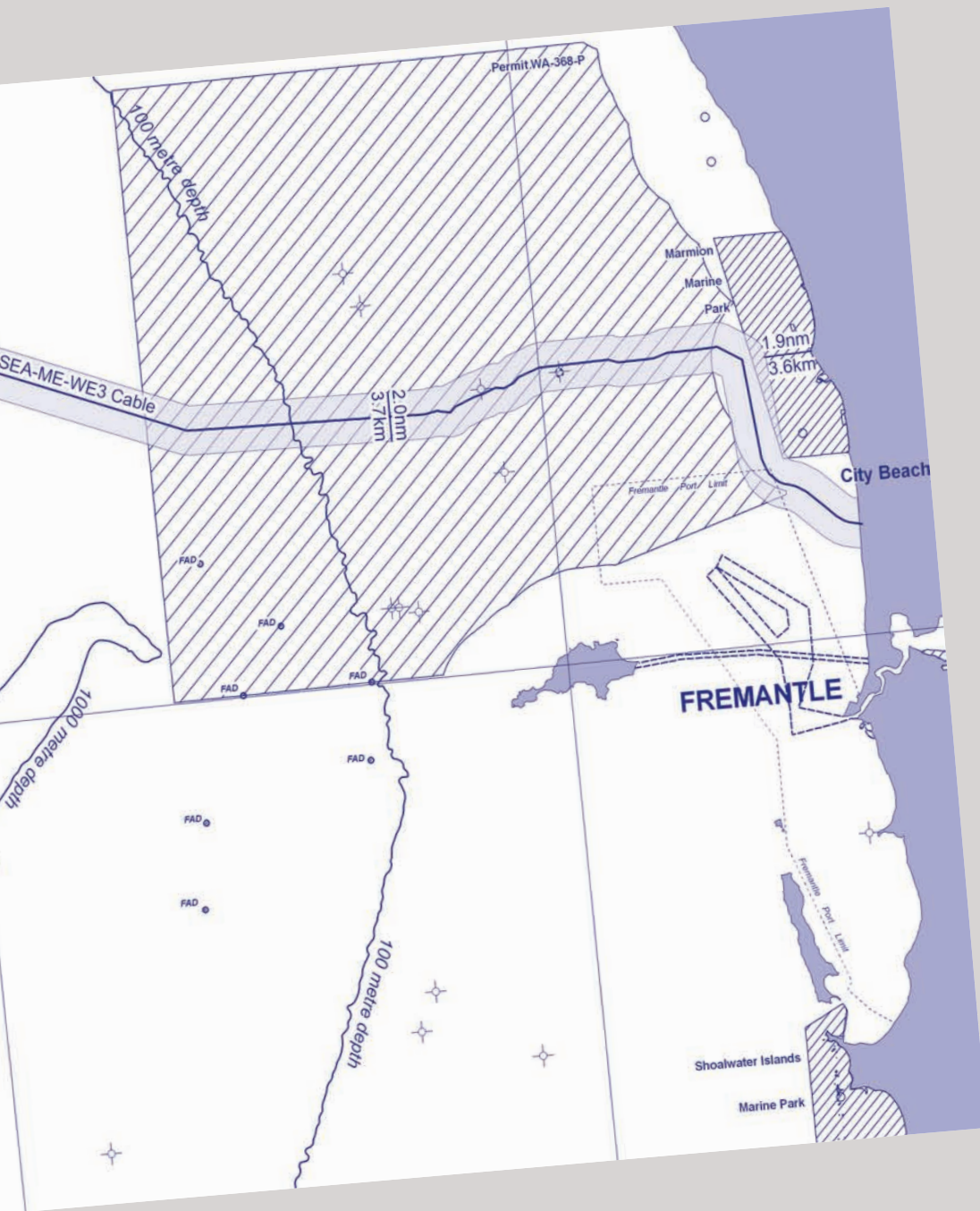
- the Australia Japan Cable—a 640 GB/s capacity cable that links Australia (via Sydney) with Guam and Japan
- the Southern Cross Cable

Network—which links Australia (Sydney) with New Zealand, Fiji and the US via two cable routes, each with 480 GB/s capacity, and

- the SEA-ME-WE3 Cable—a 40 GB/s capacity cable that links Australia (via Perth) with south-east Asia, the Middle East and Western Europe.

The SEA-ME-WE3 Cable is owned by an international consortium, including Reach, and is the highest capacity cable connecting Australia to Indonesia. The cable also provides Australia with the most direct connection to Europe. Without it, traffic to Europe may need to be routed to the United States, resulting in a noticeable delay in voice





communication.

The proposed protection zone would extend one nautical mile either side of the cable. It would commence at the shore and terminate at a point corresponding to a water depth of 2,000 metres—approximately 95 kilometres from shore. The protection zone would cover the waters around the cable, as well

as the seabed and subsoil beneath the protection zone.

Within the protection zone, activities that pose a serious risk of damaging a cable would be prohibited, such as trawl fishing, submarine bottoming, sand dredging and the scuttling of ships. Many other activities are proposed to be restricted within the protection zone, for example:

- some fishing activities that contact the seabed—such as lobster potting, anchoring, or gillnetting—can only be conducted close to shore, where the submarine cable is buried several metres below the seabed
- line fishing operations targeting bottom-dwelling species cannot be conducted

- with very large fishing hooks or using wire fishing line
- gas, oil and mineral reserves lying under a protection zone can only be accessed by drilling into the seabed from outside the protection zone, and
- seismic surveys cannot be conducted in waters less than 200 metres deep without first consulting with the cable owners.

The proposal follows legislation introduced in 2005, which grants ACMA the authority to declare protection zones within Australian waters over existing or proposed submarine cables of national significance. In developing the protection zone proposals, ACMA's goal is to ensure an appropriate level of protection for these cables, while minimising the impact on other marine users.

The closing date for submissions on the WA proposal is Friday 16 February 2007. The proposal, a detailed discussion paper and maps of the proposed protection zone are available from ACMA, telephone 1300 856 337 or email [subcablesenquiries@acma.gov.au](mailto:subcablesenquiries@acma.gov.au), or see the ACMA website at [www.acma.gov.au/subcables](http://www.acma.gov.au/subcables).