

SAFETY: Seals would be among the marine wildlife finding sanctuary in the plan.

Picture: VALERIE TAYLOR

Scientists want dramatic increase in sanctuary zones

SCIENTISTS want to set aside 50 per cent of the South-west Marine Region as sanctuary zones.

The Federal Government is planning a network of sanctuaries, stretching from the west side of Kangaroo Island to Western Australia. Currently less than 1 per cent of the area is fully protected.

Ecologist Professor Hugh Possingham, from the University of Queensland, said he hoped the Government would look carefully at a new report, released today.

"We have to be honest here," he said.

"We have had in Australia, collapses of fish stocks, because they have been over-harvested for various reasons. In a sense, a reserve system like this provides society and the fishing industry with an insurance policy, to ensure that, hopefully, that doesn't happen again."

The team used special com-

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puter software, called Marxan, to identify the best locations for sanctuaries that met accepted scientific principles, with the smallest impact on existing uses such as recreational and commercial fishing.

The "integrated" approach now can be replicated across the north-west, north and east marine regions, Professor Possingham said.

Marxan has been developed over 15 years. It has been used to rezone the Great Barrier Reef and adopted by more than 100 countries, including South Africa and Canada.

The aim is to find the most cost-effective way to protect the marine environment so animals

and plants can cope with climate change and other threats, such as agricultural and urban run-off, as well as fishing. In this case, it absorbed information from more than 3300 data sets.

Professor Possingham said he was not surprised to find half the South-west Marine Region had to be protected in sanctuary zones. This did not mean, however, economic or social activity was also reduced by half.

At worst it would displace 19 per cent of defence activity and commercial trawling, and 37 per cent of shipping activity.

The proposal, however, would protect 1465 species, including mammals such as seals, fish, birds and invertebrates and 486 key underwater features such as depth zones, seascapes and seamounts.

Commonwealth waters start about 3 nautical miles out from shore and extend to the far limits of the Exclusive Economic Zone, which is 200 nautical miles out.

MURDER CHARGE

Woman granted bail

A MT Gambier woman charged with murdering her partner in a domestic dispute last week has been granted home detention bail.

The 24-year-old, who cannot be identified, yesterday appeared in the Mt Gambier Magistrates Court charged with one count of murder.

Police said that after a domestic dispute, the victim drove off and crashed his car. He later died in hospital but his injuries were "not consistent" with a car crash. The woman was granted home detention bail to reappear in court in January.

CONCRETE CRACKING

Desal plant concerns

CONCRETE used in the desalination plant construction is cracking, the project director has conceded, but he says it's "just business as usual".

Adelaide Aqua project director Duncan Whitfield told Parliament's public works committee some concrete was showing signs of cracking.

Liberal MP Martin Hamilton-Smith said the cracking raised concerns about the quality of materials being used on the \$1.8 billion project.

But Mr Whitfield said the cracking did not pose a risk to the integrity of the structure.

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