



## **Underwater Legend Valerie Taylor Urges Protection of the Coral Sea— While We Still Have Time**

BRISBANE, 11 January 2012—The Coral Sea is a beacon of hope in the world’s oceans, yet the Australian Government’s recently released draft plan for the Coral Sea will not give it the protection its marine life needs, according to Valerie Taylor AM, renowned underwater photographer and conservationist.

To highlight her concerns, Ms Taylor has narrated a short film showcasing the beauty of the Coral Sea and urging Australians to take this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to conserve it. The film can be viewed at [www.protectourcoralsea.org.au](http://www.protectourcoralsea.org.au).

“As Australians, we are privileged to have such a healthy area of ocean under our responsibility, yet I am concerned that the government’s proposal fails to adequately safeguard the Coral Sea for future generations”, Ms Taylor said.

“I’ve seen the changes that have occurred in our oceans over many years. Establishing a very large, highly protected marine national park in the Coral Sea would safeguard this special area just like national parks do on land”, she continued.

“The government’s proposed Coral Sea Marine Reserve falls short of protecting the area’s fragile coral reefs, vital breeding sites, and spectacular marine life, including big fish like sharks, tuna, and marlin”, Ms Taylor added.

“Only the eastern half of this ocean treasure has been set aside as a safe haven for marine life. But it is the western Coral Sea where most of the species-rich coral reefs and critical spawning sites for black marlin and threatened tuna are found. Just two of 25 reefs are proposed for high-level protection in the draft”, said Daisy Barham of the Australian Marine Conservation Society.

“Although oil and gas development, and mining would be banned from the proposed Coral Sea Marine Reserve, the spectacular marine life of the coral reefs, canyons, and seamounts remain threatened by various types of fishing”, she continued.

“The Coral Sea may be the world’s last great tropical ocean ecosystem where a highly protected marine national park on a very large scale could be established and effectively managed. The government should seize the opportunity to safeguard the coral reefs and leave a legacy that Australians—and the world—can be proud of”, said Imogen Zethoven of the Pew Environment Group.

*Protect our Coral Sea is a coalition of 13 Australian and international conservation groups, which comprises the Australian Conservation Foundation, Australian Marine Conservation Society, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, Greenpeace, Humane Society International, International Fund for Animal Welfare, National Parks Association of Queensland, North Queensland Conservation Council, Pew Environment Group, Project AWARE, Queensland Conservation Council, Wildlife Queensland, and WWF Australia.*

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## Editor's Notes:

- Valerie Taylor began diving in 1956 and pioneered underwater footage of sharks when she became the first person in the world to photograph great white sharks without the protection of a cage. As a cinematographer for the film *Jaws*, Valerie and her partner, Ron Taylor, brought marine life to movie screens and TV for many Australians. Valerie was the recipient of a Centenary Medal in 2001 and was named a Member of the Order of Australia in 2010 for her outstanding contribution to marine conservation.
- More than 270 marine scientists from 35 countries, including Australia, have endorsed a science statement calling for the establishment of a worldwide system of very large, highly protected marine reserves in areas such as the Coral Sea: <http://bit.ly/swXyUc>
- In the past 50 years, more than 90 percent of the world's large predatory oceangoing fish have disappeared because of overfishing (Source: R A Myers & B Worm, *Nature*, Vol 423, 15 May 2003).
- Less than 1 percent of the world's oceans are fully protected.
- Protect Our Coral Sea, a coalition of 13 Australian and international conservation groups, is calling on the federal government to establish a large, world-class, highly protected marine park in Australia's Coral Sea that will provide a haven for marine life and recognize its historic significance. [www.ProtectOurCoralSea.org.au](http://www.ProtectOurCoralSea.org.au)
- The Protect Our Coral Sea coalition comprises the Australian Conservation Foundation, Australian Marine Conservation Society, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, Greenpeace, Humane Society International, International Fund for Animal Welfare, National Parks Association of Queensland, North Queensland Conservation Council, the Pew Environment Group, Project AWARE, Queensland Conservation Council, Wildlife Queensland, and WWF-Australia.

