



**HUMANE SOCIETY  
INTERNATIONAL**

**Media Release - Thursday, July 15 2010**

## **Critical marine habitats remain unprotected in Australian waters: report**

Only a fraction of critical marine habitats for threatened whales, dolphins and turtles are protected in Australian waters due to weaknesses in the nation's premier environmental legislation, WWF and Humane Society International (HSI) warned today.

A new report released by the two conservation groups highlights a lack of protection for feeding and breeding grounds and migratory routes for threatened marine species under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act*.

"To protect Australia's whales, dolphins and turtles we must safeguard nature's unique places, such as nesting beaches, breeding grounds, feeding sites and the blue superhighways these creatures pass through in our waters," said Dr Gilly Llewellyn, Conservation Manager, WWF-Australia.

"A network of sanctuaries to protect threatened whales, dolphins and turtles in Australian waters is a crucial part of the solution, one that can be achieved through the government's existing commitment to establish a national network of Marine Protected Areas."

HSI's Senior Program Manager Alexia Wellbelove said while Australians took great pride in their marine environment, levels of protection lagged far behind that found on the land.

"Incredibly, Australia has double the amount of highly protected areas on land than it does at sea<sup>1</sup>. Our government has been internationally vocal about the protection of whales. This is the perfect opportunity to strengthen current legislation and deliver whale and dolphin conservation in our own backyard."

Australia is home to six of the world's seven species of marine turtles; 45 of the world's 86 species of whale, dolphin and porpoise; and more than a quarter of the world's sharks, skates and rays.

With the report providing a blueprint for better identification and protection of the critical habitats of marine species - including stronger legislative protection under the *EPBC Act* - WWF and HSI are calling on the next Australian Government to urgently address the issue.

"The identification and protection of critical marine habitat must be a central plank of a long term government strategy to protect Australia's marine life," said Ms Wellbelove.

Among many suggested reforms to the EPBC Act, the report recommends:

- 'critical marine habitat' be mapped and listed under the *EPBC Act* within 12 months of a species being listed as threatened, and then incorporated into a system of protected areas<sup>2</sup>;
- the definition of 'critical habitat' be strengthened to include environments that will provide important refuges for species as climate change starts to impact on the marine environment.

"It's not about making radical changes, it's simply about giving the existing environmental framework some real legislative teeth," Dr Gilly Llewellyn said.

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<sup>1</sup> Terrestrial (lucn I-II) 8.5% 65,483,620 ha out of 768,826,956, Marine (lucn i-ii) 4%

<sup>2</sup> The report provides an indication of what such 'critical habitat maps' could look like for 16 key threatened marine species, including whales, turtles, sharks, sea lions, dolphins and the dugong, as a starting point for Government  
This press release and associated material can be found on [www.wwf.org.au](http://www.wwf.org.au)