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**Australian Academy of Science and Future Earth Australia submission on the  
*Draft Sustainable Ocean Plan***

Australia's oceans and coastal regions hold significance for all Australians, particularly for First Nations peoples who have stewarded these environments for tens of thousands of years.

Establishing a clear and ambitious national plan for Australia's oceans is imperative to create thriving, just, economically viable, and sustainable marine ecosystems for current and future generations.

The Academy and FEA:

- Support the plan's overarching priorities, which largely align with the recommendations in the FEA [Sustainable Oceans And Coasts National Strategy 2021-2030](#).
- Recommend including clear, measurable, and quantifiable actions for each proposed national priority through an action plan, to ensure a pathway to successful outcomes is presented.
- Propose that the Plan explicitly acknowledges the interconnectivity of the proposed national priorities to enable transdisciplinary opportunities and avoid fragmentation and siloing.
- Propose empowering Indigenous communities to lead in the co-management of Sea Country, with representation at all decision-making levels.
- Recommend leveraging Australia's membership of the Belmont Forum through FEA to shape and resource global science and research that meets Australia's priorities.

[Opportunity to further integrate FEA's Sustainable Oceans and Coasts National Strategy into the Sustainable Ocean Plan](#)

It is gratifying that the draft Plan draws on FEA's [Sustainable Oceans And Coasts National Strategy 2021-2030](#) (the National Strategy). To develop the National Strategy, extensive consultation was held across every state and territory, with over 261 contributors and an expert working group of 31 prominent researchers across government, academia, and industry. Seven comprehensive recommendations include clear actions and outcomes that aim to produce sustainable oceans and coastal ecosystems within Australia by 2030.

The draft Plan's priorities largely align with the seven recommendations and outcomes in the National Strategy. We hope to see the direction provided by the National Strategy acknowledged to recognise the obvious and significant contributions this work made to the Plan.

The National Strategy provides measurable and quantifiable actions that present a detailed roadmap for tackling the national priorities presented in the current draft Plan.

Further, the Plan should recognise the intrinsic value of a thriving ocean beyond the narrow 'ocean economy' view presented in the draft. A more expansive view of the value of oceans is necessary for all desired outcomes and values to come to fruition.

[Clear, measurable, and quantifiable actions to provide a pathway to success](#)

Inclusion of clear actions within the Plan to demonstrate how the identified opportunities will be achieved, and by whom, will improve the Plan. While the draft Plan contains a clear vision and notes strategic objectives, there remains a need for a clear process for defining operational objectives that can be used to track material progress. Clear articulation of responsibilities for implementing key areas is vital to facilitate a coordinated approach which implements the steps to achieve the desired outcomes listed in the Plan.

Drawing on FEA's National Strategy and its clear, concise implementation plans for each of the seven recommendations presented, directly overlaps with the national priorities and should be used as a foundation in the final Sustainable Ocean Plan.

### Empowering Indigenous leadership and custodianship

We acknowledge the deep connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with Sea Country. Their Traditional Knowledges and practices are crucial to inform sustainable management practices and industries today.

The Academy and FEA recommend that Indigenous leadership and custodianship be included as a core element of the Plan. As indicated in the draft Plan, this will support biodiversity, human, and economic outcomes for Australia. Indigenous communities need to be empowered to lead in the co-management of Sea Country, with representation at all decision-making levels that can help guide policy, research, and management.

Indigenous custodianship of Sea Country supports biosecurity and national security along Australia's vast coastline, particularly in remote and sparsely populated areas. Traditional Knowledge holders retain key cultural memories of past climate shifts of the magnitude projected for the coming decades. The knowledge corridors outlined in the National Strategy represent an ideal route to respectful, mutually beneficial sharing that can help Australia move in an integrated way to address the rapidly growing challenge of dealing with climate change.

The 'equity and inclusion' priority should include an acknowledgement that climate change has greater impacts on marginalised groups and requires co-design of climate adaptation strategies, as detailed in FEA's [National Strategy for Just Adaptation](#).

### Interconnectivity of national priorities will enable transdisciplinary opportunities

The draft Plan can be strengthened by acknowledging the interconnected nature of the priorities, creating more cohesion. Isolating the priority areas fails to consider the transdisciplinary opportunities, complex challenges, and cumulative impacts across each priority area. An integrated approach is essential for fostering resilient communities and ecosystems, ensuring adaptation plans are just and equitable, creating a thriving ocean economy, and understanding First Nations people's ways of knowing.

Opportunities in projects or partnerships that target the development of knowledge and research towards the focus areas and enablers should be harnessed and supported, such as the Belmont Forum Oceans Collaborative Research Action. The Belmont Forum is a partnership of funding organisations, international science councils, and regional consortia committed to the advancement of transdisciplinary science. The final Plan should leverage Australia's membership to the Belmont Forum, allowing Australia to shape the direction of global oceans research to better reflect Australia's interests. Through the Belmont Forum, Australia can invest in Australian research collaborations to enhance our global standing and build regional trust with Pacific partners.

### Innovative solutions for increased environmental outcomes

The 'protect and restore' priority would be strengthened by including new and emerging solutions for increased environmental outcomes to support existing targets and management strategies.

Investing in nature-based solutions for the restoration of degraded habitat and ecosystems, leveraging market opportunities to encourage public-private partnerships and private capital investments in sustainable oceans and coasts, and facilitating large-scale studies on socio-ecological systems change will be critical in building resilient communities.

Greater systematic changes, including exploring emerging markets and economies, increasing innovation within Australia's economy, and creating jobs, are necessary to foster a more sustainable ocean economy and avoid the undesirable cumulative effects of industrialisation witnessed on land. The recommendation 'decarbonise the blue economy' in the National Strategy provides actions and outcomes relevant to this priority.

The Plan's proposed development of an integrated national platform to support ocean data sharing is crucial. However, the final Plan should explicitly reference upholding the FAIR and CARE principles for data governance. This will allow for the best available data and science to be used to support decision-making while building trust with First Nations peoples.

The Academy and FEA highlight the immense opportunity for Australia to be a global leader in the space of ocean reform, management and sustainability, including through the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives and the protection of Australia's abundant, unique, and biodiverse marine ecosystems.

To discuss or clarify any aspect of this submission, please contact Mr Chris Anderson, Director Science Policy at [Chris.Anderson@science.org.au](mailto:Chris.Anderson@science.org.au) or Kate Nairn, Director of Future Earth Australia at [futureearthaustralia@science.org.au](mailto:futureearthaustralia@science.org.au).