

Bynoe Harbour - NT treasure to be protected in Marine Park

31st January 06

Bynoe Harbour is only 40 km's from the Top End capital and is one of Darwin's greatest natural assets. The Traditional Owners have managed the Bynoe Harbour land and sea for millennia and their connection to country remains strong. The future of this beautiful place is now being decided through the Bynoe Harbour Marine Park process.

Bynoe Harbour is home to a diverse range of relatively intact marine and coastal habitats and contains some of the NT's best quality reefs. Bynoe contains a rich mixture of plants and animals and provides internationally significant habitats for many species of high conservation value. Five islands are nestled in the mouth of the Harbour and the harbour coastline is made up of mangroves, fringing and subtidal reefs, sandy beaches, seagrass and mud flat/sand flat habitats. Bynoe hosts the only known large NT seagrass bed found west of Darwin with further patches of seagrass scattered throughout the region. Dugongs are often seen feeding on these seagrass beds. The area also contains valuable wader bird habitat, feeding grounds for juvenile hawksbill and green turtles, sandy beach nesting sites for flatback turtles, over 250 species of fish and high sponge diversity. Although all habitat components are important, the greatest value of this entire region is its intact and healthy state.

Due to this near-pristine state Bynoe Harbour attracts locals and tourists alike. The Harbour currently has small scale recreational and commercial activities including recreational fishing, boating, sailing and diving. Commercial uses include tourist operations, pearl farming and mud crabbing. Currently the Harbour and its natural assets are relatively pristine. The Harbour is however at a cross-roads; management and protection measures implemented over the next few years will determine if it has a secure future. The Bynoe Harbour Marine Park, if done well, can protect its biodiversity values. The greatest immediate threat is a current Sea Cage fish farm proposal which has potential to impact upon the biodiversity values that the Marine Park is aiming to protect. AMCS, together with the community, will be working hard over the next couple of years to ensure the Marine Park delivers high levels of biodiversity protection for this outstanding natural place.

Adele Pedder
Northern Marine Campaigner
Australian Marine Conservation Society