

Chapter 1

Australia's Coastal and Marine Environment

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1.1 Introduction

Australia's understanding of its coastal and marine environment has been constantly evolving throughout the past century. The management and regulation of the coastal and marine environment has also been in a state of evolution for Australian governments,¹ especially for their environmental managers, lawyers, planners and scientists. Although Australia has historically had a strong coastal outlook and focus, with approximately 50 per cent of its population living within 7 kilometres of the coastline and all of its major cities excepting Canberra located on the coast,² Australia has often displayed an inward-looking approach emphasising management and regulation of the land. Notwithstanding Australia's colonial connection with whaling³ and the early importance of the pearling industry, at Federation in 1901 maritime matters were not extensively addressed in the Constitution, though the importance of ports and shipping to Australia's overseas trade were understood.⁴ The Commonwealth government was disinterested in

- 1 All Australian governments, other than the Australian Capital Territory, have some level of responsibility for the regulation and management of the coastal and marine environment, including the territorial government of Norfolk Island. Local government also has extensive responsibilities for aspects of the coastal environment.
- 2 Geoscience Australia, Australian Government, *Australia's Coast and Estuaries* (22 November 2010) <www.ga.gov.au/marine/coasts-estuaries.html>. These figures are further reinforced by the finding that 81.1 per cent of Australia's population live within 50 kilometres of the coastline: Advisory Panel on Demographic Change and Liveability, Report commissioned by Commonwealth Minister for Sustainability Environment, Water, Population and Communities, *Demographic Change and Liveability Panel Report: An appendix to a Sustainable Population for Australia issues paper*, December 2010, xv, <www.environment.gov.au/sustainability/population/publications/pubs/demographic-panel-report.pdf>.
- 3 Which continued until the closure of the last whaling station in Albany (WA) in 1978; see Chris Pash, *The Last Whale* (Fremantle Press, 2008).
- 4 As was highlighted with the early development of major ports in Sydney, and Australia's dependence on shipping for trade and commerce given the size of the continent, its isolation, and the need to export to major markets such as Britain.

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