

10-06-10 Fishers Fight
Marine Parks

Fishers fight marine park sanctuary

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COMMERCIAL fishers have savaged claims that up to a third of the Kimberley's coastline must be quarantined in sanctuary zones, saying the move would send businesses to the wall and rob consumers of local seafood.

Responding to comments from prominent marine scientist Professor Jessica Meeuwig that between 20 and 30 per cent of the region's coastal waters should be exempted from fishing and mineral exploration, fishing groups have derided the suggestion as "off the planet".

Kimberley Professional Fishermen's Association secretary Bob Masters said if the Government agreed to lock up vast tracks of the Kimberley's waters it would be for purely political reasons.

As the Government plans to reveal whether any of the proposed Camden Sound Marine Park will be set aside as a sanctuary zone — which prohibits fishing and mineral exploration activities — Mr Masters said he would oppose any moves to curtail the rights of commercial fishers.

He said the Kimberley's fisheries were already well managed by commercial operators and were among the healthiest in the country.

And he argued commercial fishers had already taken significant Government-imposed reductions to their quotas in the interests of preserving stocks and any suggestion their activities were unsustainable was baseless.

"We have been fishing in the Kimberley for 20 years now and it's a sustainable fishery," he said.

"The most environmentally passionate people are the fishermen.

"We are so protective of the marine biodiversity and our fishery because it's good business to do that."

But in a move that is likely to inflame tensions between fishers and the Government, Environment Minister Donna Faragher indicated that she would push ahead with declaring parts of the marine park as sanctuary zones.

The final decision had to be approved by her and Mines and Petroleum Minister Norman Moore and go through a public submission period.