



COMMUNITY INFORMATION SHEET • CONNECTIVITY

Cable protection zones and the marine environment

How undersea cables and ocean users share the sea floor

The key idea: shared waters, clear rules

Subsea cables share the seabed with fishing, anchoring, aquaculture and marine life. Australia manages the highest-value cables through declared **protection zones**: mapped corridors where activities that could damage cables (bottom trawling, anchoring) are restricted or prohibited, with serious penalties, including up to 10 years' imprisonment, for deliberate or negligent damage.

Where the zones are

The ACMA has declared three protection zones over cables of national significance: two off Sydney (Northern and Southern) and one off Perth (City Beach). Each extends roughly one nautical mile either side of the protected cables, out to deep water. New cables, including future landings in northern Australia, may bring proposals for new zones. *(Status current at July 2026.)*

What it means for marine users

Within a zone, certain gear and anchoring are prohibited; outside zones, cables are still protected by general law and charts mark their routes. For fishers, the practical questions are exactly where the boundaries sit and which methods remain permitted; proponents and the ACMA publish maps and plain-language guides. Compensation arrangements for displaced fishing effort vary by project and are worth raising early.

Environmental effects

Cable installation disturbs a narrow strip of seabed once, during laying (or burial in shallower water); operational effects are generally minimal and studies commonly find the seabed recovers. The genuine questions are route-specific: reefs, seagrass, marine parks and culturally significant sea Country deserve independent assessment, published in full.

What good practice looks like

- Routes selected to avoid sensitive habitat and heritage, with alternatives documented.
- Fishers and marine users consulted on zone boundaries before declaration.
- Independent marine environmental assessment, published.
- Clear charts, notices and a contact point for marine users.

Questions to ask

Exactly where will restrictions apply and to which activities? What did the environmental assessment find and who reviewed it? Is there compensation or adjustment assistance for affected fishers?

Want to know more? The ACMA publishes protection zone maps and rules; the proponent's environmental assessment is on public exhibition during approval. This sheet is general information, not legal or planning advice; a specific proposal is confirmed by qualified assessment.