Clouds Over Jervis Bay

by Attila Kaszo

It was mid morning when we arrived at Point Perpendicular, the northern towering headland leading into Jervis Bay.

The boat ride was exhausting, not because the fishing trawler which heaved and rolled in the big swells, but more to do with what we drank the previous night.

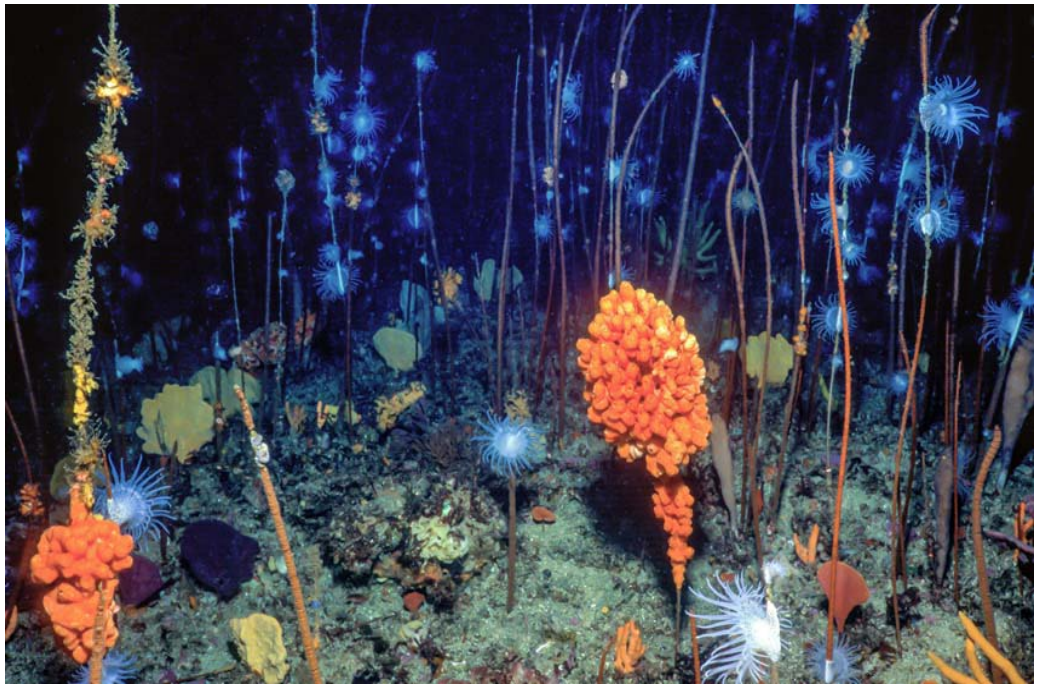
It was 1970, and I was visiting this place for the first time as part of my "open water" course. There was no dive shop facilities, nor dive operators, only a local ship builder, Alf Settree, who occasionally steamed out with fishing or diving parties keen to harvest or explore the region.

Not much has really changed in the 30 plus years as far as fishing and diving are concerned, it is still going strong. We see more fishers, a lot more divers than in 1970 and clearly more impact above and below the water.

However, what changed was in 1998 Jervis Bay was declared a Marine Park. The ramifications of this management process were significant.

Diving around the "Torpedo Tubes" (named because of the torpedo platforms built to terrorise the "invading" Japanese during WW2) wasn't as exotic as it may suggest. Huge boulders that had fallen formed most of the base to the cliffs, and overall there wasn't much about. We did what we needed for our course and went back to our campsite to prepare for the next day. Only after some discussions with a few locals were we told that far better diving was to be had if we knew where to go, isn't that always the case though!

The area now known as "The Docks" was on the agenda and when we dove a truly amazing site unfolded. Clear water filled with masses of schooling fish everywhere, stingrays, large Blue Grouper, Drummer and Red Morwong darting around the rocks. This was my first real insight into what Jervis Bay had to offer.



This is what a Jervis Bay seascape looks like at its best. Taken on the NE side of Bowen Island at about 30mtres, the Sea Whip garden is playing host to dozens of anemones. The anemones will migrate to another patch of whips once their food source becomes scarce. Aquatica / Nik F4s – S/S 1/60th @ f8 – ISO 100 Velvia – Lens 20mm f2.8 Nikkor - Strobe Sea & Sea 200

Humpback Whale and Calf resting. Jervis Bay benefits from both the Northern and Southern migration of these whales as they make their way to and from Antarctica. Aquatica Nikon D2X, 12-24mm f2.8 Nikkor @12mm, 1/80th@f5.6, ISO 200

Flying underwater at 1.76 meters a second, Fairy Penguins are difficult subjects to capture. After a week of shooting I managed two acceptable images. Bowen Island at the gateway to Jervis Bay Marine Park boasts a colony of about 5,000 nesting pairs. Much can be written about these birds, but suffice to say they are a delight when encountered and their habitat remains secure in the Marine Park. Nikonos V, 35mm u/w Nikkor, 1/500th@f5.6, ISO 100 Velvia

The Docks is not an isolated reef in the middle of the bay, it is in fact part of the rocky shoreline accessible to most people. I thought at the time if this is what's it's like here, I can only imagine what some of the more inaccessible parts of Jervis Bay must be like.

As the years passed I explored vast areas of Jervis Bay and the surrounding coastline, documenting many underwater scenes both in stills and motion.

Even after all this time, I'm still amazed at how beautiful this place really is, and still amazed at listening to new comers diving the Bay for the first time being exhilarated by its spectacle.

The Park extends outside the bay, to encompass marine protected areas north and south. The overall size of the park is over 22,000 hectares (220km) and 120km of coastline. The bay has about 45 kilometres of shoreline and relatively shallow with water depth of about 40mtrs at the heads then varying to shallower depths throughout the bay. Its size by comparison can be measured by water volume, that being about six times that of Sydney Harbour.

Generally the water is clear throughout the year, due mainly to the bays size and shape of its entrance and the small catchment area that feeds fresh water into it. The Marine Park principally comprises of 20% Sanctuary Zones, 72% Habitat Protection and the remaining designated to general use.

Without going too much into the science and the areas biodiversity, it's fair to say that the prominent currents that bring it's amazing range of marine creatures and plants are due to the East Australian Current sweeping in from the north, bringing with it warm blue water and all that that travels in it, and the nutrient enriched

Australian Fur Seals only started to frequent the Marine Park about 15 years ago. There are two primary locations where they haul out, one to the north of the park the other south. They do not breed here, but their numbers seem to indicate they have established a well stock colony. Overall numbers of these mammals have increased since hunting ceased, but are still well below prior to it. Their only known natural predator are Great White sharks and Orcas, which also migrate along the East Australian current past the Marine Park.
Nikonos V, 15mm u/w Nikkor, 1/60th@f11 ISO 100 Velvia

Hunted to near extinction, Grey Nurse Sharks (Carcharius taurus) are still threatened. Their numbers remain so low that unless considerable long term conservation measures are adopted, this species will cease to exist in the wild on the east coast of Australia. It's greatest threat is that the habitat it enjoys coincides with prized fishing grounds. The sharks in the main are caught by accident and hauled quickly to the surface during which time they suffer embolism. So the catch and release program common with other species does not work with this one, and accordingly the majority that are caught die.
Nikonos 2, 15mm u/w Nikkor, 1/60th@f8 ISO 100.

Once a common fish on the southern east coast, Long Snouted Boarfish have become a rare sighting. They became perilously close to oblivion after extensive hunting by line and spearfishers. The fish are an easy target, and due to their large size were favored as a table fish. The Marine Park offers some level of protection in the Sanctuary zone regions, but unfortunately the fish are unaware of these boundaries, and if caught by line fishers, would seldom be thrown back. Rollie Marine 6x6, Rollieflex f3.5 camera fixed lens's, ISO 100 Ektachrome, Strobe Sea Tite Australia.

upwelling's from the southern oceans.

We can boast to having Humpback whales with calves, seals, dolphins, Grey Nurse sharks, aggregating Port Jackson sharks, Giant Australian Cuttlefish, rare and endangered Bleeker's Blue Devil Fish, huge caves and the list goes on. How's that for starters!

There are however some threats to our ecosystem as well. Foreshore over development threatens to impact on the catchment, Marina construction proposals and Aquaculture farms could seriously impact and damage the fragile balance that has been struck over millennia. So what's the answer?

As a conservationist I take into account the reason why this park and others around the country were established, primarily as a sanctuary for species that were struggling to survive because of overfishing and destruction of their habitats. Reef assemblages, which are identified as in tact habitats, are given Sanctuary Zone protection and are in essence no go zones for harvesting.

All that sounds reasonable doesn't it? Well, in a small way it is, except fish are not aware of the zones or barriers, so in lies the dilemma. As soon as they leave the zone they are potential targets for fishers. The other issue is the overall size of the zones. In Jervis Bay Marine Park, only 20% is

Rare and very difficult to find the Red Indianfish (Pataecus fronto) favors reef that has kelp growth at its base. Its vibrant orange coloring is not noticeable unless it is lit artificially. Due to its shape and habit of staying near kelp beds, it's a brilliant mimic resembling its surroundings making it a perfect ambush predator. Aquatica / Nik F4s, 105mm lens, 1/60th@f11 ISO 100 Velvia, Sea & Sea 200 & Sea-Tite Australia strobes.

Humpback Whales like this one, off Point Perpendicular, migrate to the tropical waters off Queensland to have their young annually, then go all the way back heading to Antarctica with their calves. Jervis Bay has always been a place for a bit of respite for these large mammals, but they were hunted and slaughtered to the brink of extinction so their visits to the bay stopped. Since whaling ended, there has been a gradual return to the bay not only of Humpback Whales, but also Southern Right Whales, the occasional Minke and even less frequently Orcas. Nik D700, 400mm f4, 1/3200th@f5.6 ISO 400 .

designated as Sanctuary Zone, overall within the New South Wales coastline and estuarine regions there is 6.5% designated as Sanctuary Zone, hardly enough to make any significant impact at all.

To truly derive a benefit, Sanctuary Zones need to be linked, as are terrestrial wildlife corridors. Without such continuity only "islands" of Sanctuary are created which only benefit insular ecosystems and provide very little benefit to the Park proper.

I have lived in this area since 1990 and have logged a lot of dives and seen many changes underwater to habitats.

I have seen plans for all sorts of development, from a Nuclear Reactor site to a Naval Armaments Depot, to various commercial fisheries ventures to 500 plus vessel berth marinas. All of these proposals were supported by developers and the local City Council, keen on attracting business and further developing the area, all of course at the expense of the very things that attracts tourism here in the first place.

Fortunately dedicated citizens and conservationists have thwarted all of these proposals. I just wonder how long it will take for authorities to see the real value of these natural wonders, and put aside the rhetoric to preserve in tact what remains.

We have won most of our battles, but I wonder if we will win the war?

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These three photos are all taken of the same wreck in the Red Sea. The left hand image was taken on slide film, which rendered the scene completely blue. The middle image is taken with a digital SLR without a filter, using manual white balance. The white balance has brought out some of the colour of the wreck, but it has also sucked all the blue out of the water behind the wreck, making it almost grey. The right hand image is taken with the same digital camera and lens, but this time using an original Magic Filter. The filter attenuates blue light meaning that the colours of the wreck are brought out and it stands out from the background water, which is recorded as an accurate blue.

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