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## Increased connectivity and depth improve the effectiveness of marine reserves

Authors: Jordan Goetze<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Shaun Wilson<sup>1,3</sup>, Ben Radford<sup>5</sup>, Rebecca Fisher<sup>5</sup>, Tim Langlois<sup>3,4</sup>,

Jacquomo Monk<sup>6</sup>, Nathan Knott<sup>7</sup>, Hamish Malcolm<sup>8</sup>, Leanne M. Currey-Randall<sup>9</sup>, Daniel
 Ierodiaconou<sup>10</sup>, David Harasti<sup>11</sup>, Neville Barrett<sup>6</sup>, Russell C Babcock<sup>12</sup>, Nestor E. Bosch<sup>3,4</sup>,

- Danny Brock<sup>13</sup>, Joachim Claudet<sup>14</sup>, Jock Clough<sup>3</sup>, David V. Fairclough<sup>15</sup>, Michelle R. Heupel<sup>9</sup>
- 7 Thomas H. Holmes<sup>1,3</sup>, Charlie Huveneers<sup>16</sup>, Alan R. Jordan<sup>6,8</sup>, Dianne McLean<sup>3,5</sup>, Mark
- 8 Meekan<sup>5</sup>, David Miller<sup>13</sup>, Stephen J. Newman<sup>15</sup>, Matthew J. Rees<sup>5,7</sup>, Kelsey Roberts<sup>17</sup>,
- Benjamin J. Saunders<sup>2</sup>, Conrad W. Speed<sup>5</sup>, Michael J. Travers<sup>15</sup>, Eric Treml<sup>18</sup>, Sasha K.
   Whitmarsh<sup>16</sup>, Corey B. Wakefield<sup>15</sup>, Euan S. Harvey<sup>2</sup>
- 11
- <sup>1</sup>Marine Science Program, Biodiversity and Conservation Science, Department of Biodiversity,
- 13 Conservation and Attractions, Kensington, WA 6151, Australia
- <sup>2</sup>School of Molecular and Life Sciences, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, WA
   6845, Australia.
- 16
- 17 <sup>3</sup>The UWA Oceans Institute, Indian Ocean Marine Research Centre, Perth, Australia
- <sup>4</sup>School of Biological Sciences, The University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway,
   Perth, WA 6009, Australia.
- <sup>5</sup>Australian Institute of Marine Science, Indian Ocean Marine Research Centre, UWA
   (MO96), 64 Fairway St, Perth, WA 6000, Australia.
- <sup>6</sup>Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tas 7001,
   Australia
- <sup>7</sup>Fisheries Research, NSW Department of Primary Industries, 4 Woollamia Road, Huskisson,
   NSW, 2540, Australia
- <sup>8</sup>Fisheries Research, NSW Department of Primary Industries, 32 Marina Drive, Coffs
   Harbour, NSW, 2450, Australia
- <sup>9</sup>Australian Institute of Marine Science, PMB 3 Townsville, Queensland, 4810 Australia
- <sup>10</sup>School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Centre for Integrative Ecology, Deakin
   University Warrnambool, VIC, 3280, Australia
- <sup>11</sup>Fisheries Research, NSW Department of Primary Industries, Taylors Beach Road, Taylors
   Beach, NSW, 2315, Australia
- 33 <sup>12</sup>CSIRO Oceans and Atmosphere, 306 Carmody Rd, St Lucia, Qld 4011 Australia
- <sup>13</sup>Department for Environment and Water SA, 81-95 Waymouth St, Adelaide SA 5000
- <sup>14</sup>National Center for Scientific Research, PSL Université Paris, CRIOBE, USR 3278 CNRS EPHE-UPVD, Maison des Océans, 195 rue Saint-Jacques, Paris, France
- <sup>15</sup>Western Australian Fisheries and Marine Research Laboratories, Department of Primary
- Industries and Regional Development, Government of Western Australia, PO Box 20, North
   Beach, WA 6920, Australia
- <sup>16</sup>Southern Shark Ecology Group, College of Science and Engineering, Flinders University,
   Bedford Park, South Australia, 5042, Australia

- 42 <sup>17</sup>School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, 145 Endeavour Hall, Stony Brook University,
- 43 Stony Brook, New York, USA
- <sup>18</sup>School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Centre for Integrative Ecology, Deakin
   University, Geelong, Victoria, Australia
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- 47 marine conservation, marine reserve effectiveness, marine reserve design48

#### 49 Abstract (200 words)

#### 50

51 Marine reserves are a key tool for the conservation of marine biodiversity, yet only ~2.5% of 52 the world's oceans are protected. The integration of marine reserves into connected networks 53 representing all habitats has been encouraged by international agreements, yet the benefits 54 of this design has not been tested empirically. Australia has one of the largest systems of 55 marine reserves, providing a rare opportunity to assess how connectivity influences conservation success. An Australia-wide dataset was collected using baited remote 56 57 underwater video systems deployed across a depth range from 0-100 m to assess the 58 effectiveness of marine reserves for protecting teleosts subject to commercial and recreational 59 fishing. A meta-analytical comparison of 73 fished species within 91 marine reserves found 60 that, on average, marine reserves had 28% greater abundance and 53% greater biomass of 61 fished species compared to adjacent areas open to fishing. However, benefits of protection 62 were not observed across all reserves (heterogeneity), so full subsets generalised additive 63 modelling was used to consider factors that influence marine reserve effectiveness, including 64 distance-based and ecological metrics of connectivity among reserves. Our results suggest 65 that increased connectivity and depth improve the aforementioned marine reserve benefits 66 and that these factors should be considered to optimise such benefits over time. We provide 67 important guidance on factors to consider when implementing marine reserves for the purpose 68 of increasing the abundance and size of fished species, given the expected increase in 69 coverage globally. We show that marine reserves that are fully protected (no-take) and 70 designed to optimize connectivity, size and depth range can provide an effective conservation 71 strategy for fished species in temperate and tropical waters within an overarching marine 72 biodiversity conservation framework.

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#### 74 Introduction

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76 Marine reserves exist across the world's oceans with the broad objective of contributing to the 77 conservation of marine biodiversity through the exclusion of extractive activities such as 78 fishing. Some of the most tangible measures of ecological changes within marine reserves are 79 increased abundance, size, and biomass of fished species (Lester et al. 2009), which make 80 up an important component of marine biodiversity. The protection of large-bodied individuals, 81 with higher fecundity may result in significant larval supply (Marshall et al. 2019) or spillover 82 of adult fish (Di Lorenzo et al. 2016, 2020), hence providing benefits to adjacent fished areas. However, while the parties to the convention on biological diversity agreed to protect 10% of 83 their coastal and marine waters by 2020, only 2.5% of the global ocean is presently within fully 84 protected marine reserves (Sala et al. 2018), with striking differences across sea basins 85 86 (Claudet et al. 2020).

88 Previous meta-analyses over continental to global scales have demonstrated that the 89 conservation benefits of marine reserves depend on the taxa considered and increase with 90 reserve size, age, level of protection, enforcement and management effectiveness (Mosquera 91 et al. 2000; Claudet et al. 2008, 2010; Gill et al. 2017; Lester et al. 2009; Edgar et al. 2014; 92 Bergseth et al. 2015; Zupan et al. 2018; Di Lorenzo et al. 2020). While empirical evidence is 93 limited (Grorud-Colvert et al. 2014, Harrison et al. 2020), theory suggests that the ability of 94 marine reserves to improve ecosystem resilience and benefit ecosystem services, such as 95 fisheries, will depend on the extent to which reserves are connected (Botsford et al. 2009; 96 Ballantine 2014). Some studies recognise connectivity (i.e., demographic links among 97 assemblages via the dispersal of individuals as adults, juveniles, and larvae) as a key 98 component in the design of marine reserve networks (Álvarez- Romero et al. 2018; Tittensor 99 et al. 2019), while others suggest it is less important (Costello & Connor 2019). An empirical 100 assessment of connectivity between reserves, at appropriately large spatial scales, is 101 therefore required. Similarly, the extent of fishing adjacent to marine reserves combined with 102 distal social drivers can have a strong effect on local fish assemblages and should be 103 considered in any large-scale assessment of marine reserves. For example, Cinner et al. 104 (2018), found that fish biomass within marine reserves, declines with increasing human 105 impacts outside of reserves, and areas with moderate human impacts show the greatest 106 differences in fish biomass.

107

108 The influence of social, ecological and design factors on marine reserve effectiveness has 109 also differed among studies. For example, Halpern (2003) found that reserve size did not 110 influence fish abundance within reserves, yet subsequent empirical studies and meta-111 analyses found that large reserves were more effective in promoting biomass and abundance 112 (Claudet et al. 2008; Edgar et al. 2014; Malcolm et al. 2016). Differences among studies may 113 be due to data being sourced from different social and ecological systems such that the range 114 of marine reserve sizes differs among studies, or over-representation of significant results in 115 the published literature compared to null results (Graham et al. 2011). In addition, meta-116 analyses often pool data collected using different methods, yet this may not always be 117 appropriate (Cresswell et al. 2019). Species-level measures of fish size and abundance can 118 vary considerably among methods (Murphy & Jenkins 2010) and as such may influence the 119 ability to detect spatial differences in fishes (Goetze et al. 2015).

120

121 One way to avoid the confounding effects of different methodologies in meta-analyses is to 122 only consider data collected by a single technique. Baited remote underwater video systems 123 (BRUVs) are now commonly used for monitoring and research, providing non-extractive, 124 spatially extensive data for the assessment of the relative abundance of fishes and, when 125 stereo systems are used, length and biomass. This method is especially adept at detecting mobile predatory species (Watson et al. 2005; Goetze et al. 2015; Harvey et al. 2018), many 126 127 of which are targeted by fishers. Moreover, BRUVs have repeatedly recorded the direct effects 128 of fishing on the abundance, biomass and/or size of targeted species (Malcolm et al. 2007; 129 Goetze et al. 2011; Langlois et al. 2012) and are more likely to detect differences in fish 130 abundance between marine reserves and fished areas than underwater visual census (UVC) 131 due to bait increasing the proportion of predatory species surveyed (Willis & Babcock 2000; 132 Goetze et al. 2015). BRUVs are, however, limited to relative estimates of abundance/biomass due to variation in the bait plume (which prevents the calculation of a definitive sampling area; 133 134 Harvey et al. 2007) and have a limited ability to survey cryptic species (Watson et al. 2005). 135 There is also the potential for changes to fish behaviour when they approach baited cameras, 136 which can influence abundance estimates (Dunlop et al. 2015), although this is most 137 problematic in downward facing BRUVs which have a limited field of view (Cundy et al. 2017; Coghlan et al. 2017). Conversely, most broad-scale assessments of marine reserve have used 138 139 UVC to survey reef fishes, which limits these studies to shallow waters (e.g. a mean depth of 140 7.5 m in Edgar et al. 2018). Like BRUVs, UVC is also subject to biases. For example, divers can cause behavioural responses of fish, which in some locations has exaggerated the 141 142 effectiveness of marine reserves (Lindfield et al. 2014a; Januchowski-Hartley et al. 2015; Gray et al. 2016). Importantly, BRUVs are a remote technique, removing the biases associated with 143 144 divers and enabling assessments of marine reserves over a much greater depth range (Whitmarsh et al. 2017), and are being used extensively to study fisheries targeted 145 146 communities globally (MacNeil et al., 2020).

147

148 In Australia, BRUVs have been used extensively over a range of depths and habitats to answer 149 a broad range of ecological questions, including those related to marine reserves (Harvey et 150 al. 2021). Both state and federal governments have aimed to establish a comprehensive, 151 adequate and representative system of marine reserves (Kenchington 2016), providing a 152 unique opportunity to assess a broad range of marine reserves. Here, we make use of a 153 national-scale BRUVs dataset to empirically assess a snapshot of the effect that Australian 154 marine reserves have had on the abundance and biomass of fishes over a broad depth-range. 155 We use meta-analyses to investigate how relative measures of fish abundance and biomass 156 vary among these reserves. Uniquely, our analysis considers the influence of depth over 157 ranges previously not considered (0-100m) in similar studies (Edgar et al. 2018), as well as 158 the role of ecological and distance-based connectivity of marine reserves. The inclusion of 159 these factors, with others known to affect the abundance or biomass of fish within marine 160 reserves, enables a comprehensive assessment of which are most important when designing 161 marine reserve networks.

- 162 163 M
- 163 Methods
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#### 165 Selection criteria and data evaluation

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167 Australia has one of the largest systems of marine reserves, with more than 400 reserves 168 (CAPAD 2018), covering an area close to 1 million km<sup>2</sup> (mpatlas.org 2020). However, most bioregions across Australia still have less than 10% of their waters within marine reserves 169 (Roberts et al. 2018). The size range of marine reserves in Australia is also extensive, ranging 170 171 from <0.1 to >100,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment 2020). We 172 utilised a national dataset compiled in GlobalArchive (https://globalarchive.org/) consisting of 173 both single camera and stereo-BRUVs deployments, covering the Australian continental shelf, 174 across six states and five marine regions. Survey data were collected and analysed using 175 standard operating procedures for BRUVs (Langlois et al. 2020). Bait type (pilchards), the 176 method of recording abundance (MaxN; calculated as the maximum number of individuals of 177 a given species present in a single video frame; Priede et al. 1994) and taxonomic resolution 178 (species level where possible), were consistent across 19,260 BRUVs replicates, deployed 179 between 2004 and 2017. MaxN is a conservative estimate of relative abundance that has 180 become the standard metric for BRUVs given it avoids double counting (Langlois et al. 2020) 181 and tracks absolute abundance well for predatory species which are often observed in lower 182 abundance (MacNeil et al. 2020). There were differences across studies in the quantity of bait, 183 cameras used, single vs stereo systems and separation distance (discussed in detail in Harvey

et al. 2021), however, these factors did not vary for each marine reserve/control pair and log-ratio effect sizes were used to account for between study variation (described below).

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187 The following criteria were used to select data that were suitable for assessing the 188 effectiveness of marine reserves; (1) BRUVs collected data on demersal fishes with at least 189 two replicates inside and two replicates outside of a zone designated as a sanctuary, marine 190 national park, conservation park/area or no-take following Australian nomenclature used in 191 different state and commonwealth waters (herein referred to as marine reserves). While this 192 includes some partially protected areas that allow fishing within a proportion of their 193 boundaries (e.g. fishing from shore or trolling for pelagic species), all were designated as no-194 take for demersal fishing from a boat and the extent of fishing regulations were taken into 195 account as a covariate (see regulation classification below); (2) sampled during daylight hours 196 at depths less than 100 m, (3) relative abundance data (MaxN) was available for fished species 197 and (4) only the most recent inside/outside assessment was used if temporal sampling had 198 occurred, unless a dataset had greater replication and was completed less than two years 199 earlier. In this case the study with greater replication was used. (5) Paired inside/outside 200 assessments were only taken from the same field campaign (so were completed at the same 201 time of year).

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203 To ensure the appropriate controls were assigned for each marine reserve, the spatial layout 204 of data was overlayed on satellite imagery with reserve boundaries and the closest sites 205 across similar broad-scale geography (e.g., exposure/distance from shore) either side of each 206 reserve were assigned as controls. This was done in consultation with the researchers that 207 had originally designed each study and three studies were deemed to have inadequately 208 sampled the marine reserve (e.g. had <4 replicate BRUVs deployed in marine reserves > 100 209 km<sup>2</sup>) so were removed from the analysis (Supp. I). A total of 91 individual marine reserves 210 were included after selection criteria and data evaluation, representing ~25% of marine 211 reserves across Australia (CAPAD 2018; Supp I).

- 212
- 213 Response variables
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Species were classified as 'fished' if they were retained as food fish by either recreational or commercial fishers in Australia using the expert knowledge of fisheries managers across each state (listed in Supp. II). Non-targeted species (classified as all remaining species) were also examined to provide a control for fished species. Relative abundance data were available for all 91 marine reserves, however, length data were only collected in studies using stereo-BRUVs, hence relative biomass data were available for 69 marine reserves.

- 221
- 222 Meta-analysis

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224 The average abundance and biomass (based on MaxN) was calculated per replicate inside 225 and outside of each marine reserve. Effect sizes were modelled as log-ratios to quantify 226 differences in the average abundance and biomass (of both fished and non-target species) 227 inside relative to outside for each marine reserve. In cases where fish were absent either 228 inside or outside the reserve (i.e. zero values), one individual fish and the average (mean) 229 weight of an individual fish was added to one replicate (inside and outside the reserve) to allow 230 calculation of the log ratio for abundance and biomass, following Thiault et al. (2019). Effect 231 sizes were calculated as follows:

$$E_{m,i} = \ln\left(\frac{\overline{X}_{m,P,i}}{\overline{X}_{m,F,i}}\right)$$

232

where  $E_{m,i}$  is the log response ratio for each marine reserve *i* based on the metric *m* (abundance or biomass) and  $\overline{X}_{m,P,i}$  and  $\overline{X}_{m,F,i}$  are the mean of each metric *m* in protected (*P*) and fished (*F*) areas, respectively.

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239 Variance of the effect sizes were calculated as:

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$$V_{E_{m,i}} = \sum_{m,i}^{P,F} \sigma_i^2 / (n_i * \bar{X}_i^2)$$

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where  $v_{Em,i}$  is the variance associated with the effect size  $E_{m,i}$ ,  $\sigma_i$  is the standard deviations associated with the mean, and  $n_i$  is the number of replicates and  $\bar{X}_i$  the means for the protected (*P*) and fished areas (*F*).

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We then used a mixed-effects weighted meta-analysis where weights of each individual effectsize incorporate these variances as follows:

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$$w_{m,i} = \frac{1}{V_{E_{m,i}} + V_{m,a}}$$

249 250

251 where  $w_{m,i}$  is the weight associated to each effect  $E_{m,i}$ ,  $v_{Em,i}$  is the within study variance for each marine reserve *i* using the metric *m* and  $v_{m,a}$  is the among-study variance across marine 252 253 reserves for each metric. The among-study variance was obtained using the generalised 254 equation reported in Hedges & Pigott (2004). Confidence intervals for group and overall effect 255 sizes were derived from a Student's t statistic. The among study variance were calculated 256 using the restricted maximum likelihood estimator with the metafor package (Viechtbauer 257 2010) in the statistical program R (R Core Team, 2017). Log-ratio effect sizes were converted 258 back to percentage differences in text to assist with the interpretation of magnitudes.

#### 260 Habitat analysis

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262 To ensure studies had sampled comparable habitat and depths inside compared to outside of each marine reserve, information on the mean relief, depth, and percentage composition of 263 264 biotic reef was collected following the procedures outlined in (Langlois et al. 2020). Paired t-265 tests compared the means for each of these factors inside/outside of each marine reserve. 266 For assessments with a significant difference in habitat or depth inside compared to outside 267 the reserve (P < 0.05), outlying replicates were removed until no significant differences were 268 found (P > 0.05). As a result, the habitat sampled was balanced inside vs outside and these 269 variables were not considered as covariates when modelling.

#### Factors influencing marine reserve protection

273 For each marine reserve, we collated information on the size (total area in km<sup>2</sup>) and age based 274 on the time between active enforcement of the reserve regulations and sampling (CAPAD 275 2020). Depth was calculated as the average depth of BRUVs deployed within the marine 276 reserve. The influence of fishing pressure was assessed using a modification of the human 277 gravity metric (Cinner et al. 2018). Gravity was calculated as the sum of the human population 278 within a 200 km radius of each marine reserve (using the LandScan 2011 human population 279 grid) divided by the distance (km) from the marine reserve to the nearest town centre. Distance 280 to boat ramp was calculated as the average distance (km) from the marine reserve to the 281 nearest boat ramp. To determine the protection level and level of exploitation in each marine 282 reserve and fished site, respectively, we used the regulation-based classification system for 283 marine protected areas of Horta e Costa et al. (2016). This system gives a score from one to 284 eight based on the number and potential impact of different fishing gears, other human 285 activities (e.g. aquaculture) and accessibility (e.g. no anchoring) on fishes and their 286 environment. We used the difference in zone classification scores between each marine 287 reserve and its corresponding control/fished areas as a measure of the level of protection 288 afforded by each marine reserve (herein referred to as the regulation difference). Note we 289 assume that the classification scores represent a linear relationship with the impact of 290 restrictions, given this could not be calculated. Compliance was categorised into three levels 291 by local park authorities or researchers with substantial experience working in the area: high 292 (infrequent breaches of management rules), moderate (occasional breaches of management 293 rules) and low (frequent breaches of management rules).

294

#### 295 Connectivity

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297 To explore the influence of 'demographically significant' connectivity based on a biophysical 298 model of larval fish dispersal (Treml et al. 2012), we summarised the total relative in-flow for 299 each marine reserve location, from a recent study quantifying the ecological connectivity 300 among Australia's MPA system (Roberts et al. 2020). In-flow is a relative measure of 301 connectivity representing the amount of incoming larvae into a destination site and does not include local retention (Young et al. 2020). Only protected patches were used to calculate 302 303 connectivity, where an upstream connection was considered protected, if it contained a 304 protected area (see Roberts et al. 2020 for details). This analysis was based on the ecological 305 connectivity of wrasses (labridae) as they are relatively well represented in our fished species 306 list (9 species; Supp. II), while other species presented in Roberts et al. (2020) were not 307 included in our analysis. However, the top models did not change when large-bodied, longrange dispersers were considered (Trevally), and ecological connectivity was absent from top 308 309 models when small-bodied, non-targeted Damselfish were considered (Supp III).

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311 A distance-based connectivity metric was also calculated by summing the number of spatial 312 connections a marine reserve has to all other marine reserves within a 50 km radius. A 50 km 313 radius was chosen to empirically test if there are conservation benefits based on the 314 recommendation made by Almany et al. (2009), to ensure that between reserve distance is 315 ≤50 km. This distance provides a conservative estimate of a distance-based connectivity that 316 ensures zones are demographically connected for most fish species (Almany et al 2009). For 317 each marine reserve, potential connection points were spaced 1 km along the boundary, using 318 a random starting position. Points that fell on a boundary attached to land were removed so

319 that distance-based connectivity was only assessed using boundary points connected by sea. 320 The distance-based connectivity of each marine reserve was calculated by summing the 321 number of points that connected to other points belonging to neighbouring marine reserve 322 within a 50 km Euclidean distance radius (or vector). Vectors that intercepted land (e.g. a 323 headland) were excluded from analysis. Analysis was completed using the "EucDistance" 324 function arcpy python library in ESRI ArcPro version 2.4, with planar coordinates within marine reserve boundary points (GDA94 Geoscience Australia Lambert projection; EPSG:3112). 325 326 Figure 1a shows a conceptual diagram of how distance-based connectivity was calculated 327 and Fig. 1b shows the distance-based connectivity scores for the 91 marine reserves sampled. 328 We also calculated distance-based connectivity for all marine reserves within the 2018 329 Collaborative Australian Protected Area Database (CAPAD 2020), to highlight gaps in the use 330 of marine reserves across Australia (Supp. IV). Distance-based connectivity of marine 331 reserves was highest on the Great Barrier Reef, as there is a high density of marine reserves 332 compared to other locations around Australia (Figure 1b). Clusters of relatively high distance-333 based connectivity were also observed in the Ningaloo Marine Park, Western Australia, the 334 Encounter Marine Park (Adelaide/Kangaroo Island) in South Australia and Moreton Bay 335 Marine Park in Queensland. No distance-based connectivity was observed between marine 336 reserves in Victoria or Tasmania. There were also two significant gaps in use of marine 337 reserves, one in the Northern Territory and northern Queensland (to the start of the Great 338 Barrier Reef Marine Park) and the other across the southern coast from south-west Western 339 Australia to South Australia, including the Great Australian Bight (Supp IV). 340



Figure 1: (a) A conceptual diagram showing how distance-based connectivity was calculated for a small marine reserve in between two large reserves with land boundaries. (b) the resulting map of distance-based connectivity marine reserves and (c) the ecological connectivity (based on wrasses) for the sampled marine reserves across Australia using Jenks natural breaks. R = 0.815 between distance based and ecological connectivity.

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The two measures of connectivity were termed; ecological connectivity (which was based on realistic oceanography, biology, and habitat characteristics) and distance-based connectivity (which incorporated the spatial distance-based connectivity of zones based on an estimate of a suitable distance for demographic connectivity of fishes; Almany et al. 2009). Ecological connectivity was calculated independent of local larval retention and therefore the size of the focal marine reserve, while the distance-based metric was dependent on the size of the focal marine reserve.

355

356 *Models* 357

358 The influence of marine reserve characteristics (size, age, compliance, ecological and 359 distance-based connectivity, depth, gravity, distance to boat ramp and regulation difference) and location covariates (marine region and state) on abundance and biomass effect sizes 360 361 were investigated using weighted generalised additive mixed models (GAMMs; Lin & Zhang 362 1999). The distribution of continuous predictors (depth, age, size, connectivity, and gravity) was examined and transformed appropriately to ensure they were evenly distributed across 363 364 their range. We examined the possibility of any spatial correlation in the data based on latitude 365 and longitude using a variogram, which showed no evidence of spatial autocorrelation and 366 therefore no spatial correlation structure was used in the models (Supp. V). Any effects of 367 State or Marine Region were included as potential fixed effects in models rather than random effects, as they were highly correlated with several continuous predictors (Supp. VI). A 368 369 weighted full subsets method was used to fit models of all possible combinations up to a 370 maximum of three variables (Fisher et al. 2018). To avoid multicollinearity issues, predictor 371 variables with Pearson correlations (or an equivalent approximation) greater than 0.33 were 372 not included in the same model (Supp. VI). The correlation cut-off value was increased from 373 the recommended value of 0.28 (based on Graham 2003), to allow simultaneous inclusion of 374 the covariates size and age which are known to influence marine reserve effectiveness 375 (Claudet et al. 2008; Edgar et al. 2014). This represents only a marginal increase to a very 376 conservative cut-off and is unlikely to cause issues with bias in parameter estimates. In all 377 models the smoothing parameter was limited to a simple spline, allowing only monotonic 378 relationships (k = 3). Model selection was based on Akaike's Information Criterion for small 379 sample sizes (AICc; Akaike 1998) and AICc weights (ωAICc; Burnham & Anderson 2007). 380 Models with AICc values that differ by less than two units show weak evidence for favouring 381 one over the other (Raftery 1995; Burnham & Anderson 2004). The best models were 382 therefore the ones within two AICc units of the lowest AICc values. The  $\omega$ AICc, which 383 represent probabilities or weights of evidence for each model, were used to facilitate 384 interpretation of the best models. Relative support for each predictor variable was obtained by 385 calculating the summed wAIC across all subsets of models containing that variable to obtain 386 its relative importance which were plotted in R. Importance plots and P-values derived with 387 the GAM model summaries (Wood et al. 2012) were used to assess whether a significant 388 relationship with effect sizes and covariates existed, which were subsequently plotted in R. 389 Effect sizes were modelled with a Gaussian distribution using gam() in the mgcv package in

R (Wood 2011). The R language for statistical computing (R Core Team 2018) was used for all data manipulation (dplyr, Wickham et al. 2018) and graphing (ggplot2, Wickham 2009).

#### 392

#### 393 Results

#### 394

395 On average, Australian marine reserves had a 28% greater abundance and 53% greater biomass of fished species compared to areas open to fishing (Fig. 2a & b). There were no 396 397 effects of protection on the abundance or biomass of non-targeted species. There was 398 heterogeneity across effect sizes, suggesting considerable variation in the effectiveness of 399 marine reserves across Australia. For the abundance of fished species across the 91 reserves 400 studied, we observed 60 null (66%), 25 positive (27.5%) and six negative (6.5%) effect sizes 401 (Fig. 2c). Positive and negative effect sizes for abundance were detected in all states, except 402 for Tasmania (where only one marine reserve was sampled). For biomass of fished species 403 across the 69 reserves studied, we observed 46 null (66.5%), 20 positive (29%) and three 404 negative (4.5%) effect sizes (Fig. 2d). Positive effect sizes for biomass also occurred across 405 all states, however, no negative effect sizes were observed in NSW or Victoria.





Figure 2. The log ratio effect sizes of (a) abundance and (b) biomass of fished and non-targeted species inside/outside of marine reserves across Australia. Black dots represent significant results where the 95% confidence interval does not overlap zero. The superscript H indicates that significant heterogeneity (H < 0.05) was associated with the effect size. Effect sizes are converted back to percentages and the spatial extent shown for (c) abundance and</li>

(d) biomass of fished species only; green points represent a marine reserve with a significantly
greater abundance or biomass of fished species; yellow a marine reserve where confidence
levels overlapped zero and red where a significantly lower abundance was observed within
marine reserve boundaries compared to nearby fished sites.

416

The five most important variables for explaining variation in marine reserve effectiveness for fished abundance were age, size, regulation difference, distance-based connectivity, and depth (Fig. 3). The five most important variables for explaining variation in marine reserve effectiveness for fished biomass were depth, regulation difference, age, ecological connectivity and distance-based connectivity.

Age Fished Abundance Size Regulation.Difference Distance.based.Connectivity Depth Ecological.Connectivity Gravity Distance.to.boat.ramp Compliance Variable/Factor Marine.Region State Depth Regulation.Difference Fished Biomass Age Ecological.Connectivity Distance.based.Connectivity Distance.to.boat.ramp Gravity Compliance Size State Marine.Region 0.25 0.50 0.00 0.75 1.00 Relative Importance

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Figure 3. Importance scores for each explanatory variable in predicting the effectiveness of marine reserves to protect the abundance and biomass of fished species.

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428 All variables were considered in the full subset modelling and while the variance explained by 429 top models was low (Fig 4a, Fig 5a), suggesting factors not considered here and natural 430 variation are contributing to unexplained variance, they explained a greater proportion of the 431 variance than the null model for both abundance ( $\Delta AICc = 9.9$ ,  $\omega AICc = 0.001$ ) and biomass 432  $(\Delta AICc = 6.7, \omega AICc = 0.004)$ . For fished abundance there were three competing top models, 433 with size in the first model, distance-based connectivity and age in the second and ecological 434 connectivity and age in the third model having a significant relationship with effect size (P < 435 0.05; Fig 4a). Abundance of fished species within marine reserves compared to fished areas 436 (effect size) increased with increasing marine reserve size, distance-based connectivity and 437 ecological connectivity (Fig 4b,d & e). Effect size also increased with the age of marine 438 reserves up to approximately 10 years, and then remained relatively stable (Fig 4c). The small

number of marine reserves greater than 25 years old, provided little confidence in theinterpretation of a decrease in effectiveness in older reserves.

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445 Figure 4. (a) Top models for explaining the effectiveness of marine reserves to increase the abundance of fished species. Difference between lowest reported corrected Akaike 446 447 Information Criterion ( $\Delta$ AICc), AIC weights ( $\omega$ AICc), variance explained (R<sup>2</sup>) and effective 448 degrees of freedom (EDF) are reported for model comparison. The resulting relationships 449 between (b) marine reserve size, (c) age of marine reserve in years, (d) distance-based 450 connectivity and (e) ecological connectivity, with log-ratio effect sizes for fished abundance 451 are shown. Darker dots represent effect sizes with a greater weighting based on the inverse 452 of variance. Solid lines are fitted GAM curves, with dashed lines indicating standard error 453 confidence bands.

For fished biomass there were three competing top models with all covariates having a significant impact on effect sizes (P < 0.05; Fig 5a). While the effect size for fished biomass increased with depth and greater variation in the effectiveness of marine reserves within shallow waters (<15m) was observed (Fig 5d), this factor interacted with regulation difference 459 and age in other top models. The interaction between regulation difference and depth, 460 suggests that marine reserves needed to incorporate deeper waters and be fully protected 461 (which results in a high regulation difference), to provide significant benefits for fished biomass 462 (Fig. 5b). An interaction between age and depth, suggests that marine reserves which incorporated deeper waters (>15m), showed increased effect sizes as age increased, with 463 464 most positive effect sizes occurring in older, deeper marine reserves (Fig 5c). Effect size also 465 increased with increasing ecological and distance-based connectivity, indicating the fished 466 biomass within marine reserves compared to fished areas was greater for reserves with 467 greater connectivity to other reserves (Fig. 5e,f).



Figure 5. a) Top models for explaining the effectiveness of marine reserves to increase 469 470 biomass of fished species. Difference between lowest reported corrected Akaike Information 471 Criterion ( $\Delta$ AICc), AIC weights ( $\omega$ AICc), variance explained (R2) and effective degrees of 472 freedom (EDF) are reported for model comparison. Relationship of log-ratio effect sizes for 473 fished biomass with (b) the interaction between depth and regulation difference (c) depth and 474 age (d) marine reserve depth, (e) ecological connectivity and (f) distance-based connectivity. 475 The contours in plots (b) and (c) represent the predicted effect sizes based on the interactions. 476 In plots (d-f) the solid line is a fitted GAM curve and dashed line a standard error confidence 477 band. For all plots darker dots represent effect sizes with a greater weighting based on the 478 inverse of variance.

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#### 480 Discussion

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482 Our broad-scale assessment of 91 marine reserves across Australia shows that both 483 abundance and biomass of fished species is on average greater in marine reserves than in 484 adjacent areas open to fishing. However, these benefits were not observed across all marine 485 reserves, were greater in fully protected (no-take) reserves and increased with size, age, 486 connectivity, and the average depth of marine reserves. Although the positive relationship with 487 age and benefits from full protection are well established (Claudet et al. 2008; Edgar et al. 488 2014), we demonstrate that these relationships can be complex with substantial influence from 489 other emergent factors. We provide the first empirical evidence that both connectivity among 490 marine reserves and the depths they cover influence the effects of their protection. 491 Conceptually, marine reserves that are well connected with each other are thought to improve 492 resilience to disturbance and ongoing stressors as the dispersal of eggs, larvae and adult 493 fishes between boundaries is more likely and could contribute to maintaining populations (Leis 494 2003; Almany et al. 2009; Álvarez- Romero et al. 2018). The Great Barrier Reef and Ningaloo 495 Marine Parks are two examples where marine reserves have been implemented as 496 interconnected networks, with evidence of small networks in the former, generating a 497 connectivity portfolio that can potentially replenish exploited fish stocks (Harrison et al. 2020). 498

499 We found that increased ecological and distance-based connectivity among Australian marine 500 reserves is associated with a higher abundance and biomass of fished species within their 501 boundaries. It is possible that the positive relationships of abundance and biomass with 502 connectivity are partly driven by increased capability to manage marine reserves that are 503 closer together (e.g. increased enforcement and compliance due to public awareness; Edgar 504 et al. (2018)). However, compliance did not explain a significant proportion of the variance 505 across marine reserves and both ecological and distance-based connectivity metrics had a 506 positive influence on effect size, suggesting that both ecological and marine reserve design 507 factors are contributing to this result. While both metrics of connectivity were complementary with a relatively high correlation (Supp V), the distance-based connectivity metric suggests 508 509 that a maximum separation distance of 50km between marine reserves (Almany et al. 2009) 510 will provide increased conservation benefits for fishes. There is increasing evidence to suggest 511 that simple distance-based measures of connectivity can provide a useful tool for conservation 512 and marine reserve planning at local scales (D'Aloia et al., 2015; Abesamis et al., 2017), and 513 the metric presented here may provide a useful tool for countries/jurisdictions with limited in-514 situ larval and oceanographic information, that is needed for modelling ecological connectivity.

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516 By utilising a nationwide BRUVs dataset, we were able to elicit complicated interactions with 517 marine reserve effectiveness and depth, demonstrating the ability of this method to examine 518 marine reserves over depth ranges to at least 40m, and with the potential to explore broader 519 depth ranges as data becomes available. We found differences in biomass between marine 520 reserves and fished areas across depths, suggesting it is important to incorporate a broad 521 depth range within marine reserve boundaries where possible. This contrasts with other 522 studies that found a greater response to protection in shallower depths compared to deeper 523 areas, attributed to the stronger fishing pressure in shallow water and depth refugia (Claudet 524 et al. 2011; Goetze et al. 2011; Lindfield et al. 2014b). This is likely due to the increased 525 occurrence of larger fished species at greater depths. Interestingly, the relationship between 526 marine reserve effect on fish biomass over time (age) was influenced by depth. Consequently, 527 when deeper areas are not incorporated within marine reserve boundaries, benefits for the 528 biomass of fished species may be reduced, even for very old reserves. This might be explained 529 by the relatively large depth range of many commonly fished species in Australia (e.g. pink 530 snapper from 1–200 m; Paulin 1990), as well as ontogenetic shifts, whereby larger individuals 531 move into greater depths as they get larger and older, partly driven by the tendency for harvest 532 of larger individuals to first occur in shallow, more accessible waters (Frank et al. 2018). These 533 results may suggest a depth refuge effect in some marine reserves, where species most 534 vulnerable to fishing are uncommon in shallower waters, and do not participate in the response

535 to protection in this depth range (<20 m). The effect of depth refugia may be even greater in 536 areas where the absence of fishing technologies (sonar, electric reels) inhibits fishing 537 efficiency in deeper waters. There was also a high proportion of marine reserves with lower 538 levels of protection in shallow waters (e.g. shore fishing in some marine reserves in Western 539 Australia). This may be contributing to the interaction between the regulation difference and 540 depth, where marine reserves that were fully protected and greater than 20 m deep resulted 541 in the greatest differences in fished biomass. As mentioned above many exploited species 542 exhibit broad depth ranges across and along the continental shelf around Australia. Indeed, 543 most of the commercial harvest and some recreational capture of many of these species, lie 544 outside of the depth ranges of the marine reserves considered herein. As such, the marine 545 reserves considered here may not contribute directly to the conservation benefits (i.e. 546 increased abundance and biomass) of many exploited species. Nevertheless, marine 547 reserves that exhibit a broad depth range are more likely to have increased levels of biomass 548 and abundance that benefit the conservation of marine biodiversity. Moreover, high levels of 549 biomass and abundance of species targeted by fishers (artisanal, commercial and 550 recreational) in marine reserves offer a range of non-extractive benefits and related business 551 opportunities such as tourism and diving.

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While the benefits of marine reserves to fished species were consistent with other broad-scale 553 554 syntheses of marine reserves (Molloy et al. 2009; Lester et al. 2009; Edgar et al. 2014), the 555 magnitude of our results (28% > abundance and 53% > biomass) were generally lower than 556 global assessments (Molloy et al. 2009; Lester et al. 2009). This may be explained by the 557 broader range of fished species that were considered here, which are subject to varying levels 558 of fishing pressure and/or the broader depth range that was examined. However, 559 overestimation of marine reserve effectiveness has been observed when using diver-based 560 methodologies in areas where spearfishing is common (Lindfield et al. 2014a; Januchowski-561 Hartley et al. 2015; Gray et al. 2016). Australia is also considered above the global average 562 for effective fisheries management (Mora et al. 2009), and the gravity of human impacts are 563 generally low (Cinner et al. 2018), resulting in lower rates of exploitation in areas open to 564 fishing. Indeed, effective fisheries management across Australia contributes to robust populations of some predators (e.g. reef sharks; MacNeil et al. 2020), and it is likely that these 565 566 management arrangements are contributing to the presence of equivocal effects from some of the marine reserves surveyed. Regardless, we observed no effect of marine reserves on 567 568 non-target species, suggesting the results for fished species are likely driven by the increased 569 fishing pressure outside of marine reserves in the areas surveyed.

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571 A stronger effect of marine reserve protection was observed for biomass when compared to 572 the abundance of fished species, suggesting that marine reserves across Australia potentially 573 benefit large-bodied fishes. Size-related responses of populations to protection from fishing 574 are common (Russ et al. 2005; McClanahan et al. 2007, 2019) and are generally regarded as 575 a more sensitive metric compared to abundance (Nash & Graham 2016; Goetze et al. 2017). 576 This is due to the preferential targeting of large individuals by fishers (Birkeland & Dayton 577 2005), resulting in greater impacts to biomass than abundance. Our results also demonstrate 578 the value of stereo-BRUVs when monitoring, which provide an accurate measure of fish length 579 that can be converted to biomass (Harvey et al. 2002, 2007; Langlois et al. 2012). The build-580 up of fish biomass within marine reserves across Australia demonstrates how this strategy of 581 protection of large-bodied fish can provide benefits in terms of increased fecundity and 582 therefore spill over of larvae/eggs into fished areas (McClanahan & Mangi 2000; Evans & Russ

583 2004; Abesamis & Russ 2005; Evans et al. 2008). However, to have a positive effect at the 584 population scale, such reserves would have to be extensive. Note it is important to consider the spatial scale of the marine reserves in comparison to the area under effective fisheries 585 586 management, as there are numerous harvest control measures that may be applied and 587 marine reserves are just one tool that have an increasingly important role, particularly in 588 countries where governance is less effective. We also observed variation in the importance of 589 covariates between metrics, with the size of marine reserves included in top models for 590 targeted abundance (in line with the literature; Claudet et al. 2008; Edgar et al. 2014), but not 591 for biomass. This may be partly driven by a lack of biomass data in some of the largest marine 592 reserves surveyed (e.g. in the Great Barrier Reef) and the greater influence of other factors 593 (e.g. depth, connectivity and age). Size and distance-based connectivity also shared ~55% 594 and 35% of their variance for abundance and biomass respectively, due to size being 595 incorporated within the distance-based connectivity metric, suggesting that this measure of 596 connectivity is likely explaining variation due to size as well as proximity to other marine 597 reserves.

599 Despite compliance with marine reserve rules and regulations being considered one of the 600 most important drivers of conservation success globally (Guidetti et al. 2008; McClanahan et 601 al. 2009; Edgar et al. 2014), we found compliance was a poor predictor of effect sizes for fish 602 abundance or biomass. Our results reflect a relatively high level of marine reserve and 603 fisheries management across Australia compared to other countries, where reserves may vary 604 from 'paper parks' (offering little protection in the water) to strictly enforced no-entry zones 605 (Costello & Ballantine 2015). Although this is an endorsement of current management 606 strategies in some parts of Australia, a large proportion of marine reserves (~66%) provided no discernible benefits to fished species and some less than areas open to fishing (~5%), 607 608 which suggests improvement of enforcement and compliance may be required. However, this 609 result is also explained by the extensive size range of marine reserves across Australia (<0.1 610 to >100,000 km<sup>2</sup>; Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment 2020) and the need 611 for marine reserves to be large and deep enough to provide significant benefits to fished 612 species (Claudet et al. 2008; Edgar et al. 2014). Similarly, distance to boat ramp and gravity 613 were not included in top models or regarded as important variables for explaining variation in effect sizes of marine reserves. This contrasts with global studies where conservation success 614 615 is typically dependent on the gravity of human impacts (Cinner et al. 2016, 2018). Australia is 616 dominated by reefs with lower levels of gravity compared to other countries, so the range of 617 human impacts considered here was likely not large enough to have a significant impact on 618 marine reserve effectiveness. Moreover, recreational and commercial fishing can be high in 619 rural locations where resident human populations are low (e.g. the Gascoyne region of 620 Western Australia; Ryan et al. 2019), information that may not be captured by the Gravity 621 measure. Finally, our top models explained a small proportion of the overall variance in effect 622 size, although still above the average for ecological meta-analyses (Møller and Jennions 623 2002). Nonetheless large amounts of unexplained variance in effect size suggests factors not 624 considered here (e.g. management effectiveness; Gill et al. 2017 and the life-history and 625 ecological characteristics of taxa considered; Claudet et al. 2010) are likely contributing to the 626 ability of marine reserves to provide conservation benefits.

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628 While marine reserves that preclude fishing are relatively common within multi-use marine 629 parks in Australia, a large proportion of coastal waters (~70%) are not incorporated into marine 630 parks. We identified two large spatial gaps in the presence of marine parks and marine 631 reserves within state waters, from (1) the Northern Territory to Northern Queensland and (2) 632 the southern coast of Western Australia and the Great Australian Bight. Notably the gap on 633 the south coast of Australia covers a large proportion of the Great Southern Reef, which has 634 been identified as a global biodiversity hotspot and provides extensive economic benefits to 635 the tourism and fisheries industries (Bennett et al. 2016). We also identified no distance-based 636 connectivity between marine reserves within Victoria and Tasmania, suggesting the potential 637 for enhancement of existing management strategies and network designs. Roberts et al. 638 (2020) made a similar suggestion and found that Australia's marine reserve system is not 639 functioning as a connected network due to breaks in the connectivity of reef habitat. It will be 640 important to consider natural breaks in connectivity when planning for marine reserves 641 networks (e.g. lack of habitat suitable for fished species), given it may not be practical or 642 beneficial to implement marine reserves separated by less than 50km (as recommended here) 643 in these circumstances. We also found that state and marine region did not influence the 644 success of marine reserves, with positive effect sizes observed across all major states (apart 645 from Tasmania where only one reserve was sampled) suggesting that this conservation 646 strategy can be successful in both tropical and temperate waters.

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648 By using a national database of BRUVs to comprehensively assess marine reserves across 649 Australia, we demonstrate that they provide significant benefits to fished species and we 650 identify factors that can improve marine reserve design and management globally. We provide 651 new insights to marine reserve design that suggest depth and connectivity are important factors for achieving conservation gains. Although the benefits of marine reserves generally 652 653 increase with age, this effect was not common in shallow waters, supporting the 654 recommendation that marine reserves should be representative of a broad range of habitats 655 across depths (Ballantine 2014). Similarly, marine reserves that are connected provide 656 benefits that may extend to an entire ecosystem over time. Ongoing implementation and 657 enhancement of comprehensive networks of marine reserves will, however, depend on 658 effective engagement and consultation with all stakeholders on socio-economic and access 659 issues. This will be especially important given increasing anthropogenic pressures and 660 competition for the use of resources. We demonstrate that marine reserves provide an effective conservation strategy for temperate and tropical fished species within an overarching 661 662 marine biodiversity conservation framework, provided they are fully protected (no-take) and 663 have been designed to optimise connectivity, size and cover a large depth range.

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