

Fact Sheet: Marine Parks

Region

North Coast, Gascoyne Coast, West Coast, South Coast

Summary

Marine parks help to conserve marine biodiversity and provide special places for people to learn about, enjoy and appreciate spectacular marine areas.

Essentially marine parks are about sharing the marine environment with future generations and providing special care for special places – like a type of public trust. They can provide safe havens for various life stages of important species and for those with large home ranges, such as humpback whales.

Marine parks help to protect important marine areas from unsustainable development, pollution and the pressures of large numbers of people using the ocean. They provide a place where reefs, seagrass meadows, kelp forests and other habitats can be preserved in perpetuity.

A precautionary approach

The intention of marine parks is to conserve and maintain healthy environments at their peak, rather than waiting until it is too late. Whilst Western Australia's coastal waters are among the healthiest on earth, the pressure on these areas is growing, with the numbers using our marine environment increasing every year. This level of pressure can place a strain on any marine environment, even if each person is doing the right thing.

Marine parks are about conservation of entire areas and everything in them, not just the species of fish we like to catch and eat. They are places of refuge and give areas a chance to 'breathe'. Part of the conservation effort involves limiting the removal of fish, plants, animals or habitat, to protect the natural balance in a given environment.

A balancing act

Whilst some people assume that all marine parks are completely closed to fishing and other uses, this is not the case. Marine park planning is supported by the principle of 'multiple use', which involves accommodating many activities in such a way as to conserve the environment, minimise conflict and allow everyone to continue to undertake their activities in an ecologically sustainable manner.

These activities are typically managed by way of zoning. In any given marine park you may find

'no-take' sanctuary zones, recreation zones and special purpose zones which are designed to allow for, or limit particular activities. In contrast, a general use zone allows the broadest range of sustainable activities to continue occurring. When developing the zoning scheme, planners use science to develop the foundations of the marine park – with the aim of striking a balance between conservation interests and a variety of users, including recreational users. Cultural and socio-economic factors such as tourism, fishing, ports and shipping industries, customary use and scientific research, must be considered when designing marine park zoning schemes.

Whilst the challenge to find a balance between marine conservation outcomes and other interests is large, the potential reward for doing so is even larger.

Working alongside fisheries management

Whilst marine parks are not designed specifically to benefit fisheries, they do work alongside fisheries management to ensure we have healthy, productive seas for years to come.

Where effective fisheries management strategies have been adopted, such as in Western Australia, the overall influence of no-take sanctuary zones on fishery productivity is much less, than in places where management has been lacking or is ineffective and fish stocks and habitats have already been severely depleted.

Networks of no-take sanctuary zones in marine parks can play a valuable role and are capable of protecting biodiversity and habitats, providing insurance against management uncertainties and a benchmark for evaluating the effects of activities outside marine park boundaries.

One of the greatest benefits of marine parks is that they generally receive greater funding for scientific research and monitoring. Increased research and monitoring results in improved understanding of our oceans and the marine life within them, as well as documenting the benefits of successful marine park management.

Kimberley Marine Parks

Western Australia's marine areas are globally significant and the State's coastal waters are considered to be among the least disturbed in the world.

The Western Australian Government has committed to a large marine park and reserve program across the State, which includes establishing and managing five marine parks under the [Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy](#). Set to be the second largest marine park in Australia after the Great Barrier Reef, three marine parks will form a Great Kimberley Marine Park that will eventually encompass the majority of the Kimberley's state waters, extending from Talbot Bay, to the Northern Territory border.

Already established is Lalang-garram/Camden Sound Marine Park, home to the largest humpback whale nursery in Australia, and Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park, one of the world's

most important feeding grounds for migratory shorebirds and a major nesting site for flatback turtles. Planning for the Roebuck Bay, Horizontal Falls and North Kimberley marine parks is currently underway.

The State Government is progressively creating a representative system of 'multiple-use' marine parks in Western Australia. The long-term aim is to provide protection for all types of marine habitats using a system that is 'comprehensive, adequate and representative'.

The strategic objectives that have been adopted for Western Australia's marine parks include:

- **Conservation** – to maintain and enhance marine biodiversity and ecological integrity.
- **Aboriginal culture** – to provide protection and conservation of the value of an area to the culture and heritage of Aboriginal people.
- **Science and education** – to encourage and promote scientific research and education.
- **Public participation** – to encourage and promote community involvement in and support for marine parks.
- **Recreation** – to provide equitable and sustainable opportunities for recreational use and enjoyment.
- **Commercial** – to provide equitable and sustainable opportunities for commercial use and benefits.

Related resources

[Student Worksheet: What is a Marine Park?](#)