

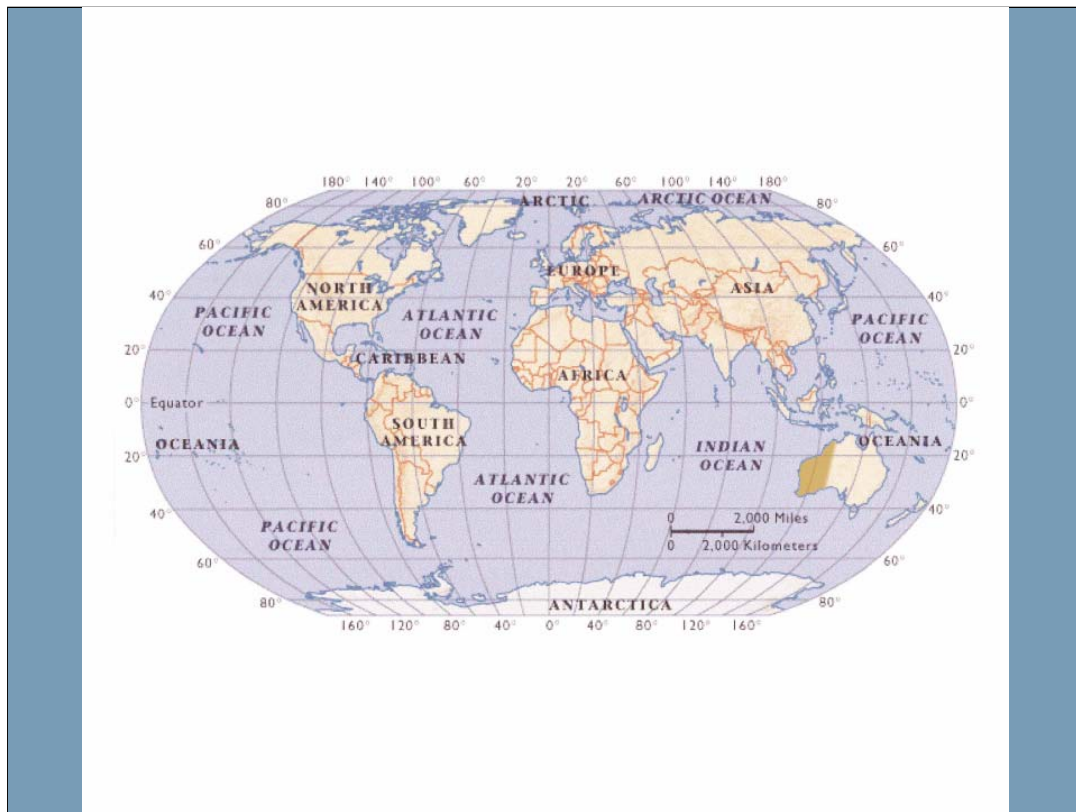
Whale Sharks in Ningaloo Marine Park – Conservation and Sustainable Tourism

Presentation by
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Executive Director

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- Want to begin by saying a little bit about Western Australia and what the Department of Conservation and Land Management does, especially for international visitors.
- And then lead in more specifically to the whale sharks of Ningaloo Marine Park and how we are seeking to manage them for both conservation and sustainable tourism.



- WA is a very large State (2.5M km²) or one-third of Australia's land area, with a 13,500 km coastline and some 3,400 islands.
- The State is also extraordinarily rich in biodiversity – the south-west is one of the world's 34 recognised terrestrial biodiversity hotspots (and the only one in Australia), particularly because of its rich flora and the very high degree of endemism in that flora, and Western Australia's coral reef habitats are recognised as one of the world's 18 tropical marine biodiversity hotspots.
- In Australia and its coastal waters, State governments have the main responsibility for the protection and management of biodiversity, and for the establishment and management of national parks, marine parks and other conservation reserves, although these responsibilities are shared in some respects with the national government. It is the national government that has the responsibility for Australia's international roles in relation to conservation.
- My agency, the Department of Conservation and Land Management, has lead responsibility for the conservation of biodiversity throughout Western Australia, and for the management of Western Australia's extensive and growing system of national parks, marine parks and other conservation reserves. Various other agencies share in those responsibilities in a number of ways, particularly the Department of Fisheries in the marine environment.
- Western Australia's marine and terrestrial system of parks and reserves is managed to conserve the rich variety of plants, animals and ecosystems they contain, their varied landscapes and seascapes, and to support nature-based recreation and tourism.
- That rich variety includes



- The World Heritage listed Purnululu National Park and its famed Bungle Bungle Ranges....



- The Karijini National Park....



- The Pinnacles in the Nambung National Park north of Perth....



- The world famous dolphin interaction at Monkey Mia in the Shark Bay Marine Park and World Heritage Property....



- And the forests of the south-west including the Tree Top Walk in the Walpole-Nornalup National Park....



- Our State fauna emblem, the Numbat....



- Spectacular cockatoos....



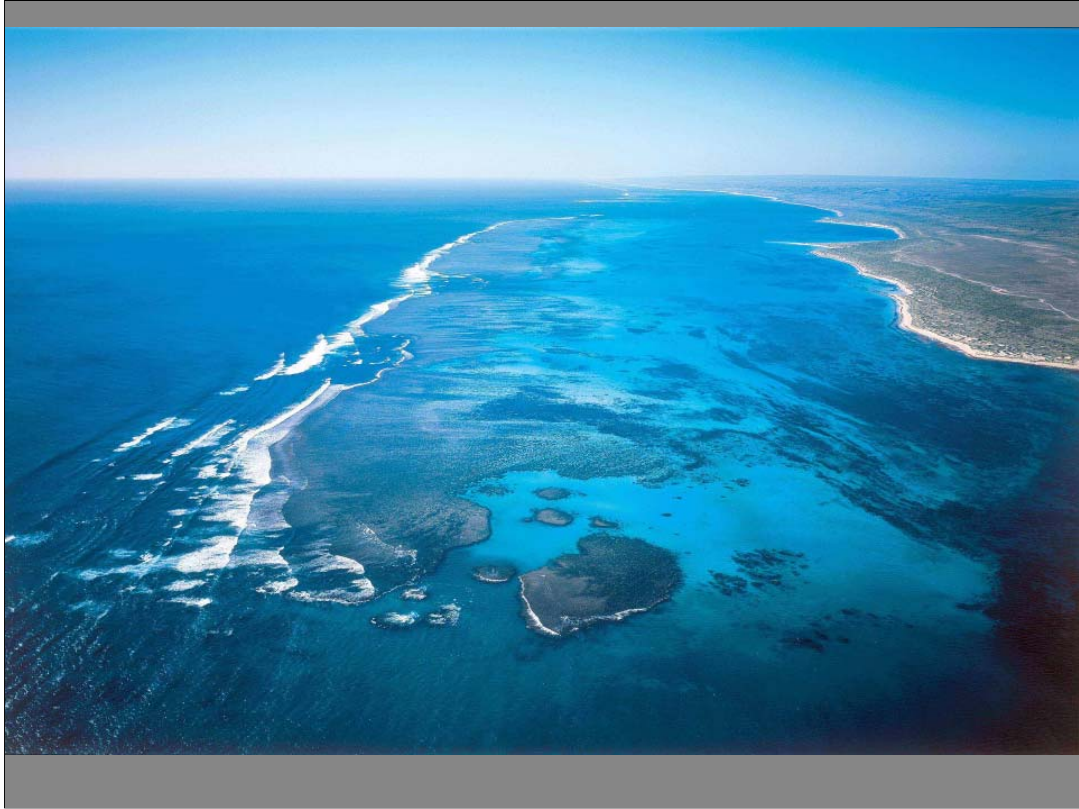
- Our flora emblem, the Kangaroo Paw....



- Our approach features community involvement in science and management....



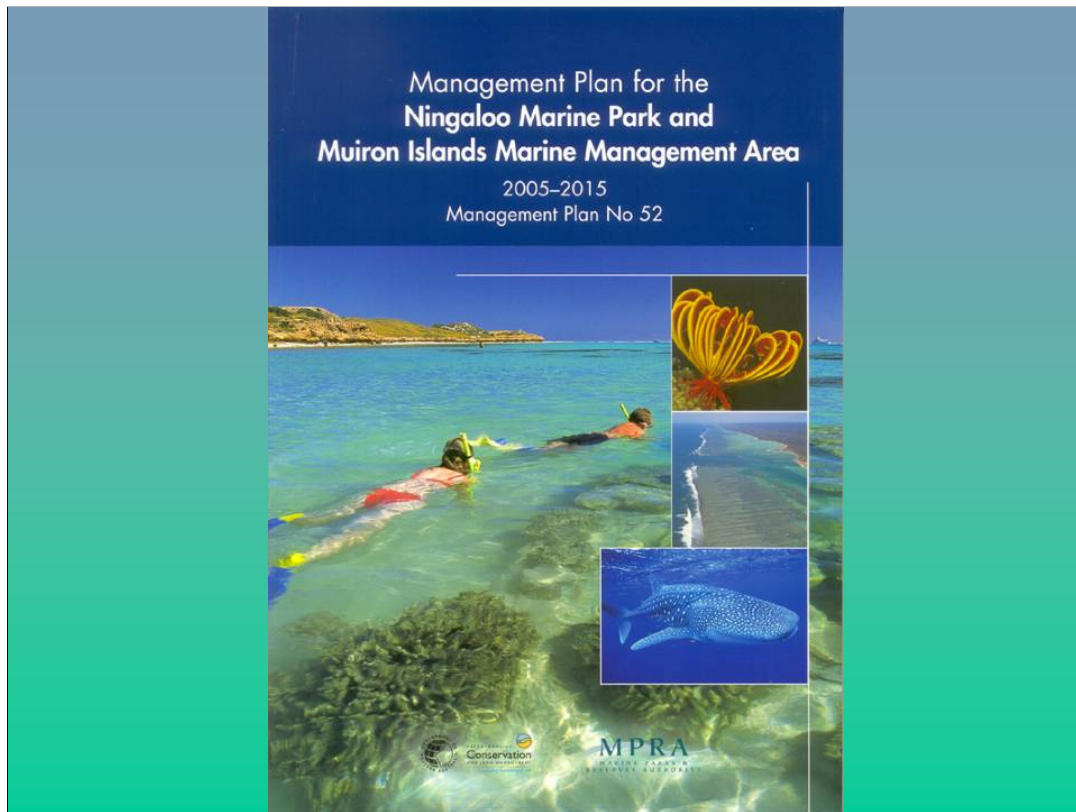
- And increasing involvement of Australia's indigenous people in the management of parks and using parks to show their culture to the wider Australian community and international visitors.
- The reason I have shown this quick selection of slides is to give you a very brief introduction to the variety of wildlife and landscapes in Western Australia, and I hope our international visitors in particular will get the opportunity to experience some of what we have to offer...
- But more importantly I have shown these slides to help me make the point that it is our natural landscapes and seascapes, and our wildlife both on the land and in the sea, that define much of the character of Western Australia and underpin much of its tourism activity.
- Indeed, the natural environment is a key element of Australia's global tourism appeal, and it is what differentiates Australia from many competing tourism destinations globally.
- And, most of Australia's important and globally recognised tourism icons are located in protected areas, placing a special onus on protected area managers to both protect and conserve those areas and their wildlife, and ensure tourism to those areas is managed sustainably.



- I now want to turn to Western Australia's marine environment and specifically the Ningaloo Marine Park, which is illustrated in this slide.
- Western Australia's marine environment is divided broadly into three major biogeographical zones – a tropical northern zone, a temperate zone along the south coast, and an overlap zone on the west coast in between the other two.
- The Western Australian Government has, since the mid 1980s, established nine marine parks and three other marine conservation reserves under the Conservation and Land Management Act, covering over 1.5M hectares or 12% of the coastal waters under State jurisdiction, as well as a number of fish habitat protection areas under fisheries legislation.
- In Western Australia, marine parks legislation and policy are based on the primary purpose of conservation while also providing for multiple use, both commercial and recreational, including fishing and nature-based tourism and recreation.
- The Government has made commitments to further expand this system of marine parks.



- Probably the best known of our nine marine parks is the Ningaloo Marine Park, 1,200 kilometres north of Perth.
- The park was established in 1987 and last year it was extended to include the full 300 kilometre length of the Ningaloo reef.
- The Ningaloo reef is the largest fringing coral reef in Australia and forms a discontinuous barrier enclosing a lagoon which varies in width from 200 metres to about 7 kilometres, with an average width of 2.5 kilometres.
- The marine park in Western Australian State waters covers approximately 260,000 hectares. A marine park has also been established under national government legislation in the waters adjacent to the State Ningaloo Marine Park, and the two areas are managed jointly as a single park.



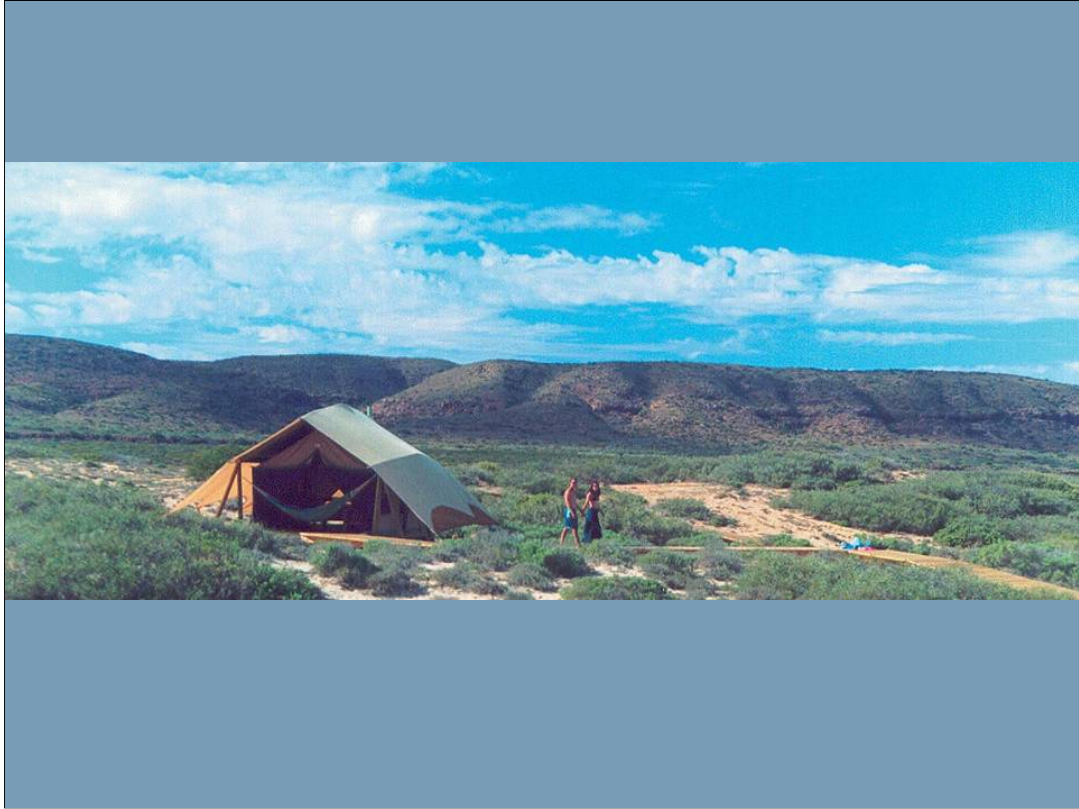
- A new management plan for the marine park was finalised late last year.
- Under the zoning arrangements in the management plan, 34% of the marine park is now in sanctuary or no-fishing zones.
- The management plan sets out, for a range of ecological and social values including whale sharks and nature-based tourism, their current status, pressures, management objectives, strategies, performance measures and short and long-term targets.
- With extra funding that has been provided by the State Government for management, research and monitoring, we are now confident that Ningaloo deserves its place in the top echelon of marine protected areas on a worldwide scale.



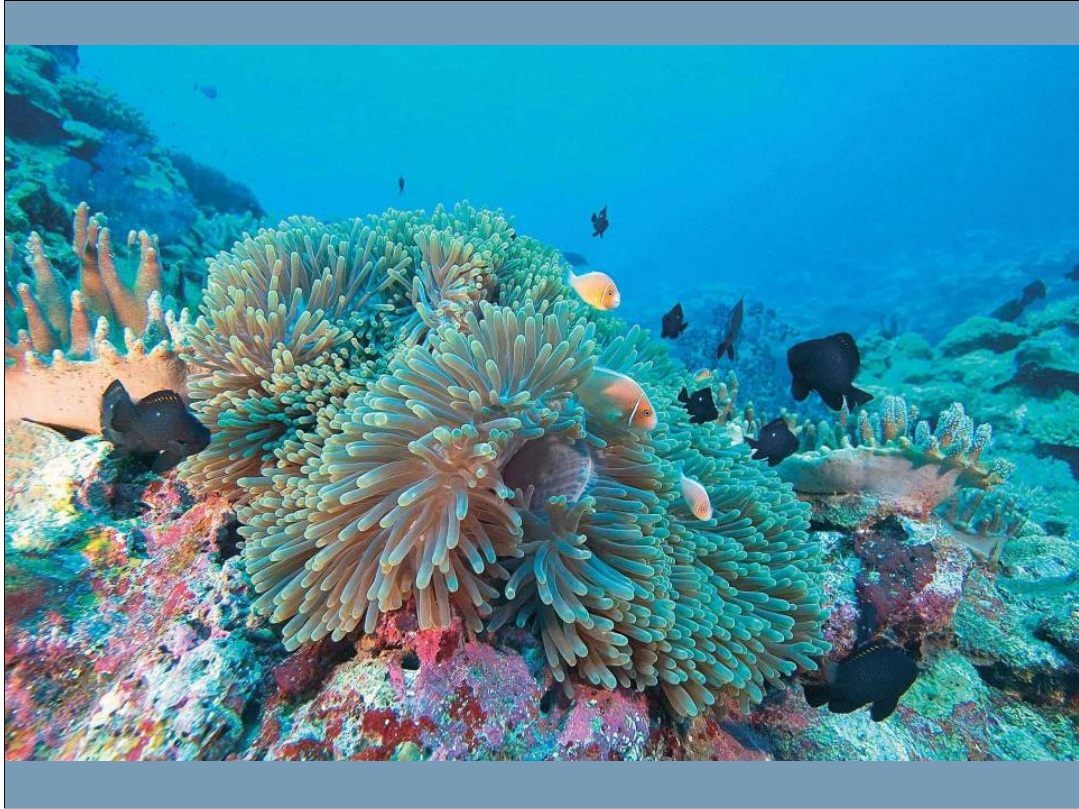
- More than 200,000 visitors come to Ningaloo each year, to enjoy its beaches and boating...



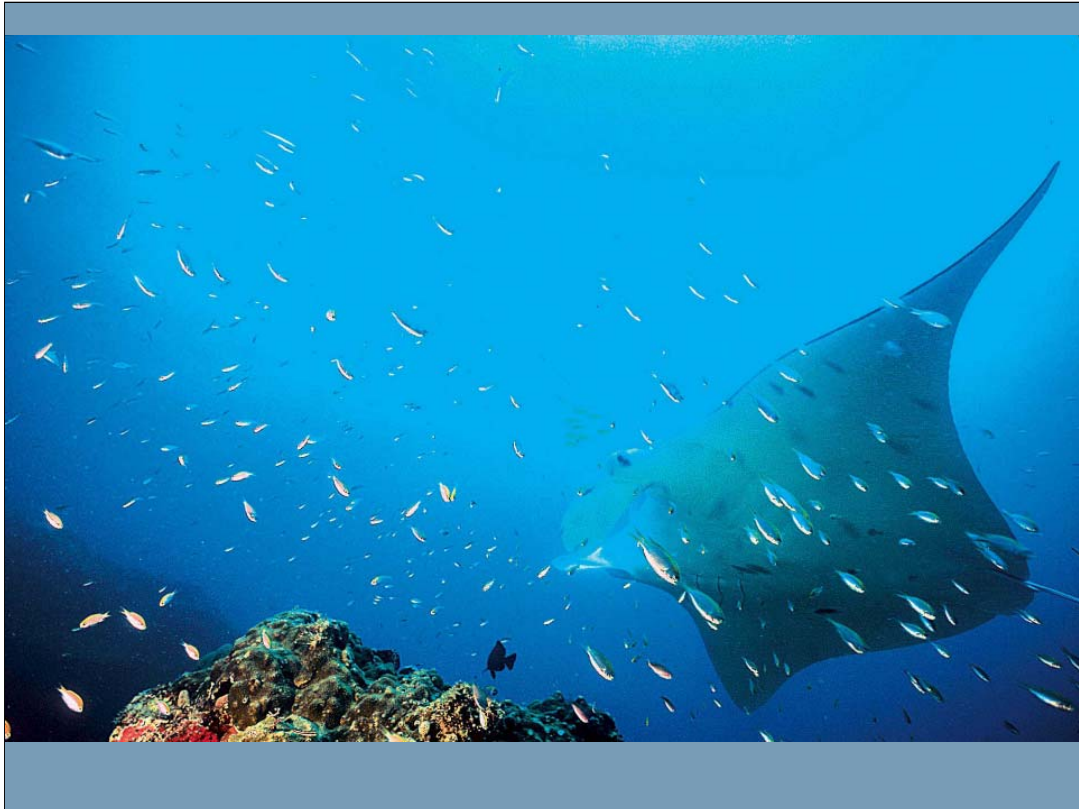
- To snorkel, dive and go fishing....



- To camp along the adjacent coast in the Cape Range National Park and the pastoral hinterland.....



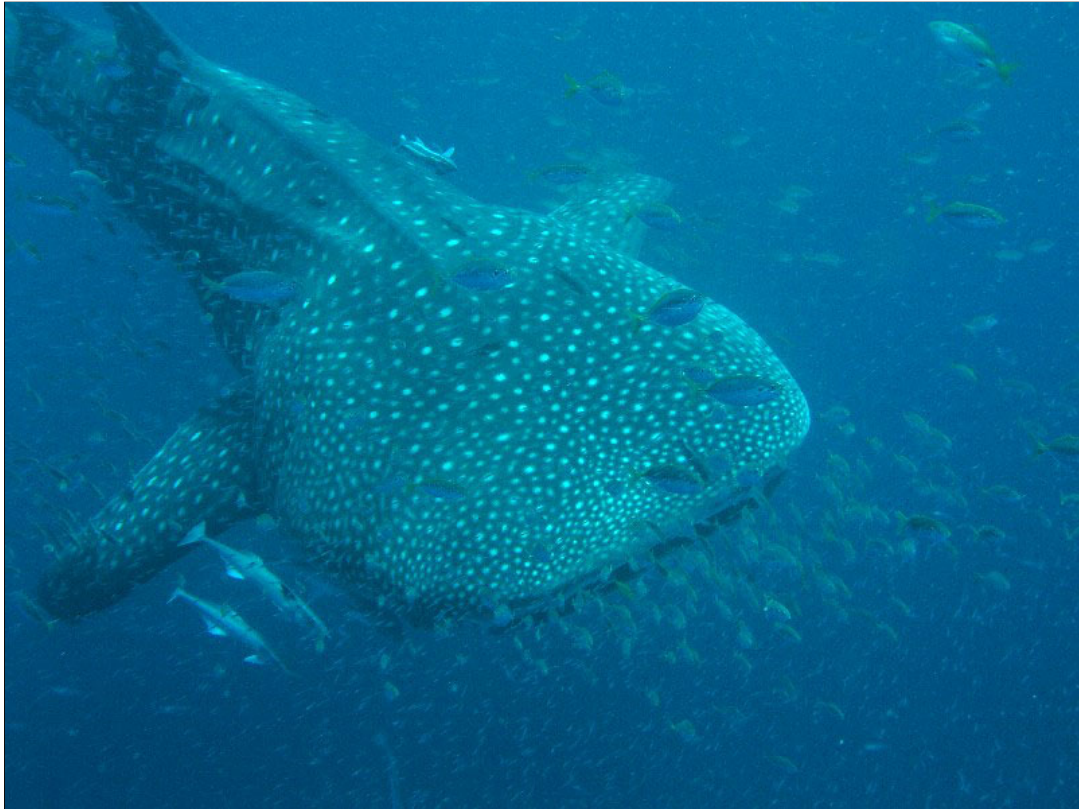
- To marvel at the rich marine life with more than 200 species of corals, 600 species of shellfish and 500 species of fish....



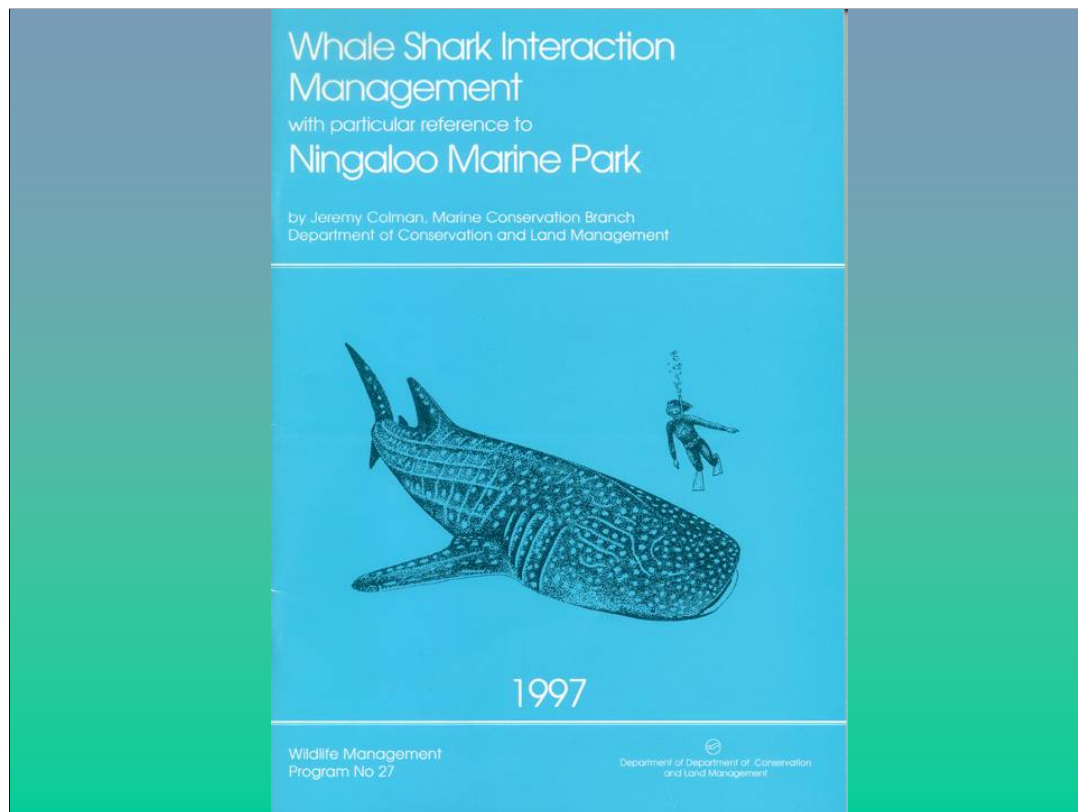
- And large marine animals such as manta rays, dugong, turtles, humpback whales and whale sharks.



- And because of these and other values, the State Government is committed to seeking World Heritage Listing for the Ningaloo Marine Park and adjoining North West Cape area.



- And turning specifically to whale sharks in Ningaloo Marine Park.
- The waters of Ningaloo Marine Park seaward of the reef crest play host to one of the world's largest known, predictable aggregations of whale sharks from March through to June each year.
- Others later in this conference will talk about the discovery of this phenomenon.
- Whale shark tours began in the marine park in 1989 and the whale sharks of Ningaloo quickly became widely known locally and overseas, leading to a rapid expansion in tourism interest.
- As the manager of the marine park which had only been established in 1987, we were faced with the task of trying to manage this tourism activity in a way that protected the whale sharks from any adverse effects, while supporting and facilitating the tourism industry that was growing around swimming with the whale sharks.
- However, the particular challenge we faced was that very little was known about the biology of these animals, their numbers, their movements, their status throughout their range, and their behavioural responses to interaction with people.
- In other words, we were faced with having to manage something with inadequate knowledge of how to do so – not an uncommon situation for wildlife and protected area managers.



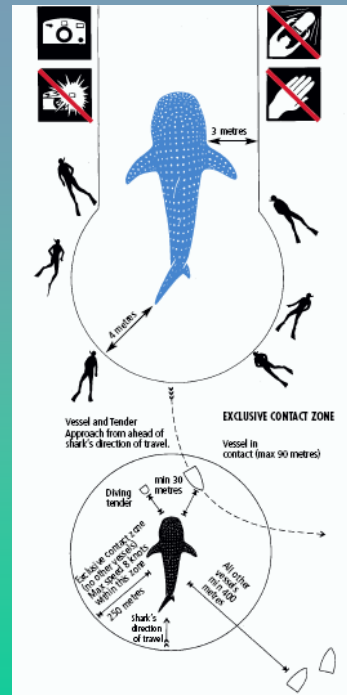
- What we did was talk to scientists, tour operators and others in the Exmouth community, particularly Geoff Taylor who will also be talking to you during this conference, who had been studying whale sharks and were drawing attention to the need to put in place a management regime.
- As a result, in 1993 a licensing regime was put in place for the commercial tour operators under the legislation that governs the management of marine parks.
- The licensing regime included limiting the number of tour operators and setting about gathering improved information for management.
- The structure under which we did this was a Whale Shark Interaction Management Program published in 1997, which covered what was known of the biology and ecology of whale sharks; management strategies for whale sharks in the marine park including tour operator licensing, an industry code of conduct and compliance monitoring; and a program of research and monitoring.

Whale Shark Interaction CALM's Aims and Roles


- Conservation of whale shark populations
- Facilitate the development of an ecologically sustainable whale shark tourism industry
- Facilitate a safe tourism experience
- Raise public awareness and appreciation of the whale sharks
- Develop, implement and periodically review a management framework including licensing, compliance, research and monitoring
- Ensure no adverse impacts from whale shark interaction



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- As already mentioned, an important part of the whale shark management program is a Code of Conduct which specifies such things as maximum boat speed, boats taking it in turn to have swimmers in the water with a particular whale shark, restrictions on how close swimmers should approach whale sharks, and the number of swimmers in the water at any one time.



DEPARTMENT OF
Conservation
AND LAND MANAGEMENT
Caring for the future of WA

Whale Shark

Interaction Log

DATE 12/4/02

W.S.L. 500

Vessel NINGALOO ONE

Recorder JOE BLOGS

Start Time 0930

Finish Time 1530

Number of Passengers

Paying		Other (F.O.C.)
Adults	Children	
<u>9</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>

Whale Shark Experience Pass

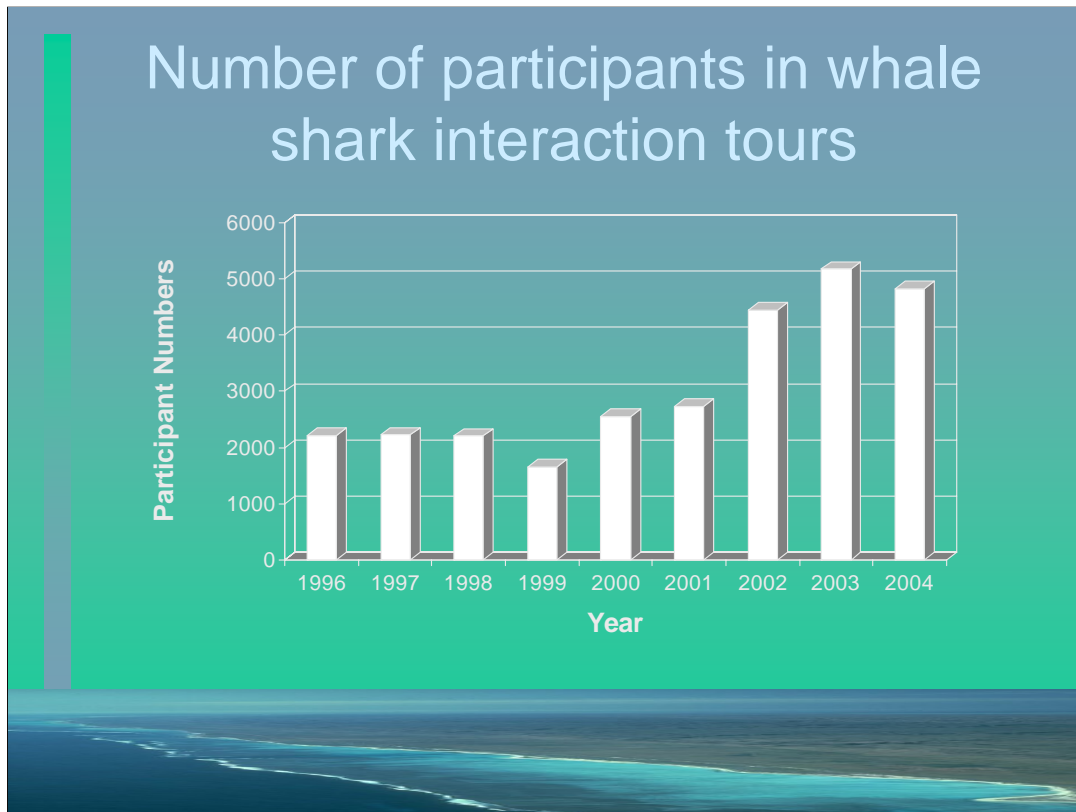
Pass Number	
From	To
<u>0358</u>	<u>0368</u>

SHARK	Position						Shark Observations										Contact Information															
	Latitude			Longitude			Depth	Time	Size	Sex	Dir	Response to swimmers					Contact Number											H/bail				
	Deg	Min	Sec	Deg	Min	Sec						I	II	III	IV	V		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10					
A	21	56	34	113	54	12	32	1045	7.5	F	NE	IN	CR	BT	PC	DV	Minutes	12	16	6	9	10	7									Y
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B	21	54	02	113	55	40	12	1230	9	M	S	ND					Minutes	5	11												Y	
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☐ No Bookings
 ☐ No Sharks
 ☐ Poor Weather
 ☐ Day Off
 ☐ Other, please specify _____

- A key part of our management approach is to work closely with the tourism operators to provide the necessary information to help measure what is happening and ensure that it is sustainable into the future.
- One of the ways that this is achieved is through log books where the operators provide valuable data, and this will be the subject of further presentations during this conference.



- This slide illustrates the growth in numbers over the last nine years, to a figure of around 5,000 in each of the last two years, across 15 licensed commercial tour operators.
- During the height of the season in April and May each year, a fee of A\$20 per adult and A\$10 per child is paid to CALM and those funds, amounting to about A\$100,000 each year are directed entirely to whale shark research and management, including contributing to some of the studies which will be reported on by speakers later in the conference.
- Nature-based tourism and recreation is making a major contribution to the local economy in the Ningaloo region.
- Independent research commissioned through Australia's Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism has shown that A\$127 million a year of the total spent by tourists to the Ningaloo region is directly attributable to the Ningaloo Marine Park and Cape Range National Park.
- The whale shark industry is itself worth A\$12 million annually to the region.



- So this is what we have at Ningaloo Marine Park now, and what we want to be able to still have a long way into the future.
- This conference is very timely for us – more than 10 years ago we set out to manage whale shark interactions at Ningaloo Marine Park with very little information, and we look forward to what we will learn over the next four days to help ensure the long-term conservation of whale sharks and sustainable tourism in partnership with the very valuable industry that has grown up around swimming with the whale sharks, and which gives people from around the world a unique experience that inspires appreciation for these magnificent creatures and the marine environment that supports them.
- However, we know that what we do in Ningaloo Marine Park is only a tiny part of the total picture.



- Elsewhere in their range, whale sharks are subject to a range of pressures including incidental captures, pollution and harvesting for human consumption.
- The challenge we have in this conference is to bring together what we know from across the world about whale sharks, because we don't have all the answers yet, and help drive the international effort that is necessary to conserve these animals.
- A key message we want to give is that healthy whale shark populations can generate significant economic value through properly managed nature-based tourism or eco-tourism.
- Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning, the Department of Conservation and Land Management is very pleased to be able to be a sponsor of this conference, and I hope many of you get to visit Ningaloo or other parts of Western Australia during your stay.