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Marine park location and zoning

How do we decide where to locate marine parks?

A set of national guidelines is used around Australia¹ to determine where marine parks and reserves are most appropriately placed. Western Australia's coastal waters are divided into different bioregions (i.e. areas with distinct biological and physical characteristics) and each bioregion has been assessed to identify the most suitable areas for marine parks and reserves based on the conservation and scientific values of the area.

The areas selected for marine parks and reserves contain, among other things, representative habitats and biodiversity found within each bioregion, key sites for threatened or protected species, and significant cultural heritage sites.

What is the purpose of marine park zones?

Marine parks are multiple use, meaning they have different zones allowing different types of activities. The marine park zoning scheme outlines the different zones and what activities are allowed within each zone. Zoning is an important management tool used to conserve marine habitats and biodiversity, as well as manage potentially conflicting activities within a marine park.

The establishment of 'no-take' sanctuary zones allows scientists to carry out long-term monitoring of marine habitats and biodiversity which are relatively unimpacted by human activities. These zones provide important reference areas or a baseline against which to compare areas where localised impacts may be occurring.

What are the different types of zones within a marine park?

The different types of zones used within WA marine parks are:

- **General use zone** – these zones are used to conserve the marine environment while allowing sustainable commercial and recreational activities to continue.
- **Recreation zone** – these zones are used primarily for recreational purposes, including recreational fishing where it is compatible with the primary recreation purpose of the zone. Commercial fishing is prohibited in recreation zones.
- **Special purpose zone** – these zones are used for a specific conservation purpose, such as the protection of marine habitats. Commercial and recreational activities that are compatible with the specific conservation purpose of the zone are allowed.
- **Sanctuary zone** – these zones provide the highest level of protection for marine plants and animals. They generally include representative habitats and biodiversity, important areas for threatened and protected species, and areas that include significant natural features. Sanctuary zones are 'look but don't take' areas and the only zone where all types of fishing and collecting is prohibited. People can continue to enjoy nature-based activities within these zones, such as wildlife watching, diving, snorkelling and boating.

¹ ANZECC TFMPA 1998. Guidelines for Establishing the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas. Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council, Task Force on Marine Protected Areas. Environment Australia, Canberra.



How do we zone a marine park?

Once the proposed boundary for a marine park has been determined, the area within it is assessed at a finer scale. This is to identify all the different habitat types, to ensure that the natural values that the marine park is to conserve are adequately protected and to ensure that there is opportunity for ongoing sustainable multiple use.

This means that in marine parks in WA:

- social and economic factors influence the placement of zones to minimise impacts on existing use
- large areas within a marine park are zoned as general use to allow ongoing sustainable uses that do not significantly impact on the natural values of the marine park
- sanctuary zones generally include representative areas of different habitat types and biodiversity, threatened species habitat, nursery or breeding areas and important cultural heritage sites
- tourism operations are an important aspect of each marine park, often enabling visitors to better appreciate and understand the area and its natural values
- zoning in marine parks is important for research and monitoring so that we can continue to learn about the ecological, cultural and social values of the area, detect environmental impacts and implement adaptive management strategies.

Community support is vital to the success of a marine park. When the marine park zoning plan is developed, the community and stakeholders are involved in its design to ensure a balance of conservation and sustainable use is achieved.



Top Harlequinfish. *Photo – Ocean Imaging*

Right Golden Kelp. *Photo – Ocean Imaging*

More information

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Header photos: Leafy seadragon. *Photo – Peter Nicholas.* Southern right whales. *Photo – Peter Nicholas/DBCA.* Fishing on the south coast. *Photo – Tourism WA.* Information current at September 2021. This publication is available in alternative formats on request.