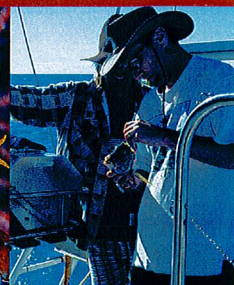


Protecting Ningaloo Coast





Foreword

The Ningaloo Coast has long been one of Western Australia's hidden natural treasures.

The unique fringing coral reef, the beautiful beaches and turquoise waters, rocky gorges and the diverse animal life have enormous environmental, spiritual and recreational value.

While the Ningaloo Coast has been attracting visitors from the animal kingdom

for thousands of years, it has only been in recent years that it has begun attracting large numbers of human visitors.

The Government is committed to the protection and proper management of the Ningaloo Coast to ensure people from all over the world are able to enjoy the area without degrading the values they have come to experience.

This paper outlines some of the strategies the Government is implementing to ensure this unique region is protected for all people to enjoy – both now and into the future.

Dr Geoff Gallop MLA
PREMIER

Dr Judy Edwards MLA
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

*Front cover, main photograph:
Ningaloo Reef (photo Ric Karniewicz).
Smaller photos, left to right: Whale shark;
diver at Ningaloo Reef (photo Sue
Osbourne); tour boat (photo Ben Radford);
yellow polyps (photo Peter and Margy
Nicholas); fishing at Ningaloo (photo Ben
Radford).*

*Right, main photograph: tour boat (photo
Ben Radford). Smaller photos, left to right:
gorgonian coral (photo Kevin Crane, CALM);
children learning about the marine
environment (photo Terry Goodlich, CALM).*



Introduction

The Ningaloo Reef is Australia's largest fringing reef spanning 280 kilometres. It supports an amazingly diverse array of marine life, from coral representing all the colours of the rainbow to the gentle giants of the ocean, the whale sharks.

This environment has enormous significance for all Western Australians and for people from all over the world who want to be able to enjoy the area without degrading the character, amenity and ecological systems that underpin its attraction.

The Government is building on past work and developing new strategies to ensure that the Ningaloo Coast is properly protected and managed for this and future generations to enjoy.

World Heritage listing

The Government is committed to nominating Ningaloo Marine Park and the North West Cape for World Heritage listing. It is clear that the Cape Range/Ningaloo region has qualities that are of international significance and that there is a high level of support in the scientific and conservation community for World Heritage listing to be pursued. Western Australia has only one World Heritage area, Shark Bay.

The Government will vigorously pursue the nomination of a combination of Ningaloo and Cape Range for World Heritage listing. It is known that these areas have significant natural values in terms of evolutionary, biological and geological processes, natural habitats and threatened species. These values have been identified in several scientific reports.

The magnificent fringing coral reef that in places is directly accessible from the shoreline, and the rugged karst systems of the range have obvious environmental and recreational value, as well as being of enormous significance to the Western Australian people. It is also possible that the Indigenous cultural heritage of this area will justify inclusion of those values in a World Heritage

nomination. The Government will fully engage the traditional owners of the area in the nomination process.

The Government is committed to full and open consultation to ensure that all interests affected by listing including tourism, petroleum, mining, fishing and pastoralism are engaged in the discussions about both listing and the potential boundaries of the area to be nominated.

It is important that the boundaries of the area to be nominated satisfy the World Heritage criterion of integrity of a nominated site.

The Premier has written to the Commonwealth Government with formal notification of the State's intention to pursue nomination of the Ningaloo/Cape Range region and seeking the support and assistance of the Commonwealth in pursuing nomination.

The Commonwealth Government has the role of determining and forwarding Australia's nominations for World Heritage listing. The State Government wishes to engage the Commonwealth Government in the process of assessing values and determining the potential boundaries of the area to be nominated so that the prospects of a successful nomination are maximised.

The nomination of the Ningaloo Reef and Cape Range is a major step in determining the future of the area.



*People walking on the Ningaloo shore -
photo by Caroline Williams.*

World Heritage listing can deliver many benefits – economic, social, as well as environmental. It helps promote the region and its extensive natural and aesthetic attractions. It can promote sustainable benefits for regional economies by way of increased revenue and

employment. It also brings responsibilities, such as managing areas in a manner that meets the expectations of the international community.

Management and land use decisions will be guided by the potential of World Heritage recognition and will reflect the State Government's commitment to the identification and protection of World Heritage values.

Securing the conservation estate

Central to ensuring that the conservation, recreation, tourism and heritage values of the region are protected and the public of Western Australia can be assured of the future protection of the region, is the consolidation of the conservation estate.

An extensive world standard marine park and national park have already been created encompassing the reef and much of the terrestrial areas from which threats to the reef emanate. These parks cater for the needs of both the current and future generations for nature based activities, including camping, so that there is sustainable access to this magnificent area.

The Ningaloo and Cape Range parks which encompass one of the world's most spectacular and accessible coral reefs are set to become amongst the best known parks internationally.



Turtle, Ningaloo - photo by Jennie Cary.

The Government is considering extensions to both the Cape Range National Park and the Ningaloo Marine Park. These proposals include the southward extension of the marine park and some areas to the north, eastward extensions of the Cape Range National Park and the reservation of the coastal strip south of the national park.

Included in proposed extensions are some of the areas already identified by the State for non-renewal of pastoral leases in 2015. A process is underway to negotiate, by December 2004, the boundaries of those areas adjacent to the existing marine and national parks that would boost the size of these conservation reserves.

There are some parts of the coastal strip which may be vested for other purposes and in local authorities, however, there will be a consistency in management approach. There will be the option for local landholders and leaseholders to have input into management of the coastal strip and adjacent lands.



A pink anemonefish - photo by Peter and Margy Nicholas.



Left: Ningaloo Reef from the air - photo by R.F. May/CALM.

Management structures

Marine and terrestrial conservation reserves in Western Australia are vested in the Conservation Commission of WA and the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority and managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

The Department for Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) commissioned a review of alternative management models which found that “the overwhelming ‘model’ elsewhere in Australia is that national parks and significant natural areas are managed by the relevant ‘parks’ agency of each State”.

However, the Environmental Protection Authority has recommended, as part of its advice on the Coral Coast Resort project, that the Ningaloo Marine Park, Cape Range National Park and adjacent coastal areas are so significant for their conservation, natural heritage, tourism and recreational values that consideration be given to the establishment of a specific management authority to cover the Ningaloo Coast region.

Models for management include:

- the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority;
- the Rottnest Island Authority;
- the Phillip Island Nature Park;
- the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area; and
- the Shark Bay World Heritage Area.

The Government has also committed itself to ensuring that conservation reserves are managed jointly with Indigenous traditional owners.

The Government welcomes community feedback on these various management models for the Ningaloo Coast.

If the Ningaloo Coast receives World Heritage listing, it is also proposed that a Community Consultative Committee will be established

specifically for the Ningaloo/Cape Range World Heritage Area under the direction of a Ministerial Council of Commonwealth and Western Australian Government Ministers. That Consultative Committee will ensure community input relating to the protection, conservation,

presentation and management of the property.

The Ministerial Council for Ningaloo will also be supported by a Scientific Advisory Committee to ensure scientific and technical advice to the Ministerial Council commensurate with the significance of the area.



The Ningaloo seascape - photo by Carolyn Williams.



Diving on Ningaloo Reef - photo by Jennie Cary, CALM.

Management planning for protection of lands and waters

The Government is committed to the protection of the Ningaloo Marine Park and Cape Range National Park and has initiated an integrated process to ensure appropriate management plans are in place and monitored for both parks.

A consultative group called the Coral Coast Parks Advisory Committee has been announced that includes representation from the conservation, tourism, local government and Indigenous communities.

The terrestrial areas are critical to ensuring the Government is able to protect the fringing coral reef of the Ningaloo Marine Park. They are also critical for providing access for visitors to experience and grow in their appreciation of natural wonders and landscapes of the region. Integrating the planning of both marine and terrestrial parks, each of which have their own values, as well as other reserves in the one

management process, will ensure the best assessment of impacts and dispersal of pressures on this precious resource.



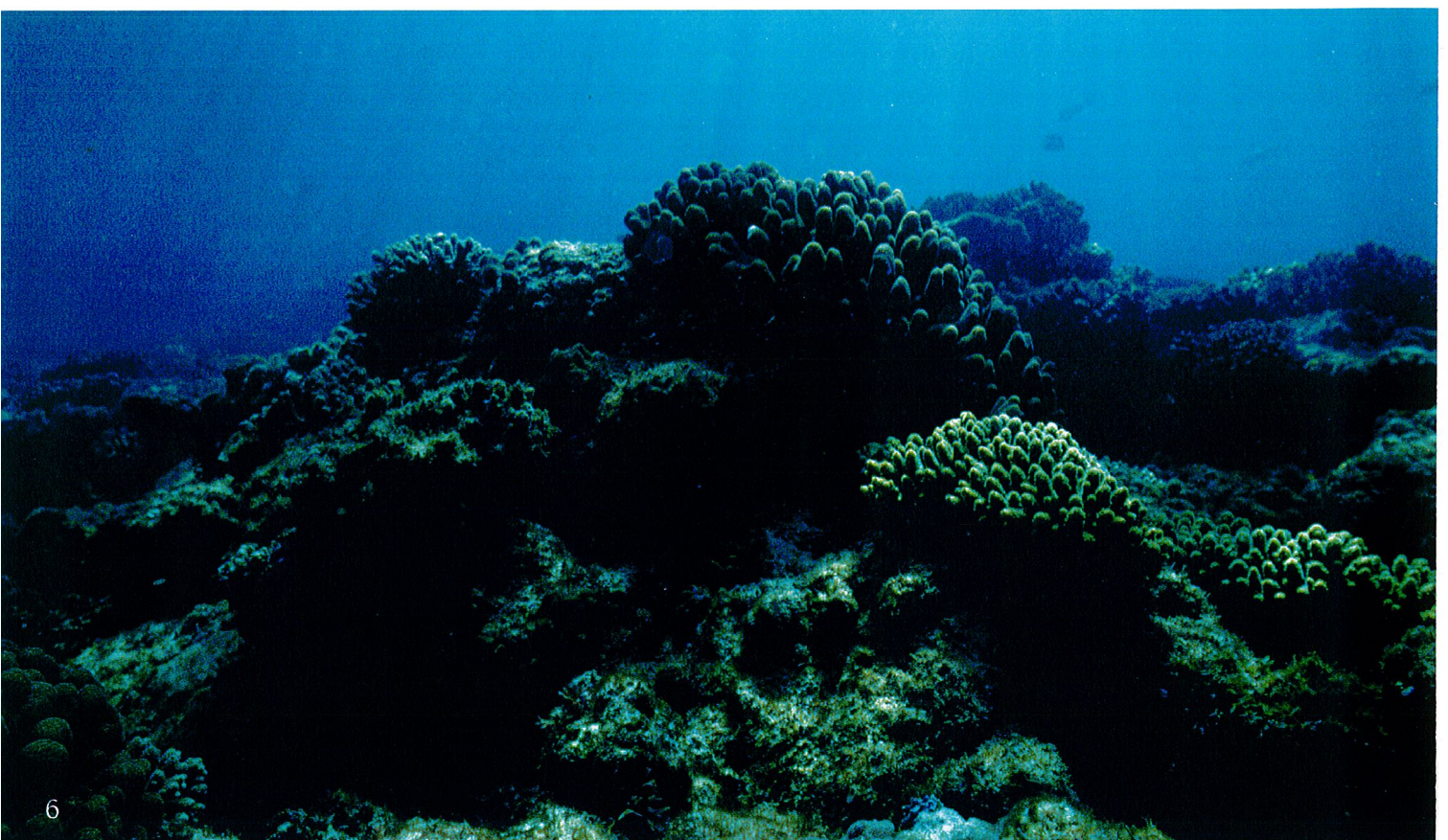
Preparing to dive at Ningaloo Reef - photo by Jennie Cary, CALM.

Management plans when prepared will be issued after extensive stakeholder consultation as drafts for public review and comment before being finalised to the satisfaction of the Government on the advice of the Conservation Commission of WA and the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority.

Management plans will ensure that threats to conservation values are contained and at the same time indicate where visitor facilities, including campgrounds, safari camps and caravan parks will be accommodated to cater for the growing number of visitors to the area.

It is an important requirement for achieving World Heritage listing that protection of values through competent management planning can be demonstrated.

Below: Tropical corals at Ningaloo Reef - photo by Jennie Cary, CALM.



Immediate effective conservation management

Significant management effort is being expended on the Ningaloo Coast area where pressures are being exerted on natural values. It is recognised that because of a structured and well planned management approach, the protection of areas within the Cape Range National Park is far superior to areas that have yet to be added to the reserve system. However, actions are now being put in place to address that deficiency.

A proposal for the development of a boating facility to service boaters at Coral Bay has been subject to a Public Environmental Review. The Government is committed to building a boat launching facility near Coral Bay at a cost of \$2.5 million to relieve pressure on the bay by relocating most of the vessels to another location. Alternative sites have been the subject of environmental assessment with the Environmental Protection Authority about to publish its assessment. As soon as the assessment allows for the facility, construction will proceed.

In the interim a Boating Strategy has been finalised, which endeavours to minimise damage in Bills Bay, adjacent to the Coral Bay townsite, and decrease the risk to swimmers and snorkellers. The aim of the strategy is to ensure people can continue to enjoy the waters of Bills Bay in safety while at the same time minimising damage to the Ningaloo Reef and coral by boats and anchors. Implementation of the strategy is underway. Boating activity has been redirected from congested areas by the development of a mooring plan and moorings for endorsed vessels at a cost of over \$240,000, including \$145,000 of Commonwealth Natural Heritage Trust funding.

The Government has also provided up to \$7.5 million for a new sewerage scheme at Coral Bay. Construction will commence within months and it will be fully operational for the next tourist season.

Facilities to enhance and manage nature based tourism in the area have been provided in the Turquoise Bay day use area in Cape Range National Park. A budget of \$180,000 has also been allocated for the provision of further visitor facilities and the

upgrading of roads in the park over the next financial year.

Management activities that will continue to be undertaken in the Cape Range/Ningaloo area include rehabilitation of coastal vegetation, public education activities and regular patrols. The extensive fox baiting program that has taken place in Cape Range National Park has also been extended to the areas that are proposed to be added to the park, including the pastoral lease non-renewal areas.



Above: Ningaloo Reef Retreat, Cape Range National Park - photo courtesy Paul Wittwer.

Right: One of the area's inhabitants, a black footed rock wallaby - photo Babs and Bert Wells/CALM.



Foxes are the single biggest predator of the threatened green and loggerhead turtle nests. A greater focus has been placed on the protection of turtle nesting habitat in the area, with additional management resources being provided during the turtle nesting period to ensure that visitor interactions with the animals are sustainable and to carry out additional fox baiting in strategic locations along the coastal strip.

In addition, the Government has provided an additional \$250,000 for improved park management in 2003/04 and this will increase to \$350,000 in 2004/05.

This is an immediate tangible demonstration of the importance of the Ningaloo Reef and this Government's intention to protect and preserve it for the public to safely enjoy.

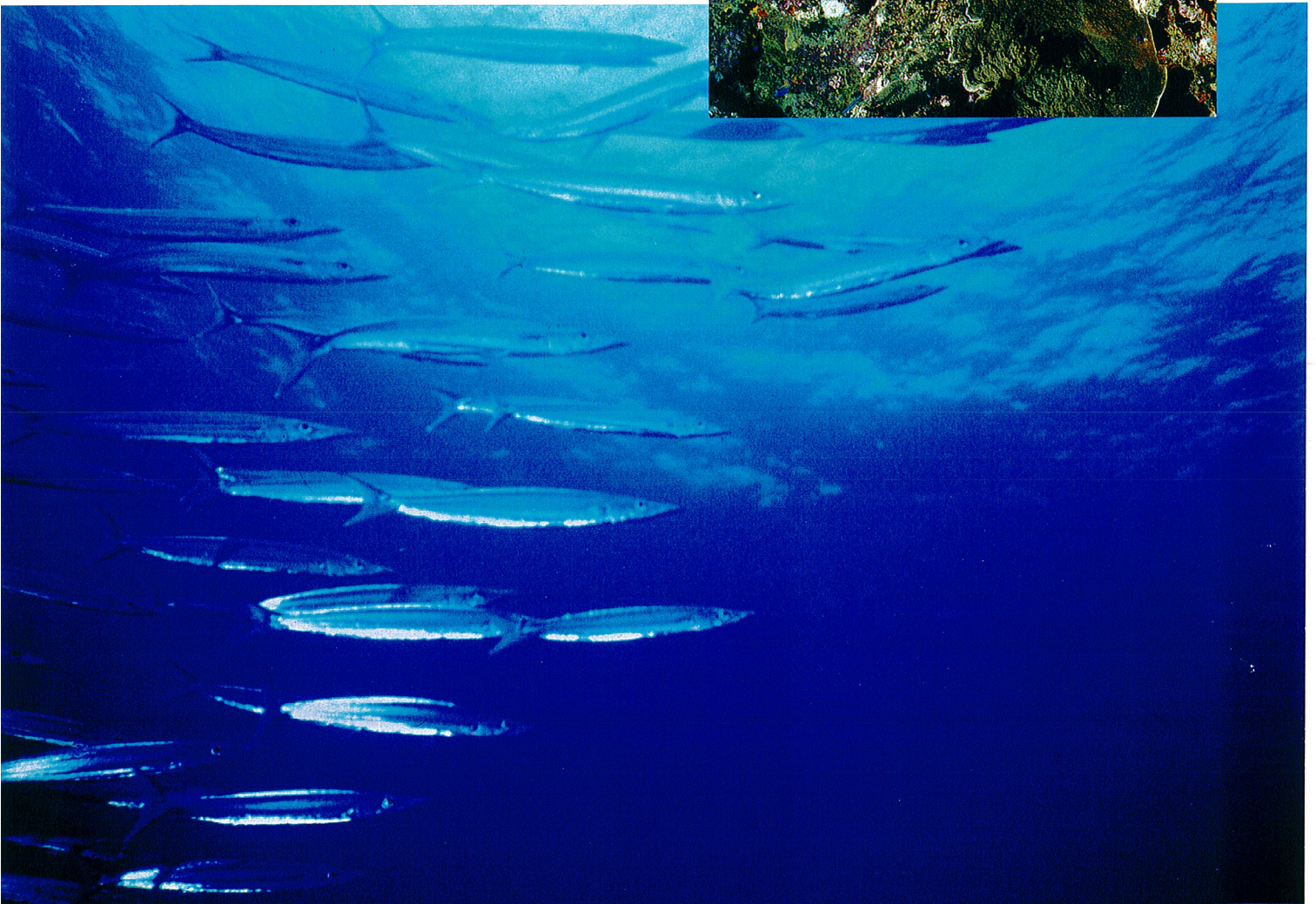


Tropical fish, Ningaloo Reef - photo by Jennie Cary, CALM.

In summary

The Government is committed to ensuring that the conservation values of Ningaloo and Cape Range are recognised and protected by:

- pursuing World Heritage listing;
- creating the best marine and national parks possible;
- making sure that a relevant, responsible management structure is in place;
- completing management plans which will direct future management needs and meet community aspirations; and
- making sure additional resources are available immediately to protect, conserve and allow appreciation of the area.



*Above: Tropical underwater life - photo by Kevin Crane, CALM.
Above right: The yellow of white surface tissue disguises the black skeleton of black coral - photo by Sue Morrison.*