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Protecting WA's marine environment

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

The Western Australian coast boasts a big area of biogeographic overlap, between the tropical north (north of Ningaloo Marine Park) and the temperate south (east of Cape Leeuwin), where tropical and temperate species co-exist. The Indian Ocean is also the only ocean in the world that has an eastern boundary current (the Leeuwin Current) that transports warm waters from the equator to the southern coast of a continent.

Our coastal waters are valued by Western Australians. The wide range of environmental, cultural, commercial and recreational values they offer generate employment and revenue and provide people with a source of pleasure and recreation.

The Western Australian Government is committed to conserving our marine environment and the sustainable use of our natural resources. A major component of the State Government's marine conservation and management strategy is the establishment of a State-wide system of marine parks and reserves. Approximately 12 per cent of State waters are currently included in marine parks and reserves, and about 2.4 per cent of State waters are in sanctuary ('no take') zones. This is complemented by fisheries regulations which also apply in all marine parks.

The conservation and sustainable use of Western Australia's marine environment is everyone's responsibility. By working together to reduce human impacts on the marine environment we can pass it on to future generations in a similar condition to what it is in today.

We need marine parks for the same reasons we have national parks on the land. Together, they protect our precious plants and animals, above and below the waterline.



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Department of Environment
and Conservation
Department of Fisheries

More information

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www.fish.wa.gov.au

Karratha Visitor Centre

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Karratha WA 6714
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Fax: (08) 9144 4620

Bureau of Meteorology

www.bom.gov.au/weather/wa/forecasts
Weather call
1900 926 150

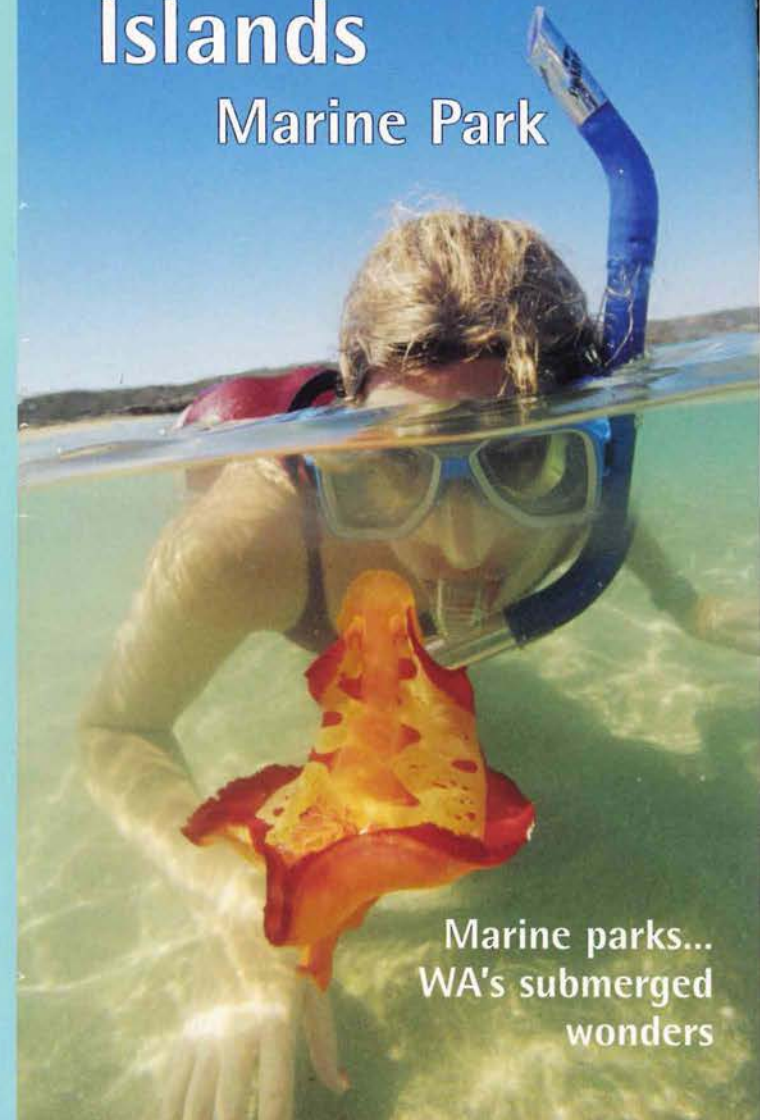
Sea Rescue

West Pilbara Volunteer Sea Search
and Rescue
Phone 0427 640 700 or 0417 932 023
Port Walcott Volunteer Marine Rescue
Phone 0439 870 995

Photos – Peter Nicholas; John Huisman; Kate Fitzgerald;
Suzanne Long/DEC; Ian Walker/DEC; Brett Lewis/DEC;
Adam Williams/DEC; Marissa Speirs/DEC.

Healthy Parks
Healthy People

Montebello Islands Marine Park



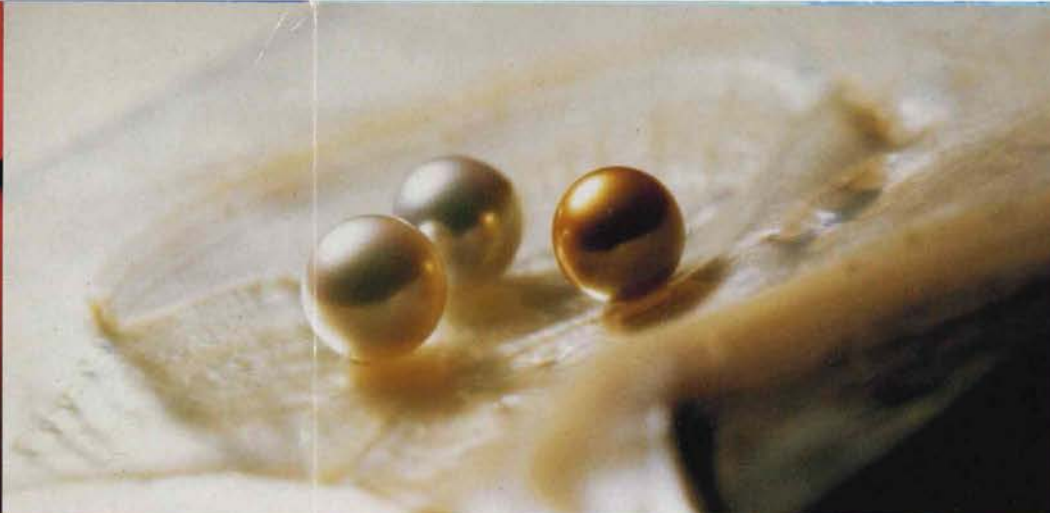
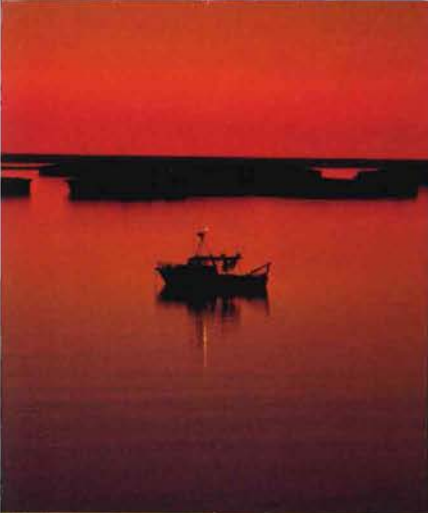
Marine parks...
WA's submerged
wonders

Information guide



Department of Environment
and Conservation
Department of Fisheries

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The Montebello Islands, about 20 kilometres north of Barrow Island and 120 kilometres west of Dampier, lie within one of the most beautiful and important marine areas anywhere along the Western Australian coast.

The Montebello Islands Marine Park protects more than 58,000 hectares of ocean surrounding more than 250 low-lying islands and islets surrounded by coral reefs and colourful tropical fish. The islands, which comprise the Montebello Islands Conservation Park, are very irregular, with convoluted coastlines, lagoons, channels, intertidal embayments, barrier and fringing coral reefs and shallow limestone platforms. The marine park is part of a larger marine reserve system, which extends southwards and comprises the Barrow Island Marine Management Area and the Barrow Island Marine Park. These marine reserves include most of the waters around Barrow Island and the Lowendal Islands.

The Montebello Islands achieved international notoriety when three British atomic weapons tests were carried out there in 1952 and 1956. The weapons were exploded on Alpha and Trimouille islands and on the war-surplus frigate HMS *Plym*, which was anchored on the west side of Trimouille Island. Remains of the military activities such as concrete bunkers, monitoring stations, roads and scrap metal can still be found on some islands, and the former military operational headquarters can be seen on the southern end of Hermite Island. Slightly elevated radiation levels still occur close to the test sites. As radiation effects on health are cumulative over your lifetime, be sure to limit

visits to the affected areas (marked on the map) to one hour per day. Do not disturb the soil in these areas and do not handle or remove any relics associated with the tests as they may still be radioactive.

Plants and animals

The complex system of reefs, lagoons and channels and the convoluted island coastlines provide an exceptionally diverse range of habitats for marine plants and animals. The area supports at least 150 species of hard coral, more than 450 species of fish, more than 630 species of molluscs and 170 known species of sea stars, urchins and other echinoderms. Further studies are likely to reveal new species.

Six species of mangroves occur in the Montebello Islands Marine Park, usually in narrow strips fringing bays. The mangroves are scientifically very important, as it is unusual to find mangroves growing within lagoons on oceanic islands. These spectacular coastal forests provide valuable nursery areas for juvenile fish and crustaceans and are stopover areas for rare and protected migratory wading birds.

Dugongs forage among the seagrass and seaweed beds and at least 10 species of whales and dolphins frequent the area.

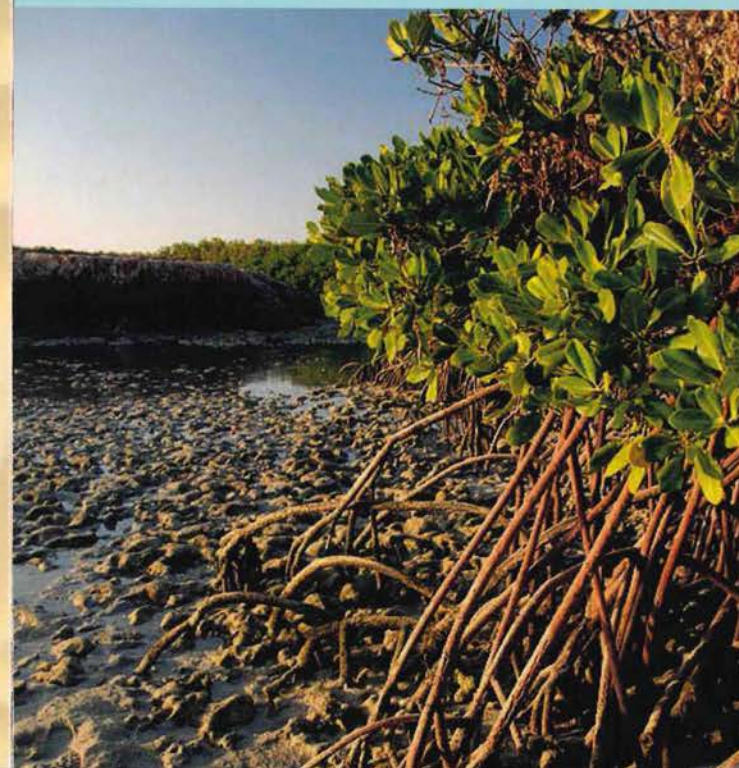
Three of the six species of marine turtles that occur in WA are regularly seen in the marine park. Green, hawksbill and flatback turtles nest on the sandy beaches. WA's hawksbill turtle population is one of the largest such populations remaining in the world while flatback turtles only nest in Australian waters.

Enjoying the marine park

The wide variety of wildlife, the natural land and seascapes and rich maritime heritage of the Montebello Islands Marine Park have great appeal to nature-based tourists. Although the islands have no visitor facilities, fishing and diving charters from Dampier, Onslow and Exmouth are becoming increasingly popular during the winter months.

The earliest known European shipwreck in Australia occurred when the English East India Company vessel *Trial* was wrecked on what are now known as the Trial Rocks north of the marine park in 1622. The 46 survivors from the wreck were the first Europeans known to have landed on the islands. Other wrecks associated with the pearling industry are known to have occurred in the marine park. Nothing should be removed from historic shipwrecks as they are protected by law.

The natural resources of the island group have been exploited since whalers arrived during the late 1800s. Commercial turtle hunting occurred from the 1870s until 1973. Cultured pearl farming commenced at the Montebello Islands in 1902 and still occurs today.



Planning your visit

The Montebello Islands Marine Park is offshore and relatively remote. Navigation to the islands should only be attempted in favourable weather conditions and in suitably sized and equipped vessels. Cyclones can form off the coast at any time but mainly between November to April, and visitors are urged to be vigilant for cyclone warnings.

You must take adequate fuel, water, food and first aid supplies as no services or facilities are available. Visitors to the Montebello Islands may camp on the beaches of Northwest, Primrose, Bluebell, Crocus, Hermite and Renewal islands, to 100 metres inland of the high-water mark. Select a site that looks as though it may have been used before. Take a portable fuel stove (not heat beads) as open fires are not permitted on the islands.

Like other island conservation reserves, the Montebello Islands provide an important refuge for native animals that are threatened or no longer found on mainland Australia. After considerable effort, the Department of Environment and Conservation successfully eradicated feral cats and rats from the Montebello Islands in 2001. It is critical that non-native animals and plants, even small insects and seeds, are not carried to the islands. Ensure that the following quarantine procedures are followed:

- Ensure your boat is clean and baited with rodent bait and that all semi-enclosed spaces are sprayed with a residual insecticide.
- Check your clothing and footwear are not carrying soil or seeds.
- Check your containers and food to ensure they are clean and free of pests and insects.
- Don't take pets.
- Take all rubbish with you on departure and dispose of it on the mainland.

Stinging jellyfish can occur in the Montebello Islands area. While the risk of being stung is low, especially if stinger suits are worn, ensure you have plenty of vinegar (to douse stings) and that you are aware of general first aid procedures.



Where you can fish

For complete lists of permitted activities see the matrix on the map overleaf.

For bag, size and possession limits see the Recreational Fishing Guide for the Pilbara/Kimberley Region available from the Department of Fisheries.

Line fishing

Is permitted in general use, recreation and special purpose (pearling) zones. Trolling only is permitted in special purpose (benthic protection) zones.

Rock lobster, recreational crabbing and spearfishing

These activities are permitted in general use, recreation and special purpose (pearling) zones. Spearfishing using underwater breathing apparatus, including SCUBA, is not permitted.

Netting

Recreational throw netting may be undertaken in general use, recreation and special purpose (pearling) zones (recreational netting licence required). Recreational set and haul netting is not permitted in the Montebello Islands Marine Park.

Management zones

Zoning is an important part of the management framework in multiple use marine conservation reserves. In some areas, fishing activities are partially or totally restricted. These zones provide reference areas that help us to measure the impact of human activity on the environment as well as protect habitats and the wildlife in them for future generations. Activities such as diving, boating and wildlife appreciation are permitted in these areas.

Fishers must 'know their zones' and check with the Department of Fisheries for the latest size, bag and possession limits that apply for various species.

Sanctuary zones

Sanctuary zones, which make up about 49 per cent of the Montebello Islands Marine Park, are 'look but don't take' areas managed for nature conservation and low-impact recreation and tourism such as diving and snorkelling. If large enough, they can act as nurseries and help replenish stocks in exploited areas. Extractive activities, such as recreational or commercial fishing, are not permitted in these zones.

Recreation zone

The priority use within this zone is recreation, including most types of recreational fishing and non-extractive tourism. Charter fishing is not permitted in recreation zones within the Montebello Islands Marine Park.

General use zone

General use zones are managed for nature conservation while allowing for sustainable commercial and recreational activities. Most recreational activities are permitted in the general use zone, which covers significant areas of the Montebello Islands Marine Park.

Special purpose zones (benthic protection)

These zones are managed for the protection of animals and plants that live on the ocean floor (benthic communities). They are essentially 'look but don't take' zones, except that recreational 'troll' fishing is allowed.

Special purpose zones (pearling)

Pearl culture is the priority use. Most recreational and some commercial activities that are compatible with pearling are permitted in these zones. However, when fishing, snorkelling, diving, windsurfing or undertaking other recreational activities in pearling zones, please keep well clear of pearl floats and lines.



Caring for the marine environment

- Know marine park zone boundaries and permitted activities.
- Fish for the future. Observe size, bag and possession limits.
- Quickly return undersized and unwanted fish to the water. Use wet hands or a wet cloth when handling fish and avoid placing on hot, dry surfaces.
- Always take your rubbish home with you – remember that plastics and fishing line can harm marine wildlife.
- Anchor in sand to protect fragile reef, sponge, seagrass and seaweed communities.
- Take care not to disturb important seabird colonies on the islands. Many species lay eggs on the ground or in burrows close to the beach and these nests may be difficult to see. Be aware of this behaviour and avoid nesting areas.
- Stay at least 100 metres from whales. Approach whales parallel to their direction of travel or move more than 300 metres ahead, stop, and allow them to come to you.
- Slow down to less than eight knots in shallow waters or if you see turtles or dugongs nearby to avoid hitting them.
- If you observe whales, dugongs or aggregations of turtles please report the locations (provide a GPS position if possible) to the Department of Environment and Conservation's Karratha Office.
- Do not collect shells. Some shells provide important habitat for animals such as hermit crabs and blue-ringed octopuses.