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# Rowley Shoals Marine Park

Marine parks...  
WA's submerged  
wonders



## Information guide



Department of Environment  
and Conservation  
Department of Fisheries

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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 ecologically 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. About 12 per cent of State waters are included in marine parks and reserves, of which 2.4 per cent is in sanctuary ('no take') areas. 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 and fishing within sustainable limits we can pass it on to future generations in 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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## More information

Department of Environment  
and Conservation  
West Kimberley District Office  
Herbert Street  
Broome WA 6725  
Phone (08) 9195 5500  
[www.dec.wa.gov.au](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au)

To book or enquire about public moorings  
email DEC at [rsmp.broome@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:rsmp.broome@dec.wa.gov.au)

Department of Fisheries Regional Office  
Port of Pearls House  
401 Port Drive  
Broome WA 6725  
Phone (08) 9193 8600  
Fax (08) 9193 8688  
[www.fish.wa.gov.au](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au)

Bureau of Meteorology  
[www.bom.gov.au/weather/wa/forecasts](http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/wa/forecasts)  
Weather call  
1900 926 150

Border Protection  
(Australian Customs Service)  
1800 061 800

Sea Search and Rescue  
(08) 9192 8202  
(08) 9192 2338



Department of Environment and Conservation  
Department of Fisheries

Photos – Suzanne Long/DEC; Eric G Matson;  
John Huismans; Huw Dilley; Tourism WA.

Information current at April 2008



The Rowley Shoals Marine Park protects two reefs that make up a chain of three coral atolls on the edge of one of the widest continental shelves in the world. Lying about 260 kilometres (170 nautical miles) west-north-west offshore from Broome, these atolls are effectively 'aquariums' in the middle of the ocean and offer some of the best diving in Australia.

Clerke and Imperieuse reefs form the Rowley Shoals Marine Park, declared in 1990 and extended four-fold in 2004. The marine park is managed by the WA Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). The nearby Mermaid Reef Marine National Nature Reserve (encompassing the northernmost reef) is managed by the Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water Resources, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) with the assistance of DEC. Both Border Protection and the WA Fisheries Department also assist with management of the shoals.

The Rowley Shoals were named in 1818 by Captain Phillip Parker King. He discovered and named Mermaid Reef after his ship. He named the middle shoal Clerke Reef after Captain Clerke, who had reported it from a whaler some time between 1800 and 1809. The south-western shoal was dubbed Imperieuse Reef after the vessel from which it was sighted by Captain Rowley in 1800. The three atolls have shallow lagoons inhabited by diverse corals and abundant marine life. Each atoll covers about 80 to 90 square kilometres and rises with near-vertical sides from very deep

water. Mermaid Reef, the most northerly, rises from about 440 metres, Clerke from 390 metres and Imperieuse from about 230 metres. The three shoals are strikingly similar in dimension, shape, orientation and distance apart. Each atoll is north-south orientated and pear-shaped, with the narrow end towards the north.

The coral atolls of the Rowley Shoals Marine Park are famed for their almost untouched coral gardens, giant clams and other shellfish. Giant potato cod and Maori wrasse sometimes follow divers around, while colourful reef fish show little fear, and trevally, mackerel and tuna hover in schools. At least 233 species of coral and 688 species of fish inhabit the shoals—including many species not found on nearshore coral reefs. There are at least 28 species of staghorn coral alone. As well as being inhabited by a number of species not recorded from other WA coral reefs, the coral and fish communities of the Rowley Shoals are unique in their composition, and in the relative abundance of species. The marine communities of the Rowley Shoals are more characteristic of south-east Asia than any other WA reefs.

From about 1977, charter boats based from Broome began operating deep sea fishing and diving expeditions to the area. Today the shoals rank among the most remote and pristine marine areas in the world. Lying on the very edge of Australia's continental shelf, they are regarded as the most perfect examples of shelf-edge atolls in Australian waters.



## Enjoying the marine park

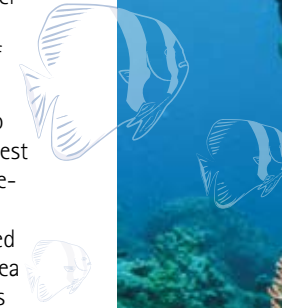
Because of their remote location, most visitors go to the Rowley Shoals Marine Park and Mermaid Reef Marine National Nature Reserve by charter boat, and trips are generally a minimum of five days. The boat trip to the Rowley Shoals takes about 12 hours. Charter operators usually depart from Broome at sunset and arrive at the shoals at about midday. Mermaid and Clerke reefs are the most visited sites. Charter operators are based in Broome and more information about charter boat operations can be obtained from the Broome Visitor Centre, phone (08) 9192 2222. Most operators visit the shoals from September to December.

Public moorings are available outside Clerke and Imperieuse reefs, and inside Clerke Reef and Mermaid lagoons. Bookings are required. For information on availability, locations and usage guidelines, please call DEC's Broome Office on (08) 9195 5500 or email [rsmp.broome@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:rsmp.broome@dec.wa.gov.au). To avoid disappointment, you are encouraged to book before your

visit. No anchoring is permitted in the marine park unless in an emergency.

The diving is excellent. The outside walls of the shoals are alive with soft corals in every imaginable colour. At low tide the water becomes ponded within the reef walls, the water gushing over them like waterfalls. At high tide, the reefs disappear beneath the sea, with only the sandy islands of Clerke and Imperieuse visible.

Bedwell Island, in Clerke Reef, is home to one of only two colonies of red-tailed tropicbirds in WA. The tropicbirds nest on the island, along with wedge-tailed shearwaters, white-bellied sea-eagles, ruddy turnstones, various terns, sand plovers, eastern reef-egrets and even a pair of white-tailed tropicbirds. Bedwell Island is also an important resting area for migratory birds making their mammoth annual flights from as far north as Siberia. Hawksbill and green turtles sometimes nest on the sandy cay.



## Where you can fish

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

For bag, size and possession limits see the 'Recreational Fishing Guide: North Coast Region' available from the Department of Fisheries. Commercial fishing is prohibited in the marine park.

### Line fishing

In general use and recreation zones.

### Recreational netting

Throw nets only in general use zones. Recreational set and haul netting are not permitted in Rowley Shoals Marine Park.

### Spearfishing (breath hold)

In general use and recreation zones, but only outside lagoons.

### Spearfishing on compressed air

In general use zones.

## 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.

### Sanctuary zones

Sanctuary zones are 'look but don't take' areas managed for nature conservation and low-impact recreation and tourism such as diving and snorkelling. Extractive activities, such as recreational or commercial fishing, are not permitted in these zones. There are sanctuary zone tags on the moorings located within sanctuary zones at the Rowley Shoals Marine Park.

### General use zones

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 zones.

### Recreation zones

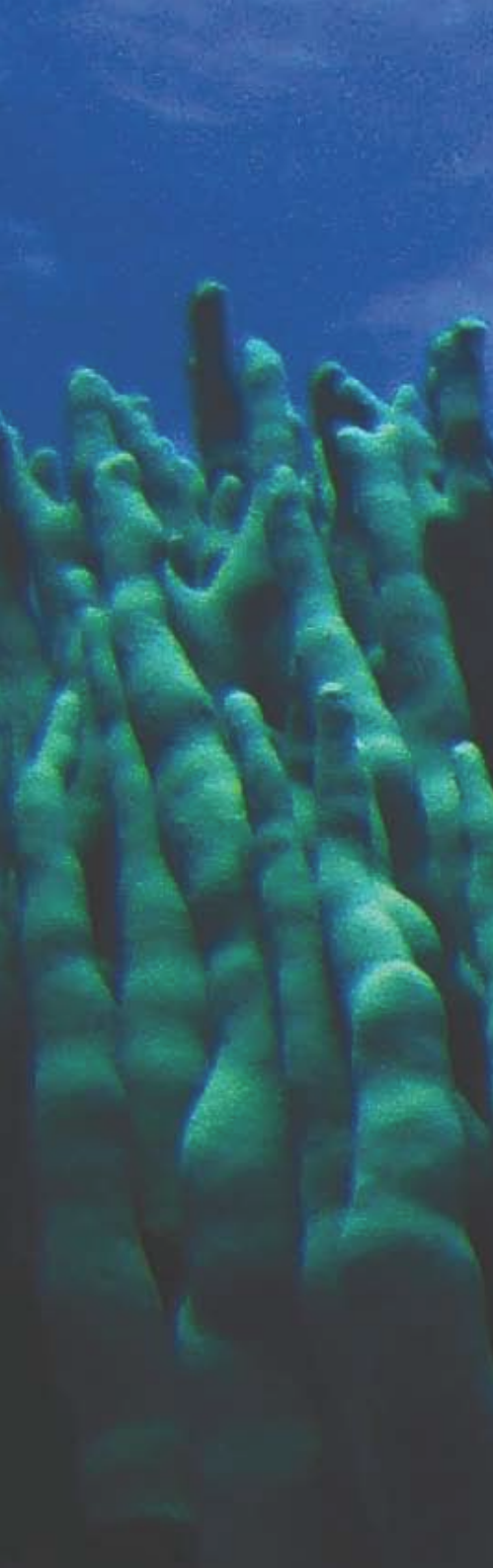
The priority use within these zones is recreation, including most types of recreational fishing and tourism.



## Caring for the marine environment

- Know the marine park zone boundaries and permitted activities.
- To avoid damaging fragile corals, no anchoring is permitted in the marine park unless in an emergency. Public moorings are available outside Clerke and Imperieuse reefs and inside Clerke Reef and Mermaid Reef lagoons. Bookings are required. For information on availability, locations and usage guidelines, please call DEC's Broome Office on (08) 9195 5500 or email [rsmp.broome@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:rsmp.broome@dec.wa.gov.au). Enquiries for use of moorings on Mermaid Reef should also be directed to this office. To avoid disappointment, you are encouraged to book before you arrive.
- You can contribute valuable data to the conservation of the Rowley Shoals by taking part in Coral Watch ([www.coralwatch.org](http://www.coralwatch.org)), a simple, non-invasive method of monitoring coral bleaching and assessing coral health. Several charter operators in the Rowley Shoals Marine Park have embraced the program and adopted a site.
- You may fish in general use and recreation zones at Clerke and Imperieuse reefs. Always fish for the future. Observe size, bag and possession limits. See 'Recreational Fishing Guide: North Coast Region' available from the Department of Fisheries.
- All cods, groper and wrasses, including potato cod, rock cod and related species, hump-head Maori wrasse, Queensland groper, coral trout, molluscs and corals are fully protected. Quickly return these species and any undersize and unwanted fish to the water. Use wet hands or a wet cloth when handling them and avoid placing them on hot, dry surfaces. Collection of shells or specimens from the islands or reefs is not permitted.
- Always take your litter home with you – remember that plastics and fishing line can harm marine wildlife. Please pay attention to waste management regulations and appropriate discharge zones. You may not discharge any waste within the lagoon areas.
- You may land on Bedwell and Cunningham islands, but you should not walk on the exposed reef, as these fragile areas are easily damaged.
- Collection of shells or specimens from the islands or reefs is not permitted.
- See the Guide to Best Environmental Practices available from DEC's Broome office for a more extensive guide to environmentally sustainable marine operations within marine parks and reserves.





ACTIVITIES	Legend		
	SANCTUARY ZONE	RECREATION ZONE	GENERAL USE ZONE
<b>COMMERCIAL FISHING</b>			
Fishing from guided charter vessels	✗	✓	✓
<b>RECREATIONAL FISHING</b>			
Line fishing	✗	✓	✓
Trolling	✗	✓	✓
Netting	✗	✗	Throw netting only <sup>2</sup>
Spearfishing – breath-hold	✗	✓	✓
Spearfishing on compressed air	✗	✗	✓
Coral, shell and specimen collecting (alive and dead)	✗	✗	✗
<b>BOATING/WATERSPORTS</b>			
Snorkelling and diving	✓	✓	✓
Surface water sports	✓	✓	✓
Boating	✓	✓	✓

1. Please contact the Department of Environment and Conservation (mineral and petroleum exploration or production) or the Department of Fisheries (commercial fishing) for information on other permissible commercial activities.

2. A recreational netting licence is required from the Department of Fisheries to use a throw net.

Legend

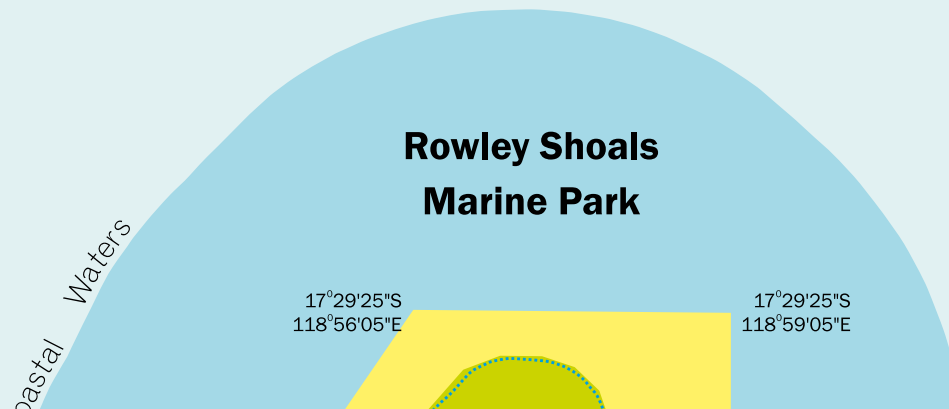
- General use zone
- Recreation zone
- Marine national nature reserve
- Sanctuary zone
- Reef edge

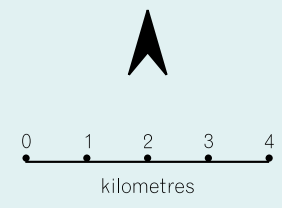
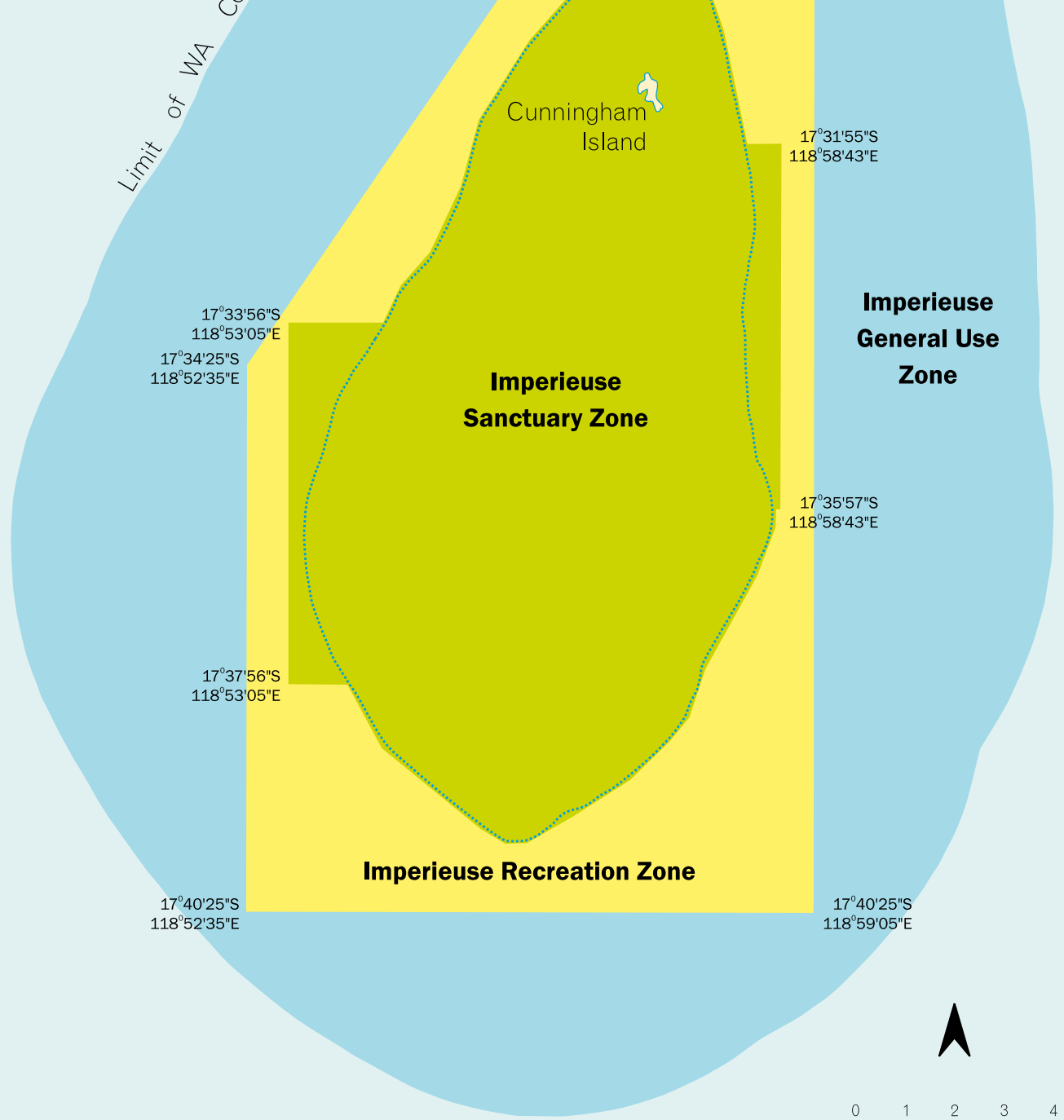
Positions on this map are referenced to the Geocentric Datum of Australia 1994 (GDA94). For GPS use, GDA94 approximates WGS84.

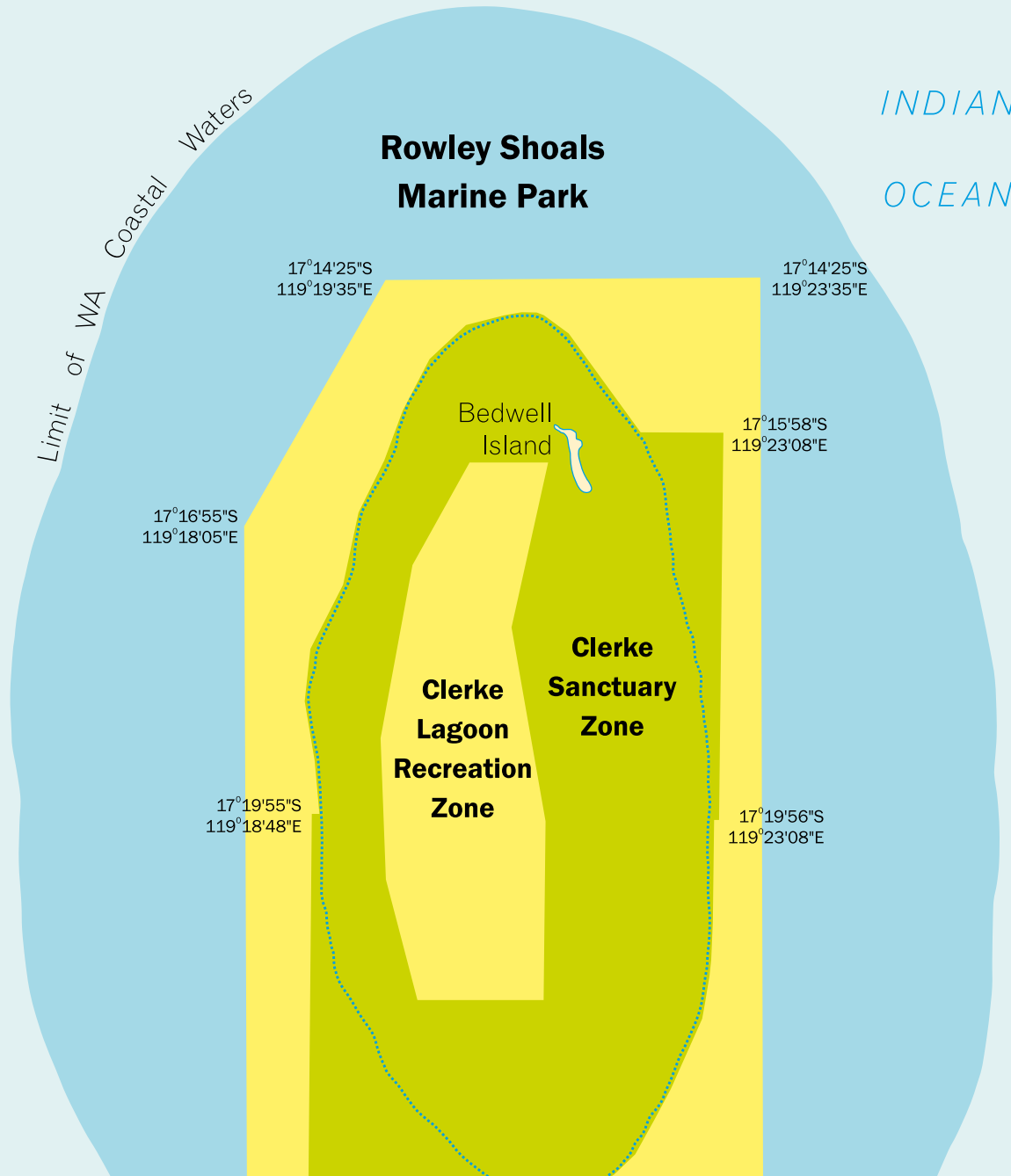
This map is for illustration purposes and not for navigation.



INDIAN OCEAN







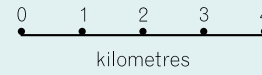


17°24'25"S  
119°18'05"E

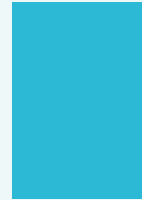
**Clerke Outer Reef Recreation Zone**

17°24'25"S  
119°23'35"E

**Clerke  
General Use  
Zone**

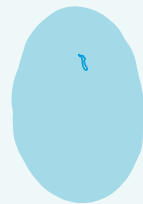


INDIAN OCEAN



**Mermaid Reef  
Marine National  
Nature Reserve**  
(Commonwealth Waters)

**Rowley Shoals  
Marine Park**  
(State Waters)



Clerke  
Reef



Imperieuse  
Reef

