

# LIBRARY

Department of Biodiversity,  
Conservation and Attractions

This PDF has been created for digital preservation. It may be used for research but is not suitable for other purposes. It may be superseded by a more current version or just be out-of-date and have no relevance to current situations.

# Visiting the Abrolhos Islands

No facilities or accommodation for visitors are available at the Abrolhos, and there are no sources of freshwater on the islands. Before setting out make sure that you have enough supplies and freshwater to last the length of your intended visit. Emergency medical assistance is available from the Silver Chain nurse on Rat Island (Easter Group) between 15 March and 30 June. Contact Channel 16 on VHF.

Wildlife is protected on all islands in the Abrolhos. Landing is permitted on uninhabited islands, but lighting fires and camping are banned. Please take great care not to disturb nesting seabirds. If you do go ashore it is better to walk along the shoreline, rather than across the islands, as you may destroy seabird nesting burrows.

The residences, jetties and rainwater tanks of commercial fishermen on the 22 islands designated for their use are private property. You may land on the islands, but you may not use the facilities unless you have written permission on board your boat from the owner. You may not stay in fishermen's camps unless the owner is present.

## Safe anchorages

When you first arrive at the Abrolhos we suggest you identify a safe anchorage for the night. A number of anchoring areas are indicated on the map overleaf. These areas are not all-weather anchorages. You will need to assess the prevailing weather conditions before deciding on an anchorage.

Coral reefs and seagrass beds are important fish habitats, are easily damaged by boat anchors and anchor chains and are very slow to regenerate. Take care not to drop your anchor on top of coral reefs - sand and mud provide the best holding bottom (see map).

## Navigating around the Abrolhos

Consult nautical chart AUS 751 for soundings and other charted features. The Abrolhos reefs are notoriously treacherous, and a wide safety margin should be allowed, particularly by skippers unfamiliar with island waters.

Bear in mind that the Abrolhos are first in the path of any weather moving in from the west or north-west. Weather conditions can be highly changeable, and cold and warm fronts may reach the islands 24 hours or more in advance of weather bureau forecasts for the mainland.

Be prepared for a prevailing westerly or south westerly swell which may reach several metres in unprotected waters.

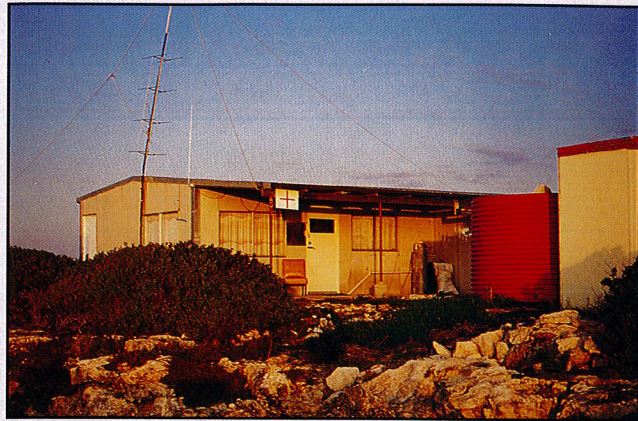


Photo: Andrew Cribb



Photo: Andrew Cribb



Photo: Andrew Cribb



Photo: Jiri Luohman



Photo: Andrew Cribb

## Sea safety

Make sure you have life jackets, flares, two-way radio, EPIRB (electronic position indicating radio beacon), fire extinguishers and other safety gear aboard in line with marine safety regulations for open sea (over 30 miles offshore). Full details are available from the Maritime Division of the Department of Transport.

## A CODE OF CONDUCT

When you visit the Abrolhos, remember - this is a special place that needs your protection.

- Anchor away from corals and seagrass to avoid damage.
- Take your rubbish away with you - don't drop it in the water.
- Only take enough fish for your personal consumption.
- Take care not to disturb birds and other wildlife on the islands.
- Don't pump bilges in the shallows - The effluent can damage corals.
- Shipwrecks and historical relics are the heritage of all Western Australians. Please do not interfere or remove objects from the sites. Report the location of any finds to the WA Maritime Museum Ph (09) 431 8444.
- When diving, avoid standing on fragile corals - they break easily.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

ABROLHOS ISLANDS CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL  
Ground floor, SGIO Building  
Geraldton WA 6530  
Ph (099) 21 0702

FISHERIES DEPARTMENT OF WA  
108 Adelaide Terrace, East Perth, 6004.  
Ph (09) 220 5333

Geraldton District Office  
PO Box 1171, Geraldton 6530  
Fisherman's Wharf, Geraldton  
Ph (099) 21 1956/21 6800. Fax (099) 21 3617



Published by

**Abrolhos Islands Consultative Council**  
**Fisheries Department of Western Australia**

This project was funded by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park  
Authority under OCEAN RESCUE 2000

# THE ABROLHOS ISLANDS

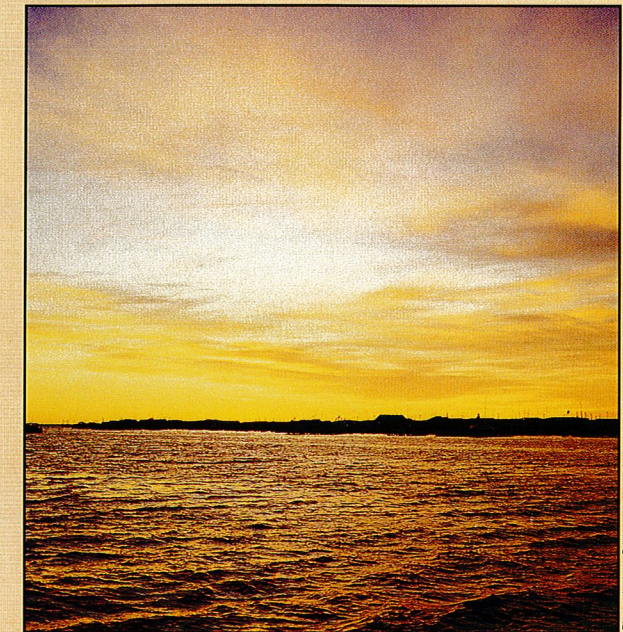


Photo: Andrew Cribb

## VISITOR'S GUIDE

**Abrolhos Islands Consultative Council**  
**Fisheries Department of Western Australia**



**November 1994**



# The Abrolhos Islands

and their surrounding coral reef communities form one of Western Australia's most unique marine areas.

Low-lying, windswept and in many cases barren and waterless, the Abrolhos have been built up through the slow growth of corals keeping pace with variations in sea levels over more than 120,000 years.

The Abrolhos lie about 60 km west of Geraldton, and consist of 122 islands clustered into three main groups: the Wallabi Group, Easter Group and Pelsaert Group, which extend from north to south across 100km of ocean.

Lying in the stream of WA's warm, southward-flowing Leeuwin Current the marine environment surrounding the Abrolhos is a meeting place for tropical and temperate sealife.

The Leeuwin Current starts to flow in April each year, and runs through the winter months until October, bringing masses of warm, low nutrient, tropical water down Western Australia's continental shelf from Indonesia. The Current carries with it a cargo of larvae, eggs and juveniles of many species of corals and other marine life far south of their normal range.

In years of strong flow the Current may reach speeds of up to three knots, but one of its most important features is that it maintains water temperatures throughout the winter at around 20-22°C, enabling corals, seagrasses and tropical species of fish and invertebrates to thrive in latitudes where they wouldn't normally survive.

Large breeding colonies of seabirds exist on many of the islands, and depend for their food on schools of pelagic baitfish such as pilchards present in island waters - more than 90 species of seabird have been identified on the islands. The lesser seabirds, in turn, provide food for white breasted sea eagles which also occur in unusually large numbers throughout the islands.

The Abrolhos also form an important part of Western Australia's most valuable commercial fishery - for western rock lobster - and during the open fishing season from 15 March to 30 June each year around 150 fishermen licensed to fish the Abrolhos waters, their families and deckhands take up residence on the 22 islands designated for fishermen's camps.

In the 14 weeks the islands are open for commercial rock lobster fishing they produce an average of around 1.5 million kilos of lobster, worth over \$30m, and comprising about 15 per cent of the total catch from the fishery.

The Abrolhos are also famous for their historic shipwrecks, the best known of which are the Dutch East India Company vessels *Batavia* (1629), on Morning Reef near Beacon Island in the Wallabi Group, and the *Zeewijk* (1727) on Half-Moon Reef in the Pelsaert Group. Eighteen other historic wrecks, mostly from the 19th Century, have also been discovered in island waters.



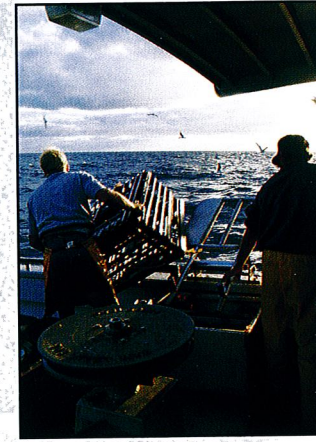
Seal morning - Big Rat Island, Easter Group



The sun rises over Pelsaert Group



Coral reefs are a special part of the Abrolhos



Lobster fishing at Dawn - Easter Group

Every year the rich fish life, unique coral reef formations, birdlife, shipwrecks and the wild beauty of the Abrolhos are attracting an increasing number of visitors from the mainland.

Many come as part of a diving or fishing charter, while others come to observe the wildlife, explore the history or simply experience the islands' unique environment.

The island environment - both marine and terrestrial - is fragile, and needs the protection of island residents and visitors alike.

The Abrolhos are part of the aquatic heritage of all West Australians - it is our task to ensure that we hand the islands, their fish stocks and their wildlife onto future generations undamaged and still productive.

This brochure is your guide to visiting and looking after the Abrolhos Islands. The Abrolhos Islands Consultative Council and the Fisheries Department hope you enjoy your time here - and leave no trace of your visit.

# Conserving island fish stocks

The importance of the Abrolhos Islands as a marine conservation area is becoming more apparent as research gradually unveils their place in WA's marine ecology.

One of their most important features until recently was their remoteness, and the low level of recreational and commercial fishing pressure, particularly on resident reef species such as baldchin groper, coral trout, and Westralian jewfish.

Scientists have long suspected that the Abrolhos play a vital role as a major habitat for the spawning stock of western rock lobster. Eggs and larvae from the Abrolhos and the deepwater refuges further north along Big Bank are thought to be distributed by ocean currents along the west coast, replenishing many areas of reef where the resident stock of mature spawning lobsters has been depleted by intensive fishing.

It is also likely that stocks of mature tailor, baldchin groper, jewfish and other species at the Abrolhos may also help replenish other areas, as their eggs and larvae are swept southward by the Leeuwin Current.

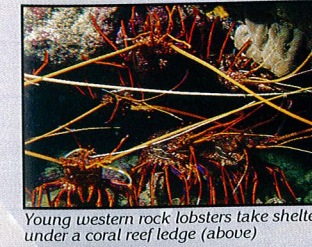
In recent times Island residents have reported a decline in fish numbers and sizes - particularly among resident species such as baldchin groper. There is no question that these declines are linked to increased fishing pressure.

The anchorage areas of some islands are home to a number of resident samson fish (*Seriola hippos*), many larger than 1.5m in length. These fish have been fed by commercial fishermen for many years, and now appear for a daily feeding time, leaping out of the water and taking fish directly from the fishermen's hands. This partnership is one of the unique features of the Abrolhos. Visitors are asked not to attempt to catch or spear these remarkable fish in the anchorage areas.

Fish for the future at the Abrolhos, and only take enough fish for your personal needs.

## Recreational fishing

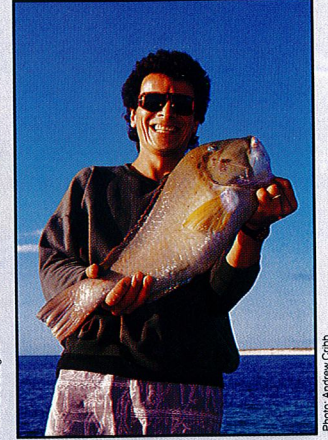
State daily bag limits, minimum legal sizes and other recreational fishing regulations apply in island waters, but it is also important for fishers to remember that the Abrolhos are a unique area. If the quality of fishing in the islands is to be maintained, then the take of excessive quantities of resident reef fish from island waters needs to stop.



Young western rock lobsters take shelter under a coral reef ledge (above)



Female (left) and male (right) baldchin groper *Choerodon rubescens* - mixed bag limit of 8 with other Reef Fish - Minimum legal size 400mm.



Full details of state fishing regulations are contained in a brochure "Fishing for the future", which is available from the Fisheries Department and most fishing tackle and dive shops.

Rock lobsters may only be taken by pots - it is illegal to take them by diving in island waters. The island rock lobster fishing season opens on 15 March and closes on 30 June. You must have a recreational fishing licence if you wish to take rock lobsters.

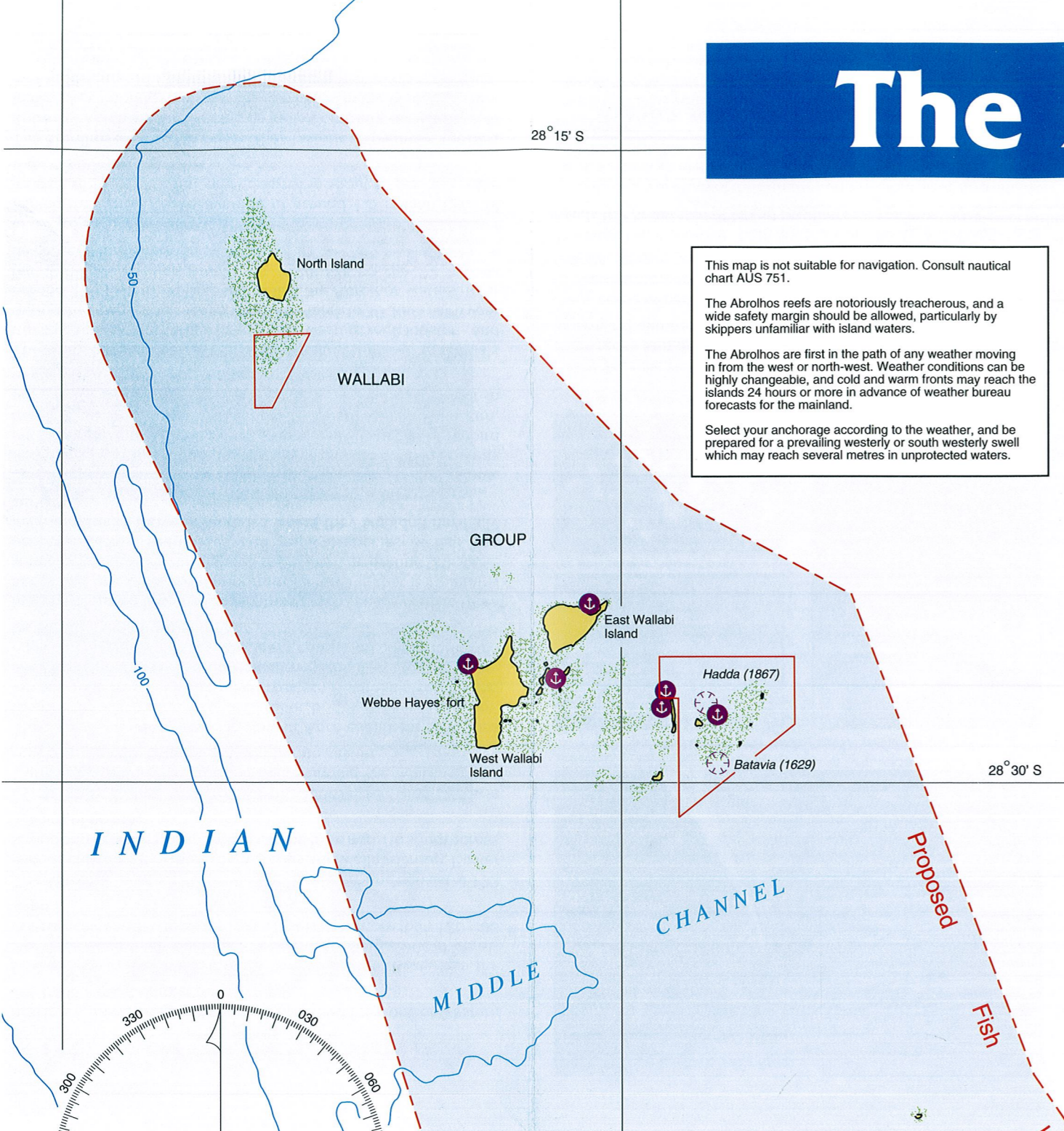
## Reef Observation Areas

Four special areas have been set aside for the conservation and study of resident reef fish species and their habitats - one in each island group. These areas are shown and co-ordinates given on the map overleaf.

Catching fish by line, spear or any other method is banned in these reef observation areas. Lobster pots may be used in reef observation areas.

A research program on baldchin groper (*Choerodon rubescens*) is being conducted by the Abrolhos Islands Consultative Council and the Fisheries Department. The groper are being tagged to study growth rates and breeding biology. Groper are thought to change sex from female to male at about four years old and 40cm in length. If this is the case, the current minimum legal size of 40cm may not be the best management strategy for protecting baldchin breeding stocks.

# The Abrolhos Islands

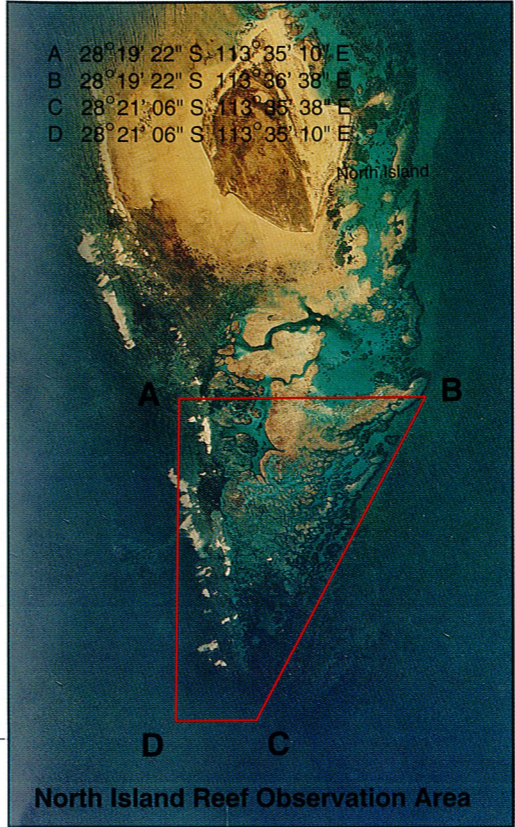


This map is not suitable for navigation. Consult nautical chart AUS 751.

The Abrolhos reefs are notoriously treacherous, and a wide safety margin should be allowed, particularly by skippers unfamiliar with island waters.

The Abrolhos are first in the path of any weather moving in from the west or north-west. Weather conditions can be highly changeable, and cold and warm fronts may reach the islands 24 hours or more in advance of weather bureau forecasts for the mainland.

Select your anchorage according to the weather, and be prepared for a prevailing westerly or south westerly swell which may reach several metres in unprotected waters.



Datum : Coordinates based on Australian Geodetic Datum

Positions obtained from satellite navigation systems are normally referred to WGS 72 Datum. Such positions should be moved 0.07 minutes SOUTHWARD and 0.08 minutes WESTWARD to agree with this map.

