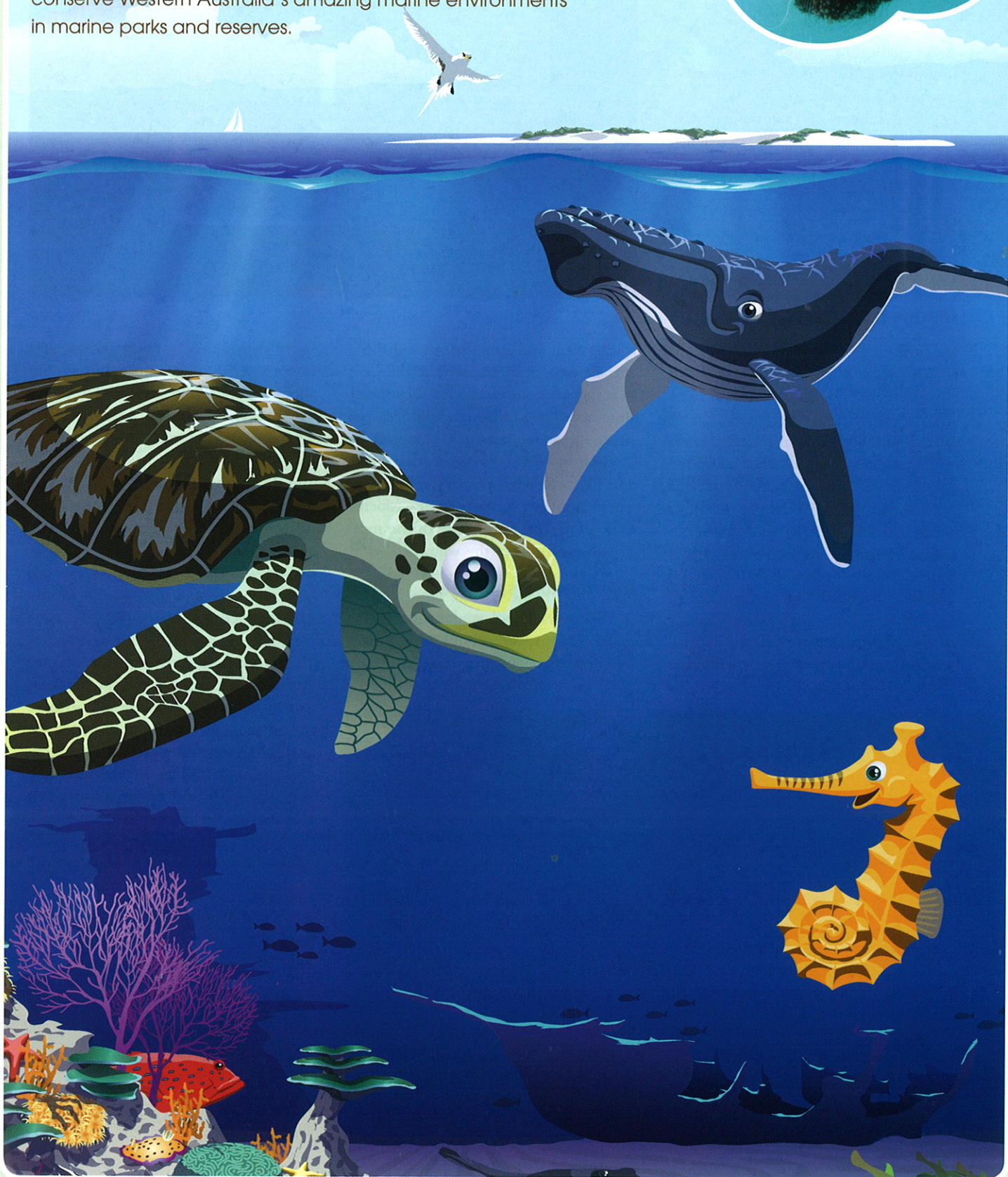


New marine parks website a hit with kids

The Department of Environment and Conservation recently developed a new website, www.marineparks.wa.gov.au, to inform primary school students about why it is so important to conserve Western Australia's amazing marine environments in marine parks and reserves.



It is vital that the State's marine parks and reserves are managed to ensure they remain in good condition and one of the most effective ways to do this is through community education and public awareness programs. Young people now access information in more and more sophisticated ways, and any conservation agency that is serious about educating children about our important natural areas needs to have a fun and interactive website. As a result, the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) recently developed a new website to educate primary school students about marine parks and the unique plants and animals that they support. The site contains scientifically accurate information and can be found at www.marineparks.wa.gov.au.

Marine park mania

Three friendly animated marine characters feature on the home page of the website: 'Fin' the baby humpback whale, 'Toot' the Western Australian seahorse and a friendly green turtle, yet to be named (kids with any suggestions for names may write to *LANDSCOPE*). The animations were drawn by talented Perth illustrator Darrell White. On another page, kids can 'Meet the Crew' to find out more about these characters and their personalities.

In the Marine Park Mania section of the website, kids can find out what marine parks are and why we need



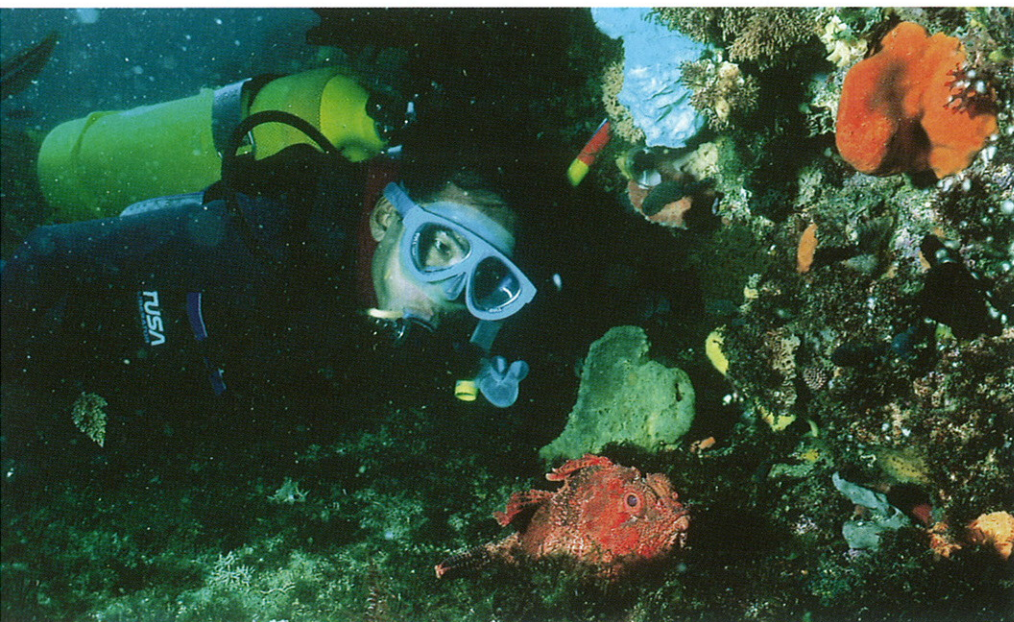
them, what you can and can't do in a marine park and discover the different marine park zones and what they mean. In another area of the site, children can learn all about marine litter and its devastating effect on marine wildlife, and find out what positive action they can personally take to become a Marine Park Protector. This is one of the most popular sections of the website.

Information 'sponges'

Primary school students are often asked to prepare school assignments about marine animals, so in the 'Fun

Facts' section they can find information, underwater footage and photographs about marine plants and animals found in Western Australian marine parks. There are 32 topics in 'Fun Facts' ranging from blue whales, coral reefs and mangroves to little penguins, sea stars and great white sharks. This information is presented in a way that also helps children to understand why our State's marine parks are so special and important and how people should care for them.

This will help to educate not just children, but their parents as well, since parents of primary school students usually help them to access and organise information for their homework. As any parent will tell you, primary school aged children are literally 'sponges' who readily absorb and retain information that they gather during their important formative years, so giving them marine conservation messages at this age will



Previous page

Main Animated marine characters featured on the home page of the website.

Illustration - Darrell White

Inset Jellyfish.

Photo - Suzanne Long/DEC

Above Website screen shot.

Left Diver at Marmion Marine Park.

Photo - Ann Storr



Above Green turtle at Ningaloo Marine Park.
Photo – Tony Howard



Right Clownfish at Rowley Shoals Marine Park.

Below Nudibranch at Jurien Bay Marine Park.
Photos – John Huisman

auger well for the aquatic environment in the future.

The 'Marine Park Secrets' section presents some fascinating facts about Western Australia's marine parks that many people would not know and the 'Galleries' contain stunning photographs of several parks and their wildlife that can be downloaded for free for all non-commercial purposes.

The kids marine parks website is also a platform for linking to information on WA's 12 existing marine parks and reserves and four proposed marine parks and reserves on DEC's main

website (www.dec.wa.gov.au). Most people know about Ningaloo Marine Park, but market research undertaken in 2007 showed that very few people could name any of our other, equally special, marine parks. The website will help fill some of these gaps in the public's knowledge.

Big hit

The website became operational in July 2008 and recorded more than 50,000 hits in its first six months. It was promoted later in the year with colourful posters that were distributed to schools throughout WA.

Despite being originally developed for primary school students to use as a resource when researching school assignments, the website is now set to

become a resource for school students of all ages. With the Department of Education and Training, DEC's Marine Policy and Planning Branch is also developing a teaching guide on marine parks for Years 8 to 10 Society and Environment students. The resource is being written by Susie Bedford, a highly respected science educator who teaches part-time at Exmouth Senior High School, and should be published in the first half of 2009. The secondary students will be able to access a great deal of the information they need to complete the six-week unit of study at www.marineparks.wa.gov.au.

While the site's popularity is already exceeding expectations, it will continue to be improved and added to over time.

Carolyn Thomson-Dans is a special projects officer with the Department of Environment and Conservation. She can be contacted by email (carolyn.thomson-dans@dec.wa.gov.au).

Kate Fitzgerald was formerly a DEC marine education officer for various marine parks around the State. She can now be found at the Australian Institute of Marine Science working as a research assistant for the Scott Reef Research Project. Kate can be contacted by email (k.fitzgerald@aims.gov.au).

Ryan Scott is a DEC web developer and content coordinator. He can be contacted on (08) 9389 8644 or by email (ryan.scott@dec.wa.gov.au).

Kate and Carolyn were the driving forces behind establishing the new website. Kate designed the site and Kate and Carolyn wrote the content. Ryan built the site and undertook the visual design.



- 51 New marine parks website a hit with kids
School children can learn about marine parks with a new interactive website.
- 54 Bringing back the animals
Karakamia Wildlife Sanctuary near Perth protects threatened native animals, enabling them to be relocated to natural habitats.

Regulars

- 3 Contributors and Editor's letter
- 15 Bookmarks
Birds of the Greater South West Western Australia
Fixing Climate: The story of climate science and how to stop global warming
Geology of Western Australia's National Parks
- 30 Feature park
Mount Augustus National Park
- 39 Endangered
Woolly lysiosepalum
- 62 Urban antics
Love is all around...

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Department of Environment and Conservation

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