



## Ngari Capes Marine Park

Below the rolling swells that sweep the headlands and reefs of the south-west Capes, creating some of the world's best surf breaks, is an underwater wilderness—a marine treasure trove of international importance.

**Above** Southern globefish (*Diodon nichthemerus*).

Photo – Clay Bryce/Lochman  
Transparencies

**Above right from top** Sheltered waters at Meelup, and a surf break at Margaret River.

Photos – Tourism WA

**Far right** Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

Stretching from Geographe Bay near Busselton to Flinders Bay near Augusta, Ngari Capes Marine Park is Western Australia's 11th marine park and one of the most recently created, gazetted on 12 June 2012. Here, beneath its alluring azure surface, the Indian Ocean hosts a mix of tropical and temperate species. The warm, tropical waters of the Leeuwin Current mix with the cool waters of the Capes Current creating one of the most diverse temperate marine environments in Australia.

Formed by an ancient past of violent geological collisions, eruptions and fragmentation, the south-west coast has many rock types and formations with estuaries, sheltered bays, sweeping beaches, plunging limestone cliffs, rocky shores and exposed islands.

While the interaction of the complex geomorphology and oceanography makes possible an exceptional array of marine flora and fauna, geographical isolation has resulted in a significant number of endemic species.

### Marine wilderness

The seagrass diversity in the marine park is of international significance. While most of the 13 species occur in meadows at depths of two to 14 metres, the clear waters enable seagrasses to grow at great depth, with patches as deep as 45 metres—a record for the state. These seagrasses—along with algal communities and soft sediments—support an array of invertebrate, fish, mammal and bird species.

Subtidal sands teem with worms, bivalve molluscs, snails, sea urchins, crabs and other crustaceans. Kelp-covered offshore reefs attract a wide range of encrusting and mobile invertebrates such as sea stars, calcareous sponges, snails, sea squirts, sponges, lace animals and soft corals.

A total of 247 fish species has been recorded in the Bunbury–Geographe Bay area, which provides important spawning and nursery habitat for at least 13 recreationally and commercially important fish, including Western Australian salmon (*Arripis truttaceus*), herring (*A. georgianus*), Western blue groper (*Achoerodus gouldii*) and King George whiting (*Sillaginoides punctatus*).



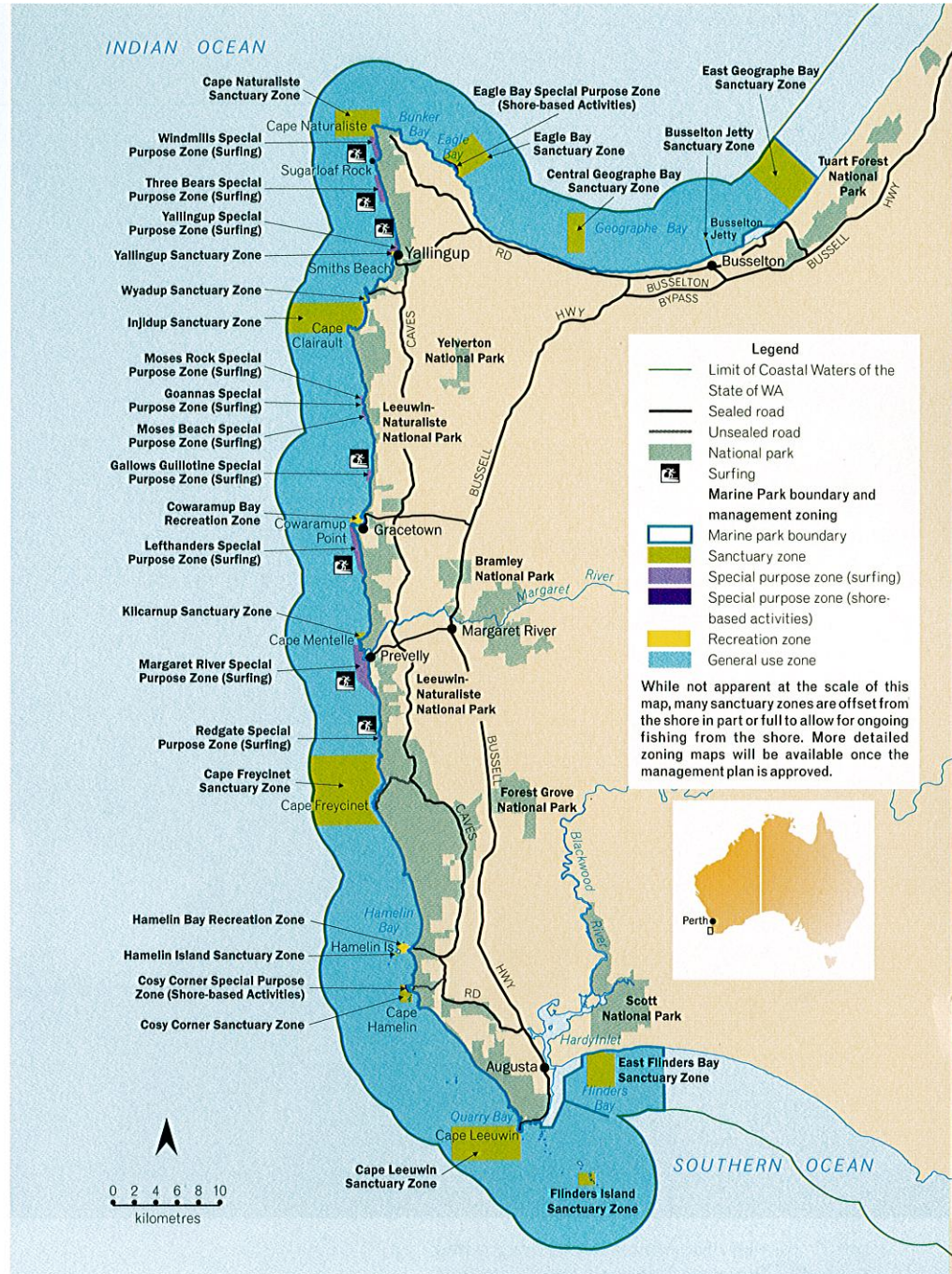


Whale migration routes bring the giants of the ocean close to shore at the western end of Geographe Bay and around Cape Naturaliste. There are 13 species of whale—including the humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), southern right (*Eubalaena australis*) and, the largest of all whales, the blue (*Balaenoptera musculus*). Three species of dolphin can also be seen in the marine park. The threatened New Zealand fur seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) is resident in the park and the Australian sea lion (*Neophoca cinerea*) is occasionally sighted.

The park also supports a great diversity of sea and shorebirds—at least 85 species have been recorded with the islands providing important breeding and nesting areas. The little penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) occurs on Saint Alouarn Island and there is an important breeding colony of red-tailed tropicbirds (*Phaethon rubricauda*) on Sugarloaf Rock. The next nearest stable breeding colony is on Christmas Island.

### Cultural and maritime heritage

Aboriginal people have lived in Western Australia's south-west for at least 40,000 years and the park takes its name from the Nyoongar word 'ngari', meaning salmon. There are at least 45



sites of Aboriginal significance in or adjacent to the marine park—most contain artefacts and several are burial sites. The ocean swells that give the area its biological diversity have also made the Leeuwin-Naturaliste coast notable for shipwrecks. The WA Maritime Museum's Hamelin Bay Wreck Trail features the *Agincourt* (1882), *Chaudiere* (1883) and *Katinka* (1900).

Whaling was part of the maritime history and whalers from as far afield as America, Norway, France and Britain operated in the area in the 1800s and the early 1900s. Other onshore places of historical value and interest include the lighthouses at Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin, the waterwheel at Cape Leeuwin, the Flinders Bay settlement and Wonnerup precinct.

### park facts

**Where is it?** The northern boundary is about 250 kilometres south of Perth. The park stretches from Geographe Bay near Busselton south to Flinders Bay and extends about three nautical miles out to sea.

**Total area:** About 124,000 hectares.

**What to do:** Nature appreciation (including whale watching), surfing, swimming, snorkelling, recreational diving and recreational boating (permitted in all zones), recreational line fishing (permitted in all zones other than sanctuary zones), and skiing and parasailing (permitted in recreation and general use zones).

**Facilities:** Visitor facilities and boat ramps are at several locations along the marine park.

**Park fees:** There is no entry fee to the park.

**Nearest DEC office:** 14 Queen Street, Busselton, phone (08) 9752 5555.





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### Publishing credits

**Executive editor** Madeleine Clews.

**Editors** Samille Mitchell, Joanna Moore.

**Scientific/technical advice** Kevin Thiele, Lachie McCaw, Keith Morris, Chris Simpson.

**Design and production** Lynne Whittle, Gooitzen van der Meer, Natalie Jolakoski, Peter Nicholas.

**Illustration** Gooitzen van der Meer.

**Cartography** Promaco Geodraft.

**Marketing** Cathy Birch.

Phone (08) 9334 0296 or fax (08) 9334 0432.

**Subscription enquiries**

Phone (08) 9219 8000.

**Prepress and printing** GEON, Western Australia.

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December 2012

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ISSN 0815-4465

Please do not send unsolicited material, but feel free to contact the editors.

Published by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), 17 Dick Perry Avenue, Kensington, Western Australia.

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