

and scenery, but misuse and exploitation are still rampant, notably in the semi-arid interior of the continent. We are still without an adequate and representative series of Australian National Parks and Wildlife Reserves; and those we have are not yet properly staffed and managed. We have still to learn how to implement conservation, in its various forms, in the Australian landscape generally, and especially around our coasts. We need to develop a more positive approach to the problems posed by the growing demand for facilities for outdoor recreation. Some of these themes are likely to be taken up by the newly-established Australian Conservation Foundation, which hopes to stimulate and encourage the surveys, research projects, management programs, and educational effort needed if conservation is to become widely understood in Australia, and practised as the only rational approach to the utilization of our natural resources.

(The Australian Journal of Science Sydney March 1966)

IS THE WEATHER CHANGING ALONG WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COAST?

Strange things are happening along the West Australian coast, reports our correspondent. Scientists believe the State's weather is changing.

In the past 50 years or so, the north has been getting drier and the south wetter. This in itself may have little to do with ocean fish. But the pattern of sea life seems to be changing too.

Fish and other ocean creatures once regarded as strict inhabitants of the tropical waters north of Capricorn are coming south and thriving. Tailor and snapper, also southern species, venture as far north as Shark Bay, Dirk Hartog, Bernier and Dorre Islands and even to Carnarvon. But they move no further north and the north-west snapper and queenfish become their northern counterparts.

About three years ago something very strange happened. Mangrove crabs suddenly appeared in the Murchison River. These heavy backed brown crabs, with claws like small boxing gloves, were named for their love of the squelchy mangrove tidal mud flats of the north. But the Murchison River has a peak tide range of only a couple of feet and its only mud is deposited on river banks on its way down from inland rains. The rest of the year the river and the beaches surrounding its mouth are a combination of emerald blue water, white sand and brick red rocks.

Stranger still, baby north west groper have begun appearing in the Murchison River. In the north it is common to catch baby groper in freshwater tidal creeks miles inland. But in the Murchison it was definitely odd. These baby groper ranged in colour from yellowish with brown spots to brown with black spots. This colouring sometimes leads baby groper to be called spotted cod.

In 1965 yet another stranger visited the Murchison River. This one is called the javelin fish previously seldom caught south of Carnarvon. The javelin is essentially a river fish. In appearance it vaguely resembles the spangled perch or yellowtail of southern rivers. It has similar speckles and spots. But it is not a perch - which is characterised by a smallish head and humped shoulders. The javelin fish looks more related to the big snout faced northern snapper, sweetlips, bream and emperors.

What is causing all this unusual movement of fish? One theory is that it has been caused by a shift in a significant warm current.

Once, according to oceanographers, a warm ocean current used to sweep in on the coast around Dongara and move northwards. Now this warm current is believed to be hitting the coast nearer to Cape Naturaliste.