

# Ningaloo Coast news

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Welcome to the second edition of *Ningaloo Coast news*. As we move into the cooler months we have seen the annual increase in visitors coming to enjoy the unique environment as well to avoid the cooler climates in the south and east.

The national park fills to capacity almost every day and it is great to see both locals and visitors taking advantage of the campground booking system to secure themselves a few days of relaxation along the Ningaloo Coast. As the year progresses more camp sites are being developed and Kurrajong camp is currently undergoing a major upgrade.

So far this year whale sharks are appearing regularly and in good numbers with some unusual events and aggregations. You can read more about whale sharks in the article right.

A highlight of this season has been the annual Whale Shark Festival. We would like to thank the committee and shire and all those involved for making this unique event a great success.

We were fortunate to have Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke and State Environment Minister Bill Marmion attend the event and jointly unveil a plaque commemorating the official listing of the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area. This event was the springboard for more World Heritage-related activity in the area with the Minister Marmion announcing the formation of a World Heritage committee, so keep an eye out for expressions of interest for membership.

The Minister also announced the creation of the *Ningaloo Coast EveryTrail guide*—an excellent source of maps, pictures and information about points of interest in the World Heritage area for locals and visitors alike. This guide can be downloaded at [www.everytrail.com/guide/ningaloo-coast-world-heritage-area](http://www.everytrail.com/guide/ningaloo-coast-world-heritage-area).



Unveiling the plaque for Ningaloo World Heritage area listing. (From left) Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke, Department of Environment and Conservation Director General Keiran McNamara, Exmouth Shire President Turk Shales, and State Environment Minister Bill Marmion. Photo: I Ford

On a final note, your World Heritage manager commences in about a month and will start work on local branding, signage and communications that will help with marketing and promotion.

**Arvid Hogstrom**  
DEC Exmouth District  
Manager

## In this issue

- Sharks with spots
- Investment in new marine park patrol vessel
- Kurrajong campground upgrade
- Kapok bush eradication works

## Sharks with spots

Dani Rob, Whale Shark Project Officer

This season has been a busy one for whale shark activity off the Ningaloo Coast. The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) has been running a number of education, training, research and monitoring programs over the past three months. This includes a collaborative project with researchers and whale shark tourism operators from Coral Bay and Exmouth which tracks individual whale sharks by their spot patterns.



Whale shark feeding.

Whale sharks have a unique pattern of spots which allows for identification of individuals through the simple use of photo identification (ID). Whale shark footage is supplied to DEC by videographers from Ningaloo whale shark tourism operators. The footage is processed and catalogued by DEC and useful images submitted to photo ID libraries such as ECOCEAN and Australian Institute of Marine Science. These images are analysed and compared to determine if a shark is new to Ningaloo Marine Park or has been returning year after year.

This simple tool helps scientists and conservation managers determine the population size and dynamics of the Ningaloo whale shark aggregation. Results so far indicate a healthy population at Ningaloo Marine Park with about two-thirds of the population returning each year.

DEC is also monitoring a newly observed feeding aggregation off the Muiron Islands. Originally reported by a member of the public, DEC has counted up to 40 whale sharks feeding at dusk over a number of days in May. More investigation into this phenomenon and what has caused this food aggregation is planned.

If you would like more information on any of the above, or would like to add to the image library, contact us at [whaleshark@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:whaleshark@dec.wa.gov.au), or visit the ECOCEAN webpage at [www.whaleshark.org](http://www.whaleshark.org).

## Investment in new marine park patrol vessel

Huw Dilley, Marine Ranger

DEC in Exmouth is currently overseeing the final stages of construction of a purpose-built patrol vessel for Ningaloo Marine Park. Built by Woody Marine Fabrication in Brisbane, the 6.5-metre, \$183,000 craft represents further significant investment by the state government in marine park management.

Technically known as a rigid inflatable boat (RIB), the vessel has the latest closed-cell foam collars covered with a spray-on skin rather than the traditional inflatable tubes. This state-of-the-art design provides the cushioning effects of an RIB while eliminating the risk of puncture and pressure fluctuations.



The near-complete vessel at Woody Marine Fabrication

With a range of more than 100 nautical miles, DEC expects the vessel will increase operational capacity and provide better exposure protection for its crew. Based in Coral Bay, it will be used for a variety of tasks including coral and fish surveys, mooring maintenance, incident response and marine park patrols.

## Kurrajong campground upgrade

Neil Taylor, Senior Ranger

Kurrajong campground in Cape Range National Park is undergoing a major expansion with funding provided through the *Royalties for Regions* program. Fourteen new individual sites and five new group sites are rapidly taking shape. Kurrajong will still be looked after through our Campground Host program with the new individual sites being added to the online booking system. The group sites will be managed manually, with access based on a permit system to enable use by schools and other large groups.

Once the contractor has completed the major earth works, DEC staff will undertake landscaping and camp site infrastructure installation. Two access points to the beach will be installed on a temporary basis, to be hardened and improved as funds allow. Temporary toilets will also be installed while more permanent ones are constructed.

DEC Visitor Services Coordinator Ray De Jong said the Kurrajong expansion was an exciting project that will enable more people to enjoy this unique area.

"I am hopeful the new sites will be operational in the latter half of the season," he said.

"The increased camping is in line with the park's management plan which recommends further camps be installed over the next 10 years."

## Kapok bush eradication works

Keely Markovina, Project Officer

Kapok bush (*Aerva javanica*) is an invasive weed species which originated in Northern Africa and western parts of Asia. This weed often occurs in sandy soils and along drainage lines. As a result, it has become widespread throughout Exmouth town and around the very low frequency (VLF) towers to the north of the township.

A smaller stand of kapok bush exists around the Lighthouse Caravan Park and Hunters area. DEC has identified this stand as a priority for weed management because it is an achievable area to clear with the resources available. Furthermore, it is a strategic point on the North West Cape on which kapok bush can be prevented from spreading south to Cape Range National Park, which is currently free of this invasive species.

DEC staff have recently completed a second round of weed spraying in the area using Roundup herbicide. Eradication efforts have also been undertaken by Lighthouse Caravan Park staff, Department of Defence staff and Ningaloo Station in areas under their respective jurisdiction. Further efforts are expected to be needed before the Lighthouse/Hunters stand can be totally eradicated.

Recently, another stand of kapok bush was sighted at Yardie Homestead Caravan Park. DEC is planning to conduct similar weed eradication in that area in the near future. If members of the public observe an outbreak of kapok bush anywhere between Mauritius car park and the southern boundary of Cape Range National Park (omitting Yardie Homestead) please contact DEC on (08) 9947 8000.



Kapok bush has characteristic 'fluffy' white flowers.

If you would like to receive a copy of this newsletter electronically please email [exmouth@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:exmouth@dec.wa.gov.au) with your contact details.

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