

# Ningaloo Coast news

## Winter 2013

Volume 2, Issue 3

Welcome to Ningaloo Coast news. The cooler winter season has set in and brought some welcome rains to an otherwise dry year. The lower land temperatures are matched by cooler water temperatures and an associated change in visiting marine life including humpbacks and orcas over the winter months.

We are fortunate to have several new staff within the district, with Teresa Coutts our new Marine Ranger and Keely Markovina our new Terrestrial Nature Conservation Ranger.

**Arvid Hogstrom**  
DPaW Exmouth District Manager



Ningalulu the whale shark mascot.

### Introducing Ningalulu

We would like to welcome our new DPaW resident whale shark mascot, Ningalulu. There were 183 entries for the name, and congratulations go to 78-year-old Harry Sanford for his winning suggestion.

A big thanks to TOLL IPEC for their sponsorship, and federal government *Caring for our Country*.

### The World Heritage area in the news

TV shows *The Living Room* and *BBC Coast* have recently been filming the Ningaloo Coast. *The Living Room* episode featuring Ningaloo whale sharks will run on 26 July. The *BBC Coast* episode will screen on Foxtel and SBS during December and will highlight the unique features of Ningaloo Reef as well as the fascinating, 20-million-year marine and geological history of Cape Range.

Travel Editor of *The West Australian* newspaper Stephen Scourfield also recently visited to experience firsthand the new DPaW kayak sites and the World Heritage-listed Cape Range National Park and Ningaloo Marine Park. He gave the area rave reviews in his Saturday edition articles on 25 May and 1 June.

See more at <http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/travel>.

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### 2013 Whaleshark Festival wrap up

The DPaW marquee at the Ningaloo Whaleshark Festival was a hub of activity, with more than 500 people visiting and learning about the World Heritage area, whale sharks, the terrestrial environment, threats to the area and how DPaW manages this area to ensure the habitats and species are protected.

The highlights of the day included a presentation by Dr Mark Meekan from the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the naming competition and storytelling with Ningalulu the whale shark, quizzes, games and giveaways.

### New kayak moorings in Ningaloo Marine Park

Visitors to the pristine and biodiverse Ningaloo Reef now have an increased opportunity to explore the sheltered waters of the lagoon, following the installation by DPaW of 10 day-use kayak moorings in Ningaloo Marine Park.

The moorings are in Bundegi Sanctuary Zone, Tantabiddi Sanctuary Zone, Osprey Sanctuary Zone and Maud Sanctuary Zone in Coral Bay, and create a number of circuits of varying length and complexity.

The kayak circuits involve paddling from shore to the kayak mooring, attaching your kayak to the mooring, snorkelling, and then returning to the launch site – a total of three or four hours, depending on the sites chosen.

These sites do require kayak and snorkelling experience. Please see the kayak information sheet provided at Milyering Visitor Centre or DPaW office for further information.



Kayaking at Ningaloo.  
Photo – Tourism WA

## The Cape Range underworld

Each year, people flock to the Ningaloo Coast to experience its spectacular landscapes and interact with its charismatic wildlife. What few people realise is that beneath the surface is

a network of subterranean caves and waterways sheltering an intriguing assembly of cave-dwelling animals. These animals are some of the most unique and diverse in the world (most species are found only in Cape Range or the local region) and are a key reason for the area's World Heritage listing.

Cave fauna are typically divided into terrestrial, troglobites (insects, centipedes, millipedes, arachnids and slaters), and aquatic, swimming stygofauna including two species of



Tanaid blind shrimp.  
Photo – Jiri Lochman

fish (blind gudgeon and cave eel), and crustaceans. Many of these creatures have adapted to the dark, humid cave life and are eyeless and/or pale in appearance, having long lost their pigmentation. Two distinct faunal assemblages are listed as threatened ecological communities, and many of the individual species are also listed as threatened.

These cave creatures also tell the epic evolutionary story of the changing planet. The stygofauna are descendants from the supercontinent Pangaea some 180 million years ago, and the troglomorphic fauna are relics from a rainforest that existed about 26 million years ago.

Threats to these cave creatures include dumping of rubbish, pollution, declining groundwater levels, disturbance to karst limestone, modification to surface water flows and introduction of exotic species such as guppies. Please help us protect these weird and wonderful creatures by conserving water and not dumping guppies in sink holes.

## Winter research and monitoring activities

- Flinders University are conducting research on Australian humpback dolphins to determine the population size, habitat use and social structure in the Exmouth/Ningaloo Reef region. They are asking the community and tourism operators to get involved. Contact Tim Hunt for more details (tim.hunt@flinders.edu.au).
- Other research is coming up in Ningaloo Marine Park on nudibranchs, manta rays, orcas, tiger sharks, giant clams, tusk fish and baldchin groper, mangroves, plankton associated with feeding whale sharks, fish assemblages around whale sharks, rates of calcification of corals and climate change, coral reef food webs, and community monitoring of corals by the non-profit reef monitoring organisation Reef Check.
- DPaW black-footed rock wallaby monitoring in Cape Range National Park in conjunction with Cape Conservation Group volunteers.

## Entangled humpback whales

The 2012 humpback whale migration saw a record number of humpback whales entangled in rope and fishing gear while travelling up the WA coast. The DPaW Whale Disentanglement Team, as well as commercial and recreational vessels, can play an important role in assisting entangled whales – last season nine humpbacks were successfully disentangled.

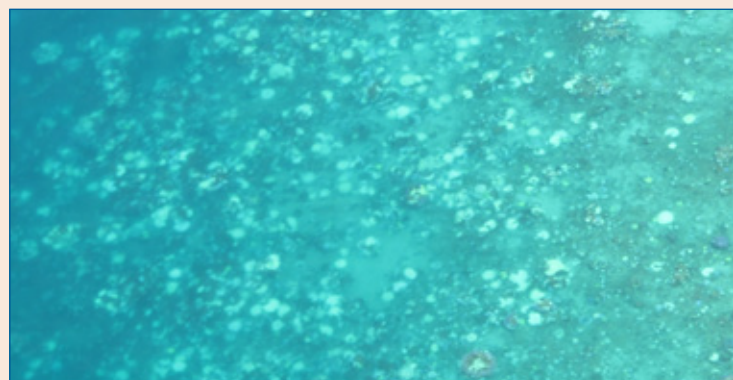
If you see an entangled whale, please contact the DPaW Exmouth Office on 9947 8000. If possible, provide the following information: location, time and date of the sighting; the whale's direction of travel, estimated speed and behaviour; and a description of gear including the number of floats, length of trailing rope and estimated wraps of rope around the whale's body. Photographs and video are also extremely useful. Please remember that the normal rules for vessel interaction with whales still apply. People must not attempt to free the whale or cut any rope themselves. Humpback whales are large, powerful, unpredictable and potentially dangerous animals.

## Coral bleaching impacts

DPaW's Marine Science Team and regional managers monitor coral condition in Ningaloo Marine Park. In aerial surveys during March and April 2013, coral bleaching was evident on the east coast of the Muiron Islands. Only minor bleaching was seen at other sites in the marine park.

Bundegi is still recovering following the 2010/11 marine heatwave in which coral mortality was about 80 to 90 per cent. Coral reef growth and decay can cycle on a decadal time scale, and we expect Bundegi to noticeably recover within the next 10 years if climatic conditions remain favourable.

DPaW will continue to monitor in Ningaloo Marine Park and implement management strategies to maximise the recovery potential of affected areas.



Coral bleaching (white patches) at the Muiron Islands as seen from the air in March 2013.

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

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