



# Montebello News

Montebello/Barrow Islands Marine Reserves

Issue 1, December 2014

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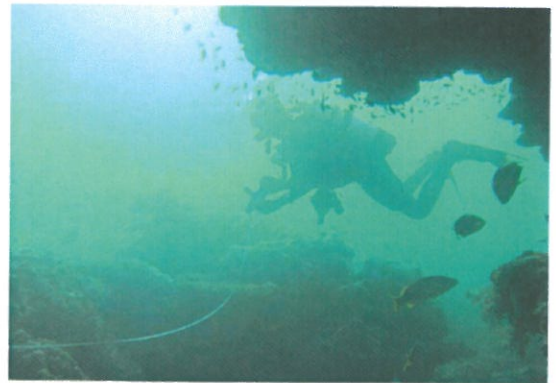
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## Marine park update

**The Montebello and Barrow islands marine and terrestrial reserve systems are truly unique biodiversity hotspots.**

The Montebello Islands particularly, with their natural land and seascapes, barrier and fringing coral reefs, wide variety of wildlife and rich maritime heritage, appeal to divers, snorkelers, fishers and sea kayakers alike.

The Department of Parks and Wildlife works with the Department of Fisheries to improve education, visitor interaction, industry engagement, public awareness, licensing, research and monitoring to learn more about this unique and protected ecosystem and share information with the public on how we can manage and protect the reserves into the future.



Above Parks and Wildlife diver undertaking coral monitoring in the Montebellos. Photo—Parks and Wildlife

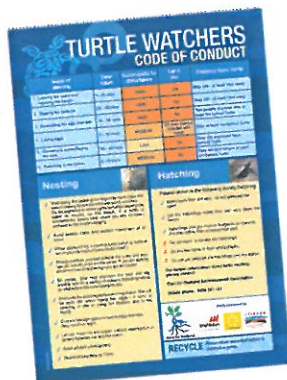
Parks and Wildlife has also been working with industry stakeholders to reduce the risk of environmental impact from an oil spill on the North-West Shelf. In collaboration with the Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre (AMOSOC), the department has developed a state-wide oiled wildlife response plan and Pilbara oiled wildlife operational plan. These plans can be found at the following link:

[dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/marine/marine-wildlife](http://dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/marine/marine-wildlife)

## Points of interest

- Turtles nest between October and April each year.
- Turtle hatchlings are attracted to lights, including deck lights.
- New "no camping" signs on Ah Chong Island
- Translocated native fauna thriving in the Montebellos
- Help report illegal dumping to Parks and Wildlife

There has been an increase in both commercial tour operator and recreational visitation to these islands during 2014. While the number of commercial tour operator licences remains steady, passenger numbers and frequency of visits are on the rise, as is the number of research and monitoring projects investigating marine biodiversity and ecosystem health trends.



## It's turtle nesting season!

Turtles nest from October to April along Western Australia's north-west coastline each year. The Montebello and Barrow islands sandy, pristine beaches attract green, flatbacks and hawksbill turtles. Montebello islands Trimouille, North West, South East and Ah Chong also attract a large number of nesting females

Care should be taken during these months to reduce any impact on turtles during mating, nesting and hatchling stages. Go slow in marine turtle habitats and abide by the Turtle Watchers Code of Conduct, which outlines the do's and don'ts of turtle interaction.





## Montebellos thriving – terrestrial research update

A number of mammal and bird species were once locally extinct from Barrow Island Nature Reserve to the Montebello Archipelago due to predation from introduced pests such as feral cats and the black rat. Four years ago, Parks and Wildlife reintroduced some of the species to the islands including the spectacled hare wallaby, golden bandicoot, boodie, spinifex bird and black and white fairy wren.

The reintroduced animals have been monitored since the initial translocation and are now thriving. Findings show the species' ranges have expanded well beyond their release sites.

It is hoped that these thriving island populations will one day follow the success of the mala and shark bay mouse, which were introduced to Trimouille Island in 1998 and Northwest Island in 1999. The success of these translocations enabled their populations to be used for source reintroductions to Lorna Glen in 2011 and 2012. The progeny of these animals will likely play a



**Above left** the boodie, one of the translocation species involved in the program. **Above right** Parks and Wildlife staff investigating Boodie warrens on Alpha Island. *Photos – Parks and Wildlife*

major role in restoring biological diversity and ecosystem health to nearly 600, 000ha of rangelands in the north-eastern Goldfields as part of the Operation Rangelands Restoration program. The success of these translocations to

the Montebellos may pave the way for a future reintroduction of the rakali (native water rat) and translocation of other threatened and priority species to the archipelago.

## Marine research and monitoring snap shot

The Montebello and Barrow Islands marine parks and marine management areas are hubs for research and monitoring for Parks and Wildlife and research institutes around the country. Parks and Wildlife has a marine monitoring program that investigates trends in coral, finfish, macro algae, seabirds and cetacean communities and populations. Each year, Parks and Wildlife report these results along with other progress indicators to the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority (MPRA) through an audit process.

Another key research and monitoring initiative currently underway is the Pilbara Marine Conservation Partnership (PMCP), which is led by the Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in partnership with the University of Western Australia and other government research bodies. The project investigates conditions of, and threats to, marine biodiversity in the Pilbara through establishing ecosystem wide baselines. This research will identify ecosystem benchmarks and thresholds,

and will directly inform future resource management and use. The findings will also ensure long-term commercial and conservation sustainability of the region. Some of the PMCP research projects include regional connectivity modeling for coral and fish recruitment; invertebrate assemblages, fish and shark assemblage dynamics, and Pilbara wide characterization of benthic biodiversity.

A third exciting research project led by Parks and Wildlife is well underway, investigating connectivity and recovery potential of Pilbara marine habitats and associated taxa. In November 2014 researchers from Parks and Wildlife conducted a research trip to the Montebello Islands Marine Park, lead by Dr Richard Evans, collecting coral, fish, mangroves and sea grass samples. These samples will be compared to those collected in Dampier, Onslow, Ningaloo and Shark Bay as well as the Kimberley to determine the degree of genetic connectivity between reef systems. This information will be integral in determining and modeling the resilience of these reef systems to disturbance and recovery potential.



**Top** Coral monitoring site in the Montebello Islands Marine Park. **Above** Divers collecting seagrass. *Photos – Parks and Wildlife*

## A collaborative approach to marine park management

Parks and Wildlife works closely with the Department of Fisheries in the day-to-day operational management of marine parks across the State. The Department of Fisheries is responsible for the management of fish zones and aquaculture, while Parks and Wildlife has the overall management of marine parks to ensure the long term natural values are protected while providing access for recreation and tourism. Both agencies are committed to ensuring the State's natural resources and recognise their respective responsibilities often overlap.

Marine park officers from both agencies have been working together during the past two years to develop operational plans that detail shared and overlapping arrangements for activities and key operations outlined in the management plan including education, patrolling, research and monitoring.



## What to expect from Parks and Wildlife and Fisheries marine officers

Parks and Wildlife officers and Fisheries officers play an integral role in ensuring marine park values. Officers patrol marine park areas to ensure visitors fish legally, do not litter, cause environmental damage or pollution or collect native flora and fauna.

Fisheries and marine officers (FMOs) manage compliance of fish stocks by ensuring that people follow commercial and recreational fishing rules, including size and bag limits and fishing in correct marine park zones. It is also their responsibility to make sure you have the required licenses and certificates to undertake certain activities in the marine environment. In addition they play an educational role.

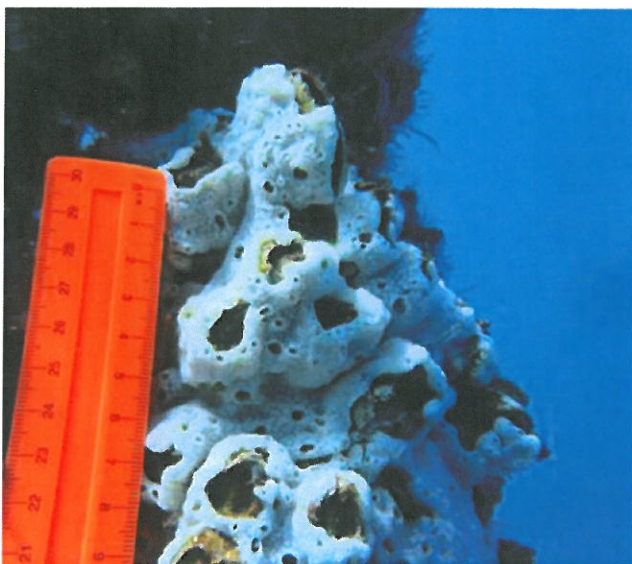
FMOs, also known as Fisheries Resource Management Act (FRM) authorised officers, can request to see all required documents on board a vessel. Fisheries suggest items such as your Fishing Tour Operators Licence and survey certificates, are kept in a file in the wheelhouse. It is the vessel master's responsibility to ensure that

these documents and your Parks and Wildlife license are on board, as well as the *Marine Tour Operator Handbook* (and terrestrial if your license covers the island reserves).

Parks and Wildlife marine rangers and officers are authorised under the *CALM Act 1984* and commercial tour operator regulations. It is their responsibility to ensure that activities do not have a negative impact on the marine park or island reserves including prohibited activities such as camp fires, pets, fuel drops, littering, and the taking of flora and fauna.

### Did you know:

Many Parks and Wildlife staff are cross-authorized under the Fisheries Resource Management Act and can act on Fisheries behalf in Marine Parks in an education and compliance capacity. Likewise, Many Fisheries and Marine Officers are cross authorized under the CALM Act and can act on Parks and Wildlife's behalf in Marine Parks.



Above *Didemnum perlucidum*, an introduced marine pest.  
Photo – Department of Fisheries

## Marine pests – what you need to know

In October this year, Parks and Wildlife received confirmation from the Department of Fisheries that *Didemnum perlucidum* was found in two locations inside the Montebello Islands Marine Park and in several other locations around WA. *Didemnum perlucidum* is an ascidian that was first recorded in Western Australia in the Swan River in 2010. Its origin remains uncertain. Since then this species has been found widely distributed across the State, growing on artificial and natural substrates. Once introduced, ascidians have the potential to negatively affect the biodiversity and ecological functions of the recipient location.

Fisheries recently added *Didemnum perlucidum* to the WA prevention list for introduced marine pests (2014). Inclusion on this list means that vessel operators need to take action if this pest is found. Fisheries, with full cooperation of vessel masters, plan to treat and eradicate the pest in high value asset areas such as marine parks. Both departments are hopeful that a *Didemnum* outbreak may be prevented in the Montebello Islands Marine Park with the cooperation of all commercial operators and recreational visitors through education, reporting and pre-trip hull assessments.

### What should you do if you think you have found/seen *Didemnum perlucidum*?

#### 1. Report it

*Didemnum perlucidum* is listed as a marine pest and a noxious fish in the Montebello Islands Marine Park. Any suspected and confirmed detections should be reported to the Department of Fisheries as soon as possible.

#### You should:

- A) Photograph it from different angles and take photos of the location where you found it.
- B) Record its size, colour, depth as well as how and where it was found, including GPS coordinates.

C) Report within 24 hours of initial suspected detection. Contact the Fisheries through FISHWATCH 1800 815 507 or via the free WA PestWatch phone app.

#### 2. Comply with the department's advice

if moving vessels or immersible equipment into or adjacent to high value asset areas. Actions include ensuring vessels, or immersible equipment, are clean before entering these areas.







**Above** The 'No Camping' signage installed at Ah Chong Island. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

## Hawksbill turtles and wedge-tailed shearwaters – long term residents of Ah Chong Island.

As part of management operations for Ah Chong island, Parks and Wildlife has installed 'No camping' signs on the four main beaches of Ah Chong Island.

The island park is enjoyed by visitors and is also a significant site for nesting hawksbill turtles during October and April, as well as a high-density wedge-tailed shearwater rookery between May and September.

To limit the impact on nesting turtles, the department is discouraging camping on these beaches. Light from campsites, noise, movement and vessel activity can interrupt and even deter female turtles from nesting on the beaches they return to year after year.

Lights and noise can also disrupt adult shearwaters returning from foraging at sea to feed their young. Shearwaters have a large wingspan and are quite clumsy when landing on hard ground. Tents and other camping equipment are additional obstacles to navigate.

Parks and Wildlife asks visitors to be understanding and respect that these areas are of high conservation value. Visitors can camp on many of the other islands in the park including Hermite, Primrose, Bluebell, Crocus, and Northwest Island, which offer beautiful protected and accessible beaches for island camping.

For further information and island locations, please view the marine park brochure available from our website [parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/park/montebello-islands](http://parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/park/montebello-islands).

## Illegal dumping

The Montebello and Barrow Island marine parks are important ecosystems and were established in 2006 because of their high ecological and social value. As such, Parks and Wildlife encourage people to take their litter home with them and not to discard on the islands or throw overboard. The reserves are located offshore, making it difficult for Parks and Wildlife staff to routinely retrieve litter.

Parks and Wildlife staff recently found six empty 22 gallon drums (pictured), which were dumped in the dunes on Alpha Island. This was likely the result of a fuel drop which is a prohibited activity in the marine park as it constitutes littering and carries a penalty.

Marine parks are there to be enjoyed by everyone in a responsible and environmentally sustainable manner. Rubbish that is left on the islands or deposited in the marine environment can become attractive to inquisitive animals such as seabirds and turtles, which commonly mistake the colours and shapes of plastic objects for food.



**Above:** drums left behind on one of the Montebello Islands this year

These artificial objects, such as plastic, which can take up 450 years to decompose, then get caught in their digestive tract, causing a painful and slow death. Aluminum cans, one of the most common litter items found on the islands, can take more than one million years to decompose and are an attractive shelter for small reptiles, often entrapping them causing death. Be environmentally smart and responsible, and take your rubbish with you.

### VISIT THE PARK AND ENJOY:

#### Understand

Understand the importance of the Montebello and Barrow Island and marine environments and learn about the importance of sanctuary zones.

#### Educate Others

Tell your family, friends and colleagues about the importance of these environments.

#### Respect

It is a valued area that requires your care and respect. Tread lightly to help preserve the marine park into the future.

#### Report

If you see anything unusual or harmful to the environment, please report it to Parks and Wildlife on (08) 9182 2000.

Visit us online [parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/park/montebello-islands](http://parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/park/montebello-islands)

### For more information contact

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Department of Parks and Wildlife

