

**Lisa Wright**

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**From:** Parks and Wildlife Service <eden.baxter@dbca.wa.gov.au>  
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**Subject:** Ngari Capes Newsletter - Autumn 2023



Issue 17 - Autumn 2023

## Welcome to the 17th issue of *Ngari Capes Marine Park News*

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**Above right:** Image by Blair Ranford - low salmon spiral

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## Marine park update

*By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood*

Welcome to our latest edition of the Marine Newsletter. As we enter the Ngari (salmon) season, we are thrilled to announce the arrival of the salmon to our waters. Salmon schools have been spotted around popular fishing sites such as Bunker Bay and Hamelin. We hope this season is a bumper season for everyone!

We also have exciting news to share as we welcome a new addition to our team - an old Department of Transport vessel, which has been repurposed to aid in our monitoring and patrolling efforts. You might recognise it from its previous use, but we are delighted to have this vessel as part of our fleet.

**Image right:** Marine ranger Glen Sutton measuring the canopy height of the seagrass during this year's monitoring program.



Below the water our team has been busy with the annual seagrass monitoring program. We will be sharing a segment on our seagrass diving efforts below. In addition to this, we have also been keeping busy with fin fish, macro invertebrates, and algae surveys on the 17-meter Patrol Vessel Woonbalu, which has come down from the East Kimberley Marine Park for two weeks to help with our monitoring.



**Images above:** Our new patrol vessel at Cape Naturaliste

We would like to thank everyone who attended our recent marine park event to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of our park's management. Your presence and support were greatly appreciated, and we are grateful for your participation in making the day a success. Thank you for being a part of this special milestone.



**Images above:** Left Dave and Glen at the NCMP information stall, and Right - NCMP's Weedy Seadragon mascot with volunteer Cole.

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## Thriving Seagrass Meadows: A promising report from NCMP monitoring program!

*By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood*

This February the Ngari Capes Marine Park team, in collaboration with Associate Professor Kathryn McMahon from ECU, have completed another successful year of shallow, mid and deep water seagrass monitoring as part of the collaborative Keep Watch monitoring, an ongoing long-term program that started back in 2012. We're thrilled to report that this year's monitoring showed some very promising results. The seagrass meadows were looking healthy and thriving, and we were excited to see the highest number of seedlings ever recorded.

This monitoring is a critical part of our ongoing monitoring program and will help us to better understand the health and dynamics of the seagrass meadows in our marine park. Seagrass is a vital component of our marine ecosystem, providing habitats for a diverse range of marine life, and playing an important role in carbon sequestration. We would like to extend a huge thank you to our Ngari Capes Marine team and Associate Professor Kathryn McMahon for their ongoing efforts to monitor this seagrass meadow.



**Images above:** Images by Associate Professor Kathryn McMahon - Seagrass meadows in Geographe Bay and monitoring team.

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## The Autumn Salmon Run at NCMP is here!

*By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood*

The much-awaited annual Autumn Salmon Run has officially begun in the Ngari Capes Marine Park. This natural phenomenon is a delight to watch as schools of Australian salmon migrate westward from early March to late April to the coastal nurseries of the Ngari Capes Marine Park, where they spawn during autumn.

As you head out to the park to witness this spectacular event, we remind you to take care of your safety. If you plan to fish from the shore, please keep the sand between your toes. But, if you decide to venture out and fish from the rocks, please remember to tie off.

If you plan on catching some salmon this season, either from the shore or a vessel, it's a good idea to familiarise yourself with the marine park's zones to make sure you're in the right place.

So, get ready to witness this awe-inspiring natural event and remember to take care of yourself and the environment. Let's make this year's Autumn Salmon Run in the Ngari Capes Marine Park a memorable experience for everyone.

Happy Fishing!



**Image above:** By Blair Ranford - A spiral of migrating Australian salmon during the annual Autumn Salmon Run in the Ngari Capes Marine Park

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## A rare visit from an Elephant Seal in Augusta

*By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood*

On April 1st, a very special visitor arrived at the marine park - an elephant seal! These incredible creatures are a rare sight on our shores, and we are honoured to have one resting here for a little while.

As you may know, elephant seals come ashore for a variety of reasons, including to moult their fur, which can take up to a month. During this time, they rest and conserve energy. It's important that we respect their space and adhere to the signs that our park rangers have installed on the beach, reminding the public to keep their distance.

**Image right:** By DBCA - Our special visitor, an elephant seal, has arrived to moult its fur at Augusta.



Despite their size and slow appearance, elephant seals are actually incredibly fast and powerful, both in and out of the water. This makes it even more crucial to give them plenty of space and not approach them too closely.

If you happen to spot our visiting elephant seal during your visit to the marine park, take a moment to admire this magnificent creature from a respectful distance. And don't forget to check in with our rangers for more information on how we can all do our part to protect and preserve these amazing animals.



**Image above:** By Candace McFerran - Protecting visitors and wildlife! Marine Ranger Kye Adams assists visitors in viewing our visiting elephant seal from a safe distance.

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## Ancient coastline surveys reveal Capes biodiversity

By [Australian Marine Parks](#), Parks Australia

A recent offshore survey in the South-west Corner Marine Park has provided a range of new discoveries about the marine park and has helped us understand how the ancient coastline and Leeuwin current shape the unique biodiversity of the area.

Working in partnership with the University of WA (UWA), Wadandi Traditional Owners provided guidance through cultural maps and knowledge which was used to inform the survey, which increased our knowledge of the biodiversity in the park. The team found 80% more mesophotic and rariphotic rocky reef habitats within the National Park Zone than expected, with extensive kelp, deep water seagrass and sponge gardens out to the last interglacial paleo shoreline in ~120 m depth. Beyond this were extensive sand plains with isolated reefs out to the shelf break in 220 m where again extensive sponge gardens were found. This survey also found the deepest seagrass and kelp recorded in the South-west Network.



**Image above:** Sponge garden interspersed with macroalgae and seagrass assemblages credit UWA

This collaboration of Traditional Knowledge and Western science has not only provided new insights into the scientific and cultural values but also provides future guidance for managing the cultural and natural values of the marine park.

South-west Corner Marine Park, managed by [Parks Australia](#), is adjacent to Ngari Capes Marine Park. It is the largest marine park in the South-west Network and protects the offshore marine environment off the south west of WA. This research was supported by the Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program (NESP) Marine Biodiversity Hub and Marine and Coastal Hub with additional funding from UWA and Parks Australia. Head to the NESP Marine and Coastal Hub website to dive into the full [South-west Corner Marine Park Survey Report](#).





**Image above:** Deploying a drop camera system. Credit: Brooke Gibbons UWA.

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## Whale sized news!

By Southwest Whale Ecology Study, [SouWEST](#)

In collaboration with the Centre for Marine Ecosystems Research at Edith Cowan University, the Southwest Whale Ecology Study ([SouWEST](#)) has compiled a 30-year library of southern right whale photos from Geographe and Flinders Bays (WA) that identified individual whales and tracked their histories.

As a result of this work, we have recommended that Geographe Bay be recognised by the Commonwealth Government as a “Biologically Important Area” for Endangered Southern Right Whales that use it to reproduce, rest and migrate. This is important information for the draft National Recovery Plan for the Southern Right Whale, which is [available for public comment](#) until 21 April 2023.

See infographic below for a summary of this National Environmental Science Program (NESP) funded project. The [full report](#) is available on the NESP Marine and Coastal Hub website. A huge thank you to all contributors, citizen scientists, and funders who helped to make this project a reality.



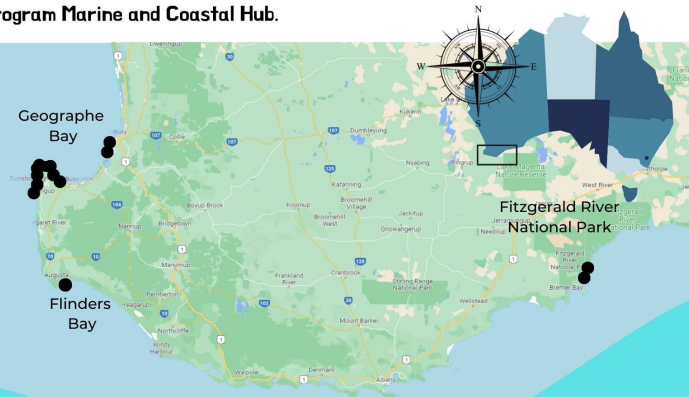
**Image above:** Photo by Chris Burton - Southern Right Whale calf in Geographe Bay

South West Whale Ecology Study (SouWEST) acknowledges the Wadandi / Pibulmun Cultural Custodians of the Bibbulmun Nation of this land we live and work on and pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future.

This project is supported with funding from the Australian Government under the National Environmental Science Program Marine and Coastal Hub.

## Photo matching identifies important Southern Right Whale aggregation areas in Geographe Bay and Flinders Bay in WA

Prepared by: Chandra Salgado Kent, Chris Burton, Marnie Giroud, & Brodie Elsdon



This project provides evidence to support the determination of two new Biologically Important Areas (BIAs) for Southern Right Whales in Geographe Bay and Flinders Bay.

Southern Right Whale images taken in 1994–2021 in the Ngari Capes Marine Park were processed, matched and uploaded to the Australasian Right Whale Photo-Identification Catalogue. Data was collected by scientists, citizen scientists, and whale watching charter operators.

The combined historical record identified up to 15 calving females in both Geographe Bay and Flinders Bay.

Both bays therefore qualify to be categorised as ‘a small established aggregation area’ for Southern Right Whales, according to BIA definitions outlined in the Southern Right Whale Conservation Management Plan.

## Sightings snapshot

**2,706  
PHOTOS**

Land and aerial photos were processed and matched with images of identified individuals and uploaded to the Australasian Right Whale Photo-Identification Catalogue (ARWPIC)

**237  
WHALES  
IDENTIFIED**

including four calves  
2 - Fitzgerald River National Park  
141 - Geographe Bay region  
88 - Flinders Bay  
2 - Bunbury  
4 - Perth

**A  
RETURNING  
FEMALE**

was resighted 9 years apart in Geographe Bay, each time with a calf in tow

**MOTHERS  
&  
CALVES**

stayed in Geographe Bay for up to 2 months

## What are BIAs?

BIAs for protected species are where individuals aggregate for calving, foraging, resting or migration. They are important to decisions made under national environmental laws. BIAs are determined by the Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and can be updated as new relevant species information becomes available.

## Engaging research users

**72**

**RESEARCH  
USERS WERE  
IDENTIFIED**

from government, industry, tourism, education and community sectors and cultural custodians

## Thank you for joining us at our marine park event!

*By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood*

We would like to take a moment to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who attended our recent marine park event on Sunday 4 February. It was a fantastic day, and we were thrilled to see so many families and individuals join us on the foreshore between Shelter Brewery and the Busselton Jetty.

We hope that everyone enjoyed the event and the range of kid-friendly educational activities on offer. It was wonderful to see so many children and adults alike, taking an interest in marine conservation and learning about our precious marine environment.



We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to our stallholders and DBCA volunteers for their support and contribution to the event. Without their participation, we would not have been able to provide such a diverse range of activities and information for our visitors.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and waters on which the event took place and offer our deepest respect and gratitude to the local Noongar community. Their Welcome to Country ceremony was a special moment for everyone in attendance, and we appreciate the opportunity to acknowledge and pay our respects to the First Nations people.

Once again, thank you to all who attended and supported our marine park event. We look forward to hosting more events in the future and continuing our efforts to protect and preserve NCMP.

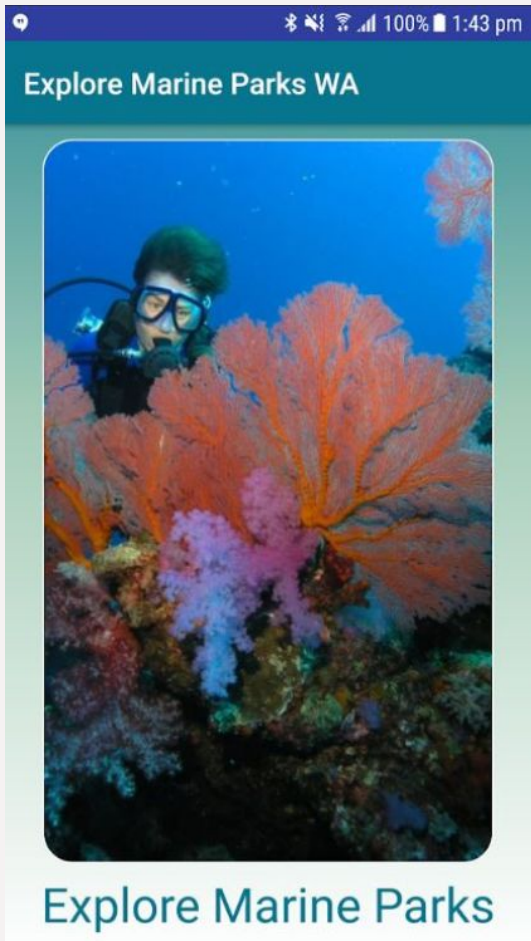




**Images above:** Taken by DBCA volunteer Emily Evans at the NCMP event, top left: touch pool, top right Busselton Jetty Stall, middle left touch table, middle right inflatable whale, last photo, NCMP team and volunteers post event photo.

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## Do you know about marine park sanctuary zones?



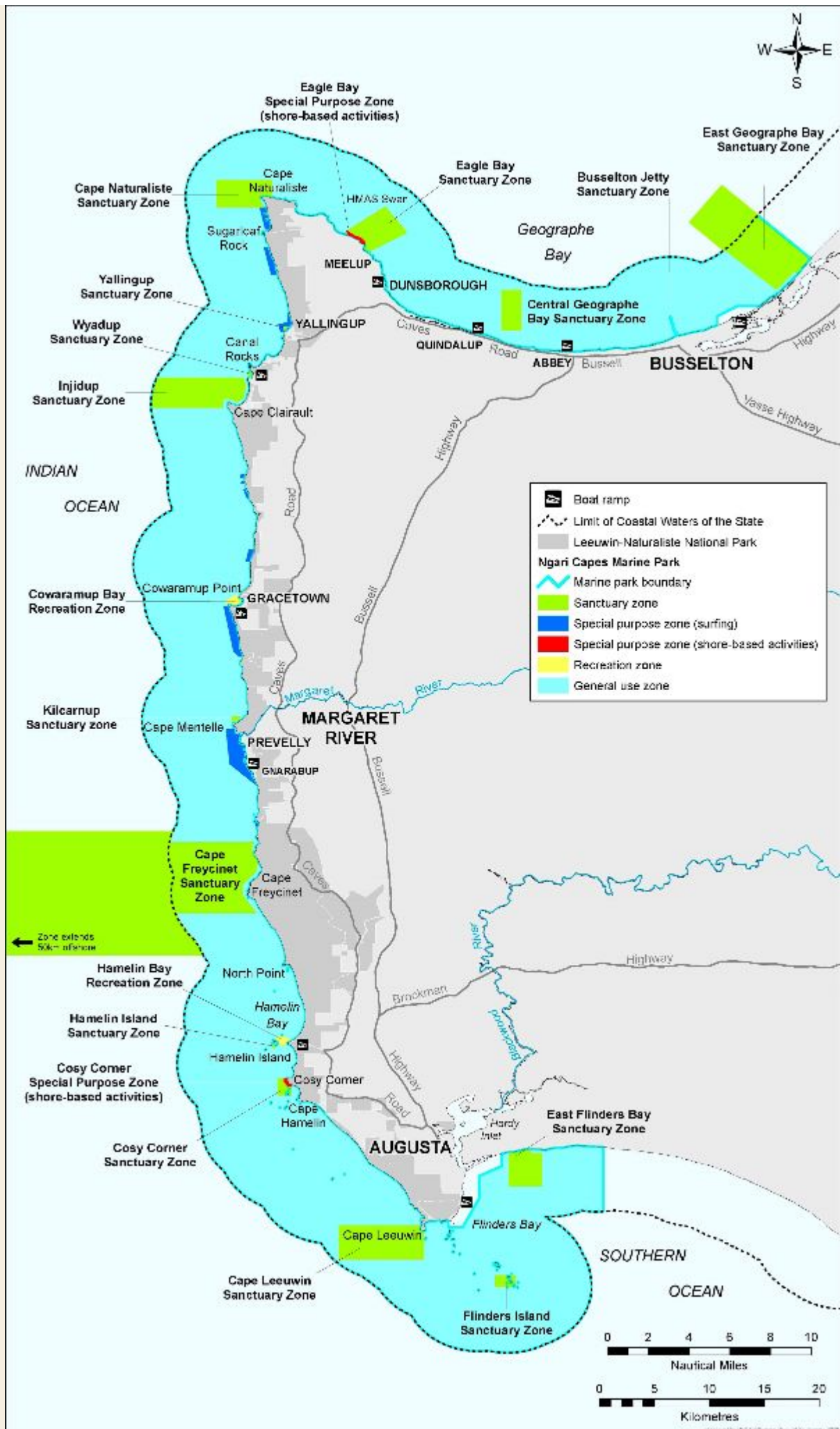
Before visiting any marine park, it's important to always 'know your zones' and find out what you can do in each zone. Since April 2020, the Ngari Capes Marine Park zones have been enforced.

These zones cater for a wide range of user groups from fishers, scuba divers and snorkelers, to surfers and kayakers. While allowing sustainable recreational and commercial activities, zoning also provides for conservation by establishing sanctuary zones for undisturbed nature study and passive enjoyment of the natural environment.

The map below is a great guide, however, if you require more information about the zones and what activities are permitted for marine parks around the capes or anywhere off the WA coast, please download the Marine Parks WA App or call the Parks and Wildlife Service Busselton office on 9752 5555.

[Get the app on iTunes](#)

[Get the app on Android](#)



**Above:** Map of Ngari Capes Marine Park showing zones plus National Park Zones in adjacent Australian marine parks.

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