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**From:** Parks and Wildlife Service <eden.baxter@dbca.wa.gov.au>  
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Issue 18 - Winter 2023

**Welcome to the 18th issue of *Ngari Capes Marine Park News***

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**Image right:** Nudibranch (credit: Stefan Andrews/Ocean Imaging)



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## Marine park update

*By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood*

Welcome to our latest edition of the Marine Newsletter.

We are thrilled to announce the return of the humpbacks and southern right whales to our waters. Numerous sightings of these gentle giants have been reported around popular nursing sites like Bunker Bay and Flinders Bay.



We have an important team update to share. Kye Adams, who has been an invaluable member of the marine team for the past year as a technical officer and acting marine park ranger, has accepted a job on Rottnest Island! While we are sad to see Kye leave, we wish him all the best in his new adventure.

In addition, we bid farewell to a much-loved elephant seal that took up residence in Augusta for just over a month while completing its molt. Affectionately named Big Gus by the Augusta locals, Gus gained celebrity status during his stay.

Above the water, the team has been keeping busy with pre-season whale disentangling training, more on this below. The team was thrilled to receive an invitation to the annual Augusta Whale Song Festival this June. This delightful event celebrates and allows everyone to experience and enjoy the natural beauty and community spirit of the South West.



**Top image:** Southern right whales (credit: Blair Ranford)

**Above:** Big Gus the Elephant Seal (credit: Barb Wall)

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## **Farewell to Big Gus: Augusta's elephant seal departs for Antarctica**

*By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood*

Following the departure of our beloved guest, Big Gus, Augusta continues to cherish the memories of this remarkable elephant seal. Affectionately named by some of the locals, Big Gus left an indelible mark on our community, capturing hearts and sparking fascination throughout his stay.

Arriving at the marine park on April 1st, Big Gus brought a rare and special presence to our shores. Elephant seals are not commonly seen in our region, making his visit all the more extraordinary. The

primary reason for their beach visits, such as Big Gus's, is to undergo the molting process, a period that can last up to a month. During this time, these seals rest and conserve their energy.



**Above:** Our special visitor, Big Gus at Augusta (credit: Barb Wall)

Throughout Big Gus's stay, our park rangers ensured the safety and well-being of both the seal and the public. Signs were placed on the beach serving as reminders to maintain a respectful distance from this extraordinary visitor. We are immensely grateful for the cooperation and understanding shown by our community during this time.

In addition to his popularity among locals and visitors, Big Gus's presence also provided an educational opportunity for the marine park team. Marine Ranger Eden Harris completed a memorable visit to the local primary school in Augusta, where she shared information about elephant seals and their vital role in marine ecosystems. The students were enthralled by the story of Big Gus and how far he had traveled for a visit to the South West.

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## Whales return to Ngari Capes Marine Park

*By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood*

We are thrilled to witness the awe-inspiring migration as our gentle giants, the southern right whales and humpbacks, make their return to Ngari Capes Marine Park. Reports from the local community indicate that the first sightings of these magnificent creatures occurred around early May, particularly in the waters near Flinders Bay.



**Above:** Eight humpies (credit: Blair Ranford)

The annual migration of whales is a natural phenomenon that captivates both locals and visitors alike. As these majestic marine mammals navigate their way to our shores, we have the privilege of observing their graceful presence in our pristine waters.

We would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone to respect the welfare and safety of these incredible creatures. When encountering whales in your vessels, adhere to separation distances to ensure minimal disturbance and safety for you and the whale. To assist you, we have included a diagram below that illustrates the recommended separation distances. By maintaining these separation distances, we allow the whales to continue their journey undisturbed while still providing us with a memorable and responsible whale watching experience.

# Whale Watching in Ngari Capes Marine Park

**NO APPROACH** 60°

**NO VESSELS**

100m

300m separation

60° **NO WAITING**

GO SLOW  
PROCEED WITH CAUTION  
BE MINDFUL OF VESSEL NOISE

100m separation

**People are not permitted to swim with whales** unless on a licensed tour.

**GIVE WHALES ROOM TO MOVE**  
Give whales space to behave naturally. Avoid chasing, crowding or blocking whales.

**GO SLOW FOR THOSE BELOW**  
Reduce your speed and maintain a lookout.

**BE COURTEOUS** to other whale watchers.

For more information, please call:  
Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions  
Parks and Wildlife Service – Blackwood District  
Ph (08) 9752 5555

Touching, disturbing, interfering with the natural movement of, or breaching separation distances for whales in Western Australia is prohibited under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. Penalties of up to \$500,000 may apply.

Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions  
PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

## Marine team enhances whale disentanglement skills

*By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood*

The dedicated members of Blackwood's whale disentanglement team have been putting in a lot of effort to enhance their skills and stay prepared for any situation. In late July, they spent two days refreshing their disentanglement skills with the renowned expert, John Edwards. Unfortunately, the weather didn't cooperate during the training, so the team had to practice various entanglement scenarios on land. This year, we were delighted to have the participation of a local Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) Fisheries Officer in our training.

Throughout the years, our team has encountered several entanglement incidents. One of the most recent cases involved a tethered humpback whale calf in Geographe Bay. These encounters serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of being prepared and skilled in assisting these remarkable creatures when they're in distress. We are immensely grateful for the guidance of John Edwards, a seasoned expert who generously shares his invaluable knowledge and experience with our team on an annual basis.



Above: Blackwood's Large Whale Disentanglement team with disentanglement equipment.

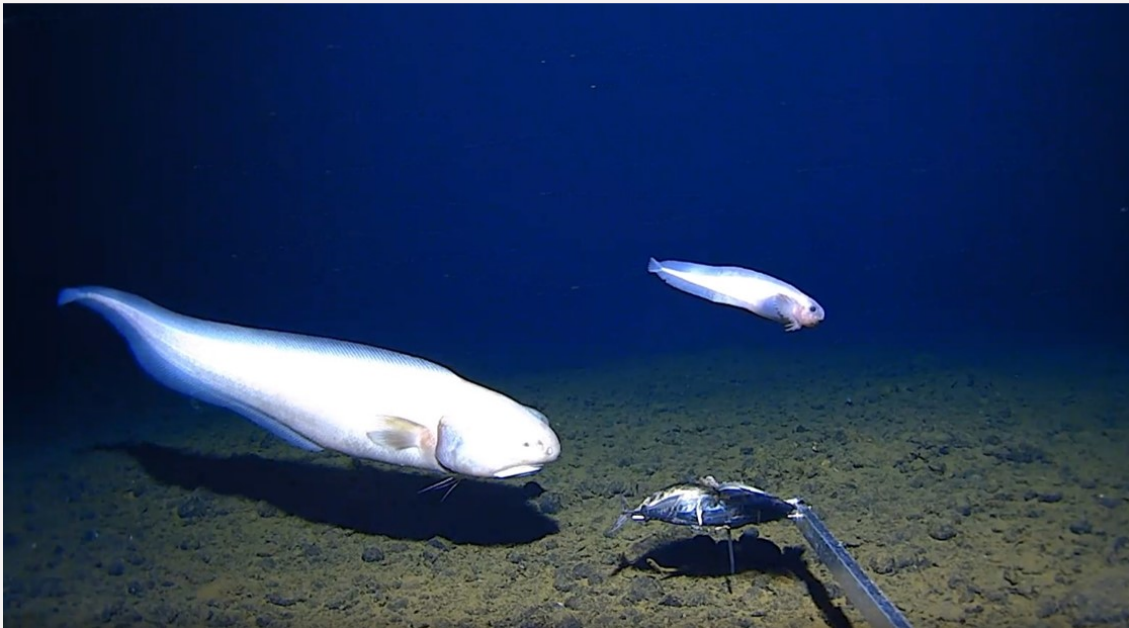
## Discovering the depths of offshore Australian marine parks

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

Researchers from the Minderoo-UWA Deep-Sea Research Centre at The University of Western Australia recently embarked on their second expedition to look at the biodiversity of the deepest parts of Australian marine parks. The project, which received funding through the Australian Government's [Our Marine Parks Grants](#) program, will open a window on the unexplored environments of deep-sea canyons across three marine parks offshore of WA.

In May, the research team departed from Fremantle for the Perth Canyon and Gascoyne Marine Parks to deploy deep-sea baited landers and long-term observatories, capable of continuously sampling the environment for 6 months. The innovative deep-sea technology, equipped with cameras and monitoring sensors, was deployed to abyssal depths of 3–6km beneath the waves.

The first expedition last year, ventured to the Diamantina Fracture Zone in the South-west Corner Marine Park. Two snailfish were collected from 6 km underwater with genetic testing yet to reveal whether this is a never-before-seen species. The Diamantina Fracture Zone is a rugged deep-water environment composed of seamounts, troughs and ridges which formed more than 50 million years ago when Australia separated from Antarctica. This complex and isolated environment with a variety of habitats is thought to support a high diversity of species. These expeditions will answer questions around whether the deep-sea communities among the three offshore marine parks are connected and highlight the importance of Australian Marine Parks to protect deep-sea environments.



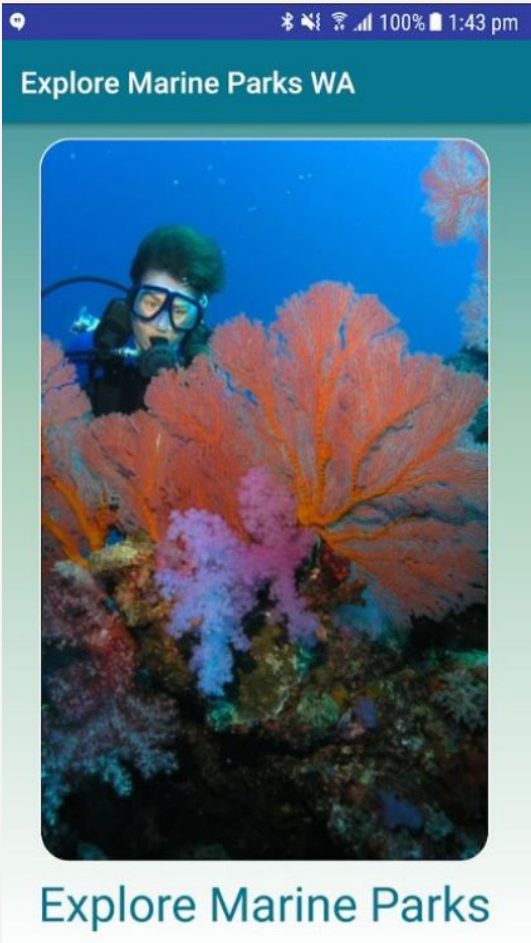
**Top image:** Deployment of the deep-sea observatory, which is new and novel technology. From left to right lead researcher Dr Todd Bond, Director of the Munderoo-UWA Deep-Sea Research Centre, Dr Alan Jamieson and post-doctoral researcher Dr Jessica Kolbusz.

**Above:** Baited lander footage of *Bassozetus* sp. (robust assfish – large fish) and an unknown species of snailfish (Liparidae – Small fish) filmed 6177m at the eastern end of the Diamantina Fracture Zone in the South-West Corner Marine Park. This is the deepest video footage ever filmed in Australia's exclusive economic zone.





## Do you know about marine park sanctuary zones?



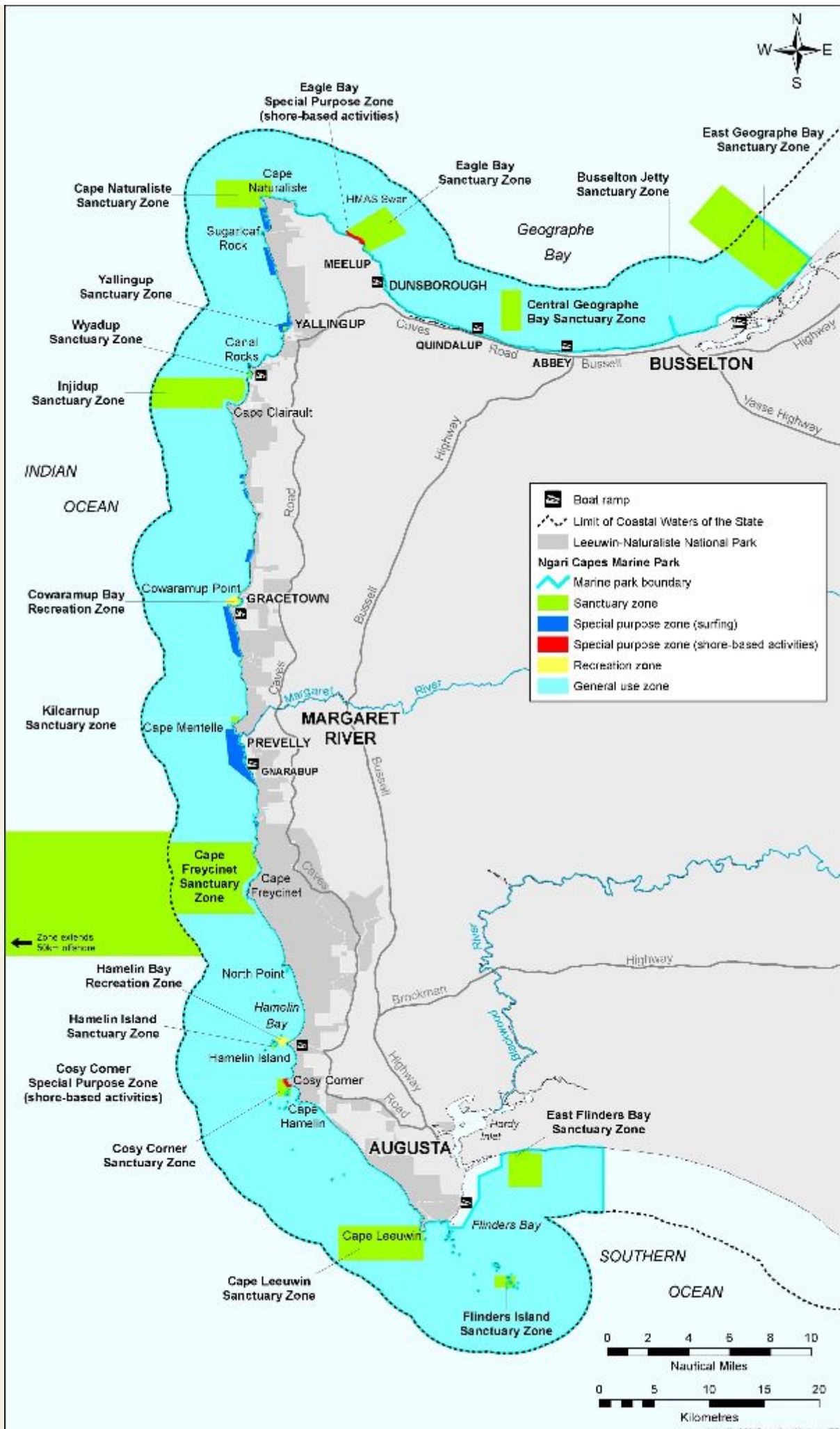
Before visiting any marine park, it's important to always 'know your zones' and find out what you can do in each zone. Since April 2020, the Ngari Capes Marine Park zones have been enforced.

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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