



Issue 19 - Spring 2023

Welcome to the 19th issue of *Ngari Capes Marine Park News*

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

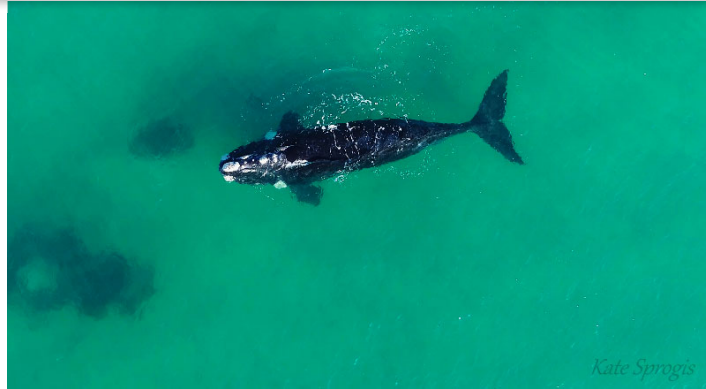


Marine park update

By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood

Welcome to our latest edition of the marine newsletter.

it – from the vibrant flowers in full bloom to the majestic southern migration of whales. As the demersal ban lifts, and our coastal region welcomes an influx of eager tourists, it's safe to say that spring has unmistakably arrived here at Ngari Capes Marine Park. With the warmer weather upon us, our dedicated marine team has been diligently increasing their compliance patrols both on the water and on land.



For the second consecutive year, we are thrilled to announce an exciting international collaboration between our department and researchers including Dr Kate Sprogis (University of Western Australia), Professor Rob Harcourt (Macquarie University), Dr. Simon Childerhouse and Associate Prof. Emma Carroll (Auckland University). Over the course of two weeks, encompassing a total of 53 hours on the water, this collaboration resulted in the biopsy and tagging of several southern right whales in Geographe Bay, Flinders Bay, and Cheynes Beach in Albany. The expedition yielded 26 valuable biopsies and led to the tagging of seven southern right whales.

In addition to this exciting research, our attention has been captivated by the pinniped colony at Cape Naturaliste over the past few months. Once a fortnight the marine team have been conducting regular drone counts of this colony since December last year, providing invaluable insights into their behavior and habitat. We are thrilled to report that they appear to be at the peak of their breeding cycle this year. Be sure to check out the graph below for detailed results and enjoy some heartwarming pictures of these adorable 'puppies of the sea'.



Image: Southern right whale in Flinders Bay Augusta and PV Leeuwin in Augusta (credit: Kate Sprogis)

Mirnong Maat (whale journeys) – southern right whale research second-year expedition in NCMP

By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood

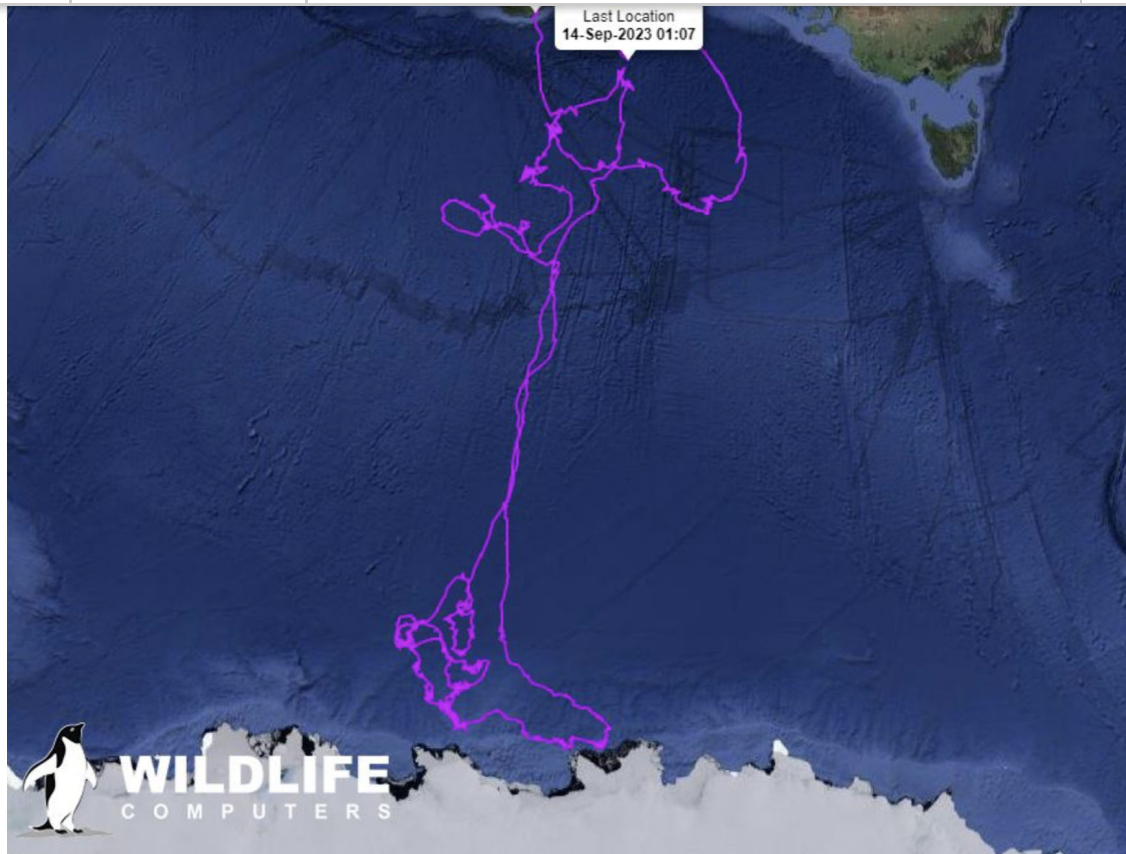
You might recall that around this time last year, we mentioned an exciting collaboration between the University of Western Australia, the University of Auckland, Macquarie University, and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation, and Attractions (DBCA). Well, we are thrilled to announce the completion of our second research collaboration with these returning researchers in early August! This international research team, in partnership with DBCA, has once again joined forces to unravel the mysteries of the southern right whales' migration patterns.



Above: Glen Sutton (DBCA staff) with southern right whale skin biopsy and PV Leeuwin with Mirnong Maat tagging and biopsy crew (Simon, Eden, Glen and Rob in Flinders Bay) (Credit: Kate Sprogis)

Very little is known about the large-scale movements and population recovery of southern right whales in Australia. To address this knowledge gap, the [Mirnong Maat project](#) was initiated, utilising satellite tags and biopsies for research purposes.

Typically, these satellite tags remain embedded in the thick blubber of the whale for approximately three months. However, this year, researchers received a pleasant surprise! One satellite tag deployed during last year's expedition in the south west is still actively recording the journey of a southern right whale. This is a groundbreaking discovery, as it represents one of the first complete migrations of a southern right whale ever documented by a satellite tag.



Above: Nebinyan's journey to Antarctica and back, captured by a satellite tag. You too can follow [Nebinyan's live track](#).

The whale responsible for this extraordinary journey is named Nebinyan. Nebinyan's migration began at Cheynes Beach, followed by a venture to the cooler waters near Antarctica, and eventually circled back to the South West, near where it initially started its remarkable journey. The entire team is buzzing with excitement over this incredible news, as it sheds new light on the migratory patterns of these magnificent creatures. To [track the whales](#) tagged in August 2023, see the Mirnong Maat Project website.

Peak season for fur seals at Cape Naturaliste

By Parks and Wildlife Service, Blackwood

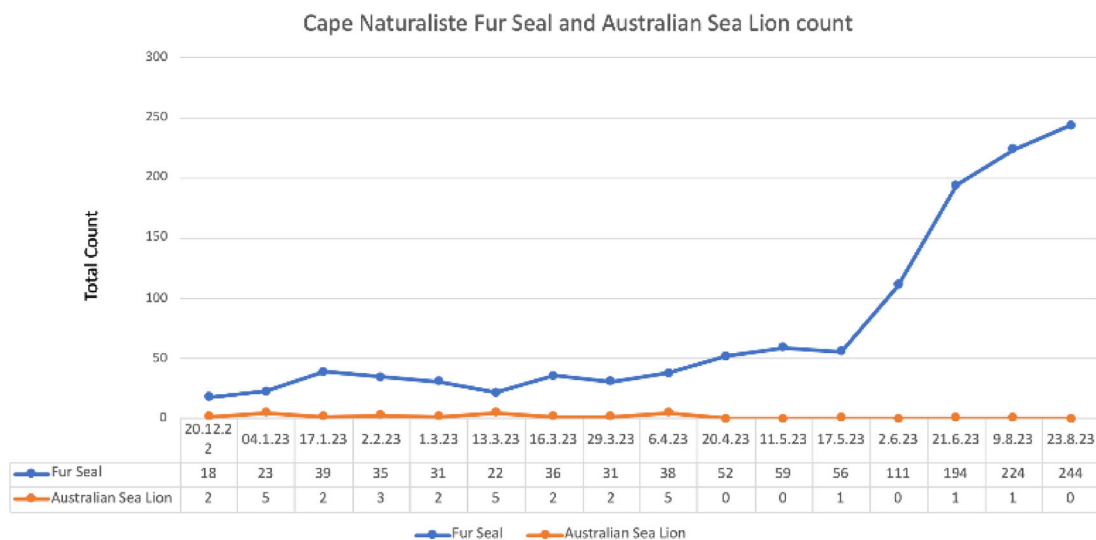
Our team's research endeavors persist, this time focused on a smaller yet equally playful marine mammal inhabiting the rugged shores of the marine park. Over the past few months, our marine team has been fully immersed in the world of pinnipeds. Through routine drone surveys conducted approximately every fortnight since December of last year, we've had the privilege of peering into the lives of these captivating creatures, gaining insight into their habits, behavior, and most intriguingly, their population size on a monthly basis.



Above: Fur seals at Cape Naturaliste (credit: Eden Harris)

As this monitoring project first took flight in late December, fur seal numbers in the area ranged between 30 to 40 individuals, a count that held steady until about April. However, with the arrival of the cooler months in May, June and July, the total count of fur seals began to rise. In early August of this year, the team recorded a peak number of 244 fur seals, ranging from all different ages, pup, sub adults and bull fur seals. While closely monitoring this fur seal colony, our team had the added delight of encountering a small number of Australian sea lions. Remarkably, it seems that the fur seals are untroubled by the presence of larger Australian sea lions on their small rocky haulout site at Cape Naturaliste, adding an extra layer of intrigue to our observations.

If you're eager to catch a glimpse of these 'sea puppies' for yourself, we recommend visiting the lookout at Cape Naturaliste lighthouse. Don't forget to bring your binoculars, as you might just spot some whales while you're there.



West coast demersal – does size matter?

By the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, DPIRD

With the introduction of some rule changes for west coast demersal scalefish fishing coming into effect this year, it is important for fishers to understand what the changes are and the reasons behind these changes before going fishing.

A common question the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development gets is “why have the minimum size for WA dhufish, breaksea cod and baldchin groper been dropped”?

Answer: Unfortunately, these species have a high post-release mortality rate, which means that between 50-90% of caught fish may die upon their release. A range of factors can contribute to this post-release mortality including stress, species biology e.g., susceptibility to changes in water pressure (barotrauma), capture depth, capture and handling practices, air exposure time, hooking injuries and shark depredation.

Removing size limits for these demersal scalefish species reduces the need for fishers to return fish to the water that are unlikely to survive, therefore helping to lower overall fishing mortality rates (i.e., fish dying as result of being caught). Please note, pink snapper have a much lower post release mortality rate and their size limits have remained.

By keeping the first two demersal scalefish you catch for a feed, including any smaller WA dhufish, baldchin groper or breaksea cod, you can help to reduce post-release mortality and help to support the overall stock recovery. It is imperative that fishers do NOT high grade their catch, as this will result in more fish dying than necessary.

To find out more please visit: fish.wa.gov.au and report any illegal fishing to FishWatch 1800 815 507.



Marine parks are there to be enjoyed

Australian marine parks are busy places – whether its people enjoying themselves with a day out on the water, making a living, conducting research, or the natural activity of ocean waters and their inhabitants – there's always something happening.

To keep up to date with the latest news in the neighbouring Geographe and South-West Corner Marine Parks, follow us on social media or visit our [website](#).

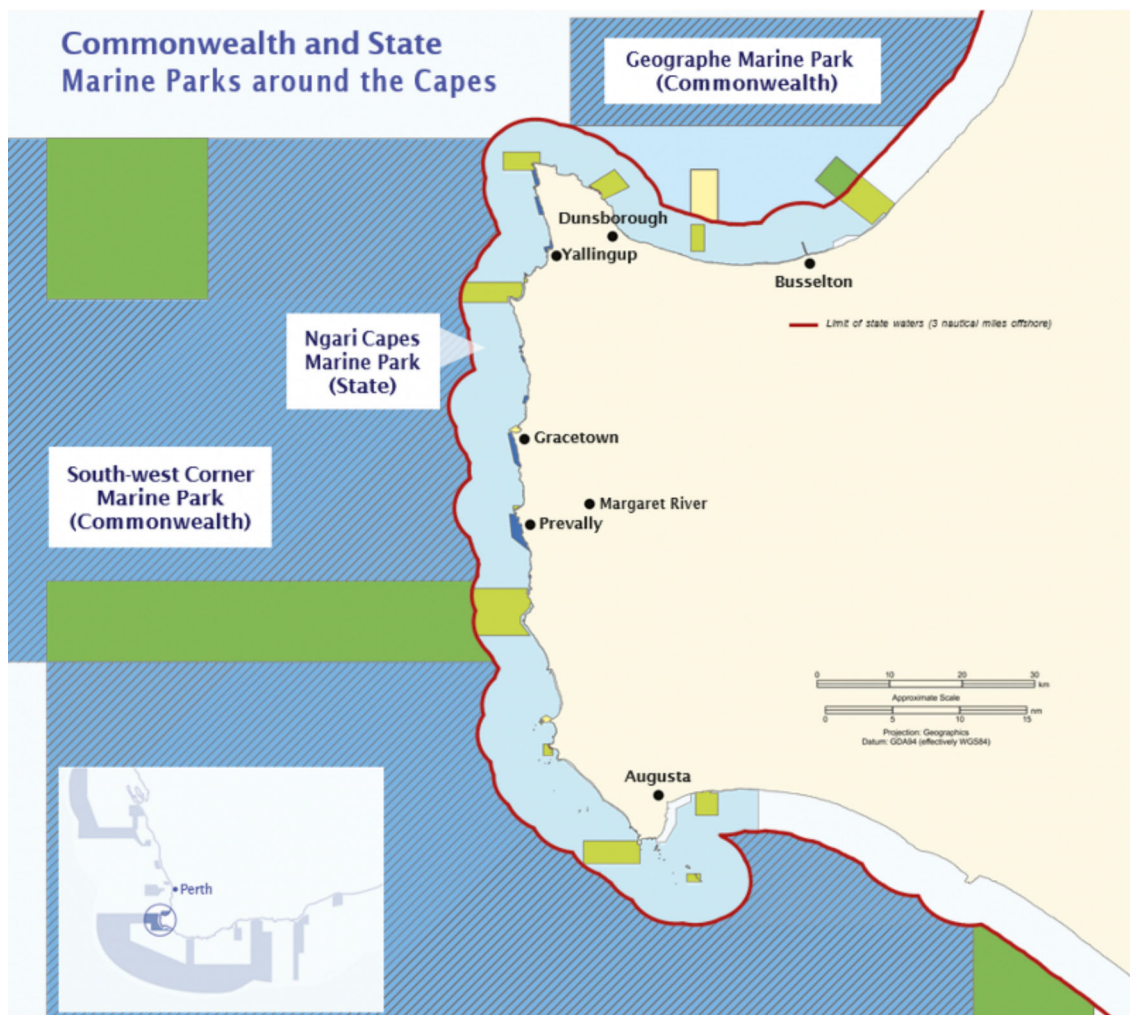


And if you're thinking of heading out to Geographe or South-West Corner yourself – or to any of the other 22 Australian marine parks off Western Australia – your smartphone can help you plan your trip. Use the latest Recfishwest app or Marine Parks WA app to find out what you can do in each park zone.

Download the Recfishwest app now by visiting the [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#).

Download the Marine Parks WA app now by visiting the [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#).

News doesn't just go one way – we'd love to hear about your experiences exploring our marine parks – use [@ausmarineparks](#) to tag us in your post.



Above: Commonwealth and State marine parks around the Capes.

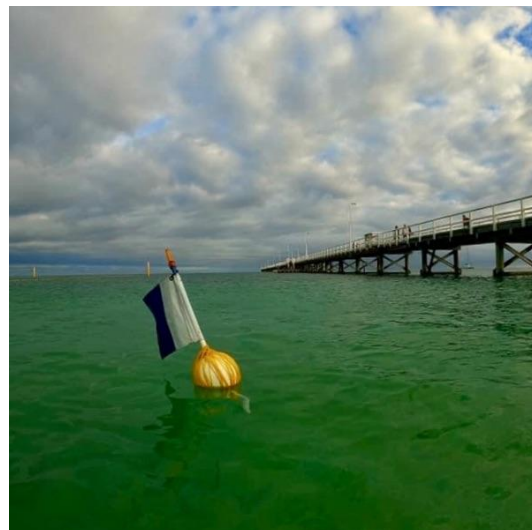
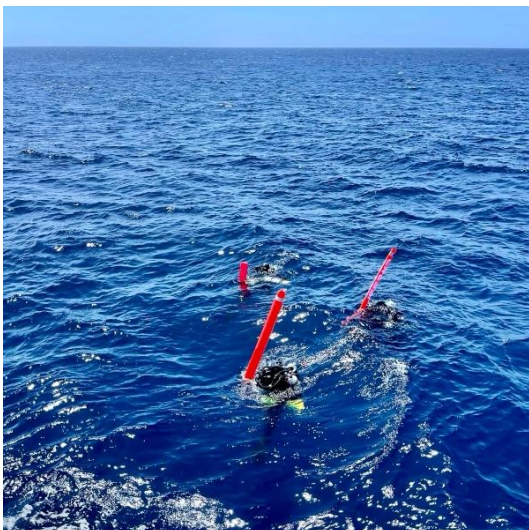
Scuba diving safety

By Southwest WA Divers

Spring has officially landed in the Ngari Capes Marine Park. The better weather brings an increase in ocean temperatures along with improved visibility in the water, and with this comes an influx of scuba divers! Whilst this is a great time to get your gear dusted off and serviced there are a few other safety considerations to take when jumping back in the water.

Buddy checks — Prior to a dive it's always best practice to do some gear checks before your dive. Is your air turned all the way on? Pressure gauge showing contents and enough gas for the planned dive? Are both regulators working correctly? Inflate/deflate working correctly? Weights attached and secured? Familiarity with release points and air dumps etc? The list goes on. What we find down south in the warmer months is a lot of people travel to the area for dives, coupled with an increase in social group dives being organised its often inevitable that buddy pairs might be new to each other. In this instance its beneficial to lengthen the discussions, take extra time to get familiar with each other's gear so you recognise each other in the water. In any emergency/panicked situation that bit of added familiarisation goes a long way. Recap on your lost buddy procedure and agree on a method of finding each other should the need arise.

Plan the dive, dive the plan — No matter how well you know the chosen dive site or your buddy its always important to have a plan and stick to it where possible. Discussions can include; where are you heading and what are the goals for your dive? Are the goals feasible? What conditions directly relate to the dive site, is there potential current? Surge? Reduced visibility? Are there any site-specific hazards? Communication can get tricky underwater so have a recap on things like hand signals and agreed gas pressure turnaround points etc. Having a well-constructed plan can make a slightly nervous diver feel more at ease prior to and during the dive which is always a positive too. Things like maximum depth should be considered and based on not just certification level but also experience, along with environmental factors too. Somebody used to diving at 30m in clear blue tropical water may well feel completely different in shallow temperate greener water with surge. Factor in and discuss safety stops and contingencies around low air scenarios etc.



Debriefs — Almost as important as the plan, a debrief following a dive is often overlooked but is a very valuable tool in analysing what went well and what could be improved. It's a great time after the dive to openly discuss any communication breakdowns and look at how it could be done differently next time. Discuss the highlights and marine life etc but also look at air consumption and gear configuration. Was the equipment you had suitable? Did the gas management/turn point go to plan? The list can go on and on. Debriefs are not just about learning but in general are a great way to recap and share the great memories from the dive.

Boat safety — Its very common in the Ngari Capes Marine Park for divers to be in the water straight off the beach and in some of the most popular spots boat traffic should always be a consideration. The WA Department of Transport has guidelines about the use of flags whilst diving and it is in fact a legal requirement to use a flag. When using flags don't always assume that boat operators in the area are aware of what they mean, any time you ascend up to your flag remain vigilant and keep an ear out for approaching boat traffic. Sometimes divers may become lost or have an unforeseen issue meaning they're not able to surface at their flag. In this instance a delayed surface marker buoy (DSMB) is a fantastic tool for making your presence in the water known. The inflatable tube can be attached to a reel and sent to the surface from depth. The diver can then safely ascend up the line knowing they have a marker above their heads. All divers should not just carry a DSMB and reel but be familiar in its operation.

Safety equipment — There is a whole multitude of diver safety devices on the market and its important to carry a selection suited to the diving you're doing. These items can include but are not limited to; safety whistles, signal mirrors, DSMB's, dye marker, torches, cutting devices and the list goes on. Where possible use devices to aid communication, things like torches can be great to signal above and below the water along with underwater notepads which can be used to physically write messages to your buddy. Review the type of diving you're undertaking and if needed discuss with your local dive shop some of the kit available.

Training, experience & knowledge —There is always more to learn in scuba diving, going to your local dive store and discussing courses available to further your training and develop your skills is always beneficial. You can often undertake courses that align with your interests whether it be deep diving, wreck diving, search and recovery, marine identification and navigation—the options are endless. All training will develop you as a diver but also joining social dive events and group trips can be a really great way to get out and build on experience in a safe environment too. Those days when the swell's up, or you have some free time, the internet is a great source for reading about diving to develop knowledge along with a whole wealth of books and publications on the subject.

Southwest WA Divers' Facebook group welcomes new divers and there is a great bunch of experienced local divers always keen to get out diving, share the knowledge and share the love of diving the amazing waters of the Ngari Capes Marine Park. Dive safe, and here's to a great season ahead.

Do you know about marine park sanctuary zones?



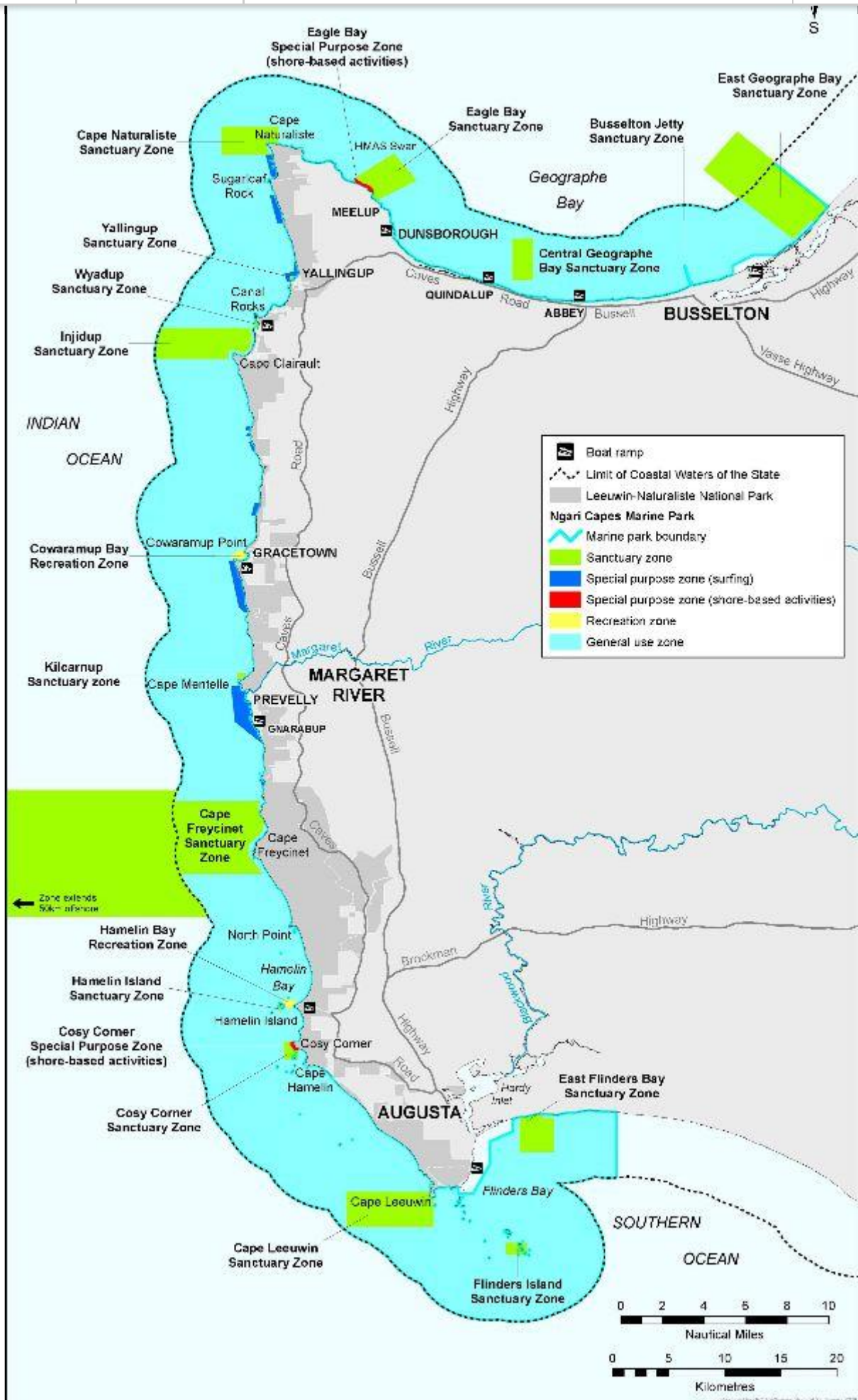
can do in each zone. Since April 2020, the Ngari Capes Marine Park zones have been enforced.

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](#)

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