

# Shoalwater Islands Marine Park



## Visitor guide



Department of Biodiversity,  
Conservation and Attractions



**PARKS AND  
WILDLIFE**  
SERVICE

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## **Shoalwater Islands Marine Park – seagrass, sealions and shipwrecks**

Shoalwater Islands Marine Park and its adjacent island nature reserves host an exceptional diversity of marine plants and animals and is within easy reach of Rockingham.

Swimming, snorkelling, scuba diving, fishing, boating, surfing, kayaking, water skiing, kite surfing, wind surfing and paddle boarding are all enjoyed in the marine park.

The area is culturally important to local Aboriginal people who have a long history of connection to the land and sea. The Gnaarla Karla Booja people are the traditional custodians of Shoalwater Islands Marine Park.

The marine park is one of Perth's most important aquatic playgrounds. Its clean accessible beaches and clear shallow waters support marine life that can often only be viewed in more remote areas of Australia.



## Enjoying the marine park

Shoalwater Islands Marine Park is one of three marine parks in the Perth metropolitan area. Shoalwater Islands, Marmion and the Swan Estuary marine parks were established to help ensure biodiversity values are protected and conserved for all to enjoy, now and in the future.

### Geology

Rocky limestone shores fringe the marine park at Cape Peron with limestone pinnacles being the only remaining evidence that a forest once stood. Rock platforms underlie many of the beaches throughout the marine park. Be sure to keep your eye out for fossilised cone shells cemented into the rocky shores found only in the south-west.

### Seagrass meadows

The marine park has some of the healthiest seagrass meadows in the Perth metropolitan area, consisting of long-lived species such as *Posidonia* spp. and *Amphibolis* spp. that take decades to recover if damaged. Seagrass meadows provide an important habitat and nursery area for a large number of marine species such as fish, rock lobsters, tiny worms, shellfish, sea stars and crustaceans. Fish, sharks and rays also seek camouflage, shelter and prey in the large brown macroalgae beds of kelp and *Sargassum* that dominate the offshore reefs of the marine park.



## Birds

The many jagged-edged islands and rocky islets of the marine park provide important roosting and nesting areas for numerous bird species. Some of these birds migrate annually from the northern hemisphere, while others such as the regal pelican live there year-round. Seabirds are constantly moving around the marine park. Look up and you can see pelicans riding thermal uplifts, cormorants flying in a 'V' formation, crested terns and gannets dive bombing from great heights to snatch small fish and bridled terns dancing in the wind around Penguin Island.

## Sea lions

The Australian sea lion is the rarest sea lion in the world and is only found in southern Australia. Sea lions can be seen basking on the shores of Penguin and Seal islands or swimming through the waters of the marine park as they hunt for prey and investigate their surroundings. Sea lions found near Perth are all males. Most of them vacate the area every 18 months to travel to breeding islands about 200km north of Perth.

See more information in 'Caring for the marine park' and at [dbca.wa.gov.au/sealwise](http://dbca.wa.gov.au/sealwise)



## Penguins

The little penguin is the smallest of 17 penguin species and is the only one that nests along Australia's mainland coast. Penguin Island has one of the largest breeding colonies on the west coast of Australia. These flightless seabirds are superbly adapted to the marine environment as their wings have evolved into flippers with which they use to propel themselves, 'flying' underwater. On land they stand upright, walking or waddling awkwardly.

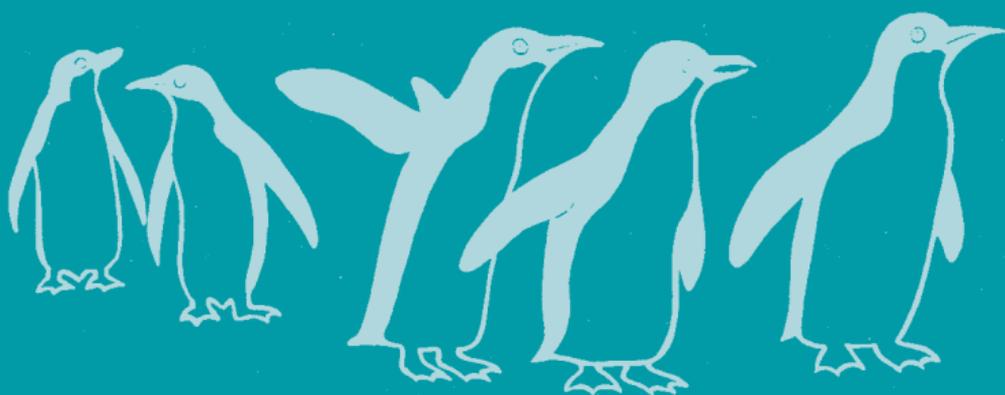
## Dolphins

Bottlenose dolphins are common in Perth metropolitan waters. Their playful and intelligent nature makes them a favourite marine mammal for many. More than 60 dolphins have been recorded in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park, primarily spending their time rearing young, frolicking and hunting along the shoreline and in the offshore reef system.

## Water sports

Cavernous reefs around the islands are good spots for snorkelling and diving, depending on daily weather. Popular sites include Cape Peron and The Sisters. The *Saxon Ranger* dive wreck lies in 18m of water in Warnbro Sound. A permit to dive the wreck is required and can be purchased at the Rockingham Visitor Centre.

Recreational boating, swimming, wind surfing and kite surfing are also popular. The west side of Penguin Island provides good surfing and there is a water ski area within Warnbro Sound.



## Going to Penguin Island?

Ferry transfers operate hourly from Mersey Point from mid-October to early June.

To help protect the wildlife of Penguin Island, people may only visit during the day. Visitors are asked to keep to beaches, boardwalks and designated walkways.

Penguin Island closes from early June to mid-October every year to protect the penguins from human disturbance during their breeding season.



### **Penguin Island access risk**

People have drowned attempting to cross the sandbar to Penguin Island. Strong currents can occur in this area and water depth and conditions vary and change rapidly. Please do not risk your safety on the sandbar when you can keep your feet and belongings dry and take a safe, comfortable ferry ride to the island.



## **Marine parks and reserves – help protect our wildlife!**

### **Fish for the future**

Fishing is popular in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park and permitted in appropriate marine park zones. Please refer to the map and its accompanying permitted uses table in this brochure to see where you can fish.

- Fishing is not permitted in sanctuary zones or the Saxon Ranger Dive Wreck Restricted Area and not all types of fishing gear can be used in all zones.
- Abalone can only be taken in the special purpose zone (wildlife conservation) and the general use zone, but only during the metropolitan abalone fishing season and if you hold a current recreational fishing licence endorsed for abalone.
- Spearfishing using scuba or hookah is not allowed in the marine park. Spearfishing by breath-hold only is permitted in the general use zone.
- Sea urchins and all molluscs (shellfish), including turban shells, whelks, periwinkles and baler shells are protected and cannot be taken from the park. The only exceptions are mussels, abalone (during the season), squid, cuttlefish and octopus.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's (DPIRD) Fisheries Division enforces gear, bag, size and possession limits to ensure there will always be fish for the future in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park. Fishers must ensure they are familiar with rules and hold the required fishing and boating licences.

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, (DBCAs) Parks and Wildlife Service works collaboratively with the (DPIRD) Fisheries Division and the Department of Transport on enforcement, education and other programs.



## **Speed limits**

Speed restrictions for all vessels apply in designated sensitive areas to help protect animals from boat strikes. An 8-knot speed limit applies to all motorised vessels in the Seal Island Sanctuary Zone and Shoalwater Bay Special Purpose Zone (wildlife conservation). An 8-knot speed limit applies to all vessels in the Saxon Ranger Dive Wreck Restricted Area and anchoring or passing over the wreck is not permitted. No motorised vessels are permitted in the white bait protection area around Becher Point to help protect the aggregation of white bait.

For more boating information go to [transport.wa.gov.au/imate](https://transport.wa.gov.au/imate)

## **Go slow for those below**

Shoalwater Islands Marine Park is home to some incredible marine life. Little penguins, Australian sea lions and dolphins often swim near the surface and are susceptible to boat strikes which can cause life threatening injuries or may even be fatal. Please go slow for those below.

## **Weather**

The weather and sea conditions in the Rockingham area can change suddenly as a result of strong summer breezes and winter storms. Consider your safety and check the forecast before heading offshore to explore the marine park.



## Know your zones

Shoalwater Islands Marine Park is zoned to help ensure the biodiversity values of the marine park are conserved and protected, while providing managed opportunities for recreational use and enjoyment. There are three sanctuary zones, two special purpose zones and a large general use zone in the park. The location and coordinates of each zone are displayed on the map in this visitor guide, along with the activities permitted in each zone type.

Sanctuary zones are 'look but don't take' areas and provide the highest level of protection for marine habitat and wildlife. Sanctuary zones are managed for nature conservation and allow non-extractive activities such as boating, swimming, scuba diving, snorkelling and nature appreciation. Fishing is not permitted in sanctuary zones.

Special purpose zones are areas where a priority purpose has been designated. In Shoalwater Islands Marine Park the special purpose zones provide a high level of protection for wildlife conservation in Shoalwater Bay encompassing the island nature reserves, and for scientific reference over the Murray Reef south of The Sisters rock formation. Only activities that are compatible with the purpose of the zones are permitted.

The general use zone of the marine park is the largest zone and enables a wide range of commercial and recreational activities to occur such as boating, swimming, scuba diving, snorkelling, fishing and aquaculture.



## Zone markers

Sanctuary zones are marked by yellow buoys that extend over 1m above sea level. The markers can be used as an aid to line up the zone boundary. They are not designed to be used as moorings and it is an offence to do so.



## Caring for the marine park

- To protect important roosting and nesting areas for seabirds, you may not land your boat on nature reserves, which include the islands and rock outcrops.
- Penguin Island Conservation Park is open for day visits from mid-October to early June. Please keep to pathways, boardwalks or sandy beaches to protect bird nests and penguin burrows and avoid disturbing young birds not yet ready to fly.
- Always take litter home with you—remember that plastics and fishing line can harm and potentially kill marine wildlife.
- Go slow for those below. Keep an eye out for Australian sea lions, little penguins and bottlenose dolphins, which spend much of their time in the top 2m of water but are often difficult to see.
- Please do not feed wildlife. Feeding changes their behaviour from hunters to beggars and increases their vulnerability to boat strikes, disease and entanglements in fishing gear. Help keep our marine wildlife healthy, safe and wild.
- Sea lions are wild and unpredictable. Swimming with sea lions can be dangerous and they have been known to bite. There is also a potential risk of airborne disease transfer such as Tuberculosis. Seals are protected in WA. Keep a regulated minimum distance of 50 metres in the water, and 100 metres in a vessel or watercraft. Don't approach seals on land while they are resting; it's recommended you keep at least 30 metres from them and a regulated minimum distance of 10 metres. Licensed tour operators may approach closer under licence conditions. For more information visit [dbca.wa.gov.au/sealwise](https://dbca.wa.gov.au/sealwise)

- Quickly and carefully return undersize and unwanted fish to the water. Use wet hands or a wet cloth when handling fish and avoid placing them on hot dry surfaces.
- Anchor in sand to protect fragile reef, algae and seagrass communities as these are important nursery habitats and can take years to recover if damaged.
- Keep off reefs where possible—reef walking can physically damage intertidal reef communities.
- Please admire the caves that fringe the beach from a distance as they are rock fall risk areas.



If you find a stranded, sick or injured dolphin, little penguin, whale, turtle, seabird or sea lion, or you are unsure if a seal needs assistance, please call the Wildcare Helpline on (08) 9474 9055.

*Photos – Michael Clitheroe, Ian Beattie, Rockingham Wild Encounters, Tourism WA, Barb Green and John Huisman/DBCA*

*Image of boat strike taken under United States National Marine Fisheries Service Scientific Research Permit No. 15543.*

*Photo – Chicago Zoological Society's Sarasota Dolphin Research Program*



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[emergencyplus.com.au](https://www.emergencyplus.com.au)

Download the free Emergency+ app before your visit. Use the app in an emergency to call for assistance. If there is no mobile phone coverage you **WILL NOT** be able to call **000** but the app will provide you with your GPS location.

## More information

### Parks and Wildlife Service

Swan Coastal District Office

5 Dundobar Road

Wanneroo WA 6065

Ph: (08) 9303 7700

[dbca.wa.gov.au](http://dbca.wa.gov.au)

### Bureau of Meteorology

Boating weather

Ph: 1300 815 916

[bom.gov.au/wa](http://bom.gov.au/wa)

### Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Fisheries Division

FishWatch 24hrs Hotline

Ph: 1800 815 507

[fish.wa.gov.au](http://fish.wa.gov.au)

### Department of Transport

Marine Safety Hotline:

Ph: 13 11 56

[transport.wa.gov.au/imarine](http://transport.wa.gov.au/imarine)

### Marine Rescue Rockingham

*Log on and log off*

VHF Ch 72 or

Ph: (08) 9527 9988

*Monitoring Radio Frequencies:*

VHF Ch 16, 72 and 81

[marinerescuerockingham.com.au](http://marinerescuerockingham.com.au)

Check for alerts and updates directly related to parks and major trails at [alerts.dbca.wa.gov.au](http://alerts.dbca.wa.gov.au) and for all emergency information in Western Australia at [emergency.wa.gov.au](http://emergency.wa.gov.au)

Find more park visitor information, book campsites and share your experiences at [exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au](http://exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au)

@waparkswildlife



@exploreparkswa



Information current at November 2023.  
Publication available in alternative format on request.



# Shoalwater Islands Marine Park

## INDIAN OCEAN

**Sea lions - take care**  
 Australian sea lions are rare and protected. They can be found on and around Seal Island for most of the year and they fish and swim in nearby waters. Sea lions are attractive and interesting creatures but can deliver a nasty bite if aggravated. For your safety and the protection of this species, you are required to keep at least 50m away from sea lions in the water and 10m away on land. If a sea lion approaches you in the water, move away or remove yourself from the water until the sea lion has swum away. For more information visit [www.dbca.wa.gov.au/sealwise](http://www.dbca.wa.gov.au/sealwise)

**Help protect our wildlife - no feeding**  
 Do not feed dolphins, sea lions, birds or any other wildlife - this helps to protect their health and wellbeing. Although you may feel you are doing them no harm, feeding changes their behaviour from hunters to beggars and increases their vulnerability to disease, boat strikes and entanglement in fishing line. Please report sick or injured wildlife by phoning the Wildcare Helpline on (08) 9474 9055.

**Island access within Shoalwater Islands Marine Park**  
 Islands and rock outcrops within the marine park provide important habitats for seabirds and other wildlife. All rock outcrops and islands within the marine park (except Penguin Island) are nature reserves and access is prohibited. Penguin Island is a conservation park and is open for day visitors only mid-October to early June.

**Speed restrictions**  
 An 8 knot speed limit applies to all vessels in the Seal Island Sanctuary Zone and the Shoalwater Bay Special Purpose Zone (wildlife conservation). In addition there is an 8 knot speed limit within 200m of the shore. For further boating information and to obtain the Rockingham Boating Guide visit [www.transport.wa.gov.au/imarine](http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/imarine)



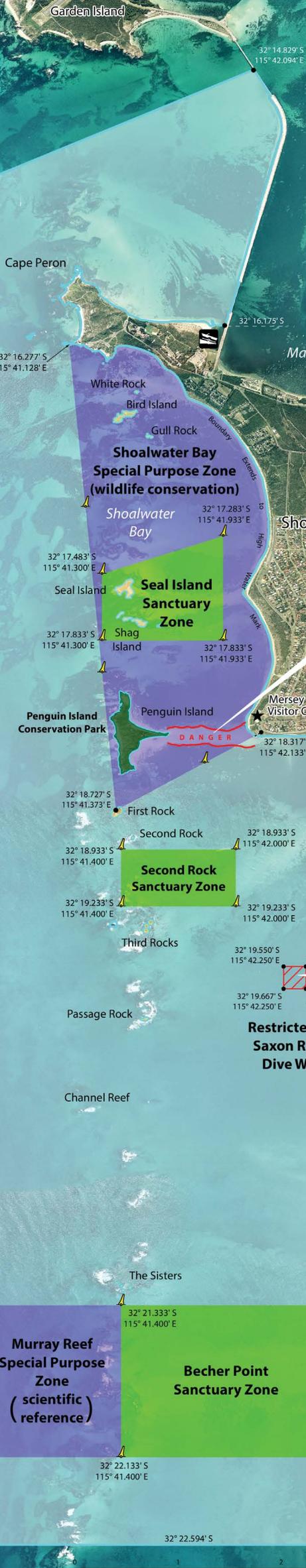
### Shoalwater Islands Marine Park

- Marine Park boundary
- Sanctuary Zone
- Special Purpose Zone
- General Use Zone
- Boat ramp
- Nature Reserve
- Conservation Park

Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions  
 Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development



Produced by Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Parks and Wildlife Service (DBCA) on 03 November 2023



ACTIVITIES	SHOALWATER ISLANDS MARINE PARK			GENERAL USE ZONE
	SANCTUARY ZONE	wildlife conservation	scientific reference	
Line fishing <sup>2</sup>	X	✓	X	✓
Crabbing <sup>2</sup>	X	✓	X	✓
Rock lobster fishing <sup>3</sup>	X	✓	✓	✓
Abalone fishing <sup>3</sup>	X	✓	X	✓
Octopus potting <sup>2</sup>	X	✓	X	✓
Haul and throw netting <sup>4</sup>	X	X	X	✓ <sup>4</sup>
Set netting <sup>4</sup>	X	X	X	X
Spearfishing - breath-hold only (No SCUBA or hookah) <sup>5</sup>	X	X	X	✓
Coral, shell and specimen collecting (alive and dead)	X	X	X	X
Aquarium fish collecting	X	X	X	X
Diving, snorkelling, swimming	✓	✓	✓	✓
Water skiing	X	X	X	✓ <sup>6</sup>
Jet skiing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Windsurfing, kite surfing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Boating, yachting and non-motorised water sports	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wildlife interaction <sup>8</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓

1. This table is for recreational activities only. For information on permissible commercial activities contact the relevant numbers below.  
 2. Fisheries licence is required for fishing from boats and seasonal closures apply for some species. For further details contact Fisheries Division.  
 3. Fisheries licence is required and seasonal closures apply. For further details contact Fisheries Division.  
 4. Fisheries licence is required for the use of all nets. Netting is only permitted in certain areas. For further details contact the Fisheries Division.  
 5. No spearfishing using SCUBA or hookah allowed in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park.  
 6. Water skiing permitted only within the gazetted water ski area. See the Department of Transport Rockingham Boating Guide for further details.  
 7. An 8 knot speed limit applies to motorised vessels. See Department of Transport Rockingham Boating Guide for further details.  
 8. Subject to the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 and Wildlife Conservation Act 1950.

**Contacts:**  
 Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) - Parks and Wildlife Service  
[www.dbca.wa.gov.au](http://www.dbca.wa.gov.au)  
 (Swan Coastal District) - (08) 9303 7700  
 Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development - (Fisheries)  
[www.fish.wa.gov.au](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au)  
 FishWatch 24hr Hotline - 1800 815 507  
 Department of Transport (DoT)  
[www.transport.wa.gov.au/imarine](http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/imarine)  
 Marine Safety Hotline - 13 11 56

**PENGUIN ISLAND ACCESS RISK**  
 Do not walk across the sandbar to or from Penguin Island. The sandbar is dangerous and people have drowned attempting this crossing. Strong rips and currents can occur, and water depths and conditions can change rapidly.  
**For your safety:** Access to Penguin Island is permitted during daylight hours only. Access is only acceptable by boat or ferry. Ferry leaves Mersey Point hourly mid-October to early June. **Infringements may be issued for ignoring sandbar closures.**

**Tern Island Nature Reserve - seasonal closures**  
 Tern Island Nature Reserve provides an important habitat for many local and migratory birds. The nature reserve is subject to seasonal closures during summer and spring to ensure nesting birds remain undisturbed. **Dogs are prohibited on the nature reserve. Kite rigging is prohibited on the nature reserve.**

**Saxon Ranger Dive Wreck Restricted Area**  
 A recreational dive permit is required to dive here and must be displayed on your vessel. Permits are available for purchase from the Rockingham Visitor Centre and are contactable on (08) 9592 3464.  
 • Vessel speed is restricted to 8 knots.  
 • Vessels must not be operated in a way that causes them to pass over the wreck.  
 • No anchoring or fishing by any means.

**Whitebait Protection Area - Motorised Vessels Prohibited**  
 This area has been recognised as an important whitebait spawning site and a significant little penguin feeding area. Whitebait is the main diet for the little penguin and other seabirds, and for fish such as tailor that forage in these waters and surrounding bays. After spawning, whitebait eggs are suspended in the first metre of the water surface where they are highly susceptible to pollutants and disturbance from motorised vessels. Motorised vessels are prohibited from entering the whitebait protection area. For further boating information and to obtain the Rockingham Boating Guide visit [www.transport.wa.gov.au/imarine](http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/imarine)