

# Montebello Islands Marine Park



Marine parks...  
WA's submerged  
wonders

Visitor guide



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

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## Management zones

Zoning is an important part of the management framework in multiple use marine conservation reserves. In some areas, fishing activities are partially or totally restricted. These zones provide reference areas that help us to measure the impact of human activity on the environment as well as protect habitats and the wildlife in them for future generations. Activities such as diving, boating and wildlife appreciation are permitted in these areas.

Fishers must 'know their zones' and check with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development for the latest size, bag and possession limits that apply for various species.

### Sanctuary zones

Sanctuary zones, which make up about 49 per cent of the Montebello Islands Marine Park, are 'look but don't take' areas managed for nature conservation and low-impact recreation and tourism such as diving and snorkelling. If large enough, they can act as nurseries and help replenish stocks in exploited areas. Extractive activities, such as recreational or commercial fishing, are not permitted in these zones.

### Recreation zone

The priority use within this zone is recreation, including most types of recreational fishing and non-extractive tourism. Charter fishing is not permitted in recreation zones within the Montebello Islands Marine Park.

### General use zone

General use zones are managed for nature conservation while allowing for sustainable commercial and recreational activities. Commercial and recreational fishing activities are permitted in general use zones, which cover significant areas of the Montebello Islands Marine Park.



### Special purpose zones (benthic protection)

This zone is managed for the protection of plants and animals that live on the ocean floor. Most forms of commercial and recreational fishing are not permitted in this zone, with the exception of recreational and commercial 'troll' fishing only. This area is in the vicinity of important turtle aggregation areas and whale migration paths. Please take care when fishing or travelling through this zone.

### Special purpose zones (pearling)

The special purpose zones (pearling) protect subtidal silt and sand habitats which support rich and diverse fauna. Pearl culture is a priority use in these zones. Most recreational and some commercial activities are permitted, providing they are compatible with the conservation purpose of these zones. When undertaking recreational activities in special purpose zones (pearling), please keep well clear of pearl floats and lines.



## Caring for the marine environment

- Know marine park zone boundaries and permitted activities.
- Fish for the future. Observe size, bag and possession limits.
- Quickly return undersized and unwanted fish to the water. Use wet hands or a wet cloth when handling fish and avoid placing on hot, dry surfaces.
- Always take your rubbish home with you – remember that plastics and fishing line can harm marine wildlife.
- Anchor in sand to protect fragile reef, sponge, seagrass and seaweed communities.
- Take care not to disturb important seabird colonies on the islands. Many species lay eggs on the ground or in burrows close to the beach and these nests may be difficult to see. Be aware of this behaviour and avoid nesting areas.
- Stay at least 100m from whales. Approach whales parallel to their direction of travel or move more than 300m ahead, stop, and allow them to come to you.
- Slow down to less than eight knots in shallow waters or if you see turtles or dugongs nearby to avoid hitting them.
- If you observe whales, dugongs or aggregations of turtles please report the locations (provide a GPS position if possible) to the DBCA's Parks and Wildlife Service Karratha Office.
- Do not collect shells. Some shells provide important habitat for animals such as hermit crabs and blue-ringed octopuses.

The Montebello Islands achieved international notoriety when three British atomic weapons tests were carried out there in 1952 and 1956. The weapons were exploded on Alpha and Trimouille Islands and on the war-surplus frigate *HMS Plym*, which was anchored on the west side of Trimouille Island. Remains of the military activities such as concrete bunkers, monitoring stations, roads and scrap metal can still be found on some islands, and the former military operational headquarters can be seen on the southern end of Hermite Island. Slightly elevated radiation levels still occur close to the test sites. As radiation effects on health are cumulative over your lifetime, be sure to limit visits to the affected areas (marked on the map) to one hour per day. Do not disturb the soil in these areas and do not handle or remove any relics associated with the tests as they may still be radioactive.

## Plants and animals

The complex system of reefs, lagoons and channels and the convoluted island coastlines provide an exceptionally diverse range of habitats for marine plants and animals. The area supports at least 150 species of hard coral, more than 450 species of fish, more than 630 species of molluscs and 170 known species of sea stars, urchins and other echinoderms. Further studies are likely to reveal new species.

Six species of mangroves occur in the Montebello Islands Marine Park, usually in narrow strips fringing bays. The mangroves are scientifically very important, as it is unusual to find mangroves growing within lagoons on oceanic islands. These spectacular coastal forests provide valuable nursery areas for juvenile fish and crustaceans and are stopover areas for rare and protected migratory wading birds.

Dugongs forage among the seagrass and seaweed beds and at least 10 species of whales and dolphins frequent the area.

Three of the six species of marine turtles that occur in WA are regularly seen in the marine park. Green, hawksbill and flatback turtles nest on the sandy beaches. WA's hawksbill turtle population is one of the largest such populations remaining in the world while flatback turtles only nest in Australian waters.



## Enjoying the marine park

The wide variety of wildlife, the natural land and seascapes and rich maritime heritage of the Montebello Islands Marine Park have great appeal to nature-based tourists. Although the islands have no visitor facilities, fishing and diving charters from Dampier, Onslow and Exmouth are becoming increasingly popular during the winter months.

The earliest known European shipwreck in Australia occurred when the English East India Company vessel *Trial* was wrecked on what are now known as the Trial Rocks north of the marine park in 1622. The 46 survivors from the wreck were the first Europeans known to have landed on the islands. Other wrecks associated with the pearling industry are known to have occurred in the marine park. Nothing should be removed from historic shipwrecks as they are protected by law.

The natural resources of the island group have been exploited since whalers arrived during the late 1800s. Commercial turtle hunting occurred from the 1870s until 1973. Cultured pearl farming commenced at the Montebello Islands in the early 1900s with an experimental shell pool on Hermite Island.





The Montebello Islands, about 20km north of Barrow Island and 120km west of Dampier, lie within one of the most beautiful and important marine areas anywhere along the Western Australian coast.

The Montebello Islands Marine Park protects more than 58,000 hectares of ocean surrounding more than 250 low-lying islands and islets surrounded by coral reefs and colourful tropical fish. The islands, which comprise the Montebello Islands Conservation Park, are very irregular, with convoluted coastlines, lagoons, channels, intertidal embayments, barrier and fringing coral reefs and shallow limestone platforms. The marine park is part of a larger marine reserve system, which extends southwards and comprises the Barrow Island Marine Management Area and the Barrow Island Marine Park. These marine reserves include most of the waters around Barrow Island and the Lowendal Islands.

## Planning your visit

The Montebello Islands Marine Park is offshore and relatively remote. Navigation to the islands should only be attempted in favourable weather conditions and in suitably sized and equipped vessels. Cyclones can form off the coast at any time but mainly between November to April, and visitors are urged to be vigilant for cyclone warnings.

You must take adequate fuel, water, food and first aid supplies as no services or facilities are available. Visitors may only camp on Primrose, Bluebell, Crocus, Hermite and Renewal Islands throughout the year, and on Northwest Island from April to September (due to turtle nesting/hatching season from October–March). Camping should be restricted to 100m inland of the high-water mark, and for no longer than five consecutive nights. Select a site that has been used before, and take a portable fuel stove (not heat beads) as open fires are not permitted.

Like other island conservation reserves, the Montebello Islands provide an important refuge for native animals that are threatened or no longer found on mainland Australia. After considerable effort, the Parks and Wildlife Service successfully eradicated feral cats and rats from the Montebello Islands in 2001. It is critical that non-native animals and plants, even small insects and seeds, are not carried to the islands. Ensure that the following quarantine procedures are followed:

- Ensure your boat is clean and baited with rodent bait and that all semi-enclosed spaces are sprayed with a residual insecticide.
- Check your clothing and footwear are not carrying soil or seeds.
- Check your containers and food to ensure they are clean and free of pests and insects.
- Don't take pets.
- Take all rubbish with you on departure and dispose of it on the mainland.

Stinging jellyfish can occur in the Montebello Islands area. While the risk of being stung is low, especially if stinger suits are worn, ensure you have plenty of vinegar (to douse stings) and that you are aware of general first aid procedures.



## Where you can fish

For complete lists of permitted activities see the matrix on the map overleaf.

For bag, size and possession limits see the Recreational Fishing Guide available from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

### Line fishing

Is permitted in general use, recreation and special purpose (pearling) zones. Trolling only is permitted in special purpose (benthic protection) zones.

### Rock lobster, recreational crabbing and spearfishing

These activities are permitted in general use, recreation and special purpose (pearling) zones.

### Netting

Recreational throw netting may be undertaken in general use, recreation and special purpose (pearling) zones (recreational netting licence required).



## Protecting WA's marine environment

Western Australia's marine areas are globally significant. The State's coastal waters are considered to be among the least disturbed in the world.

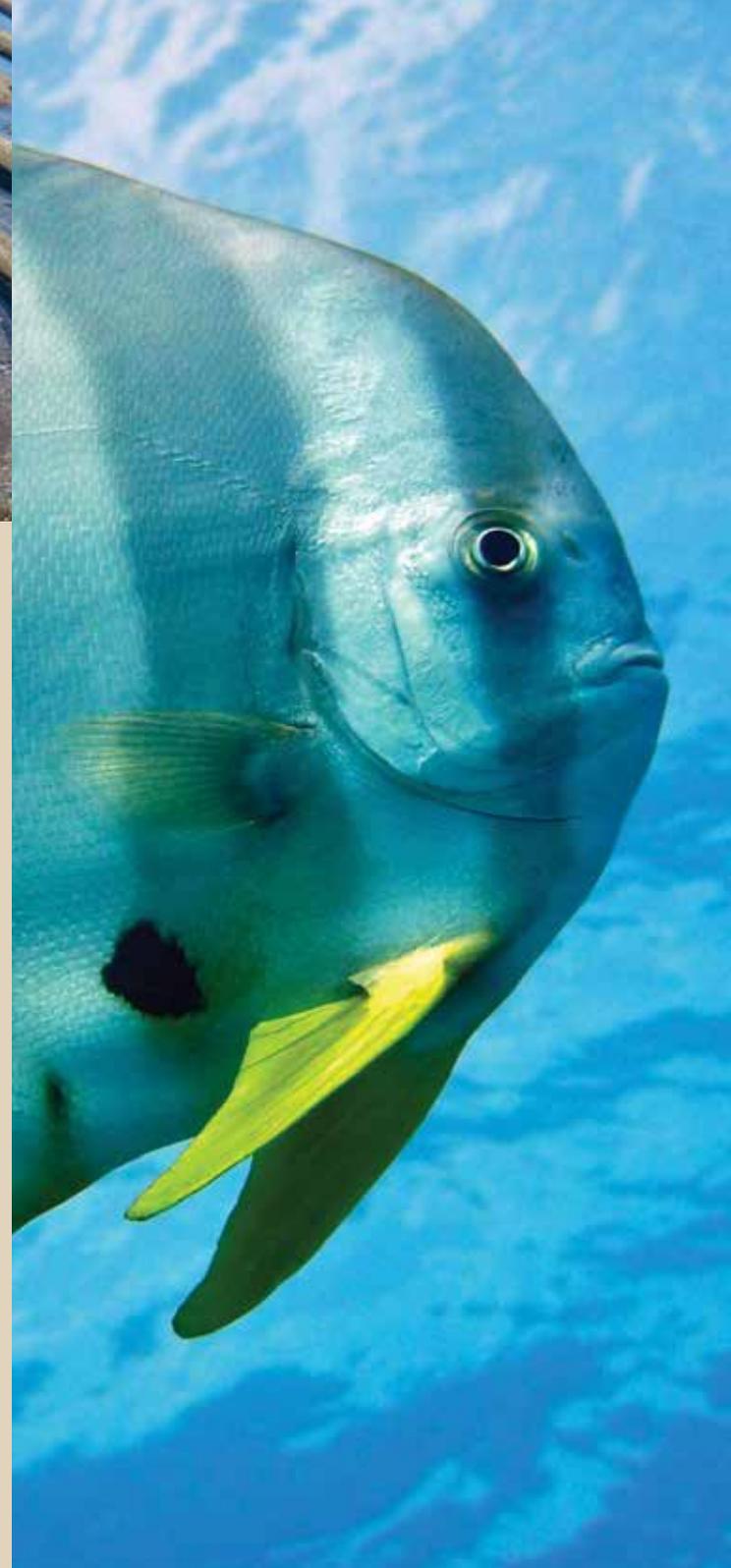
The Western Australian coast boasts a big area of biogeographic overlap, between the tropical north (north of Ningaloo Marine Park) and the temperate south (east of Cape Leeuwin), where tropical and temperate species co-exist. The Indian Ocean is also the only ocean in the world that has an eastern boundary current (the Leeuwin Current) that transports warm waters from the equator to the southern coast of a continent.

Our coastal waters are valued by Western Australians. The wide range of environmental, cultural, commercial and recreational values they offer generate employment and revenue and provide people with a source of pleasure and recreation.

Approximately 39 per cent of State waters are currently in marine parks and reserves, and about 7.3 per cent of State waters are in sanctuary ('no take') zones.

The conservation and sustainable use of Western Australia's marine environment is everyone's responsibility. By working together to reduce human impacts on the marine environment we can pass it on to future generations in a similar condition to what it is in today.

We need marine parks for the same reasons we have national parks on the land. Together, they protect our precious plants and animals, above and below the waterline.



### More information

#### Parks and Wildlife Service Pilbara Regional Office

Lot 3 Anderson Road  
Karratha Industrial Estate  
Karratha WA 6714  
(08) 9182 2000  
[karratha.admin@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:karratha.admin@dbca.wa.gov.au)  
[dbca.wa.gov.au](http://dbca.wa.gov.au)

#### Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development District Office

Unit 1/17-19 Crane Circle  
Karratha WA 6714  
(08) 9144 4337  
[fish.wa.gov.au](http://fish.wa.gov.au)

#### Karratha Visitor Centre

Lot 4548 De Witt Road  
Karratha WA 6714  
(08) 9144 4600  
[karrathavisitorcentre.com.au](http://karrathavisitorcentre.com.au)

#### Bureau of Meteorology

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

#### Sea Rescue

Marine Rescue Dampier  
17 The Esplanade  
Dampier WA 6713  
0437 978 774  
[marinerescuedampier.com](http://marinerescuedampier.com)

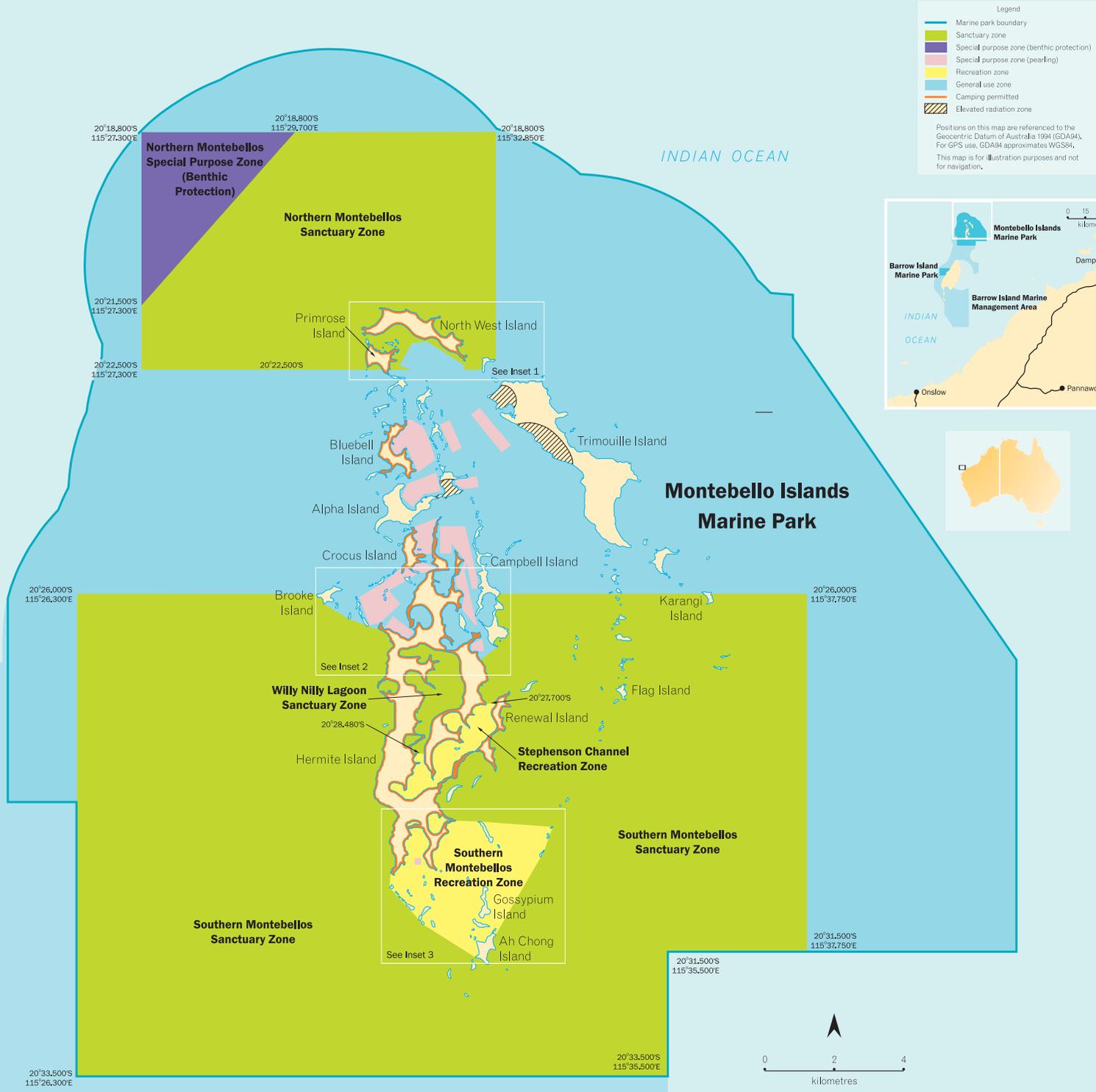


Department of **Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions**  
Department of **Primary Industries and Regional Development**

Photos - DBCA

Information current at July 2017.

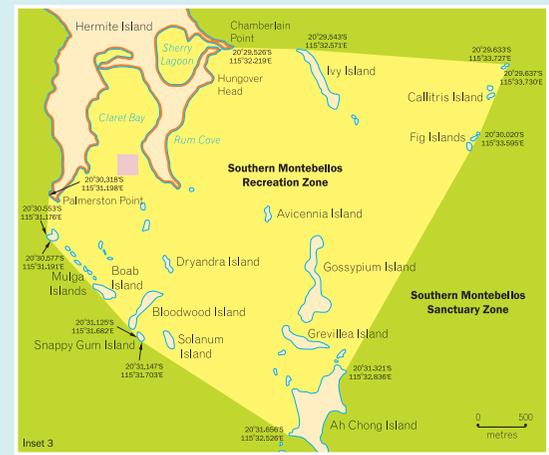
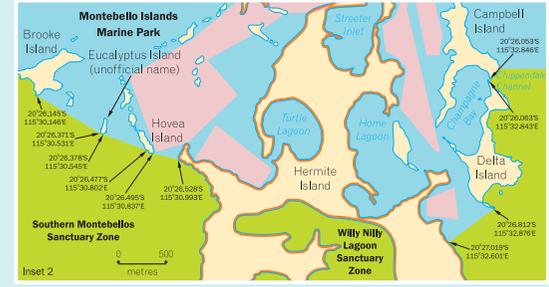
This document is available in alternative formats on request.



| Activity                            | Zone      |                                      |                             |                             |                |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
|                                     | Sanctuary | Special purpose (benthic protection) | Special purpose (pearling)  | Recreation                  | General use    |
| Fishing from guided charter vessels | ✗         | Trolling only                        | ✓                           | ✗ <sup>1</sup>              | ✓              |
| Line fishing (other than trolling)  | ✗         | ✗                                    | ✓                           | ✓                           | ✓              |
| Trolling                            | ✗         | ✓                                    | ✓                           | ✓                           | ✓              |
| Crabbing                            | ✗         | ✗                                    | ✓                           | ✓                           | ✓              |
| Rock lobster fishing                | ✗         | ✗                                    | ✓                           | ✓                           | ✓              |
| Netting                             | ✗         | ✗                                    | Throw net only <sup>2</sup> | Throw net only <sup>2</sup> | ✓ <sup>2</sup> |
| Spearfishing                        | ✗         | ✗                                    | ✓                           | ✓                           | ✓              |
| Specimen shell collecting           | ✗         | ✗                                    | ✗                           | ✗                           | ✓              |
| Snorkelling and diving              | ✓         | ✓                                    | ✓                           | ✓                           | ✓              |
| Surface water sports                | ✓         | ✓                                    | ✓                           | ✓                           | ✓              |
| Boating                             | ✓         | ✓                                    | ✓                           | ✓                           | ✓              |

Please contact the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (mineral and petroleum exploration or production) or the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (commercial fishing) for information on other permissible commercial activities.

1. Charter vessel fishing is not permitted in the two recreation zones, however, unguided recreational fishing by customers of charter vessels is permitted in recreation zones.  
2. A recreational netting licence is required from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to use a throw net.



**Barrow Island Marine Management Area**