

How do marine parks work?



Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions



**PARKS AND
WILDLIFE
SERVICE**

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Front cover Snorkelling in a Ningaloo Marine Park sanctuary zone.

Photo – Blue Media Exmouth

Above Australian sea lions. *Photo – DBCA*

The State's marine environments are unique and irreplaceable. Like national parks on land, they warrant protection, so everyone can continue to appreciate and enjoy healthy marine ecosystems into the future.

In Western Australia, marine parks and reserves are managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and are spread along the coast from the south to the north, encompassing a wide range of marine environments. They are multiple-use areas that support sustainable activities like fishing, recreation and tourism.

Do marine parks work? Is there good science?

Yes, marine parks are globally recognised as the best tool for the conservation of a broad range of marine life and are backed by rigorous, evidence-based science⁷.

Having areas set aside to allow marine environments to exist in a relatively undisturbed state makes our oceans more resilient and acts as an 'insurance policy'².

What is a sanctuary zone and what benefits do they provide?

A sanctuary zone is an area within a marine park where all forms of fishing and collecting are prohibited. Visitors can enjoy low impact activities like snorkelling, diving and wildlife viewing.

Sanctuary zones help us to understand the impacts of human activities on marine environments by providing protected areas that scientists can compare to fished areas⁸.

Australia's sanctuary zones significantly increase the number and size of fish within their boundaries when well designed⁶.

By protecting large, older fish that produce more eggs, sanctuary zones can also benefit fisheries through spillover into fished areas^{3,11}.



Above Coral and sponge garden, proposed Exmouth Gulf Marine Park.
Photo – Oceanwise

What is a well-designed sanctuary zone?

A large area fully protected from destructive and extractive activities, extending from shore to deeper waters and connected to a network of other sanctuaries⁶.

Aren't fisheries already sustainable?

Western Australia's fisheries are managed by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) for sustainability. Marine parks add extra protection by safeguarding habitats and biodiversity, and maintain a natural balance in the ecosystem. This combined approach is the most effective¹.

Can you fish in a marine park?

Yes! Most marine parks have large areas open to fishing, alongside sanctuary zones where extractive activities such as fishing aren't allowed. Check the Explore Parks WA website or pick up a marine park brochure to see where the zones are in each park.

Is there community support for marine parks?

The community strongly supports marine parks and sanctuary zones in Western Australia and are in favour of larger sanctuary zones for enhanced protection¹².

Recreational fishers are also largely supportive, and support tends to increase over time as people experience the benefits of marine parks^{9,10}.

Do marine parks help the economy?

Yes, they support local economies by maintaining fishing opportunities, expanding eco-cultural tourism and creating jobs⁴. For example, the Ningaloo Marine Park contributes \$100M annually⁵.

General Use Zone

open to fishing

Sanctuary Zone

highly protected



Fish are larger (by 53% on average) and produce more eggs

Studies showed Australian sanctuary zones have on average 28% more fish

Benefits of sanctuary zones can spill over into areas open to fishing, due to dispersal of fish and eggs

Scientists compare fished areas to sanctuary zones to monitor human impacts

Excellent areas for diving, snorkelling and marine tourism

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Scan to learn more about WA's marine parks.



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Information current at June 2026.

Publication available in alternative format on request.