

THE MANY BENEFITS FROM PROTECTING WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S BIG BLUE BACKYARD

Western Australia's marine life from Kalbarri to Eucla is astonishing in its breadth and distinctiveness and is unique on a global scale. But it remains unprotected.

The delivery of a network of large no-take marine reserves offers the best hope for maintaining healthy populations of the region's marine species by protecting their feeding, breeding, nursery and resting areas. This is an effective way to allow overfished species such as the 'Vulnerable 5' to rebuild, and to support the recovery of blue whales, leatherback turtles and other threatened species.

The movement of water, nutrients and marine life creates strong connections between estuaries, inshore and offshore waters and from the sea floor to the surface. Large no-take marine reserves can help maintain these connections, as well as the vital role of the region's biggest connector of all, the Leeuwin Current.

Monitoring in many no-take areas around the world has shown that fish abundance and size are higher in no-take reserves than in areas that continue to be fished. The eggs, larvae, juveniles and adults of many species that flow across the boundaries of the reserves will be dispersed through the region by the Leeuwin and other currents. This effect, and the protection of nursery and spawning areas, will improve the security of fish stocks for commercial and recreational fishers alike.

Large no-take marine reserves protecting unique local marine life can strengthen the regional tourism brand. They can also broaden the economic profile of a region and help protect local economies from contractions of tourism markets during financial crises or from declines in traditional marine-based industries such as commercial fishing.

Large no-take marine reserves are not 'no-go' areas. Non-extractive uses such as diving, scientific research, tourism and education will continue, benefiting from improved marine health. Shipping and sailing will go on as before. Jobs in Western Australia will keep growing in the marine-based industries of the future, including whale watching and the dive and ecotourism sectors, and in turn support coastal economies.

By establishing a network of large no-take marine reserves in the Kalbarri to Eucla region, the Australian Government will again put our nation at the forefront of international efforts to protect the world's oceans. Such a network will also lay the foundation necessary to maintain the health of the region's precious marine life, and preserve the culture, heritage, traditions, economies and lifestyle of Western Australians and their big blue backyard.

Western Australia has always been larger than life, politically, economically, socially and environmentally. Its marine environment is no different. Big values need big protection.

SAVE OUR MARINE LIFE
WWW.SAVEOURMARINELIFE.ORG.AU

The *Save our Marine Life* Collaboration comprises global, national and state-based environment organisations: the Conservation Council of Western Australia, the Australian Conservation Foundation, The Wilderness Society, WWF-Australia, the Australian Marine Conservation Society, The Nature Conservancy and the Pew Environment Group. The Collaboration brings community, science and good public policy together to assist the Australian Government in establishing a network of large no-take marine reserves in Australia's marine environment.

Find out more about the *Save our Marine Life* Collaboration and its case for protecting Western Australia's big blue backyard at www.saveourmarinelife.org.au

Protecting Western Australia's big blue backyard has been prepared for the *Save our Marine Life* Collaboration by the Australian Conservation Foundation.

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Protecting Western Australia's big blue backyard

UNIQUE AND UNPROTECTED

It is globally unique, of critical importance to Australia and vital to the lifestyle of Western Australians, but the marine environment from Kalbarri to Eucla to date has received little protection—less than one per cent of Western Australia's big blue backyard is protected.

Protecting Western Australia's big blue backyard is the first report of the recently formed *Save our Marine Life* Collaboration of global, national, and state-based environment organisations. The report advocates the establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) network of large no-take marine reserves in the Kalbarri to Eucla region, arguing that this action is required if the Australian Government is to maintain its international reputation in marine protection and protect Australia's unique marine life.

Protecting Western Australia's big blue backyard contains beautiful photographs of the Kalbarri to Eucla region's marine life—often found nowhere else on Earth. The report also documents the region's global significance, the threats to its superlative values and a compelling case for marine protection. It does this while following the route of the unique Leeuwin Current, the world's longest continuous coastal current, and undoubtedly the reason why this region is so special. As it flows through the south-west waters of Western Australia, it profoundly influences climate, marine life and people.

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WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S BIG BLUE BACKYARD?

The Kalbarri to Eucla region's unique and threatened species, underwater features and ecosystems include:

- globally high levels of unique marine species (70–90 per cent found nowhere else on Earth)
- a series of marine life hotspots including the Houtman-Abrolhos Islands, the Perth Canyon, the Naturaliste Plateau, the Diamantina Fracture Zone and the Recherche Archipelago
- critical habitat for a range of significant species including the world's largest animal, the endangered blue whale
- threatened and endangered species such as one of the world's largest sharks, the white shark, and the world's largest marine turtle, the leatherback turtle
- the southernmost major tropical coral reefs in the Indian Ocean
- an unusual collection of fish life and habitats as a result of low nutrients, clear water due to limited river runoff, and waters warmer than are normally found so far south
- geologically and ecologically significant subsea features including the deepest point in Australia's oceans, our highest underwater mountain range and largest marine canyon, and an island under the sea—a large submerged fragment of the continental shelf.

As well as its special natural values, the region's marine environment underpins Western Australia's social, cultural and economic development. Commercial fisheries annually harvest around 25,000 tonnes of seafood, including the catch of western rock lobsters, Australia's most lucrative fishery. The region also has a significant share of the state's \$3 billion tourism industry and the \$45 million whale-watching industry, while the Port of Fremantle handles \$15 billion of trade.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S THREATENED MARINE LIFESTYLE

In a state that has a population increasing by nearly 1000 people each week, growing faster than any other in Australia, the marine lifestyle in Western Australia will continue to focus on the Kalbarri to Eucla region. But this lifestyle is now under threat.

The region's marine environment faces considerable threats and lacks any marine protected areas, and the social and economic benefits it provides are increasingly at risk. This has not gone unnoticed by the Western Australian community, which has begun to recognise the signs that all is not well in its big blue backyard.

Western Australians are aware of the commercial and recreational overfishing of the big reef fish species known as the 'Vulnerable 5'—West Australian dhufish, baldchin groper, breaksea cod, pink snapper and red snapper. They have also observed the decline of water quality, marine life and habitats, the loss of seagrass nursery areas for fish as well as increasing algal blooms and fish kills. Rising global temperatures due to climate change could also alter the influence of ocean currents like the Leeuwin Current. This would have major implications for marine life as well as Western Australia's fisheries.

The continuing good health of the marine waters from Kalbarri to Eucla is integral to the lives of Western Australians. In a recent poll, 73 per cent said that marine protection was very important to them. According to 75 per cent of the respondents, there was not enough marine protection, and nearly 50 per cent called for protection to cover almost one third of the marine environment.

MAINTAINING AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION IN MARINE PROTECTION

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Australia has the right to use its Exclusive Economic Zone (extending out to 200 nautical miles) for social and economic benefits. This right entails a formal responsibility for the huge area of the world's marine environment entrusted to our care.

Australia is seen as a leader in protection of the marine environment and highly values its reputation. However, this should not be taken for granted. A recent analysis by WWF-Australia revealed that the marine environment in the South-east Marine Region was not adequately protected by the Commonwealth network of marine reserves established there in late 2007.

Australia's challenge is to implement the recommendation of international experts (World Parks Congress 2003) that all nations establish networks of no-take areas covering at least 20–30 per cent of each marine habitat by 2012. As little as four per cent of Australia's marine environment is afforded no-take protection. A network of large no-take marine reserves in the unique waters of the Kalbarri to Eucla region would help ensure Australia maintains its international reputation in marine protection.

Creating effective and credible marine protected areas is a big task. The marine environment is immense, complex and interconnected. To be comprehensive, adequate and representative, marine reserves must reflect the size of marine ecosystems and processes as well as the geographical ranges of species they seek to protect.

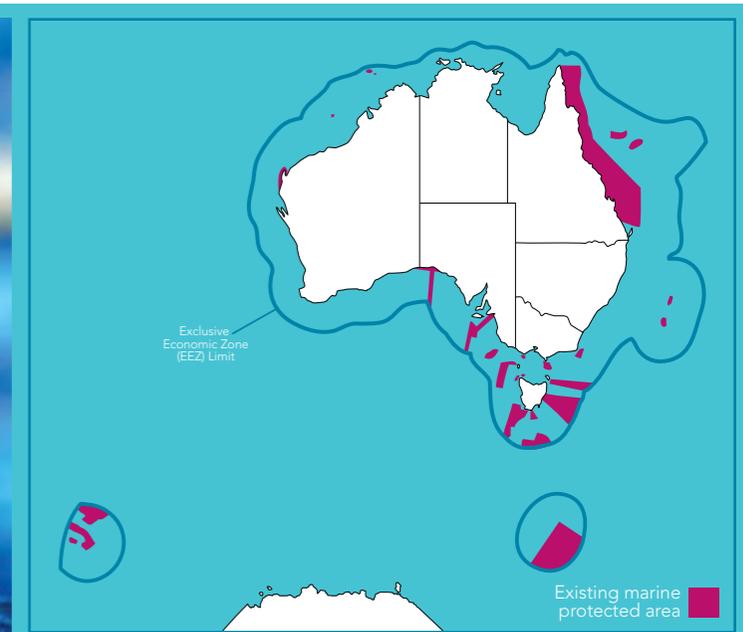
This was recognised by the US Government which established two of the world's three largest no-take marine protected areas in 2006 and 2009. A total of 865,000 square kilometres is now protected by these national monuments in US waters.

Looking after a marine environment as large as Western Australia's big blue backyard is an enormous responsibility, but Australia is well-placed to do so. We have a stable government system, a history of international leadership in marine protection, the necessary scientific expertise and a community that is seeking action.

The first step is to lay the cornerstone of marine protection: large no-take marine reserves. In time, the next step will be to ensure that all industries using Australian waters are truly sustainable, operating within the constraints of the marine ecosystems that support them.



Populations of New Zealand fur seals are slowly recovering after being all but wiped out in the region by 19th century sealing
© Gary Bell / Oceanwidelmages.com



Nine per cent of Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone is under some form of marine protection, but less than half of that is free of extractive activities. Off Western Australia, in contrast to the east coast, much less than one per cent of the marine environment is covered by protected areas. The World Parks Congress urged all nations to establish networks of no-take areas to protect at least 20-30 per cent of each marine habitat.