

8. NINGALOO MARINE PARK

8.1 Description¹⁸

Location, size

Ningaloo Marine Park is located on the western side of the Cape Range Peninsula, 1200 km north of Perth in Western Australia. The Marine Park covers a total of 4300 km². It abuts the coast and includes a narrow strip (40 m) of coastal land.

Major natural features

The Marine Park encompasses a fringing reef enclosing a shallow lagoon. It is the largest fringing barrier reef in Australia. The reef sits on the narrowest part of the Australian continental shelf and the park includes deep oceanic waters which occur immediately offshore from the reef.

History

The Ningaloo Marine Park was declared over Western Australian and Commonwealth waters in 1987.

Management arrangements

The Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) manages the Marine Park on behalf of the Commonwealth and state governments, in cooperation with the Australian Nature Conservation Agency. Fisheries in the area are managed by Western Australian Fisheries and the Australian Fisheries Service in collaboration with CALM. CALM has produced a Management Plan for 1989 to 1999.

Management funding

Commonwealth and Western Australian government funding for management within the State waters of Ningaloo Marine Park in 1991-92 was \$581 000. This covers salaries of local staff and half the cost of running the visitor centre located in Cape Range National Park that also services Ningaloo Marine Park, but not research or other overheads. Contributions were from CALM (\$324 000), WA Fisheries Department (\$152 000) and the (then) Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service through the Ocean Rescue 2000 program (\$105 000).

Management objectives

The principle aim for park management as stated in the Management Plan is 'to provide for conservation of the marine environment, with recreational use to the extent that it is compatible with conservation of its natural environment' (CALM 1989, p. 1).

Major uses

The primary use of the Ningaloo Marine Park is nature conservation. Tourism and recreation is the major direct use, see section 8.2 below.

Commercial fishing is an existing direct use, but at very low levels. A number of the fishing techniques used prior to the declaration of the Marine Park are to be phased out over the life of the Management Plan, or at least reviewed, with the possibility of other more environmentally benign methods being developed. In 1989, about 20 boats were working in areas including the Marine Park. More recent information is that commercial fishing is negligible with only two regular operators working within the Marine Park.

At the time of declaration of the Marine Park, three offshore and two onshore petroleum exploration leases were in effect. The offshore leases are within Commonwealth waters, and as Commonwealth legislation did not allow petroleum exploration in Marine Parks, these lease areas were excluded from the Marine Park. One of these leases has since lapsed and the area has been included in the Marine Park.

¹⁸ Information was compiled from *Ningaloo Marine Park Management Plan 1989 - 1999*, CALM 1989 and personal communication from CALM and WA Fisheries staff.

8.2 Ningaloo Marine Park tourism and recreation¹⁹

The current number of visitors to Ningaloo Marine Park is not accurately known. There are numerous points of entry, which makes overall monitoring difficult. In 1982, it was estimated that 55 000 people visited the area. By 1989, this was estimated to have doubled. Complete records are kept of visitors to the Milyering Visitor Centre which is the main visitor and interpretive facility for Ningaloo Marine Park and the adjacent Cape Range National Park. The number of visitors increased from 17 000 in 1989 to 19 000 in 1992.

Recreation and tourism are the major direct uses of Ningaloo Marine Park. Private recreation, mostly incorporating recreational fishing from the beach or private boats, is popular. Fishing is the highest priority activity for 84 per cent of visitors. Visitors generally arrive in their own vehicles and many camp by the beach, along the length of the Marine Park. A particular pattern noted in visitor studies is long term stays by retired Western Australian residents escaping the winter. These visitors influence the figures recorded for average length of stay in the region. High average stays of 28 days and 35.6 nights have been calculated from two separate surveys. This can be compared with an average stay of 4.9 nights per trip for the wider Gascoyne Region in which Ningaloo Marine Park is located (Insight Research et al. 1992).

Commercial accommodation, including in a number of caravan parks, is available at Exmouth and Coral Bay adjacent to the Marine Park. Commercial tour boats operate out of Exmouth and Coral Bay taking recreational fishing trips for both bottom and game fishing. Other commercial boat trips offer SCUBA diving, snorkelling, sightseeing trips to view whale sharks, and coral viewing via a semi submersible and glass bottom boats. In 1993, there were 15 commercial charter vessels operating in the Marine Park. Activity, and most probably passenger numbers, has increased since the time of the publication of the Management Plan in 1989, when there were eight boats operating. Visitor numbers are not currently available but will become so in the future as new regulations will require vessels to be licensed.

Financial values

The gross financial value of tourism and recreation in Ningaloo Marine Park, as measured by expenditure by tourists to the Marine Park, is not known. The Western Australian Tourism Monitor collects information on expenditure by tourists and reports on a regional basis. The towns of Exmouth and Coral Bay are included in the Gascoyne Region which also includes Carnarvon, Shark Bay and Gascoyne Junction. In 1990-91 this region hosted 228 000 visitors for 1 118 000 visitor nights. These visitors spent an estimated \$57.6 million in the region, not including travel to the region (Insight Research et al. 1992). This figure is clearly higher than that generated by tourism and recreation in Ningaloo Marine Park alone and can only be interpreted as placing an upper limit on the relevant value attributable to Ningaloo Marine Park.

No multiplier has been applied to this figure as it is not sufficiently accurate in regard to Ningaloo Marine Park to warrant further interpretation.

¹⁹ Much of the information presented here is taken from an as yet unpublished section on Ningaloo Marine Park in the forthcoming *State of the Marine Environment Report* (CALM 1993). This was compiled by CALM staff from surveys, visitor statistics and observations.

TABLE 8.1 NINGALOO MARINE PARK

<i>USES</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>	<i>GROSS FINANCIAL VALUES</i>	<i>ECONOMIC VALUES</i>
PRIMARY USES			
Nature conservation	4300 km ² of relatively undisturbed marine environment.	Nil, however these attributes provide the resource base for potentially sustainable direct uses which generate financial values	These attributes provide the resource base for economic values of potentially sustainable direct uses plus the economic values of non-market indirect uses Economic values of non-market indirect uses have not been measured for Ningaloo Marine Park.
COMPATIBLE DIRECT USES			
Tourism and recreation	Of the order of 110 000 visits per year	not known	not known
Commercial fishing	2 operators	negligible	negligible
Research	minor	minor	not known