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 Booya 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.
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-September 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.

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 brochure, 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.
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.

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 and be sure to keep your eye out for fossilised cone shells cemented into the rocky shores found only in the south-west.

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.

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 in Warnbro Sound lies in 25m of water and a permit from the Rockingham Visitor Centre is needed to dive it. Recreational boating, swimming, and windsurfing are also popular. The west side of Penguin Island provides good surfing and there is a water ski area within Warnbro Sound.

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.

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 the largest breeding colony 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.

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.

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 seaweed beds of kelp and Sargassum that dominate the offshore reefs of the marine park.

Going to Penguin Island?

Ferry tours operate hourly from Mersey Point from mid-September to early June. The best place to see little penguins feeding and frolicking in the water is the Penguin Island Discovery Centre as they are often at sea feeding during the day and are not found on the island. Entry into the discovery centre can be purchased in conjunction with the ferry ticket or upon entry.

To help protect the nature 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-September every year to protect the penguins from human disturbance during their breeding season.

For more information on Penguin Island and its inhabitants please pick up a Penguin Island brochure from the Rockingham Visitor Centre or the gift shop at Mersey Point.

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.
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 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 bailer 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, (DBCA) 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 information contact the Department of Transport on the number listed on the back of this brochure.

Weather or not

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.

Marine parks and reserves – help protect our wildlife!

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.
Sea lions—take care
Australian sea lions are rare and protected. They can be found on and around Tasman Island for most of the year and they may be seen in inshore waters. Sea lions are attractive and interesting creatures that can often be a little unpredictable. For your safety and the protection of this species, you are advised to keep at least 50m away from sea lions at all times. If you see a sea lion approaching you in the water, move away or remove yourself from the water until the sea lion has swum away.

Help protect our wildlife—no feeding
Do not feed the birds, sea lions, seals or any other wildlife—this helps to protect their health and wellbeing. Although you may feel that 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 an injured wildlife by phoning the wildlife helpline on 0800 070 110.

Island access within Shoalwater Islands Marine Park
Islands and most surrounds within the marine park provide important habitats for wildlife and other natural values. All rock outcrops and islands within the marine park (except Penguin Island) are a nature reserve and access is prohibited. Penguin Island is a conservation park and it is open for guided visits only.

Speed restrictions
As it kept quiet estuary, resort to all means in the Seal Island Sanctuary and the Shoalwater Bay Special Purpose Zone. In addition, there is a speed limit of 20 knots of the deck. Further information, obtain the Rockingham Boating Guideline available from the Department of Transport, or visit www.westernports.gov.au.

Shoalwater Islands Marine Park
- Marine Park boundary
- Sanctuary Zone
- Special Purpose Zone
- General Use Zone

Shoalwater Bay Special Purpose Zone (wildlife conservation)
- Shoalwater Bay
- Seal Island
- Ship Island
- Penguin Island

Penguin Island Access Risk
- This area is dangerous. There have been fatal. Be aware of strong currents in the area.
- Beware of strong currents in the area. Swimming is not advisable in the area. Avoid swimming when the tide is rising. For your safety—keep away from Pigeon Island while diving or snorkeling. Ensure you carry a mobile phone at all times. Be aware of the area and be vigilant. Do not approach or enter the area. Keep a safe distance from the sealion. Cetacean—Porpoise—Keep at least 50m away. For your safety—keep away from Pigeon Island while diving or snorkeling. Ensure you carry a mobile phone at all times. Be aware of the area and be vigilant. Do not approach or enter the area. Keep a safe distance from the sealion. Cetacean—Porpoise—Keep at least 50m away.

Torin Island Nature Reserve—seasonal closure
- The nature reserve is protected and closed to the public until the end of April.
- The nature reserve is closed to the public until the end of April.

Saxon Ranger Dive Wreck—Restricted Areas
- Saxon Ranger dive wreck is protected under the Marine Park Act.
- The wreck is only accessible by boat and must be explored by experienced divers.

Whitehall Protection Area—Mammal Species Prohibited
- The area is protected under the Protection Park Act.
- The area is protected under the Protection Park Act.

Landmarks
- Cape Peron
- Cockburn Sound
- Manjaree Island
- Rockingham
- Wombol Sound

Map Information
- This map is for general information only.
- This map is for general information only.
- This map is for general information only.
- This map is for general information only.
- This map is for general information only.

Map Notes
- This map is for general information only.
- This map is for general information only.
- This map is for general information only.
- This map is for general information only.
- This map is for general information only.

Map Scale
- 1:60,000
- 1:60,000
- 1:60,000
- 1:60,000
- 1:60,000

Map Credits
- Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
- Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
- Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
- Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
- Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

Map Copyright
- © Commonwealth of Australia 2019
- © Commonwealth of Australia 2019
- © Commonwealth of Australia 2019
- © Commonwealth of Australia 2019
- © Commonwealth of Australia 2019