Shoalwater Islands Marine Park – one of the state’s most important marine protected areas

Shoalwater Islands Marine Park and its associated island nature reserves host an exceptional diversity of marine-dependent fauna and flora within easy reach of urban areas.

Swimming, snorkelling, scuba diving, fishing, pleasure boating, kayaking, boat skiing, kite and wind surfing and paddle boarding are all enjoyed in the marine park.

The area is also culturally important to local Aboriginal people who have a long history of connection to the land and sea.

Management of Shoalwater Islands Marine Park will ensure that the marine flora, fauna, habitats and water quality will be in the same or better condition for years to come.

The marine park is truly one of Rockingham’s most important aquatic playgrounds and presents a unique opportunity for people visiting or living in close proximity to Perth to enjoy clean accessible beaches and clear shallow waters in the company of marine life that can often only be viewed in more remote areas of Australia.

Further information

Department of Environment and Conservation
Swan Coastal District Office
5 Dundebar Road
Wanneroo WA 6065
Ph (08) 9405 0700
www.dec.wa.gov.au
DEC rangers are stationed on Penguin Island and Point Peron.

Department of Fisheries
District Office
Suite 4, Commerce House
Benjamin Way
Rockingham WA 6168
Ph (08) 9527 3699  Fax (08) 9527 9776
www.fish.wa.gov.au

Bureau of Meteorology
www.bom.gov.au/weather/wa/forecasts
Weather call 1900 926 150

Rockingham Sea Rescue (VN6KC)
Ph (08) 9528 2222
Radio Frequencies:
27 MHz  Ch 90 – Working and calling frequency
        Ch 88 – Emergency calling
        Ch 86 – Alternate emergency calling
VHF    Ch 73 – Working and calling frequency
        Ch 16 – Emergency calling
HF     4125 KHz – Working and emergency calling

Department of Environment and Conservation
Department of Fisheries

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Zoning and permitted uses

Shoalwater Islands Marine Park is zoned to enable different levels of use to occur while ensuring the biodiversity values of the marine park are conserved and protected. In Shoalwater Islands Marine Park there are three sanctuary zones, two special purpose zones and a large general use zone. The location and coordinates of each zone are displayed on the map within this brochure, along with the activities permitted in each zone type.

Sanctuary zones are ‘look but don’t take’ areas managed solely for nature conservation. Visitors can undertake non-extractive activities such as boating, scuba diving, snorkelling and nature appreciation. Fishing is not permitted in sanctuary zones as it is an extractive activity.

Special purpose zones are areas where a priority conservation purpose or use 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, diving, fishing and aquaculture. This is the largest zone in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park and enables visitors to enjoy a wide range of activities and experiences.

Shoalwater Islands Marine Park is home to a wide variety of marine life including threatened species such as little penguins and Australian sealions which have given their names to Penguin and Seal islands, and which actively forage in the near-shore and deeper waters of the marine park.

The many jagged edged islands and rocks of the marine park provide important roosting and nesting areas for many seabird species. Some of these birds migrate annually from the northern hemisphere, while others such as the regal pelican are resident year round. To ensure protection of the very special marine life of the marine park while on land, the Department of Environment and Conservation has restricted access to island nature reserves and those areas of Penguin Island that are used extensively by seabirds for nesting.
Did you know?

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 ensure biodiversity values are protected and conserved for all to enjoy well into the future.

Rocky limestone shores fringe the marine park at Cape Peron and rock platforms underlie many of the beaches throughout the marine park. The remains of a cone shell species found only in the South West are cemented into the rocky shores. Round limestone columns are the only remaining evidence that a forest once stood at the cape.

Offshore limestone reefs, rocks and islands, features of the Garden Island ridge system, act as a protective barrier against oceanic swells moving toward Shoalwater Bay and Warnbro Sound and help ensure Rockingham’s near-shore waters remain relatively calm and clear. The limestone rocks and islands, including Teen Island which is now connected to the mainland at Safety Bay, are important nesting and roosting habitat for seabirds in the marine park and along the Perth metropolitan coast. Walk on pathways or low on the water line to avoid trampling nests or unduly disturbing young birds not yet ready to fly. Please leave your dog at home.

Look up! Seabirds are constantly moving around the marine park. Look up and watch pelicans riding thermal uplifts, cormorants flying in a ‘V’ formation, crested terns and gannets dive bombing from great heights to catch small fish below the surface and bridled terns dancing on the wind around Penguin Island.

Seagrass is the foundation of the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park marine ecosystem as it provides shelter and food for a huge number of marine species. Seagrass, just like your lawn grass at home, grows by spreading a root system throughout a sandy substrate. The marine park has some of the healthiest seagrass meadows in the Perth metropolitan area but when disturbed can take decades to regrow. To protect seagrass, it is important that moorings are appropriately placed and that anchoring does not occur in seagrass meadows.

Look down! When travelling in a boat or swimming, look down into the clear shallow waters to view the marine park’s magnificent seagrass meadows and reefs that provide habitat for a diverse array of marine life.

Large brown algae such as kelp and sargassum are dominant on the offshore reefs of the marine park. They are important habitat for fish, sharks and rays that seek camouflage, shelter and prey. The large algae also shade marine life such as sea squirts, sponges, snail-like molluscs and corals in shallow areas.

The Australian sealion, a marine mammal found only in southern Australia, 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. While sealions can be playful in the water, they are large animals that can be unpredictable in their movements. Sealions have been known to bite people when agitated so you are not permitted to land on Seal Island and you should not get too close to them on Penguin Island. If a sealion approaches you in the water, swim away or remove yourself from the water to ensure your safety and the welfare of the sealion.

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, which have a life expectancy of six or more years, are superbly adapted to the marine environment. Their wings have evolved into flippers with which they propel themselves, ‘flying’ underwater. On land they stand upright, walking or waddling awkwardly on their hind legs. A great place to see little penguins and learn about them is The Penguin Experience – Island Discovery Centre, which is just a short ferry ride across the marine park from Mersey Point.

The bottlenose dolphin is one of the most commonly seen dolphins 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 amongst the offshore reef system. Boat fishers have been known to feed dolphins that approach their boat, however, this exposes the dolphin to a high risk of boat strike, disease and fishing gear entanglement. Help keep our dolphins healthy and wild by not feeding them.

Look out! Go slow for those below. Australian sealions, little penguins and bottlenose dolphins are often difficult to see in the water but spend much of their time in the top two metres of the water column. They can become victims of boat strikes so make sure you keep an eye out and go slow for those below when boating in the waters of the marine park.
For more information contact the Department of Environment and Conservation or Department of Fisheries on the numbers listed on the back of this brochure.

Weather or not
The weather conditions in the Rockingham area can change suddenly. Consider your safety and find out what the forecast is before heading offshore to explore the marine park.

Going to Penguin Island?
Ferry tours operate regularly between mid-September and early June. You cansee little penguins feeding and frolicking in the water at The Penguin Experience – Island Discovery Centre. Entry into the centre is included in the cost of the ferry ride or tour.

Visitors to Penguin Island are warned NOT to walk or swim along the submerged sandbar between the mainland and the island. It’s important to be aware that people have been swept off the sandbar and lives have been lost due to unexpected changes in water depth, wind direction and strength and through the development of strong cross currents.

To help protect the nature of Penguin Island, people may only visit the island during the day. Visitors are asked to keep to beaches, boardwalks and designated walkways.

Have a great day fishing!
Fishing is a much enjoyed recreational activity within Shoalwater Islands Marine Park. Fishers should become confident about which marine park zones they can fish in by looking at the map within this brochure and its accompanying activity table.

• Fishing is not permitted in sanctuary zones 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 license 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) with the exception of mussels, abalone (during the season), squid, cuttlefish and octopus, are protected and cannot be taken in this marine park. They include turban shells, whelks, periwinkles and bailer shells.

The Department of Fisheries legally enforce gear, bag, size and possession limits to ensure there will always be fish for the future in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park. Fishers should become familiar with these limits before heading off for a day fishing.

Marine parks and reserves – established for all to enjoy!
Western Australia’s coastal waters are considered to be among the least disturbed in the world with many marine areas and species having global significance. Marine parks and reserves are established in areas which have been recognised as having special importance to the community in regard to their ecological values.

The conservation and sustainable use of Western Australia’s marine environment is everyone’s responsibility. By working together to manage human activities we can ensure future generations enjoy the marine environment just as we do today.