

# Tourism Council WA Policy Paper



## Proposal for the South-west Commonwealth Marine Reserves Network

Diver under the Busselton Jetty



Diver near school of tarwhine, off the Dunsborough coast



Australian sea lion, near Carnac Island



Whale watching in Flinders Bay, near Augusta

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Tourism Council WA is the peak body representing tourism businesses, industries and regions in Western Australia. The Council promotes the value of tourism, facilitates sustainable tourism development and advocates industry policy on behalf of its members.

As the voice of the industry, Tourism Council WA proudly represents members and promotes the value of tourism to the state economy, environment and the social fabric of local communities.

Tourism Council WA develops evidence-based industry policy on business regulation; marketing and events; parks and environment; planning and infrastructure; aviation and transport; and workforce development. The council advocates our policy agenda to government and maintains an active public profile and media presence to communicate critical industry issues

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism Council WA supports the implementation of the broadest and highest level of protection of South-west commonwealth waters that will support and foster tourism opportunities and regional growth.

Whilst there are many benefits in the establishment of marine reserves, careful consideration needs to be given to the location, size and permissible activities; so that ultimately the marine reserves have a positive impact on the tourism industry and support job creation.

***Below is a list of recommendations Tourism Council WA believes will help ensure that WA is able to secure a positive outcome for tourism growth and the protection of our important marine assets.***

### **1. PROTECTING WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S TOURISM BRAND**

The establishment of South-west Commonwealth Marine Reserves has the potential to provide numerous benefits for the WA Tourism Industry.

World-class marine parks could further add to WA's reputation as a quality, high end, nature based tourism destination for both domestic and international visitors by associating the WA brand with a recognisable, world-class attraction.

In addition to providing new avenues for tourism growth, world-class marine reserves would provide an opportunity to support and expand water sport industries that are critical for tourism such as snorkeling, underwater photography and SCUBA diving as well as the more passive but complimentary observation-based activities such as whale and dolphin watching.

Research indicates that visitors involved in nature based tourism activities spend more money and stay longer. In 2009, 28.31 million visitors participated in nature based tourism activity, spending \$33.3 billion in Australia. Almost two thirds of visitors expected to have a nature based experience during their stay (DRET, Nature Tourism in Australia - Snapshots 2009). With this niche market continuing to grow it is vital that WA captures their share of the expenditure from this sector which has been shown to spend almost *twice as much* as other sectors.

It is also important to ensure that our iconic brand image is not affected by incompatible marine activities which may result in a negative impact on visitor numbers and experiences. The extensive application of marine park zones would offer protection to our marine areas and adjacent coastal locations from a downturn in tourism as a result of irreversible damage to our eco-tourism brand.

### **RECOMMENDATION ONE:**

**The extensive implementation of marine national park zoning to protect the region's tourism industry from the risk of activities which could destroy local tourism and tarnish WA's brand and reputation for nature-based tourism activities.**

## **2. SUFFICIENT MONEY IS ALLOCATED TO SUPPORT TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN MARINE PARKS**

The establishment of marine reserves may affect coastal communities reliant on commercial industries operating in these areas. Impacts could range from reduced operating capacity for those reliant on extractive activities, or potential cessation of the activity.

However, the growing nature-based economy provides significant opportunities to contribute to social, economic and environmental outcomes. Over the past 15 years or so there has been a growing appreciation of the environmental features along WA's coastline with particular growth in eco-tourism markets in the areas between Perth and Shark Bay.

Nature based tourism activities are recognised as an important compatible marine park, non-extractive industry that contributes significantly to the Australian economy.

With the establishment of marine reserves, affected communities could essentially capitalise on new nature based tourism opportunities to provide an alternate economic base which may have otherwise be weakened by the establishment of marine reserves.

Direct evidence of strong economic benefits as a result of marine parks was seen in Tropical North Queensland following the establishment of marine sanctuaries within the Great Barrier Reef. Economic-use activities undertaken in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (tourism, fishing and recreation) had a direct gross value of production (GVP) in excess of \$890 million per annum and directly employed around 10,000 people. Flow-on economic benefits included approximately \$760 million annual in GVP, and indirect employment for around 7000 people. For the full version of the report go to:

[http://www.saveourmarinelife.org.au/somlblog/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/The\\_Economics\\_of\\_Marine\\_Protected\\_Areas\\_Allen\\_Consulting-1.pdf](http://www.saveourmarinelife.org.au/somlblog/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/The_Economics_of_Marine_Protected_Areas_Allen_Consulting-1.pdf)

International studies in countries similar to Australia also show strong economic benefits. An analysis of New Zealand's Leigh Marine Reserve found it to be worth an estimated \$18.6 million per year to the regional centre and supports 173 full time equivalent jobs (Hunt, 2008). [http://www.marinenz.org.nz/documents/leigh\\_eco\\_impact.pdf](http://www.marinenz.org.nz/documents/leigh_eco_impact.pdf)

Compensation has been outlined for established commercial fishing operations affected by the proposed marine reserves, however this should be part of a broader mitigation package that looks to stimulate a regions economic activity, which may have been significantly reliant on commercial and extractive activities, through alternative complementary tourism activities, in particular nature based and eco-tourism and regional events.

### **RECOMMENDATION TWO:**

**A mitigation package is created for regional areas affected by the establishment of marine reserves that does not rely solely on compensation, but also the promotion of tourism as an alternative economic stimulant. It should include funding to promote nature based**

**tourism experiences and regional events within, and adjacent to, marine reserves to attract visitors and create significant opportunities to contribute to a regions social, economic and environmental development through a non-extractive industry.**

### **3. LOCATION OF MARINE RESERVES AND ZONING SCHEMES**

The establishment of Commonwealth Marine Reserves may potentially have an impact on recreational and charter fishing operations depending on the location of marine reserves and the zoning schemes allocated within these reserves. Initial research suggests that there will only be minimal overlap of reserves and iconic recreational and charter fishing sites.

Recreational and charter fishing are important activities that contribute significantly to the economies of many regional communities reliant on the associated visitor spend in their business operations such as accommodation providers, food and retail services.

Location of reserves has the potential to affect these communities negatively if they are located off coastal areas that solely/largely rely on visiting fishing tourists to provide an income. The establishment of marine reserves (particularly Marine National Park zoning) should be avoided where it will have a detrimental economic impact on communities reliant on recreational and charter fishing. In areas where this may be unavoidable, the impact should be mitigated through strategies that encourage growth in tourism visitation and spend through new product development; events etc. and create demand for alternative activities compatible with marine reserves,.

#### **RECOMMENDATION THREE:**

**That the impact on coastal communities reliant on recreational fishing visitors/tourists be considered in the location and size of reserves. The establishment of reserves in locations which will have a detrimental effect on regional economies should be avoided. Where these effects are unavoidable, they should be mitigated through a package that aims to increase visitor numbers through compatible nature based tourism activities and regional events.**

### **4. PROVISION OF EDUCATIONAL & INTERPRETATION MATERIALS FOR OPERATORS**

It is important that tourism operators visiting these waters have access to accurate information that is easily obtained, simple to understand and, ultimately, helps them promote the unique biophysical, ecological and conservation values of the region to visitors.

The primary goal of the establishment of the marine reserve network is to:

- Ensure that a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of marine protected areas are established and managed to contribute to the long-term ecological viability of marine and estuarine systems;
- To maintain ecological processes and systems; and
- To protect Australia's biological diversity at all levels.

The South-west corner reserves consist of relatively pristine and unexploited ocean environments. The reserves will protect a wide range of ecosystems that are biologically important to species inhabiting, breeding and foraging from the marine waters.

Information should be able to be distributed to visitors through a range of educational and interpretational means, with the ultimate goal that it contributes to a positive eco-tourism experience for the visitor.

#### **RECOMMENDATION FOUR:**

**Education and interpretation program be made available to tourism operators to enable them to promote the unique biophysical, ecological and conservation values of the South-west Marine Reserves.**

#### **LICENCING OF OPERATORS**

Under the proposed zoning scheme for the South-west Commonwealth Marine Reserve Network, tourism operators participating in compatible tourism activities will be required to obtain approval to conduct these activities within Marine National Park Zones (IUCN Category II).

Tourism Council WA believes that only tourism operators who demonstrate, through an appropriate accreditation program i.e. a program incorporating high environmental best practice standards, that they meet the highest quality standards and commitment to environmental sustainability should have access to these Marine National Park Zones.

Moreover, any operator accessing marine reserve zones (Multiple Use Zone [IUCN Category VI] and Special Purpose Zone [IUCN Category VI]), should also be required to obtain approval and meet minimum safety and environmental standards such as those achieved through recognised accreditation program which ensures businesses have obtained appropriate insurances, are licensed to carry out their activities, and are maintaining minimum safety standards relating to these activities.

Tourism Accreditation can function as a risk management tool for the commonwealth government, certifying that operators accessing all zones of commonwealth marine reserves are operating at minimum standards. It also enables the consumer to make an informed and confident choice about the legitimacy and quality of a tourism product.

Acknowledging and supporting accredited tourism businesses is expected to help raise service standards, delivery and development of quality products for nature-based tourism.

Mandatory accreditation would be in line with the policies of Western Australia's state government agencies, Tourism WA and the Department of Environment and Conservation, which require businesses to achieve tourism accreditation in order to conduct activities in the State's protected areas and to participate in the agency's marketing and promotional activities.

Requirements to achieve accreditation would also be in line with the National Tourism Accreditation Framework, established under the National Long Term Tourism Strategy and the national symbol of quality – the TQUAL mark.

**RECOMMENDATION FIVE:**

**Tourism Accreditation will be a requirement for operators wishing to conduct tourism activities in commonwealth marine reserves. Tourism Accreditation that incorporates a high level of best environmental practice will be a requirement for operators wishing to conduct activities in the higher risk commonwealth marine national parks. Tourism Accreditation must be obtained through a TQUAL endorsed program such as the Australian Tourism Accreditation Program.**

## TOURISM COUNCIL WA RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.** The extensive implementation of marine national park zoning to protect the region's tourism industry from the risk of activities which could destroy local tourism and tarnish WA's brand and reputation for nature-based tourism activities.
- 2.** A mitigation package is created for regional areas affected by the establishment of marine reserves that does not rely solely on compensation, but also the promotion of tourism as an alternative economic stimulant. It should include funding to promote nature based tourism experiences and regional events within, and adjacent to, marine reserves to attract visitors and create significant opportunities to contribute to a regions social, economic and environmental development through a non-extractive industry.
- 3.** That the impact on coastal communities reliant on recreational fishing visitors/tourists be considered in the location and size of reserves. The establishment of reserves in locations which will have a detrimental effect on regional economies should be avoided. Where these effects are unavoidable, they should be mitigated through a package that aims to increase visitor numbers through compatible nature based tourism activities and regional events.
- 4.** Education and interpretation program be made available to tourism operators to enable them to promote the unique biophysical, ecological and conservation values of the South-west Marine Reserves.
- 5.** Tourism Accreditation will be a requirement for operators wishing to conduct tourism activities in commonwealth marine reserves. Tourism Accreditation that incorporates a high level of best environmental practice will be a requirement for operators wishing to conduct activities in the higher risk commonwealth marine national parks. Tourism Accreditation must be obtained through a TQUAL endorsed program such as the Australian Tourism Accreditation Program.



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