



Conserving our unique marine worlds

Victoria became a world leader in marine conservation when it established a system of highly-protected marine national parks and sanctuaries in June 2002.

The marine national parks system is the result of 11 years investigation, community consultation and public debate, and places Victoria at the forefront of international efforts to conserve the marine environment.

What is a marine national park?

Marine national parks are highly protected areas that conserve unique marine habitats in their natural state, and provide an insurance policy against environmental impacts. Victoria's marine areas include rocky reefs, sponge gardens, towering kelp forests, sandy sea-floors, seagrass meadows, mangroves and saltmarsh.

Victoria's 13 parks and 11 marine sanctuaries are highly protected and reserved for:

- Conservation and protection of marine biodiversity and natural processes.
- Maintenance of scientific reference areas.
- Nature observation, scuba diving, snorkelling, surfing, swimming, boating, windsurfing and other non-extractive activities.

Commercial and recreational fishing is not permitted in the marine national parks. Extractive or damaging uses such as aquaculture, exploration drilling, oil and gas extraction, dredging and waste disposal are also prohibited.

There are generally no restrictions on access for recreation, tourism, education and research within marine national parks.

What was recommended?

On 24 October 2000 the final report of the Environment Conservation Council (ECC) was tabled in State Parliament. Established by the Kennett government in 1997 to replace the Land Conservation Council, the ECC was asked to advise the government on the preferred approach and priorities for the establishment of a representative system of marine parks in Victoria.

The report recommended 13 marine national parks



Kelp forests are essential breeding habitat for many marine species, and important for fisheries. Photo: David Bryant, Seapics

and 11 marine sanctuaries for Victoria's marine waters. The marine national parks covered 62,245 ha and marine sanctuaries 891ha – in total about 6.2 per cent of marine waters.

The ECC recommended that the remaining 94 per cent of Victoria's marine waters (not in marine protected areas) be managed sustainably as part of a Coastal Waters Reserve. Under this strategy all of Victoria's marine waters would be multiple-use, with a network of highly protected areas included.

Victoria's marine national parks

In June 2002, the Victorian Parliament passed legislation that established 13 marine national parks and 11 sanctuaries.

Although the boundary changes at Cape Howe, Corner Inlet, Twelve Apostles and Discovery Bay removed important marine habitats and reduced the quality of the individual parks, the system established by Parliament has the full support of VNPA as a first important step for the conservation of Victoria's marine biodiversity.

A) Discovery Bay Marine National Park

About 20 km west of Portland and adjacent to Discovery Bay Coastal Park, this park covers 3050 ha in the path of high-energy waves.

The area is part of the largest coastal basalt formation in Western Victoria and has a high diversity of intertidal and shallow subtidal invertebrates, including abalone and rock lobster. Basalt reefs are covered in kelps, including the large brown kelp *Ecklonia radiata*, while calcarenite reefs abound with sponges, ascidians, bryozoans and gorgonians.

The region is well known for whale watching, with blue whales regularly passing by the area. Unfortunately, boundary changes to the ECC proposal have removed the basalt shoreline from the park and undermined its integrity. VNPA will continue its efforts to have this shoreline returned to the park.

B) Twelve Apostles Marine National Park

Located 7km east of Port Campbell, this park runs along The Twelve Apostles coastline and contains 7500ha. The park includes some of Victoria's most spectacular underwater scenery, with rich intertidal and subtidal invertebrate communities and dramatic underwater arches, canyons, fissures, gutters and deep sloping reefs.

Two long sections of beach, at Gibsons Steps and between Princetown and Rivernook, have been excluded from the park to enable shore-based recreational fishing to continue. The ECC proposal was 11,700ha and included the deep-water Otways sandstone reefs off Moonlight Head. These were excluded from the final park to reduce the impact on commercial rock lobster fishers. VNPA will continue to campaign for protection of the Otways sandstone reefs in a marine national park.

C) Point Addis Marine National Park

Rugged sandstone cliffs overlook this 4600 ha park that includes the internationally renowned Bells Beach. The park extends along 10km of coastline between Anglesea and Bells Beach.

Cover photos: Weedy sea dragons, Parks Victoria/Mary Malloy; hermit crab, DSE/William Boyle; Australian fur seals, Mary Malloy; seagrass, Parks Victoria/Mary Malloy.

A highlight is Ingoldsby Reef, where a range of marine life includes the weedy seadragon. Amphibolis seagrass is found off Point Addis, Addiscott Beach is popular for surfing, and Ingoldsby Reef is used for diving and nature study.

D) Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park

Six separate marine areas are included in this 3580ha park at the southern end of Port Phillip Bay.

The seagrass meadows at Swan Bay, intertidal platforms at Cheviot Beach and Point Lonsdale, Ramsar-listed sites at Swan Bay and Mud Islands, popular dive locations at Pope's Eye and Portsea Hole, and spectacular dive sites at the Lonsdale and Nepean walls, provide a combination of outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values.

E) Yaringa National Park

This park forms part of the Western Port Ramsar-listed wetlands (internationally significant for wader birds). It covers 980ha and is adjacent to Quail Island Nature Conservation Reserve, about 9km south-west of Tooradin. The area comprises saltmarsh, mangroves, sheltered intertidal mudflats, subtidal soft sediments and tidal channels.

The mangroves here are of state significance and the mudflats of national significance, with many water birds and wader birds roosting among the mangroves. The mangroves are vital to the life cycles of crabs, shrimps, sand hoppers, marine snails and bivalves, and adult and juvenile fish.

F) French Island Marine National Park

This 2800ha park extends along 15km of the northern side of French Island National Park. It is also part of the Western Port Ramsar-listed wetlands and includes mangrove and saltmarsh habitats of state significance and a well-developed tidal channel system that contribute to habitat diversity. Barralier Island provides a high-tide roost area for birds.

G) Churchill Island Marine National Park

Along the eastern shore of Philip Island, this 670ha park includes seagrass beds, mangroves, mudflats and sandy beaches.

Also part of the Western Port Ramsar site, it contains significant roosting and feeding sites for migratory waders. Some of its mudflats are of state significance, while others that are the primary foraging areas for migratory waders are nationally significant.

H) Bunurong Marine National Park

Located about 6km south-west of Inverloch in South Gippsland, this 2100 ha park includes the sanctuary zone of the existing Bunurong Marine Park.

It contains extensive intertidal platforms and subtidal



rocky reefs that are uncommon along the Victorian coast. These sandstone areas provide numerous micro-habitats and contribute to the area having a very high diversity of intertidal and shallow subtidal invertebrates.

There is a mixed assemblage of brown algae and a high proportion of Victoria's marine invertebrates, including brittle stars, sea cucumbers, barnacles, sea anemones and chitons. The area is popular with people wishing to explore intertidal platforms and rock pools.

I) Wilsons Promontory Marine National Park

This is Victoria's largest marine national park, covering 15,500ha along the southern end of Wilsons Promontory National Park, and containing granitic marine habitats that are unusual for Victoria.

Here spectacular underwater scenery includes granite cliffs plunging below the surface, abundant fish, and deep reefs covered in sponges, ascidians and sea whips. Seagrass beds are found in sheltered bays such as Waterloo Bay and Oberon Bay.

The park extends along 70km of the mainland coastline, but also includes islands that are home to Australian fur-seals, penguins and seabirds. Kanowna Island is one of four fur-seal breeding colonies in Victoria. Wilsons Promontory is also the distribution limit for a number of species including the seagrass, *Amphibolis antarctica*, intertidal molluscs such as *Austrocochlea odontis*, and a number of fish species.

J) Corner Inlet Marine National Park

This 1550ha park comprises two small and separate areas on the southern shoreline of Corner Inlet. Here are the only extensive beds of *Posidonia* seagrass in Victoria, the Corner Inlet habitat with the most diverse fauna.

There is a very high diversity of invertebrates in soft sediments, which encourages the over-wintering of migratory wading birds and has led to the inlet's entry on the Ramsar list, the international register of significant wetlands.

The ECC recommended a park of 4150ha and VNPA stands by those boundaries as the best way to protect Corner Inlet's special habitats.

K) Ninety-Mile Beach Marine National Park

The Ninety-Mile Beach area has been found to have the highest known species diversity of any sandy shoreline on the planet. In 10 square metres, 860 species were

discovered living in the sand; in one square metre a staggering 187 species!

Located 30km south of Sale (between Seaspray and Golden Beach), Ninety-Mile Beach Marine National Park is adjacent to the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park and covers 2750ha.

Calcarene reefs are dominated by invertebrates including sponges, ascidians, bryozoans, hydroids and soft coral. The unusual soft coral, *Pseudogorgia godefroyi*, is only found in Victoria between McGuarans and Delray beaches.

The park will provide much needed protection from trawling for a small section of the coast and have little impact on commercial fishing operations. After consultation with the local community, the ECC relocated its proposal to the western side of Seaspray to minimise the impact on recreational fishing.

L) Point Hicks Marine National Park

This 4000 hectare park contains a very rich marine fauna, including intertidal and shallow subtidal invertebrates, colourful and diverse sessile invertebrates living on spectacular subtidal reefs, as well as kelps, small algae and a high diversity of reef fish.

Point Hicks Marine National Park abuts Croajingolong National Park, about 25km south-east of Cann River in East Gippsland. The area's rich marine life makes snorkelling and scuba diving a popular pursuit in the region.

Popular sand and rock recreational fishing areas east of Point Hicks have been excluded, along with Clinton Rocks and other reefs to benefit Cann River and Bemm River residents. Commercial abalone reefs to the east have also been excluded.

M) Cape Howe Marine National Park

Covering 4050ha, Cape Howe Marine National Park is adjacent to Croajingolong National Park and the Cape Howe Wilderness Area.

The park contains granite and sandstone reefs with a high diversity of intertidal and shallow subtidal invertebrates including sponges, hydroids, ascidians and gorgonians.

Many species from warmer northern waters reach their southern limits here in far-east Gippsland. The Iron Prince Reef was excluded from the Environment Conservation Council (ECC) proposal to reduce the impact on the abalone industry.



Victoria's marine sanctuaries

Marine sanctuaries are smaller than Marine National Parks (the 11 sanctuaries total less than 900ha) but they have similar restrictions on extractive uses and protect the natural values of a particular area. The sanctuaries are described briefly below:

A) Merri Marine Sanctuary (25ha)

At the mouth of the Merri River, Warrnambool, this sanctuary contains a range of marine habitats in reef and sand, with rocky overhangs and deep canyons supporting many fish. Penguin colonies are found here and the area is frequently visited by dolphins.

B) The Arches Marine Sanctuary (45ha)

Included in this sanctuary are some of Victoria's most spectacular underwater limestone formations near the Twelve Apostles. Reefs here are carpeted by sponges, bryozoans, gorgonians and seastars.

C) Marengo Reefs Marine Sanctuary (12ha)

These two small reefs near Apollo Bay provide a wide variety of habitats, a dense growth of seaweeds and an abundance of soft corals and sponges.

D) Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary (17ha)

A variety of habitats formed in basalt and sandstone are found in this sanctuary at Airey's Inlet. There are kelp forests as well as a high diversity of invertebrates including sponges, seastars, crabs and sea anemones.

E) Point Danger Marine Sanctuary (25ha)

This small sanctuary at Torquay contains a high diversity of intertidal invertebrates on limestone.

F) Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary (17ha)

The sandstone and basalt reefs within this Barwon Heads sanctuary contain giant and bull kelps and two shipwrecks.

G) Point Cooke Marine Sanctuary (290ha)

Mud and sand beaches and basalt reefs provide habitat for algae, sponges, sea-urchins, crustaceans,



Southern dumpling squid. Photo: courtesy Parks Victoria & William Boyle

sharks and skates in this sanctuary on the western shore of Port Phillip Bay.

H) Jawbone Marine Sanctuary (30ha)

Near the Rifle Range Estate close to Williamstown, this sanctuary contains rocky basalt reef, seagrass beds, saltmarsh and the largest occurrence of mangroves in Port Phillip Bay. It is also a roosting site for migratory wading birds.

I) Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary (115ha)

This sanctuary at Beaumaris contains sandstone reefs and sandy beaches with a high diversity of flora and fauna.

J) Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary (80ha)

The Mushroom Reef at Flinders has the most diverse intertidal rocky reef communities in Victoria.

K) Beware Reef Marine Sanctuary (220ha)

Included in this sanctuary near Cape Conran, East Gippsland, are granite reefs with bull kelp, a diversity of corals, sponges and anemones, and 20 species of reef fish.