

Western Port Marine National Parks

- Life between the tides

A hidden abundance

Western Port, Victoria's second largest bay, is a biological treasure trove. Largely concealed from view behind a shoreline veil of marshland and mangroves, its waters contain expansive intertidal mudflats, meadows of seagrass, deep channels and small rocky reefs.

The result of this is an abundance of marine life. Juvenile fish find protection within the extensive seagrass beds, while adult fish and sharks gorge themselves on the small animals that live in the mud and seagrass beds. When the tide rolls out the extensive mudflats provide a wealth of food for waterbirds to feast on.

The tides are the key to understanding Western Port's marine life. The waters' ebb and flow exposes shallow mudflats and creates deep channels that function as rich feeding grounds.

Western Port is recognised as one of the world's most valuable areas for international migratory wader birds. Along with resident waders, many species of birds migrate from northern and central Asia to Western Port every year.

This rich and diverse marine environment will now be conserved in three new Marine National Parks.

The serene waters of **Yaringa Marine National Park**, in the north of the bay, preserve the connection between mangroves and mudflats that is so important for roosting waterbirds.

French Island Marine National Park, in the centre, protects extensive seagrass beds that have largely disappeared elsewhere in the bay since the 1950s.



Lamp Shells

In the south, **Churchill Island Marine National Park** is influenced in part by the nearby open coast, and hosts beds of the living fossils known as lamp shells or Brachiopods. This ancient group of animals once had thousands of species, but is now reduced to a few species worldwide.

All three parks contain internationally significant roosting sites and feeding areas for migratory waders and other waterbirds.

Birdwatching is a popular and rewarding pastime in the coastal areas and each park provides opportunities for wader bird observation. Exploring the mangroves at high tide in a canoe or the channels in small boats are great ways to explore Western Port.

Protecting our marine environment

The waters off Australia's southern coast are very special and unique. Over 90% of the plants and animals living here are found nowhere else on earth.

The Victorian Government has created a system of 13 Marine National Parks and 11 smaller Marine Sanctuaries to ensure that representative samples of Victoria's diverse, distinctive and amazing marine environment are conserved for future generations.

These parks and sanctuaries now protect 5.3% of Victoria's coastal waters, safeguarding important marine habitats and species, and complementing our world-class national parks system on land.

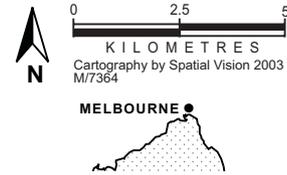
By keeping some of these marine areas in a natural state, free from potentially damaging human activities, we will protect these environments into the future. Victorians will also benefit from the positive effects that this protection will have on recreation and tourism, community education and scientific research.

People are encouraged to visit Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries, but extractive or potentially damaging activities (e.g. fishing and mining) are prohibited within their boundaries in order to preserve marine biodiversity and maintain or enhance the condition of these areas.



Yaringa, French Island & Churchill Island Marine National Parks

-  Highway
-  Sealed road
-  Marine National Park
-  Boat access point
-  Yellow Triangular boundary marker
-  In water boundary

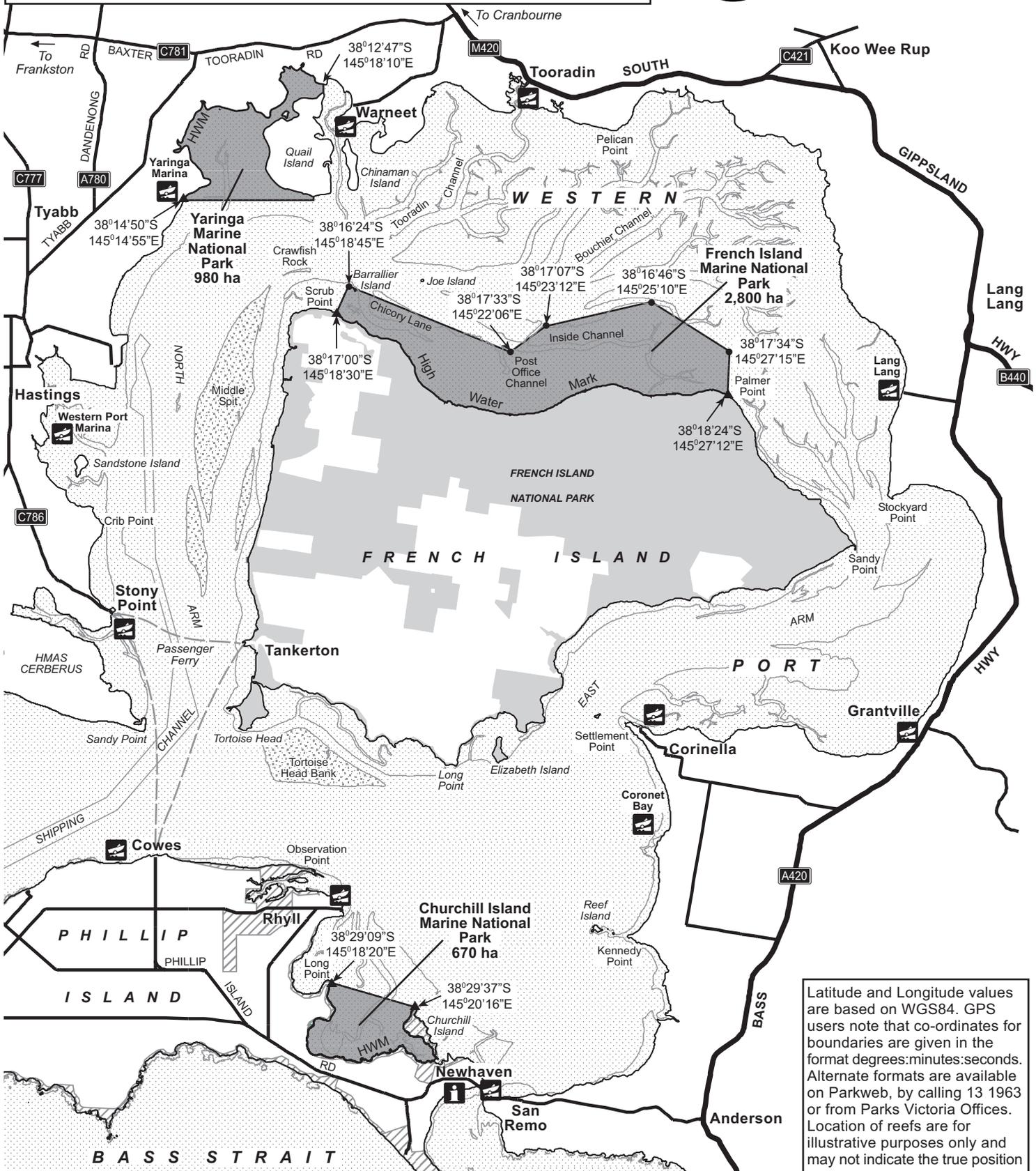


No fishing, netting, spearing, taking or killing of marine life. All methods of fishing, from the shore or at sea, are prohibited.

-  Nature Park
-  Waterbody
-  Exposed at low water
-  Information
-  HWM High Water Mark



objects (artefacts).



Latitude and Longitude values are based on WGS84. GPS users note that co-ordinates for boundaries are given in the format degrees:minutes:seconds. Alternate formats are available on Parkweb, by calling 13 1963 or from Parks Victoria Offices. Location of reefs are for illustrative purposes only and may not indicate the true position

Western Port Marine National Parks

Western Port's diverse and sensitive marine environment is protected in three Marine National Parks.

Yaringa Marine National Park (980 ha) protects extensive mangroves, sheltered intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh areas. The relatively undisturbed mangrove and saltmarsh habitats of Watson Inlet and Quail Island are of State geomorphological significance.

Mangroves are a vital part of the bay ecosystem and provide an important habitat for a number of invertebrates, marine snails and bivalves and adult and juvenile fish.

The intertidal mudflats are of international significance as roosting and foraging areas for waders and waterbirds, while the adjacent coast supports sand heathland, coastal saltmarsh and low woodland dominated by manna gums.

Nearby Quail and Chinaman Islands are of State botanical and zoological significance and are managed as a nature conservation reserve.



Curlew Sandpiper

French Island Marine National Park (2,800 ha) is adjacent to the northern shore of French Island National Park, and contains a variety of sheltered habitats, including seagrass beds, deep channels, mangroves, intertidal mudflats and sandy beaches.

The northern shore of French Island has one of the most extensive areas of saltmarsh and mangrove communities in Victoria and the mudflats are of State geomorphological significance. The seagrass beds are nursery areas for fish, including commercially and recreationally important species such as King George Whiting, Bream and Mullet.

The area is especially significant as a feeding habitat for the 32 species of migratory waders found in Western Port. The waters around Barralier Island, one of the bay's 13 high tide roost sites, are particularly sensitive to disturbance.

Churchill Marine National Park (670 ha) protects seagrass beds, mangroves, sheltered intertidal mudflats and sandy beaches, with a raised beach in the Marine National Park of State geological and geomorphological significance. The intertidal mudflats extending from Rhyll to Newhaven also support seagrasses and vast numbers of bivalve molluscs, worms and creatures that provide a rich food source for birds and fish.

The area around Rhyll, the nearest town, is popular for boat-based activities, shore-based sightseeing, birdwatching and other natural history activities.

Ramsar wetlands

These three Marine National Parks are all part of the internationally listed Western Port Ramsar wetlands, containing important foraging and roosting areas for a number of waterbird species, including migratory waders.

The site is also an important drought refuge for inland waterbirds during the summer months as the marine environment provides habitat all year round.

Western Port is one of the three most important sites in Victoria in terms of wader numbers and density. It periodically supports more than 10,000 ducks and black swans, as well as more than 5% of the Victorian population of eight migratory shorebird species, including the Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, Double-banded Plover, Eastern Curlew and Red-necked Stint.

Western Port is also a significant breeding area for the Fairy Tern, Pied Oystercatcher, Pied Cormorant, Australian Pelican and Hooded Plover.

Hooded Plovers nest in very exposed beach locations, so please take care and watch for eggs when walking above the high tide line, especially between August and February.



Hooded Plover

Marine National Park boundaries

Yaringa Marine National Park (980 hectares) is adjacent to Quail Island Nature Conservation Reserve. A shore marker at Yaringa Marina identifies the park boundary.

French Island Marine National Park (2,800 ha) extends 15 km along the northern shore of French Island National Park. The park boundary follows North Arm and the Horseshoe Channel and is marked by In-water navigation marks and Shore marks at the eastern and western extent of the park.

Churchill Island Marine National Park (675 ha) is located south of Rhyll, on the eastern shore of Phillip Island. Shore marks at Long Point and the north point of Churchill Island identify the park boundary.

Activity	What can I do?
Recreational activities	
• nature observation and sightseeing	yes
• snorkelling and scuba diving	yes
• swimming, surfing	yes
• windsurfing, sailing, boating	yes (1)
• filming and photography	yes
Recreational fishing and harvesting	
• all forms of fishing - line, spear, netting, traps	no
• shellfish collection, including abalone and rock lobster collection	no
• bait collection	no
• catch and release fishing	no
Commercial fishing and marine aquaculture	
• abalone fishing	no
• rock lobster fishing	no
• netting, line fishing and trapping	no
• marine aquaculture	no
Education and research	
• educational excursions	yes
• scientific research	yes (2)
Other uses	
• licensed tour operators	yes (2)
• filming and photography (commercial)	yes (2)
• removal or disturbance of plants or animals	no
• dredging and spoil dispersal	no
• activities that disturb the seafloor	no
• waste and ballast discharge	no
<p>1 Restrictions may apply to high-speed boating or the use of personal watercraft where there is a conflict with natural values or other users</p> <p>2 Subject to permit</p>	

Personal safety

Diving should only be undertaken by trained and experienced divers

Beware of sudden changes in weather, especially when boating or canoeing on open water

Wear adequate protective footwear when exploring coastal environments

Watch where your hands are going at all times to avoid potentially dangerous creatures

Beware of large tidal variations of up to three metres

Stay away from cliff edges and bases

Ensure adequate protection from the sun and wind

Practise safe boating, and follow all signs and markers correctly

Caring for the marine environment

Keep clear of bird feeding or roosting areas

Take all rubbish home with you – plastic and other waste can kill bird and marine life

Always replace any organisms or rocks you may have disturbed

Clean bilges and sumps out regularly on land

Dispose of all waste material on land in a way in which it will not flow into the Bay

Take care when you drop anchor, avoid sensitive areas and use incoming buoys where provided

Practise minimal impact diving and snorkelling techniques

Take the time to learn more about Victoria's marine animals and plants and the habitats they depend on

Enjoying Western Port's Marine National Parks

As well as protecting the marine environment, Western Port's Marine National Parks offer an attractive range of recreation opportunities.

Canoeing is an ideal way to explore the mangroves and estuarine conditions of Yaringa and Churchill Island marine national parks.

Whether on land or from the water, bird watching can be very rewarding, with many species breeding or roosting around the bay, including a number of migratory waders.

Yachting is increasingly popular in the bay's relatively tranquil waters. In particular, a trip around French Island is an enjoyable experience - but please remember to take care when mooring within the fragile sea grass beds and avoid nesting and roosting sites for birds.

On calm days snorkelling and diving among the sea grass meadows will reveal a myriad of crustaceans, fish and other marine species. Be on the look out for the Pot-bellied Seahorse and Weedy Seadragon, Victoria's marine emblem.

Nearby parks and reserves

French Island National Park

A quiet haven for nature lovers, the park has a large koala population and abundant native birdlife. Access is by ferry from Stony Point. Visitors' cars are not permitted on the island, so travel is by foot, bicycle or guided tour.

Mornington Peninsula National Park

Taking in Point Nepean, Greens Bush and the ocean coastline between Portsea and Flinders, the park features superb surf beaches, rocky headlands and magnificent coastal scenery. Explore the nineteenth century fortifications of Fort Nepean, including tunnels and gun emplacements, and take a tour or stay overnight at the historic Cape Schanck Lighthouse.

Bunurong Marine National Park

The Bunurong coast features striking rock formations, attractive sandy coves, rugged sandstone cliffs and prominent headlands. The coastal waters also contain a remarkable range of habitats that support abundant marine life.

The Bunurong coast is ideal for all sorts of activities, from swimming, boating and diving to beach walks, exploring rockpools to discover Bunurong's fascinating marine creatures or simply enjoying the spectacular coastal scenery.

Restrictions

For the protection of the marine environment, a number of activities are prohibited within the boundaries of Victoria's Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries.



No fishing, netting, spearing, taking or killing of marine life. All methods of fishing, from the shore or at sea, are prohibited



No taking or damaging of animals, plants and objects (artefacts)

There are strong penalties under the National Parks Act for fishing in Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries. These restrictions and penalties apply in Western Port's Marine National Parks from 16 November 2002.

You may carry fin-fish on board your boat within park boundaries if you caught the fish outside the parks, and you may also carry (but not use) a fishing rod or a spear gun.

You may also have abalone or rock lobster and associated equipment (securely stowed) on board the boat provided that you are travelling straight through the park by the shortest practicable route.

To report a fishing offence call the Department of Primary Industries on 13FISH (133 474).



Canoeing

Parks Victoria is responsible for the day-to-day management of Victoria's Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries.

If you would like further information about Victoria's Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries, contact the Parks Victoria Information Centre on **13 1963** or visit the Parks Victoria website at: www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

Parknotes on each of Victoria's Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries, including boundaries and permitted and prohibited activities, have been produced to assist visitors to these areas.