Cape Howe Marine National Park

Visitor Guide

At the far eastern tip of Victoria is a remote wilderness that few people have experienced. Adjacent to the Cape Howe Wilderness Area of Croajingolong National Park, Cape Howe Marine National Park is where Victoria touches the Pacific. Bathed in warm water from the tropical north and buffered from waves generated in the east, it is Victoria’s Pacific gem.

Location and access

Cape Howe Marine National Park is adjacent to the Croajingolong National Park and covers 4,050 hectares. Access is via boat or by walking along the Wilderness Coast Walk from Mallacoota, or the Nadgee Nature Reserve in New South Wales. The Park extends along the coastline (excluding the Iron Prince headland reef area) and offshore for approximately three nautical miles, to the limit of Victorian waters.

What you might see

Much of the coastline is formed from mobile sand dunes that are gradually shifting over the border into New South Wales. Bordering these dunes is a mixture of ancient pink granite and purple sandstone formed over 350 million years ago. These rocks outcrop near the border at Cape Howe.

Low profile reefs are covered in a dense forest of the brown seaweed *Phyllospora* or Crayweed that reaches over two metres long. Beneath this thick, swirling canopy shelter many smaller seaweeds, red sea-tulips, sponges, sea-stars and many large shells. Tiny brittle-stars, pill-bugs and brightly coloured worms nestle around large sea squirts.

Off this section of the coast, the seafloor tilts steeply down into deeper water. Here, there is not enough light for the large brown seaweeds and the low sandstone reefs are covered with small patches of leafy red seaweeds and many attached animals. Sea-whips are common, arching gracefully up from the sea floor.

The whole region is alive with a variety of fish, with an assortment of warm and cool water species. Purple Wrasse, Blue-Throated Wrasse and Herring Cale dart amongst the kelp. Large, disk-like Sunfish are relatively frequent visitors, drifting in the surface waters and feeding on jellyfish.

Large, inquisitive and charismatic, the Eastern Blue Groper (*Achoerodus viridis*) is actually a member of the wrasse family and is not a true Groper. These fish are local identities of the rocky ledges and gutters of the park. When scuba diving you may see and hear these fish crunching on Black Sea-urchins or molluscs with their plump, tough lips. Colour distinguishes male from female fish - males being blue or green and females usually brown or red. Reaching up to one metre in length, Eastern Blue Gropers inhabit reefs to a depth of 40 metres.

Hundreds of humpback whales pass through on their annual migration between the tropics and Antarctic waters, sometimes followed by pods of Orcas. Little Penguins are common too, foraging from the large rookery at Gabo Island.

Protected for the future

Cape Howe Marine National Park is part of a system of 13 Marine National Parks and 11 smaller Marine Sanctuaries created by the Victorian Government 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.
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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.

There are strong penalties under the National Parks Act for fishing in Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries. To report a fishing offence call the Department of Primary Industries on 13 FISH (13 3474).

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

Park notes on Victoria’s Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries, including boundaries, permitted and prohibited activities, have been produced to assist visitors to these areas.

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