

Best Practice Management of Commercial Whale Shark Tours



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Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation

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Holbox Island Mexico
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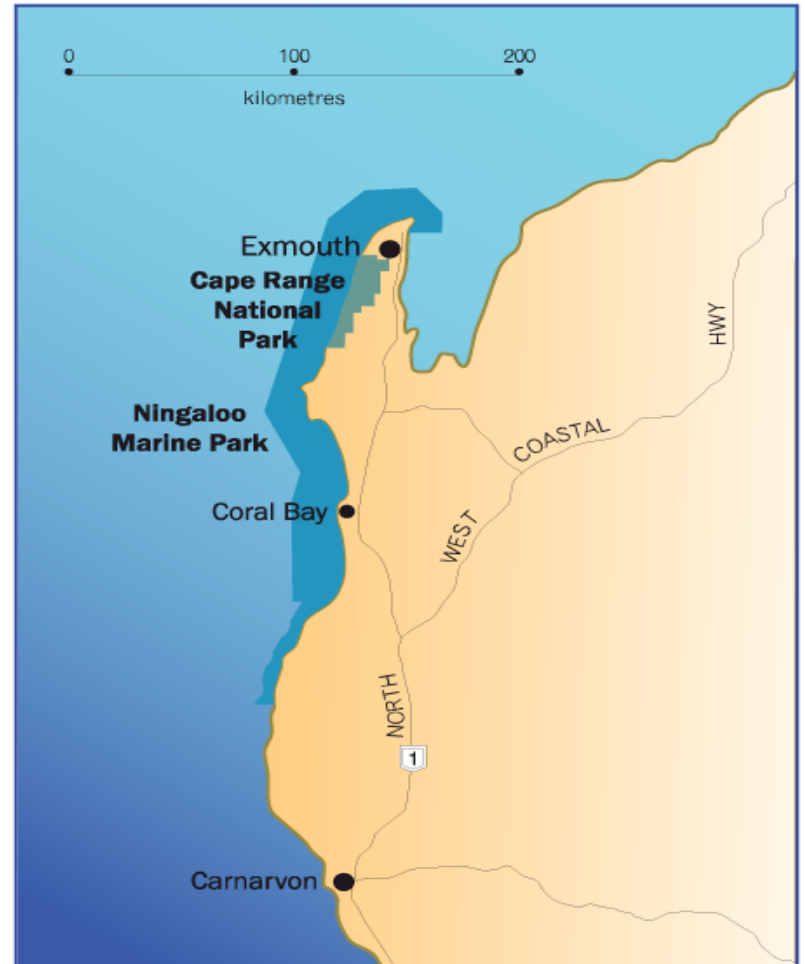


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Location



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DEC's Role

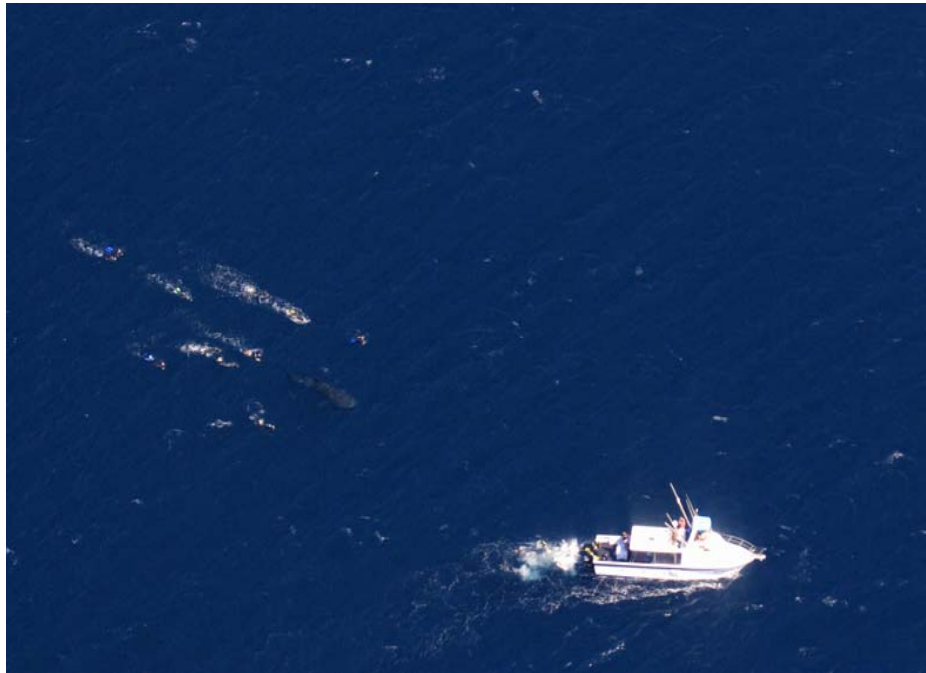
- ❑ DEC manages over 25 Million hectares of lands and waters
- ❑ *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 & Regulations*
- ❑ *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 & Regulations*
- ❑ Marine Park Purpose is:
 - Allowing only that level of recreational and commercial activity that is consistent with the proper conservation and restoration of the natural environment and protection of flora and fauna CALM Act s13B



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DEC – Recreation & Tourism




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- ❑ Promote recreational opportunities
- ❑ Protect and conserve flora and fauna
- ❑ Increase appreciation and understanding of the natural environment within the community
- ❑ Best way to conserve something is to make it valuable
 - Financially and/or
 - Emotionally



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DEC – Recreation & Tourism

- ❑ Provides sustainable economic opportunities for local communities – especially Indigenous people
- ❑ Can contribute to human well being
 - Healthy Parks Healthy People
 - ❑ Qualities & attributes of custodianship
 - ❑ Environmental protection, and
 - ❑ Making a contribution to society



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DEC – Recreation & Tourism


- ❑ Contributes financial & material resources to management and research
- ❑ Visitor management and tourism are important conservation tools



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Status of Whale Sharks in WA

- ❑ Protected species – managed pursuant to the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950
- ❑ Formal management commenced in 1993
- ❑ Wildlife management program completed in 1997
 - *Whale Shark Interaction Management with particular reference to Ningaloo Marine Park (Coleman 1997)*



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Objectives of Program

- ❑ Improve management of whale shark interactions
- ❑ Provide long term scientific basis to determine management strategies
 - Provided overview of biology & ecology – reasons for management
 - Government's role-management/compliance
 - Research & monitoring requirements
 - Implementation & review



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Licensing of Commercial Tours

- ❑ Restricted licences introduced in 1997
- ❑ 15 allocated via competitive process (EOI)
- ❑ Licences granted for 5 years with 5 years renewal period (Expire December 2008)
- ❑ Conditions developed from Code of Conduct in consultation with operators
- ❑ DEC management team - Government
- ❑ Whale Sharks WA - Operators



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Issues



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- ❑ Compliance – Overt/Covert monitoring
- ❑ Reasonable use of the licence
- ❑ Safety
- ❑ Public education
- ❑ Operator training

Operator Training Program

- ▣ Background
 - Developed in 2006
 - Industry staff
 - Improve delivery of whale shark tourism




Operator Training Program

- Why develop a training program?
 - Tourism industry/DEC relationship
 - Protection of the environment
 - Conservation of whale sharks
 - Consumer demand – Catlin study 2005
 - Provide education on the importance of the area and species ecologically

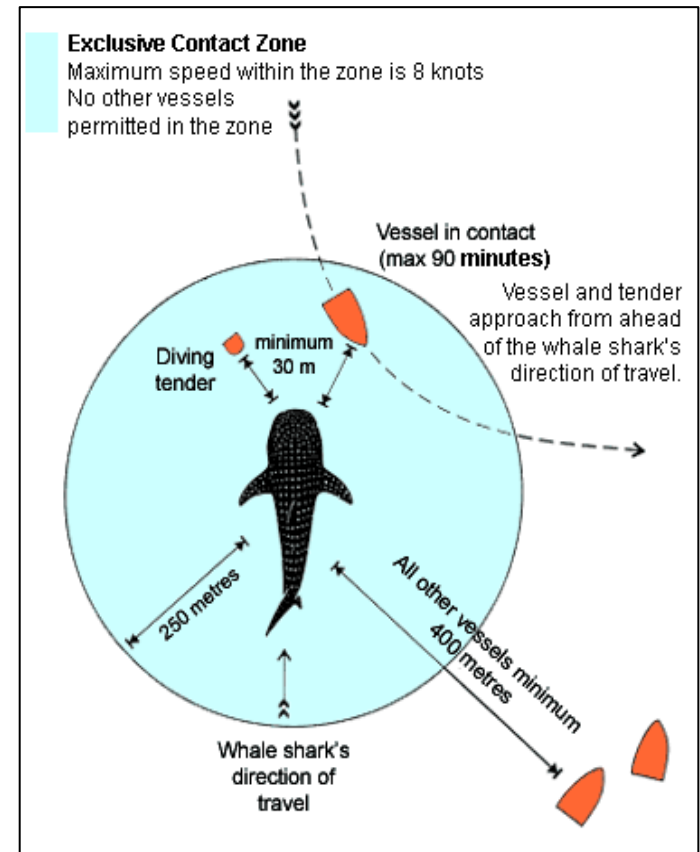


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Operator Training Program

- Course outcomes
 - Increase understanding
 - Minimize potential impacts on whale sharks
 - Increase compliance with licence conditions
 - Increase visitor satisfaction



Operator Training Program

□ Where are we at?

- Course design – 3 modules
- Practical session – production of DVD
- Timing – flexibility
- 8 to 58 participants
- Accepted by industry

Whale Shark Interaction Training DVD

Introduction

Play All

1. Departure

2. Vessel Introduction

3. Interaction Preparation

4. Morning Snorkel

5. Interaction Procedures


6. Interaction Protocol

7. Behaviours & Observations

8. Interpretation



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Sustainable Operations

- ❑ WA Government adopts a Sustainability Policy
- ❑ Triple Bottom Line
- ❑ Environment
 - Natural/Greenhouse/Wildlife
- ❑ Social
 - Community/Stewardship/Appreciation
- ❑ Economic
 - Business/Conservation Management



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Reallocation of Licences 2009

- ❑ Reallocated on publicly advertised competitive basis
- ❑ Selection criteria based on
 - Fit and proper person
 - Natural Environmental Performance
 - Social Performance
 - Economic Performance
- ❑ Assessment of
 - Past performance/experience
 - Future commitment to best practice



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Reallocation of Licences 2009

- Accountability
 - Independent annual audit/review against licence conditions
- Setting of minimum standards & best practice examples



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Natural Environment Performance

- ❑ Maintenance of the natural ecology
- ❑ Greenhouse gas emissions
- ❑ Wildlife interaction strategies
- ❑ Solid waste
- ❑ Renewable energy
- ❑ Environmental stewardship
- ❑ Reduced vehicle use
- ❑ Fuel and chemical storage and handling
- ❑ Noise levels



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Social Environment Performance

- ❑ Level of Indigenous employment/ownership
- ❑ Culturally sensitive behavior
- ❑ Interpretive materials & presentations
- ❑ Safety equipment & procedures
- ❑ Visitor feedback
- ❑ Content of marketing material
- ❑ Proportion of expenditure from local businesses
- ❑ Membership of local associations
- ❑ Service and access to accommodate a range of disabilities



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Economic Performance

- ❑ Skills & qualifications of key personnel in business/nature based tourism/wildlife interaction tourism
- ❑ Marketing plan
- ❑ Itineraries
- ❑ Cash flow statements
- ❑ Financial capacity
- ❑ Contribution to park management over and above licence charge
- ❑ Business structure



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EOI Process


- ❑ Pre EOI workshop for potential applicants-input
- ❑ Assessment panel –
 - DEC Licensing/Wildlife staff
 - Tourism WA representative
 - Probity Auditor
- ❑ Consultation with Marine Parks & Reserves Authority
- ❑ Approval of Minister for the Environment

Outcomes

- ❑ Only 14 licences granted
 - 1 vacant – review in 3 years
- ❑ Customised conditions to suit applicant commitments
- ❑ Commitments from all applicants to all staff trained
- ❑ Adoption of GPS electronic monitoring/log books
- ❑ Accountability framework for operators and DEC



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Courtesy Tourism WA



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