

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Rangeland's marine and coastal environment provides significant economic, social and cultural value to the region. It is home to the Shark Bay World Heritage Area, the World Heritage nominated Ningaloo Marine Park, some of Western Australia's largest commercial fishers and infrastructure that is critical to the operations of the region's mining industry. The coastal environment incorporates major estuaries, karst landforms, dune systems and beaches. The coastal and marine environments are also of special significance to Aboriginal communities.

The task of managing the marine and coastal environment (within the boundary of the State of Western Australia) falls to a number of Western Australia State Government agencies. These include:

- The Department of Local Government and Regional Development
- The Department of Environment and Conservation
- The Department of Fisheries
- The Department of Minerals and Petroleum (formerly the Department of Industry and Resources)
- The Department of Planning and Infrastructure
- The Western Australian Planning Commission
- The Department of Indigenous Affairs
- The Department of State Development

Local Governments and Aboriginal Land Corporations in the region also have a core role in managing the environment.

Together with these government agencies, the Rangelands NRM Coordinating Group (hereafter Rangelands WA) has a crucial role in the management of the Region's coastal and marine environment. Rangelands WA is a non-government organisation concerned with facilitating the delivery of the Australian Government's natural resource management initiatives, programmes and policies. The overarching purpose of Rangelands WA is to identify and facilitate effective partnerships for the sustainable management of the region's 'natural heritage'. The marine and coastal programme focuses on the area's extensive and diverse coastal and marine environment (Figure 1.1 illustrates the extent of the Rangelands region).

Over recent years, the Rangelands coastal and marine area has attracted an increase in investment in research projects designed to support natural resource management. Investment supporting the development of management plans for the assets of the Rangeland's coastal and marine environment also increased. As of December 2008, there were in excess of 40 management plans or strategies concerning human activities within the Rangelands coastal and marine environment.

Given the coverage of natural resource management provided through existing management plans, when considering future research, monitoring or remediation projects, it is first necessary to identify what limitations or 'gaps' exist within existing management and research frameworks.

Determining the nature of limitations or 'gaps' is problematic. For example, various agencies, organisations and community groups generally represent a specific set of interests that invariably influence their understanding of limitations and gaps. In determining the nature of limitations or 'gaps' within current management and research frameworks, this study recognises two key factors. These are:

1. Many of the management activities undertaken in the Rangelands region involve the voluntary efforts of the individuals who use the environment. As such, ongoing management efforts and research projects must consider the priorities and perceptions of users.

2. Individuals who frequently visit (and use) the marine and coastal environment are well positioned to observe how recent regulations, infrastructure developments and demographic changes have influenced the uses of the marine and coastal environment, and thereby identify priority limitations or gaps within existing management frameworks.

This study provides critical background information for directing the development of future management frameworks and research projects through providing a summary of users' priority concerns regarding the management of the Rangelands marine and coastal environment.

Figure 1.1 Rangelands Region



1.2 Scope of the Study

This report focuses on the coastal and marine environment from the East Pilbara Statistical Local Area to the Wyndham – East Kimberley Statistical Local Area¹. The objectives of the study were:

1. To describe the major human activities occurring within the Rangeland's coastal and marine environment.
2. To identify users' priority concerns regarding the management of the coastal and marine environment.
3. To identify probable development trends within the key coastal settlements in the Rangelands region, and implications that development trends might have for the uses of the coastal and marine environment.
4. Given probable development trends within the study area, to identify users' perceptions of limitations and gaps within existing management frameworks and research programmes.

The study recognised that users and managers of the marine environment were well placed to describe the uses of the marine and coastal environment and identify priority concerns regarding the management of the natural resources. The study involved extensive community consultations and interviews. Other supporting information sources included: data sets compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics; management documents and research reports written by various government agencies and consultancy firms and, data releases prepared by mining companies. Full details of the research methods of this study have been included in Appendix A.

This study recognises the work done by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts in assessing Indigenous peoples' connection to and uses of the Rangelands coastal and marine environment. In 2007, the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts released their findings of an extensive review of literature describing how Indigenous people use and value the coastal and marine environment. The report for that study was entitled 'Sea Countries of the North-West: Literature Review on Indigenous Connection to and Uses of the North West Marine Region' and was prepared by Dr Dermot Smith. This study does not seek to replicate Smith's work and the authors of this report recommend that this report be read in conjunction with Smith's report. Smith's report is available from <<http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/publications/north-west/pubs/nw-sea-countries.pdf>>.

In addition to this report, some of the results from the study have been included on a purpose built website. The website, which was constructed to house data that describe the nature and location of human uses within the Rangelands marine and coastal environment, acts as a complementary resource for this report. The website can be accessed at <<http://www.rangelandswa.info>>. Details on how to use this website have been included in Appendix B.

1.3 Structure of the Report

This report is structured into six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two presents findings related to the East Pilbara Statistical Local Area. The discussion commences with a review of the population and employment characteristics of the area before outlining the major human uses of the marine and coastal environment. This is followed by a description of the users' priority concerns regarding the nature of human activities in the coastal and marine environment and implications for the natural environment. The discussion then turns to a review of activities, strategies and projects already underway in the East Pilbara coastal area to address these priority concerns. From this discussion the 'gaps' in existing activities, strategies and projects for addressing users priority concerns are identified.

Chapters Three, Four and Five are structured similarly to Chapter Two, which each focusing on a different coastal statistical local area within the study region. Chapter Three centres on the Broome Statistical Local Area, which incorporates well-known destinations such as 80 Mile Beach, Cable Beach and Ardyaloon.

¹ A study focusing on the coastal and marine environment between Carnarvon and Port Hedland was completed concurrently and the results are presented in the report entitled 'Human Uses of the Rangelands Coast Part One: Major Uses and Priorities for Natural Resource Management from Carnarvon to Port Hedland'.

Chapter Four centres on the Derby – West Kimberley Statistical Local Area and Chapter Five centres on the Wyndham – East Kimberley Statistical Local Area.

Chapter Six, the conclusion, summarises the major findings of the study. This chapter outlines the recommended areas for future research and on-ground works to improve the sustainability of the natural environment given current and probable future human activities in the area.

The report contains three appendices. Appendix A describes the methods used in this study. Appendix B provides a guide to using the web-based marine and coastal information ‘clearing house’ developed as part of this study. Appendix C provides a bibliography to compliment this report.