Personal safety
Diving should only be undertaken by trained and experienced divers.
Beware of sudden changes in weather, especially when boating on open water.
Beware of strong currents and undertows when snorkelling or at the beach.
Wear shoes that grip well when walking on rock platforms.
Watch where your hands are going at all times to avoid potentially dangerous creatures.
Be aware of large unexpected waves when walking on shore, especially on rock platforms.

There are no surf lifesaving patrols in Merri Marine Sanctuary. The nearest patrolled beach is at Lady Bay. It is recommended that swimming be contained within marked areas patrolled by surf life saving clubs.

Caring for the marine environment
Discarded gear and rubbish can endanger birds and marine animals - please take your rubbish home.
Always report any organisms or rocks you may have turned over.
No Dogs are allowed in Merri Marine Sanctuary.
The intertidal zone in Victoria is protected - both inside and outside marine national parks and sanctuaries. Visit www.delpi.vic.gov.au for more information.
To report a fishing offence call 13 FISH (133 477).
Enhance your visit by exploring with a licensed tour operator. www.parks.vic.gov.au for a list of operators who run activities in this park.

Victoria’s unique coastline
The southern coastline of Australia has been isolated for millions of years from other continents due to ocean currents. This has resulted in our marine life evolving in many different ways. Ninety percent (90%) of all marine life here is found nowhere else.
Home to over 12,000 species of plants and animals, it is considered one of the most biodiverse and unique marine ecosystems in the world. For this reason, this significant marine environment is protected for the future.

Education and research
The network of marine national parks and sanctuaries provides excellent sites for research and education opportunities. All research must be approved before commencing. Schools, researchers or other groups visiting Merri Marine Sanctuary need to register their visit with local rangers on 13 1963.

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.
Rangers and Fisheries Officers regularly patrol these areas and enforce regulations.

No fishing, netting, spearling, 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).

Protected network
Merri Marine Sanctuary is part of a system of 13 marine national parks and 11 marine sanctuaries in Victoria. By keeping these areas in a natural state we will protect this unique marine environment into the future.

The establishment of marine protected areas was based on scientific research. It followed ten years of community and industry consultation. An ongoing research and monitoring program forms part of Parks Victoria’s management of these areas.
Victoria was the first jurisdiction in the world to create an entire system of fully protected marine national parks at the same time.

Parks Victoria is responsible for the day-to-day management of Victoria’s marine national parks and marine sanctuaries.

Marine pests
Marine pests are non-native plants or animals that can have a detrimental impact on native marine ecosystems. They are a significant threat to the health of the marine environment. Marine pests can wipe out native species by preying upon or out-competing them.
Pests can arrive in new areas in a variety of ways, and preventing their spread is one way visitors can help protect the marine environment. Park users should wash down all equipment and dry it thoroughly before changing locations to minimise the risk of spreading these pests.


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.parks.vic.gov.au.

Merri Marine Sanctuary

Sea life prospers in the cold, crystal-clear waters off Victoria’s west coast near Warrnambool. At the mouth of the Merri River, 29 ha of precious habitat for many marine species are protected in Merri Marine Sanctuary. Two small islands in the middle of the sanctuary are important roosting areas for Little Penguins and Short-tailed Shearwaters. Beneath the surface of the water, a spectacular array of marine plants and animals thrive.

Sharkelling and diving
The sanctuary is one of the most popular scuba diving areas around Warrnambool. Areas around Middle Island and Pickering Point are also used for snorkelling. Take care, as the sanctuary is regularly exposed to large swells from the Southern Ocean.
There are a number of dive groups in the area that dive the sanctuary. To find a list of licensed tour operators visit www.parks.vic.gov.au.

Coastal walking and beach activities
A walking track follows the coastline along the cliffs. A footbridge allows pedestrians to cross the Merri River. Near the footbridge is a flat expanse of sand and cool blue sheltered water. Here, on calm days, Stinger Ray is the ideal location for beach activities. Dogs are not permitted within the Marine Sanctuary or on Pickering Point or Thunder Point areas.

Bird watching
Merri is a haven for many bird species. Birdwatchers are likely to see Australasian Gannets, Crested Terns and Pacific Gulls. Penguins, Pied Cormorants and Shearwaters nest on Merri and Middle Islands. The shallow sandy areas are important feeding areas for shorebirds. 51 conservation listed shore or sea birds have been sighted in and around Merri Marine Sanctuary.

Enjoying the park
Visitors can enjoy the park from land or in the water. Scuba dive or snorkel and discover Sea Sweep, Pot-bellied Seahorses and colourful sea life under water. Stroll along cliff top paths and take in views of the sanctuary and out to the Southern Ocean.

Pickering Point
When conditions are safe, the rock pools at Pickering Point are popular for families and school groups to explore and learn about our marine life. More than 80 species of invertebrates have been found on Pickering Point’s intertidal reef. The western portion of Pickering Point intertidal reef is particularly diverse and has been designated a Special Protection Area. Please help us protect the sanctuary by leaving everything as you find it.

Middle and Merri Islands
Little Penguins and Short-tailed Shearwaters live in burrows and nests on Middle Island. Trampling is a major threat to these birds’ eggs and young; therefore the islands are not accessible to the public.
The vegetation consists of coastal plants, including Seaberry Saltbush, Beaded Glasswort, Coastal Pigface and Cushion Bush.

Shipwrecks
The Warrnambool shipping trade commenced in the early 1840s. Early photos show sailing ships anchored in the area now known as Stinger Bay. Middle Island was the site of a light station and cottage, which have been relocated to Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum. The coastline in the Warrnambool area is home to numerous shipwrecks, including the remains of a wrecked steel barge. Removal of artefacts or objects from these sites is not permitted.

For more information call the on 13 1963 or visit our website at ParksVictoriaInformationCentre@parks.vic.gov.au.

November 2012
Printed on Australian-made 100% recycled paper

How to get there
The Merri Marine Sanctuary is on the Victorian south-west coast at Warrnambool, located between the Harbour Breakwater and Thunder Point Coastal Reserve - approximately 260 km west of Melbourne. Access to Thunder Point and Pickering Point is via Macdonald St. A footbridge leading from Viaduct Rd also provides access to the walking track.
Subtidal reefs

Subtidal reefs are made up of large rocks found underwater. Many reefs at Merri have been eroded by wave action and provide perfect places for marine algae to attach. Between the large beds of seaweed, Sea Sweeper, Pot-bellied Seashores and Giant Cuttlefish are often seen on subtidal reefs in the sanctuary.

Inter tidal reefs

Intertidal reefs are rocky areas between the high and low tide lines along the shore. Life on an intertidal reef can be tough. Plants and animals living on these rocky structures are often exposed to hot sun, icy wind, rain and large waves.

At Merri Marine Sanctuary, green sea lettuce and sun bleached red coraline algae form a carpet of colour over the rock platform. Limpets, sea stars and anemones are common along the high tide line. Bull Kelp can be found along the fringes of the intertidal reefs.

OCEAN

Merri Marine Sanctuary boundary

The Merri Marine Sanctuary includes areas below the mean high water mark between Thunder Point and the west and easterly marks on the south-eastern end for approximately one metre. The sanctuary surrounds Middle and M Illas.

CUTTLEFISH

One of the most fascinating creatures you may discover here is the curious and charismatic Giant Cuttlefish. Large and generally solitary, they tend to hide in crevices and amongst seaweed during the day, but if you manage to find one, patient observation will be rewarded. The Giant Cuttlefish is a masterful quick-change artist, able to adjust its skin colouration in a split second to match its surroundings.

OCEAN

Merri Marine Sanctuary boundary

The Merri Marine Sanctuary includes areas below the mean high water mark between Thunder Point and the west and easterly marks on the south-eastern end for approximately one metre. The sanctuary surrounds Middle and M Illas.

Cuttlefish

One of the most fascinating creatures you may discover here is the curious and charismatic Giant Cuttlefish. Large and generally solitary, they tend to hide in crevices and amongst seaweed during the day, but if you manage to find one, patient observation will be rewarded. The Giant Cuttlefish is a masterful quick-change artist, able to adjust its skin coloration in a split second to match its surroundings.