

Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary

Discovering marine wonders at Flinders

The rocky shores and surrounding reefs at Flinders, at the south-west corner of Western Port, are famous for the diversity of their marine life. For thousands of school children, Flinders is their first exposure to the wonderful creatures that live along or rocky shores – the numerous rectangular crabs that scurry under rocks, multicoloured cushion seastars, spiralled shells of many shapes and sizes, and rows of colourful anemones.

For over a hundred years, scientists and naturalists have frequented the reefs, and the areas has revealed numerous animal species not previously known to science. Recent discoveries include seastars that brood their young in the stomach, and another tiny seastar species previously thought to be juveniles.

At high tide the coastline is spectacular enough, but the breaking waves generally conceal the offshore reefs. At low tide, the sea withdraws to expose a huge mushroom-shaped platform. A line of cobbles stretches out to sea, forming the stalk of the mushroom. At the tip, sections of reef branch out on either side to form the mushroom cap. Other reefs lie to the left and right and further out to sea, creating a mosaic of sheltered bays and pools.

The reef is formed from ancient basalt that has weathered extensively to form a multitude of micro-habitats, allowing a diverse range of creatures to shelter under the loose rocks or within the crevices and cracks. The bottoms of the rock pools are covered in dense meadows of bright green seagrass and brown seaweed.

Fish such as Saddled Wrasse and Magpie Morwong swim hastily between the fronds. Strange box-like cowfish and Weedy Seadragons, Victoria's marine state emblem, beat their small fins continuously to hover furtively over the seagrass beds.

Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary 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.



Rockpool rambling

Enjoying Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary

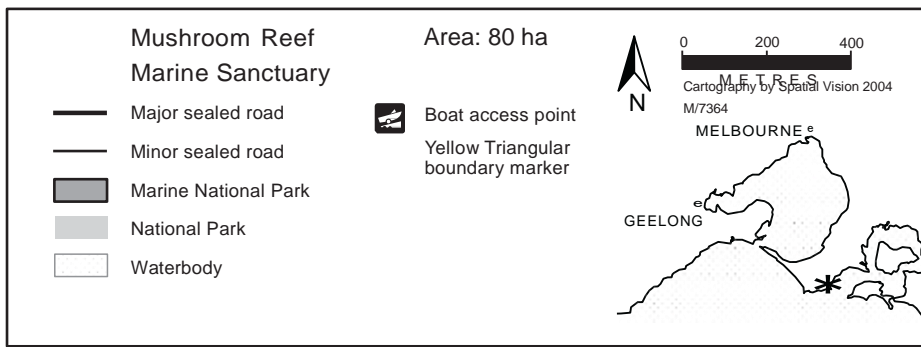
The rockpools at Flinders provide a wonderful opportunity to explore, appreciate and learn about the amazing diversity of Victoria's marine life.

Diving and snorkelling on the subtidal reefs is also popular. If you look carefully, you may see the amazing Black and White Sea Star, one of only two sea stars known to brood its young in its stomach. It carefully deposits the eggs onto rocks and after fertilisation passes the eggs one by one with its tube feet to the mouth.

Up to 300 juveniles grow in the stomach for a month or so and are released as clusters of tiny pink stars in October. No one knows for sure, but it appears that the female does not eat during this period.

The Black and White Sea Star is not common. It appears to favour shallow rockpools on basalt and occurs only in Victoria and Tasmania.



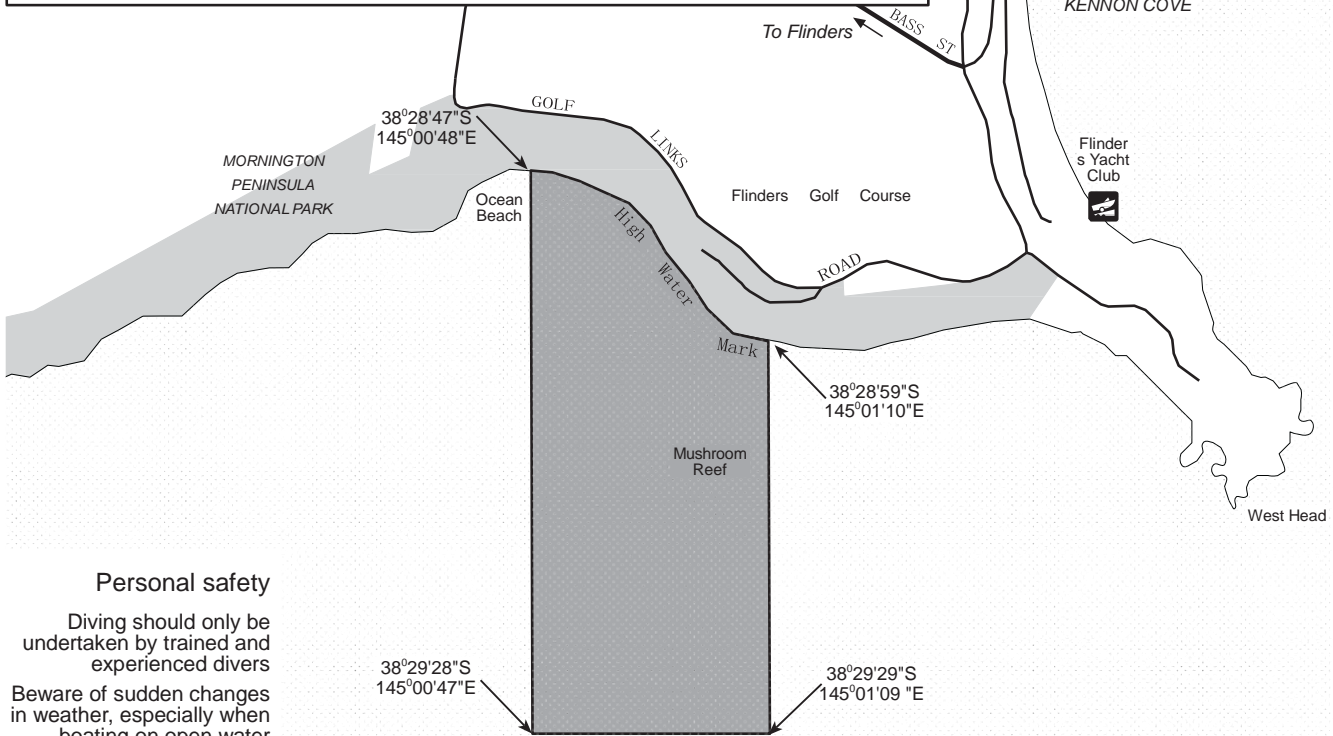


No fishing, netting, spearing, taking or killing of marine life. All methods of fishing, from the shore or at sea, are prohibited.



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

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 true position.



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 solid 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
- Stay away from cliff edges and bases
- Ensure adequate protection from the sun (hat, loose clothing and sunscreen)

Caring for the marine environment

- Discarded gear and rubbish can endanger birds and marine animals - please take your rubbish home
- Always replace any organisms or rocks you may have disturbed
- Keep clear of bird nesting or roosting areas
- Do not remove rock pool animals and plants from the water

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.

There are strong penalties under the National Parks Act for fishing in Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries. These restrictions and penalties apply in Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary 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.

Marine Sanctuary boundaries

Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary (80 ha) is located at Flinders. The sanctuary encompasses Mushroom Reef and extends offshore to the south for approximately 1 kilometre.

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

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