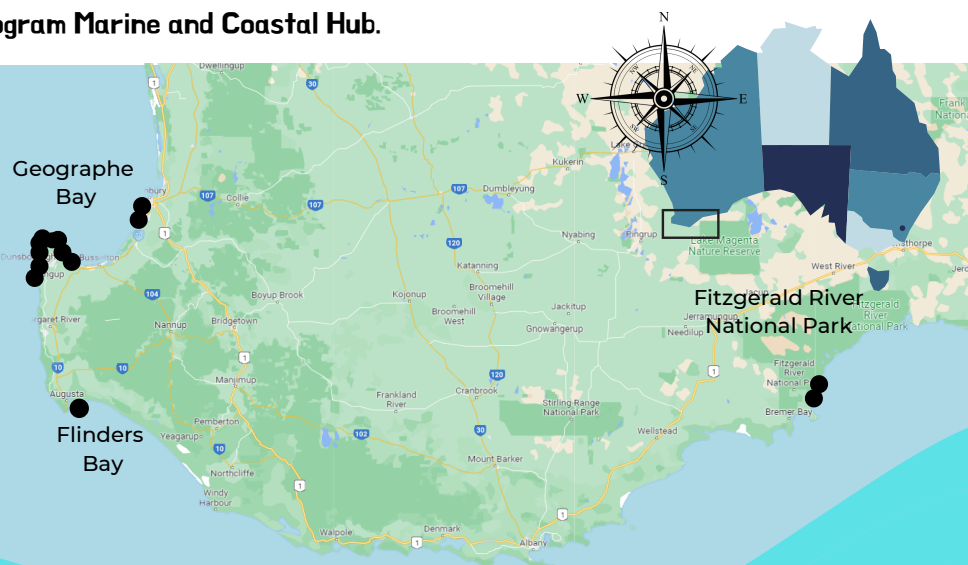


South West Whale Ecology Study (SouWEST) acknowledges the Wadandi / Pibulum Cultural Custodians of the Bibbulmun Nation of this land we live and work on and pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future.

This project is supported with funding from the Australian Government under the National Environmental Science Program Marine and Coastal Hub.

Photo matching identifies important Southern Right Whale aggregation areas in Geographe Bay and Flinders Bay in WA

Prepared by: Chandra Salgado Kent, Chris Burton, Marnie Giroud, & Brodie Elsdon



This project provides evidence to support the determination of two new Biologically Important Areas (BIAs) for Southern Right Whales in Geographe Bay and Flinders Bay.

Southern Right Whale images taken in 1994–2021 in the Ngari Capes Marine Park were processed, matched and uploaded to the Australasian Right Whale Photo-Identification Catalogue. Data was collected by scientists, citizen scientists, and whale watching charter operators.

The combined historical record identified up to 15 calving females in both Geographe Bay and Flinders Bay.

Both bays therefore qualify to be categorised as ‘a small established aggregation area’ for Southern Right Whales, according to BIA definitions outlined in the Southern Right Whale Conservation Management Plan.

Sightings snapshot

**2,706
PHOTOS**

Land and aerial photos were processed and matched with images of identified individuals and uploaded to the Australasian Right Whale Photo-Identification Catalogue (ARWPIC)

A RETURNING FEMALE

was resighted 9 years apart in Geographe Bay, each time with a calf in tow

**237
WHALES
IDENTIFIED**

including four calves
2 - Fitzgerald River National Park
141 - Geographe Bay region
88 - Flinders Bay
2 - Bunbury
4 - Perth

MOTHERS & CALVES

stayed in Geographe Bay for up to 2 months

What are BIAs?

BIAs for protected species are where individuals aggregate for calving, foraging, resting or migration. They are important to decisions made under national environmental laws. BIAs are determined by the Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and can be updated as new relevant species information becomes available.

Engaging research users

**72
RESEARCH
USERS WERE
IDENTIFIED**

from government, industry, tourism, education and community sectors and cultural custodians

**18
RESEARCH
USERS JOINED
A WORKSHOP**

to identify information needs and the best ways to share project findings: for management, conservation, education and community awareness

RECOMMENDATIONS

Flinders Bay and Geographe Bay both be classified as small established aggregation BIAs.

- Extend future research to capture wider ranging patterns within and between breeding grounds.
- Continue opportunistic photography as a cost-effective way to examining site-fidelity, movement, demographics, biological parameters and abundance.
- Conduct complementary systematic surveys across a broader spatial area and the entire breeding season.
- Compare photographs over the broader range of the western sub-population to evaluate connectivity and re-establishment of former breeding grounds across Western Australia and into South Australia.

For more information visit www.nespmarinecoastal.edu.au.

Acknowledgements: DBCA, Naturaliste Charters, Blair Ranford, Ian Wiese, Bruce King, Frank Eckler, Jennifer Baker, Jen Gill, Kate Sprogis, Mich Kennedy, Pia Markovic, Rod Peterson, Heidi Taylor, Therese Sayers., and Chanelle Webster.