

Merri Marine Sanctuary

Marine abundance in cold waters

Sea life prospers in the cold, crystal-clear, oxygen-charged waters off Victoria's west coast. If you waded into the sea off Warrnambool you soon realise that you are in waters that are part of the Southern Ocean.

The coastline just west of the breakwater at Warrnambool, near the mouth of the Merri River, is a perfect example of this thriving cool water environment. Rock platforms are covered in Neptune's Necklace, brown seaweed that looks like a string of beads. Numerous seasnails cling tightly to the rocks to avoid being washed into the sea by the strong waves. The seabed at the river mouth is a mixture of reef and sand, providing a range of habitats that support diverse marine life.

Two islands, Middle and Merri, sit just offshore, the remains of an ancient sand dune that stretches from Pickering Point, built up hundreds of thousands of years ago. The canyon between the islands is packed with sea life - kelps sway with the waves, colourful sponges dominate the overhangs, and rock lobster hide in the crevices.

Fish include Cat and Draughtboard Sharks, various leatherjackets, Blue-throated Wrasse, Bastard Trumpeters, Magpie Perch, parrotfish and morwongs. Penguins nest on the two islands and dolphins are frequent visitors.



Giant Cuttlefish

Merri 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.

Enjoying Merri Marine Sanctuary

The striking underwater scenery and variety of marine life combine to make the waters around Merri a popular site for diving and snorkelling.

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 caves 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.

Merri's beaches are popular for swimming, and walking tracks lead to points of interest.

Visitors may access Middle Island to see a colony of little penguins, but please note that access to the island can sometimes be dangerous. Be aware of sharp rocks, deep gutters and incoming tides. The sea floor may also change over time.

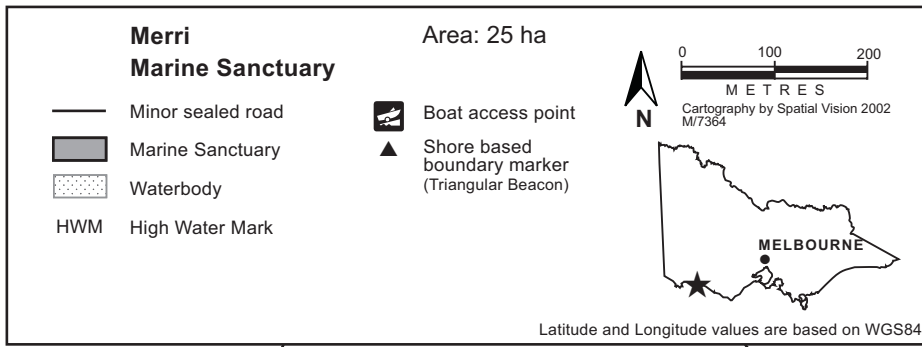
The coast at Merri is easily accessible by car, and nearby Warrnambool has a full range of facilities including caravan and camping grounds and a Visitor Information Centre.



Parks Victoria Ranger

"Victoria's system of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries provides total protection for their unique inhabitants, offering unlimited opportunities for us all to learn more about this stunning underwater world."

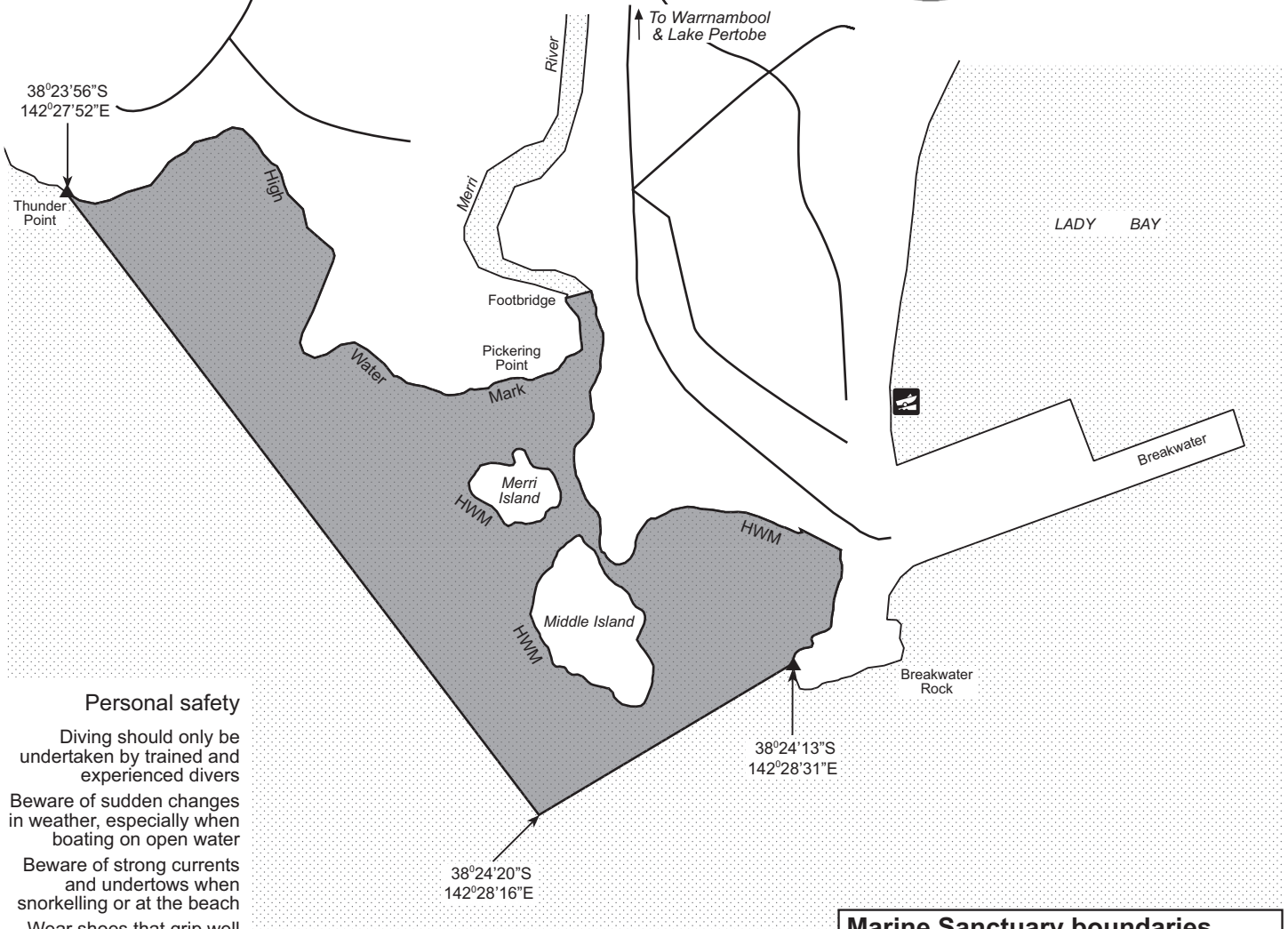
For more information call the Parks Victoria Information Centre on 13 1963 or visit our website at www.parkweb.vic.gov.au



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)



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
- Avoid putting your hand in dark holes that may contain venomous marine creatures
- Be aware of large unexpected waves when walking on shore, especially on rock platforms
- Stay away from cliff edges and bases

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 off most islands to avoid bird nesting or roosting areas. On Middle Island please keep to the formed boardwalk

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 Merri 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

Merri Marine Sanctuary (25 ha) is located offshore from the mouth of the Merri River. The sanctuary encompasses the waters around Merri and Middle Islands. The sanctuary boundary extends from the footbridge over the Merri River to west of the Breakwater and offshore to a point in line with Thunder Point to the northwest.

To report a fishing offence contact NRE Fisheries on (03) 9483 4283. Please ask for the Duty Officer and give a short message and leave a contact number.

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.