

# Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park

## - the jewel of the bay

### Marine wonders on Melbourne's doorstep

Dramatic underwater gorges, colourful sponge gardens, tall kelp forests, emerald seagrass beds, expanses of glittering yellow sand, surging currents and tranquil backwaters - the southern end of Port Phillip Bay has it all.

This superb marine environment is now fully protected in Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park, which comprises six separate areas - Swan Bay, Mud Islands, Pope's Eye, Point Lonsdale, Point Nepean and Portsea Hole.

Much of the area's energy and drama comes from its unique location at the narrow entrance to the largest bay in Victoria. Water surges through this entrance, known as the 'The Rip', as the bay fills and empties with the tides. With the tide comes suspended food for the many filter-feeding animals that live in the area.

Beneath the kelp-covered ledges on the walls of the deep gorge that runs through Port Phillip Heads are spectacular sponge gardens, which when illuminated are as colourful as tropical coral reefs. Sheer rock faces are painted with Jewel Anemones, bright Yellow Zooanthids, and a diversity of colourful sponges. Resting under the ledges during the day are bright Blue Devilfish, and inquisitive leatherjackets abound. Divers come from around the world to admire these magnificent scenes.

Inside the Bay conditions are less severe. On the sheltered side of Point Nepean are a series of reefs covered in Brown kelps and wiry Seagrass. This is a well-known location for the stunning Weedy Seadragon, Victoria's marine state emblem.



*Weedy Seadragon*

Behind Queenscliff lies Swan Bay, a large seagrass meadow that shelters many juvenile fish, including a number of commercially important species such as King George Whiting. Swan Bay is also a major feeding area for many species of wader birds.

Popes Eye, a small semi-circle of rocks halfway between Queenscliff and Sorrento, was constructed for defence of the Bay in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is now famous for its amazing diversity of marine plants, fish, invertebrates, and a colony of Australasian Gannets.

Mud Islands are a series of sand islands surrounding a shallow lagoon that are particularly important as bird breeding, roosting and feeding areas. Many seabirds breed here in spring, and over summer they are home to thousands of international migratory waders.

### Protecting our marine environment

The waters off Australia's southern coast are very special and unique. Over 90% of the plants and animals living here are found nowhere else on earth.

The Victorian Government has created a system of 13 Marine National Parks and 11 smaller Marine Sanctuaries 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. Victorians will also benefit from the positive effects that this protection will have on recreation and tourism, community education and scientific research.

People are encouraged to visit Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries, but extractive or potentially damaging activities (e.g. fishing and mining) are prohibited within their boundaries in order to preserve marine biodiversity and maintain or enhance the condition of these areas.









**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."*

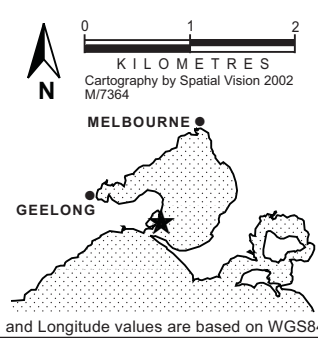
**For more information  
call the Parks Victoria  
Information Centre  
on 13 1963 or  
visit our website at  
[www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)**

**Port Phillip Heads  
Marine National Park**

Area: 3,580 ha

-  Highway
-  Sealed road
-  Marine National Park
-  National Park
-  Waterbody
-  HWM High Water Mark

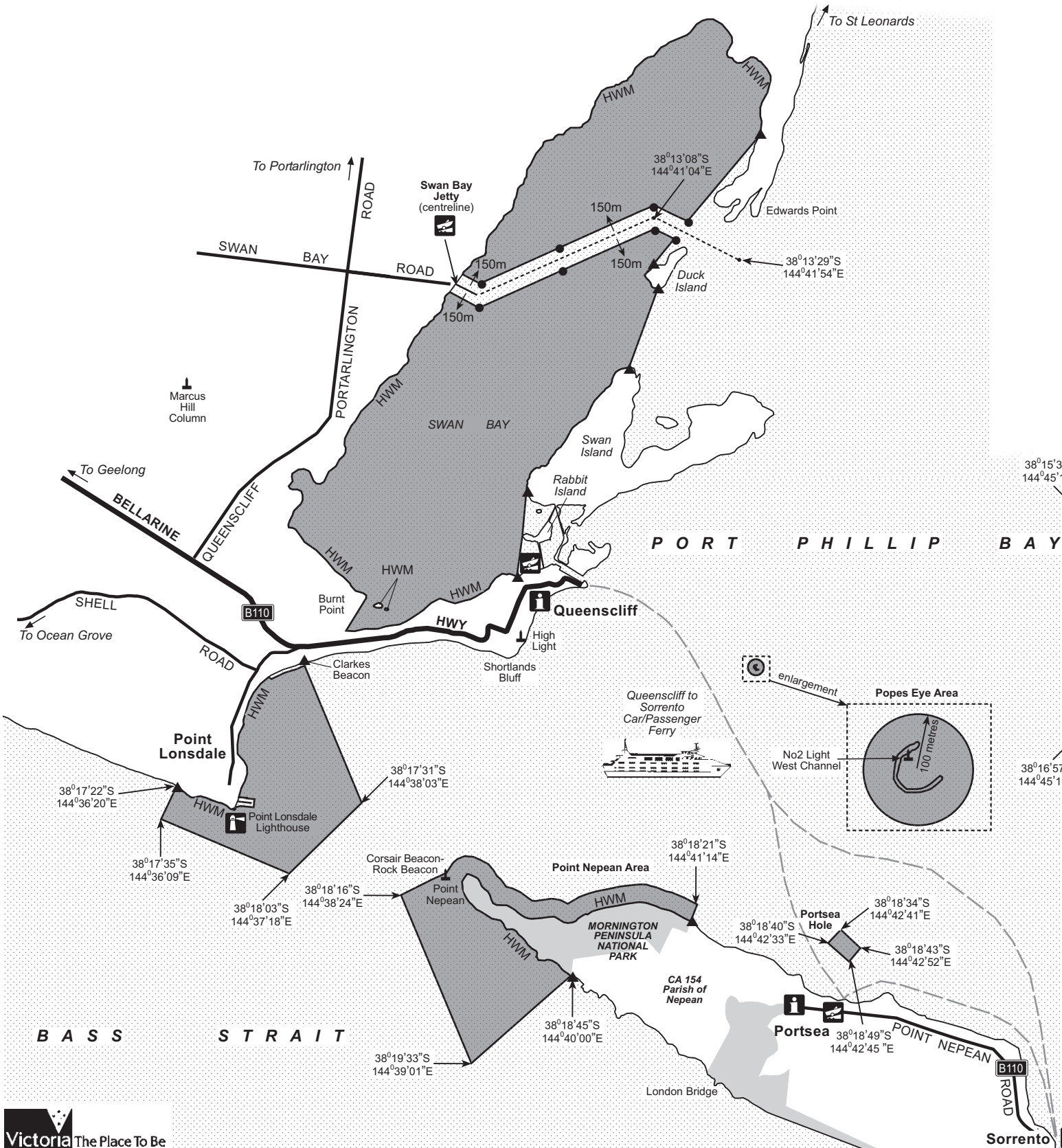
-  Boat access point
-  Shore based boundary marker (Triangular Beacon)
-  In water boundary marker (Pile or Buoy)
-  Lighthouse
-  Information

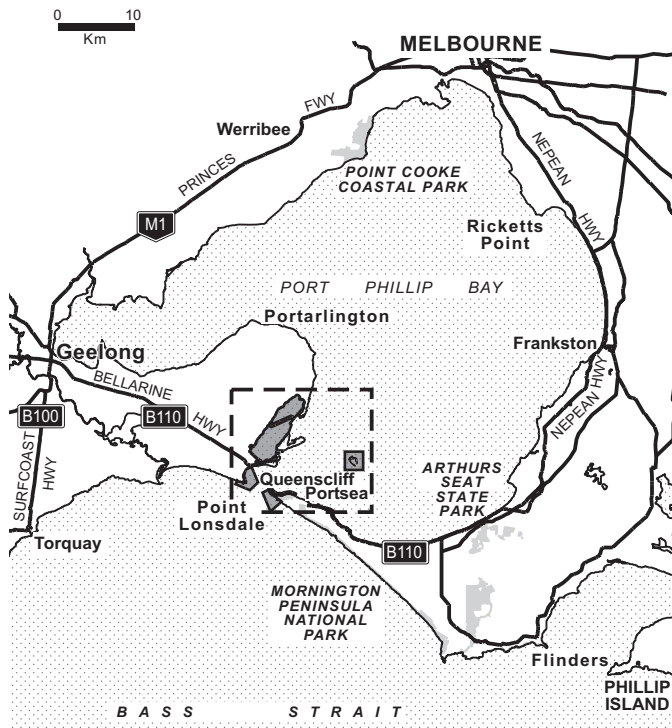


No fishing, netting, spearing, taking or killing of marine life. All methods of fishing, from the shore or at sea, are prohibited.



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





## Marine National Park boundaries

**Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park (3,580 ha)** is made up of six separate areas including Swan Bay, Mud Islands, Point Lonsdale, Point Nepean, Popes Eye and Portsea Hole.

The Swan Bay component of the park includes almost the entire bay, identified by a series of Shore Markers along the eastern boundary. A 300 metre wide channel, identified by In-water navigation markers extending from Swan Bay Jetty to the park boundary north of Duck Island, is not within the park.

The Mud Islands component of the park is a 2.5 km square area surrounding Mud Islands.

The Point Lonsdale component of the park extends along and off-shore from Clarks Beach to west of Point Lonsdale and excludes an area around the pier. Shore markers identify the park boundaries at Clarks Beacon and near the life saving station.

The Point Nepean component of the park extends along and off-shore from the Mornington Peninsula National Park. Shore markers identify the boundary of the park.

The boundary of the park at Popes Eye extends for a circle of 100 metres radius from its centre.

The boundary of the park is a rectangular area over Portsea Hole offshore of Portsea.

## What you might see

The incredible diversity of marine life around the entrance to Port Phillip is due to the wide range of habitats in the area and its central Victorian location. The area marks the end of the range for some animals and plants that prefer the cold waters of western Victoria, but it also supports some warmth-loving species from eastern Australia that can survive in the bay's relatively calm and shallow waters.

### Western Blue Devilfish *Paraplesiops meleagris*

Against the backdrop of the bright reds, oranges, yellows and whites of Port Phillip Head's sponge 'gardens', the vivid sapphire body and iridescent blue spots of the pouting Blue Devilfish is a stunning sight. A favourite with scuba divers, this inquisitive fish rarely ventures beyond its home ledge, crevice or small cave. It is believed that the male guards the eggs that are laid by the female well back in the crevice.

Western Blue Devilfish grow to around 30 centimetres in length, and are found at depths between 10 and 45 metres. The population of Blue Devilfish at Port Phillip Heads is thought to be the largest in Victoria, and the fish is near the eastern extent of its range here.



*Verco's Nudibranch*

### Activity

### What can I do?

#### Recreational activities

- nature observation and sightseeing
- snorkelling and scuba diving
- swimming, surfing
- windsurfing, sailing, boating
- filming and photography

yes  
yes  
yes  
yes  
yes

#### Recreational fishing and harvesting

- all forms of fishing - line, spear, netting, traps
- shellfish collection, including abalone and rock lobster collection
- bait collection
- catch and release fishing

no  
no  
no  
no

#### Commercial fishing and marine aquaculture

- abalone fishing
- rock lobster fishing
- netting, line fishing and trapping
- marine aquaculture

no  
no  
no  
no

#### Education and research

- educational excursions
- scientific research

yes  
yes (2)

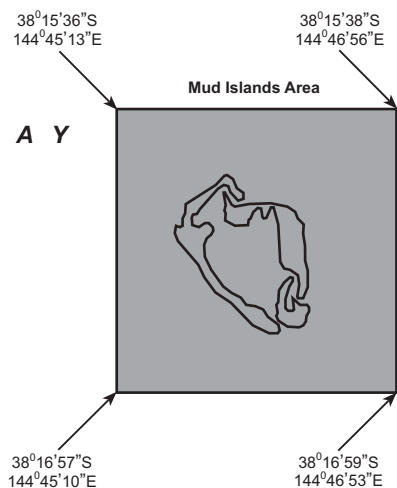
#### Other uses

- licensed tour operators
- filming and photography
- removal or disturbance of plants or animals
- dredging and spoil dispersal
- activities that disturb the seafloor
- waste and ballast discharge

yes (2)  
yes (2)  
no  
no  
no  
no

**1 Restrictions may apply to high-speed boating or the use of personal watercraft where there is a conflict with natural values or other users**

**2 Subject to permit**



### Verco's Nudibranch *Tambja verconis*

Verco's Nudibranch is just one of the 400 species of colourful nudibranchs found in Australian waters. The name nudibranch (pronounced noo-dee-brank) refers to the animals naked gills, and Verco's Nudibranch displays these as feathery plumes on its back. The animal's bright yellow and blue colouration signals its distasteful characteristics to fish, and acidic defence glands in the skin make it unpalatable or even poisonous.

Named after the prominent South Australian marine naturalist and surgeon, Dr Joseph Verco, it reaches 13 centimetres in length and lives at depths of between 2 and 36 metres.

Verco's Nudibranch preys almost exclusively upon the bryozoan *Bugula dentata*, a bushy, green colony of moss animals. If you look closely near this bryozoan, you can sometimes find the nudibranch's orange eggs in its girdle of jelly.

## Personal safety

- Diving should only be undertaken by trained and experienced divers
- 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
- Stay away from cliff edges and bases
- If you are unsure of the local boating areas and zones, please check with local authorities
- Practise safe boating, and follow all signs and markers correctly
- Do not anchor in shipping channels
- Beware of sudden changes in weather, especially when boating on open water
- Ensure adequate protection from the sun and wind
- Beware of strong currents and undertows
- Due to the presence of unexploded ordnance from previous military uses, there is no access from the water to beaches surrounding Point Nepean

## 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
- Dogs and other domestic animals are not permitted on Mud Islands
- Please do not feed any wildlife including seagulls and seals

## Enjoying Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park

The diversity of marine habitats within the park create opportunities for a wide range of recreational pursuits from snorkelling, diving, surfing, swimming and boating to birdwatching, nature study and beach activities. The park is also easily accessible from Melbourne, Geelong, and the Mornington and Bellarine peninsulas.

In the Rip, appropriately qualified divers can experience spectacular wall diving and challenging drift dives, with outstanding invertebrate life rivalling the colour and diversity seen on tropical coral reefs. Divers have a wide choice of exciting destinations from Portsea Hole, the Lonsdale and Nepean walls, Pope's Eye and many other locations.

Sheltered rockpools at Point Lonsdale and Point Nepean allow beginner and experienced snorkellers to experience Victoria's underwater life in relative ease.

Pope's Eye is a popular tourist destination for snorkelling, scuba diving, underwater photography, bird watching and education programs. Lonsdale Reef near Point Lonsdale has at least four visible and recognisable shipwrecks – the iron sailing barques *George Roper*, *Holyhead* and *Gange*, and the gold rush steamer *Conside*.

Surfing and body boarding on the outstanding breaks at Point Lonsdale and Point Nepean, canoeing in Swan Bay and safe swimming on sheltered beaches are all popular activities.

You don't have to be on or under the water to enjoy the park's diverse marine environment. There are many wonderful coastal settings for nature observation such as mudflats wading and bird watching, rockpooling or just walking and relaxing on the beach with the family.

## Nearby parks and reserves

### Mornington Peninsula National Park

Taking in Point Nepean, Greens Bush and the ocean coastline between Portsea and Flinders, the park features superb surf beaches, rocky headlands and magnificent coastal scenery. Explore the nineteenth century fortifications of Fort Nepean, enjoy walks with stunning views and take a tour or stay overnight at the historic Cape Schanck Lighthouse.

### South Channel Fort

Built in 1872 as a strategic defence post and sea-lane channel marker, the fort is part of Mornington Peninsula National Park and includes antiquated gun emplacements and underground passages. Visitors are welcome, but please keep to formed walking tracks to avoid trampling nests of White-faced Storm Petrels.

## 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.



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)

There are strong penalties under the National Parks Act for fishing in Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries.

These restrictions and penalties apply in Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park 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.

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.



*Western Blue Devilfish*

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

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.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://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.