



## Establishing joint management at Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park

Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park, off the north-west coast of Western Australia between Port Hedland and Broome, lies some 1,700km north of Perth. It covers an area of about 200,000ha and extends for nearly 260km along the coast, including the longest uninterrupted beach in Western Australia.

The park provides one of the world's most important feeding grounds for migratory shorebirds that travel to the area each summer from countries as far away as China and Russia and forms part of a Ramsar site. It is a major nesting area for flatback turtles, which are found only in northern Australia. Sawfish, dugong, dolphins and millions of invertebrates live in the sand and mudflats, seagrass meadows, coral reefs and mangroves. The panoramic vistas and turquoise waters make the marine park popular for beach fishing, camping, four-wheel driving, walking, swimming, beachcombing, bird watching, wildlife viewing and enjoying magnificent sunsets.

The intertidal area of the proposed marine park is subject to native title determination. Three Aboriginal groups have native title claims or determinations in the marine park: the Karajarri people at the northern end of the marine park, the Nyangumarta people over the central and southern portions of Eighty Mile Beach, and Ngarla people in the vicinity of Cape Keraudren.

In December 2006, the Western Australia Government announced a proposed marine park in the Eighty Mile Beach area. In 2011 the Government released its Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy, which included the establishment of five new marine parks in Kimberley waters, including Eighty Mile Beach.

Under the *Native Title Act 1993*, substantial intertidal areas cannot be included in the marine conservation reserve system without the registration of Indigenous Land Agreements (ILUAs). The planning process for the creation of Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park was undertaken in a context where the traditional owners had long-standing connections, rights and interests. Developing appropriate, inclusive and transparent engagement with indigenous people was essential for the marine parks and reserves to succeed, with joint management of the park a key goal of the process.



Photo - Matt Fossey/Parks and Wildlife



Photo - Dave & Fiona Harvey/ Naturalist Volunteers

The department's indigenous engagement program had several key components: the preparation of a draft negotiation protocol; production of an information product for traditional owners (the 'Big Book'); and meetings and on-country visits with the relevant native title groups.

These helped to inform the marine park management plan, which recognises and seeks to conserve the area's Aboriginal cultural and heritage values, includes special zoning to protect sites of cultural significance and provides a framework for joint management.

A number of success factors, challenges and limitations were identified from our experience at Eighty Mile Beach:

- **Recognise indigenous people as more than stakeholders** – because indigenous people regard themselves as principal landowners, special effort needs to be made to enable their involvement in protected area planning and management.
- **Provide opportunities for protected area staff and traditional owners to listen and learn from each other** – spending time on country proved an excellent way of sharing ideas, issues and features important to traditional owners on their country. If traditional owners are to be positively engaged in planning and management, they must be well informed.
- **Agree on the values to be managed and develop a shared vision.**
- **Build relationships** – achieving joint management is part of an ongoing process of developing relationships. On-country visits and participatory planning approaches helped to build trust, rapport and constructive relationships. Joint management of the marine park is a logical next step and relationships will continue to be built and strengthened.
- **Allow adequate time and resources** – developing joint management arrangements requires substantial investment in time and resources. Government planning processes often need to be carried out within relatively short timeframes and this will continue to be a challenge in pursuing joint management. A dedicated project officer resulted in improved engagement outcomes.
- **Some factors are beyond the control of protected area staff and traditional owners** – pursuing joint management can be difficult and time consuming. Factors include differing priorities, changing governments and limited engagement opportunities due to ceremonial activities, deaths in the community or weather events.



Photo – Matt Fossey/ Parks and Wildlife



Photo – Lori-Ann Shibish