



Department of  
**Local Government, Sport  
and Cultural Industries**

# **Gascoyne Outdoor Recreation Strategy**

2021—24





Francois Peron National Park, Shark Bay.  
Photo by Nick Thake Photography.





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The DLGSC works with partners across government and within its diverse sectors to enliven the Western Australian community and economy through support for and provision of sporting, recreational, cultural and artistic policy, programs and activities for locals and visitors to the State.

The department provides regulation and support to local governments and the racing, gaming and liquor industries to maintain quality and compliance with relevant legislation, for the benefit of all Western Australians. This publication is current at October 2020.

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# Gascoyne Outdoor Recreation Strategy

2021–24





Walking, Francois Peron National Park, Shark Bay.  
Photo by Nick Thake Photography.

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## Acronyms

ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CaLD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
DBCA	Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
DLGSC	Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries
DoE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health
DoT	Department of Transport
DPIRD	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
DPLH	Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage
DWER	Department of Water and Environmental Regulation
GDC	Gascoyne Development Commission
LG	Local Government
NGO	Non-Government Organisations
NFP	Not for Profit Organisations
SSA	State Sporting Associations





# Introduction

The Gascoyne region on the central west coast of Western Australia spans a vast landscape, from rugged desert hinterland to the waters of the Ningaloo Marine and Shark Bay. A range of outdoor recreation pursuits including hiking, mountain biking, paddling and sea-kayaking, windsurfing, surfing, diving and snorkelling, fishing and boating, and four-wheel driving can be enjoyed across the region.

Boasting two World Heritage areas, the attractive lifestyle and year-round, sub-tropical climate makes the Gascoyne a popular destination to live, work and play.

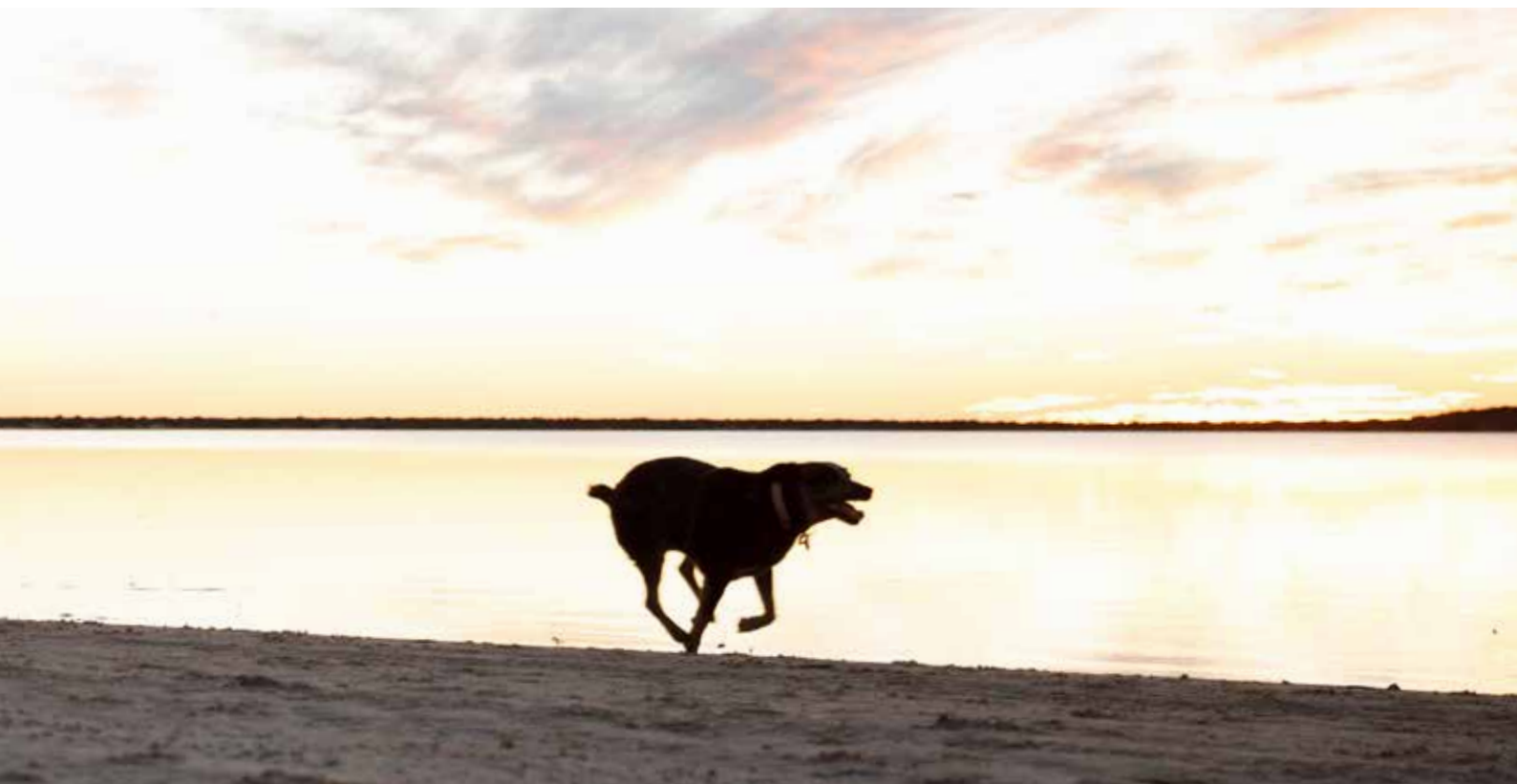
In addition to the Ningaloo and Shark Bay World Heritage areas, the region is home to iconic Mount Augustus, the world's largest monocline; the Gascoyne River, the longest river in Western Australia; five renowned national parks including the elevated sandstone plateau of the Kennedy Ranges; and marine parks including the picturesque Muiron Islands.

With nature's playground at the doorstep, residents and visitors to the Gascoyne have abundant opportunities to engage in outdoor recreation and healthy living.

Promoting a healthy lifestyle by being physically, mentally and socially active are well understood and include benefits such as improved mental health, social interaction, stronger communities, education outcomes, environmental stewardship and economic development.

The flexibility to engage with the natural environment and participate in unstructured activities sees a growing appeal and increased participation in outdoor recreation such as walking and hiking, together with a notable interest in a thrill-seeking component which includes activities such as surfing and motocross.

There is a strong desire for the accessibility of outdoor recreation activities by all ages, gender and ethnicity groups. This Strategy aims to further promote and meet this growing demand whilst establishing a coordinated approach to achieving sustainable, viable outcomes and initiatives.



# The Gascoyne Region

The Gascoyne region in the north west of Western Australia stretches 600 kilometres along the Indian Ocean coast from Shark Bay (south) to Exmouth (north), and more than 500 kilometres inland. The region covers almost 138,000 km<sup>2</sup> over the four local government areas of Shark Bay, Carnarvon, Upper Gascoyne and Exmouth. With a population of more than 10,000 people, the Gascoyne has the lowest population density and is the most sparsely populated region in Australia.



# Purpose of this Strategy

The purpose of the Gascoyne Outdoor Recreation Strategy is to guide the development of outdoor recreation in the Gascoyne and make accessible, high-quality opportunities that exemplify outdoor recreation in the region and impart an enduring benefit for all.

## What is this Strategy aiming to achieve?

This Strategy seeks to achieve strong collaboration between multiple sectors to assist with identifying gaps in access and provision of outdoor recreation activities, service delivery and infrastructure; understanding community expectations and values; and identifying opportunities and barriers to development of increased outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism experiences in the Gascoyne region.

Expected outcomes include:

- Increased outdoor recreation opportunities for all through improved availability and access
- Increased participation in outdoor recreation, creating more active and healthier communities
- Expanded capacity and capability among outdoor recreation providers
- Stimulation of economic growth and jobs, and enhancement of local and visitor experience in outdoor recreation
- Increased environmental stewardship and management of the potential impacts of participation in outdoor recreation in a fragile and remote environment
- Development of a sustainable and collaborative outdoor recreation sector.

## Who is it for?

This Strategy was developed for the benefit of all sectors of the community who partake in or are concerned with outdoor recreation.

**Residents and visitors:** the Gascoyne comprises a community who highly value feeling connected with the natural environment and township and having a positive sense of health and well-being through participation in outdoor recreation.

Purpose: increase opportunities and improve experience for all residents and visitors to participate in outdoor recreation.

**Public and private sector:** The provision of outdoor recreation products, services and programs by local and State governments, businesses, community organisations and groups.

Purpose: support the development, delivery and availability of sustainable, quality outdoor recreation activities.

**Land managers and land owners:** Access and participation in outdoor recreation activities occurs across a vast landscape owned and managed by Western Australian Government agencies, local government and private land owners and leaseholders.

Purpose: integrated approach regarding access, and the preservation of the environment to enable continued engagement in quality outdoor recreation experiences.



## How was it developed?

Consultation took place with key stakeholders within the Gascoyne region including; relevant State Government departments, local government, community groups and organisations. The consultation phase in the planning and development of the strategy included:

- Informal discussion with key stakeholders during preliminary meetings
- Discussion between relevant DLGSC Leederville staff and regional staff.

Community consultation opened with a forum facilitated in Denham, Shark Bay on 10 October 2018. Three workshops followed in:

- Carnarvon, Shire of Carnarvon on 18 February 2019
- Exmouth, Shire of Exmouth on 19 February 2019
- Gascoyne Junction, Shire of Upper Gascoyne on 19 March 2019.

Representation from each of the workshops and forum included:

- All four local government areas within the Gascoyne region
- State Government departments
- Non-Government Organisations (NGO)
- Not for Profit Organisations (NFP)
- Community groups.

The development of two surveys consisting of multiple choice and open answer questions, designed to obtain views regarding the context of outdoor recreation in the region. The first was addressed to local government staff and representatives and the other specific to the community.

A working group was established in May 2019 to inform the development of the strategy through:

- Providing strategic leadership and direction to the development of the Gascoyne Outdoor Recreation Strategy
- Ensuring stakeholders identified throughout the project were informed and consulted on the progress and outcomes of the strategy

- Acting as a communication channel between the Gascoyne Outdoor Recreation Strategy and the organisation they represent.

Representation on the working groups included:

- All four local government areas within the Gascoyne region
- State Government departments
- Non-Government Organisations (NGO)
- Not for Profit Organisations (NFP).

Thorough desktop review, including existing Gascoyne reports, plans, strategies and studies and industry data was conducted by the DLGSC. Importantly, state-wide strategies and frameworks were used to guide the development of the Strategy and ensure its alignment with State objectives.

Following publication of an initial draft, a series of review workshops were conducted in August 2020 with representatives from the Shires of Exmouth, Carnarvon and Shark Bay, State Government agencies, community organisations, community members, and Traditional Owners. These workshops provided opportunity for proposed strategies and initiatives to be reviewed and refined.

## How will it be delivered?

The Strategy recognises priorities for the region and individual local government areas and through continued consultation and collaboration, how these key priorities can be achieved. It is not intended to dispose any sector of the community to act unless otherwise inclined.

In effect, the Strategy will assist to reduce effort, minimise duplication of initiatives and deliver maximum benefits through increasing information sharing, sharing of resources, a coordinated approach to attaining funding, providing a clear direction and a comprehensive understanding of community needs and values. In a continuously changing economic environment, this Strategy allows for flexibility of new initiatives, from the initial stages of planning through to implementation.

## Who will be responsible for implementation?

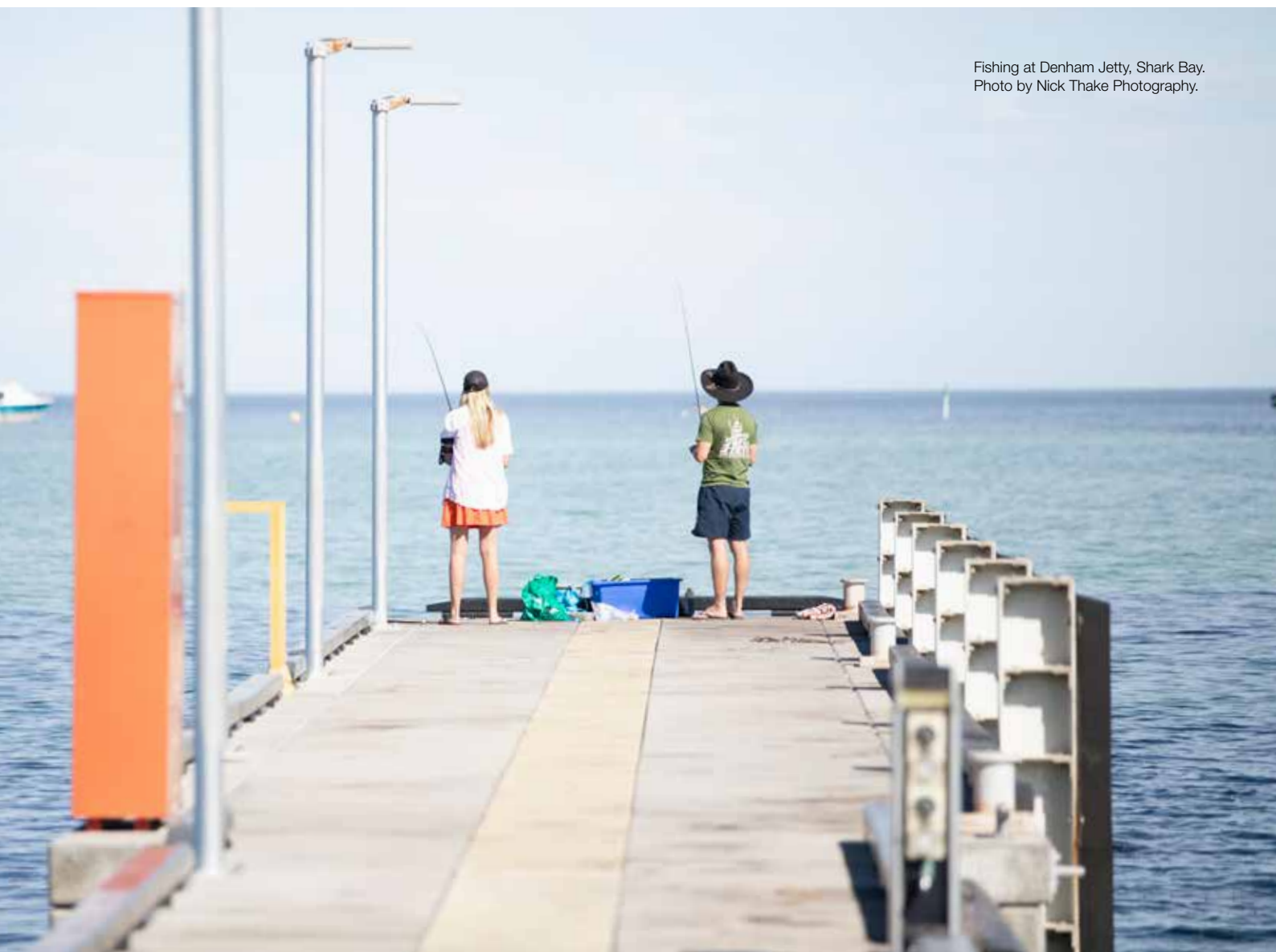
Maximising the benefits of outdoor recreation will take a collaborative team effort involving representatives from public, private and not-for-profit organisations and from all levels of decision-making (federal, State, regional and local).

To achieve desired outcomes, input from people with knowledge of various disciplines (i.e. health, education, recreation, environment, tourism, and private industry) may be required.

In addition, Traditional Owners must be invited to participate in project planning and implementation.

DLGSC will facilitate the implementation of this Strategy. It is expected that local working groups or project teams will be formed to identify and address initiatives most relevant to each local government area. It is also expected DLGSC will work with its project partners to identify opportunities for collaboration across the Gascoyne region.

Each working group or project team will be responsible for identifying desired outcomes and establishing a suitable evaluation process to determine how success will be measured.



Fishing at Denham Jetty, Shark Bay.  
Photo by Nick Thake Photography.

# Outdoor recreation activities include:

## Land-based



bushwalking



trail running



mountain biking



orienteering and navigation



rock climbing and abseiling



trail bike riding



horse riding



four-wheel driving



camping

## Water-based



swimming



surfing



kayaking and white water rafting



canoeing



paddle boarding



fishing



sailing



kiteboarding



wind surfing



boating

## Where does outdoor recreation take place?



urban parklands



regional and national parks



rivers, lakes and oceans



wilderness areas



# What is outdoor recreation?

Outdoor recreation involves physical activities that are done outdoors, usually in a natural or nature-based environment. Outdoor recreation often involves a personal challenge which leads to satisfaction, enjoyment and improved wellbeing.

This could be as simple as going on a bush walk, or as challenging as completing a multi-day trek or mountain bike ride. There's also a trend towards adventure sports with a thrill-seeking component such as kiteboarding or rock climbing.

While there are many outdoor recreation providers and organisations offering structured recreation opportunities, outdoor recreation can generally be done at any time that suits the participant.

Unlike sport, there's not a primary focus on competitive outcomes. However, it's recognised that some activities, particularly those like trail running, mountain biking and paddling are often included in adventure events, and cross over from recreation to competitive sport.

Activities such as road cycling and skateboarding are not usually considered within outdoor recreation plans as they are not always conducted in environments that could be described as natural or nature-based. However, activities like these are considered within this Strategy when they are done outdoors, include elements of risk, people can participate at a time that suits them and they are primarily conducted in a non-competitive environment.

Four-wheel driving and camping are also considered in this Strategy as it's recognised that these activities often lead to people being active in the outdoors. For example, people may drive off-road to a specific place to bush walk or camp overnight as part of an expedition or spend time at a location that provides outdoor recreation opportunities.



# Participation in outdoor recreation

Participation in outdoor recreation can vary considerably depending on the activity, setting, level of participation and skill, intensity of experience and experience sought.

Participation spectrum		Setting	Level of participation and skill	Intensity of experience	Experience sought
Outdoor aware	<b>Virtual or visual</b>	On-screen viewing and/or spectating	Urban parks and outdoor spaces: EASILY ACCESSIBLE and HIGHLY DEVELOPED	HIGH level of participation with MINIMAL skill level required	LOW INTENSITY with early exploration of outdoor places often focused on enjoyment
	<b>Incidental</b>	Spending time in green spaces at home and on-route			
	<b>Outdoor play</b>	Play and outdoor recreation in urban and neighbourhood parks			
Outdoor active	<b>Managed outdoor recreation</b>	Participation in low-risk outdoor activities in managed environments	National and regional parks and reserves, and campsites: MODERATELY ACCESSIBLE with LIMITED DEVELOPMENT	MODERATE TO HIGH level of participation with MINIMAL to MODERATE skill level required	MODERATE INTENSITY focused on discovery and personal challenge experiences
	<b>Adventure recreation</b>	Participation in more challenging activities and extended visits to natural environments			
	<b>Outdoor immersion</b>	Multi-day activity and/or overnight camping in natural environments			
Outdoor adventure	<b>Wilderness adventure</b>	Self-sufficient, multi-day experience in remote locations	Wilderness locations: REMOTE ACCESS with LITTLE or NO DEVELOPMENT	LOW level of participation (depending on location and accessibility) as HIGH level of skill and experience individuals required	HIGH INTENSITY adventure experience with elevated risk
	<b>Extreme adventure</b>	Life-affirming, life-changing challenge in extreme conditions			

## Benefits of being active outdoors

There are many reasons and benefits associated with being outdoors and participation in outdoor recreation activities. These benefits are shared on all levels by individuals, community groups and organisations, private enterprise and government agencies.

Five pillars supporting the benefits of outdoor recreation are presented below:

Key Benefit	Focus Areas	Outcomes
<b>Personal development, challenge and enjoyment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building resilience</li> <li>• Fostering spirit and identity</li> <li>• Changing lives for young people at risk</li> <li>• Encouraging challenge and risk-taking</li> </ul>	<p>Outdoor adventure experiences help develop reliance, leadership, risk management, problem-solving skills and self-resilience, leading to people being better equipped to cope with 'normal' stresses of modern life.</p> <p>Participation in 'safe danger' activities and 'controlled risk' can assist to divert young people from illegal or socially-unacceptable risk behaviours.</p>
<b>Improved health and well-being</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical and mental health benefits</li> <li>• Social cohesion and inclusion</li> <li>• Avoided healthcare costs</li> </ul>	<p>Physical inactivity is a recognised leading cause of ill-health and associated health, social and economic burden.</p> <p>Research shows that chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and depression respond well to time spent being physically active outdoors.</p> <p>Active, self-reliant people are less susceptible to depression, anxiety and anti-social behaviour, and social isolation.</p>





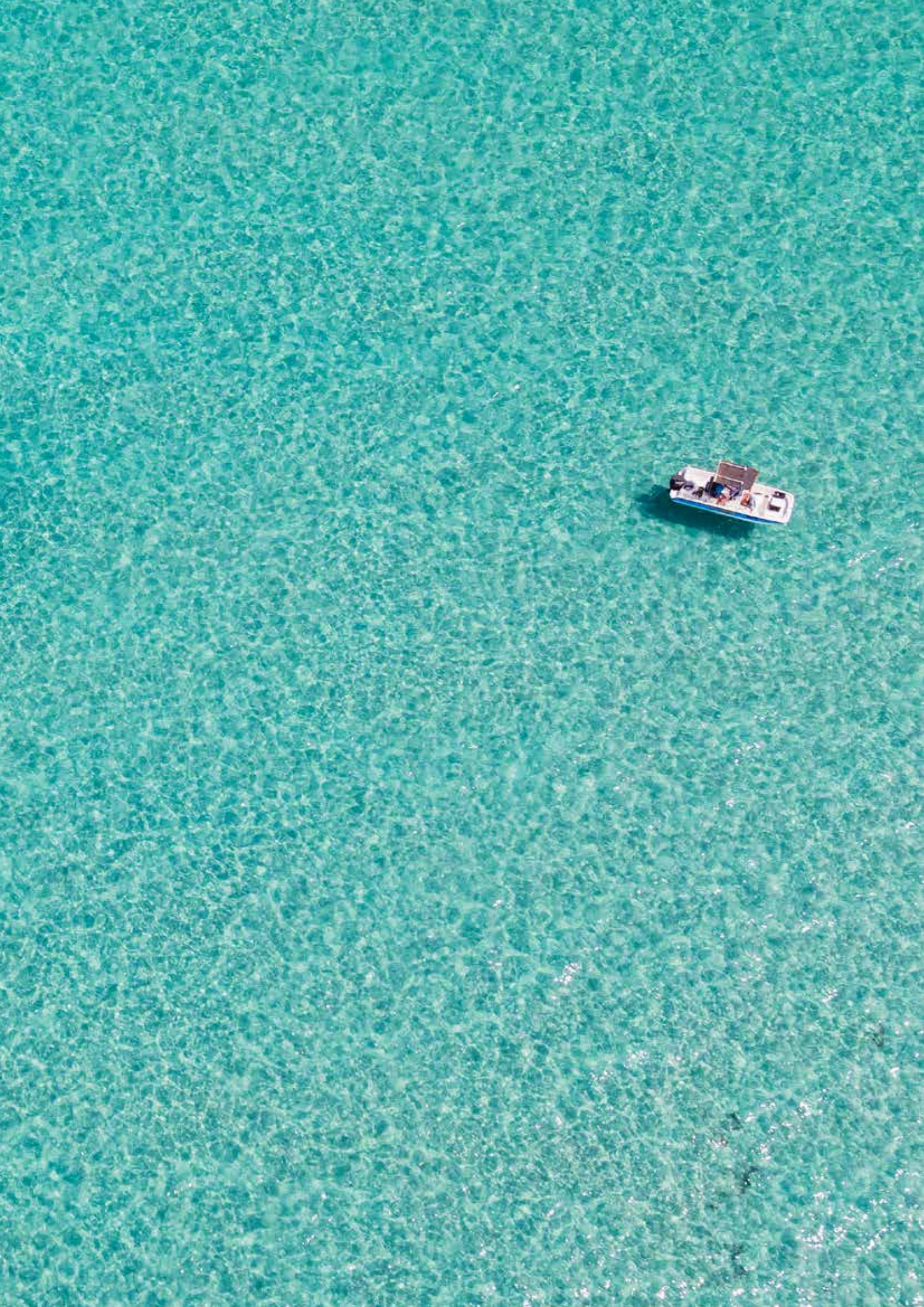
Scuba diving, Shark Bay.  
Photo by Nick Thake Photography.

Key Benefit	Focus Areas	Outcomes
<b>Outdoor learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outdoor literacy</li> <li>• Outdoor education</li> </ul>	<p>In the same way that participation in physical activity can assist with developing physical confidence and fundamental movement skills (physical literacy), participation in outdoor activities can assist to develop confidence and competence (outdoor literacy).</p> <p>Outdoor education activities can develop outdoor knowledge and activity skills and help foster positive character traits such as self-confidence and leadership skills.</p>
<b>Connection to nature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting back to nature</li> <li>• Volunteering</li> <li>• Environmental stewardship</li> </ul>	<p>Contact with nature elicits restorative properties, fostering an individual's feelings of vitality, alertness, and resurgence in energy.</p> <p>Participation in nature-based outdoor activities contributes towards developing greater environmental awareness and stewardship.</p>
<b>Economic development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in tourism and recreational facilities</li> <li>• Pathways to employment</li> </ul>	<p>Viewing participation in outdoor recreation as simply an individual leisure or lifestyle choice can obscure its economic importance.</p> <p>Outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism can make a significant contribution to local economies through construction and maintenance of recreational infrastructure, visitor expenditure and ongoing employment.</p>











# Strategic priorities

## Objectives

The priority projects and associated actions proposed in this Strategy are aligned with key objectives outlined in *More People, More Active Outdoors: A Framework for Outdoor Recreation in Western Australia 2019* available at [www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au](http://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au).

These objectives – valuing, encouraging, enabling and developing – provided the structure for identification of priority projects and opportunities for potential partnerships in the Gascoyne region.

### **VALUING = realising benefits**

Ensuring strategies are in place to maximise the economic, social, health, and education benefits of outdoor recreation.

### **ENCOURAGING = promoting participation**

Motivating all stakeholders to act to increase participation, to encourage diversity and ensure access to outdoor recreation for people of all ages, backgrounds and ability.

### **ENABLING = meeting demand**

Investing in outdoor recreation programs, facilities and infrastructure and providing access to places and spaces, to meet the demands of diverse user groups.

### **DEVELOPING = creating opportunities**

Enhancing the skills, capacity and capability of the outdoor sector to provide safe, enjoyable outdoor recreation experiences and keep pace with growing demand.

## Guiding principles

Implementation of initiatives proposed in this Strategy will be guided by the following Principles.

- **Engagement with Traditional Owners** to ensure Aboriginal ownership of land is acknowledged and culturally sensitive sites are identified within planning and design processes, with appropriate information made available to encourage respect for significant areas
- **Access and inclusion** to ensure people of all ages and abilities can participate in outdoor recreation activities
- **Sustainability** to ensure all project initiatives consider the social, environmental, and economic outcomes of proposed actions
- **Management and maintenance** to ensure long term viability and access to outdoor recreation sites, infrastructure and facilities.

## Priority Projects

Following consultation with the Gascoyne community and stakeholders, five priority projects were identified that will assist to achieve the four objectives described above. These projects are:

Priority Project	Objective
<b>An active community</b>	Promotion of community-based and community owned initiatives that encourage active participation in outdoor recreation activities; and improve the overall health, wellbeing and quality of life among all sectors of the community.
<b>World-class aquatic and marine recreation</b>	Promote the recreational qualities of the Gascoyne's unique aquatic and marine environment and its sustainable use by all sectors, to maintain its attraction and value as a desired setting for outdoor recreation pursuits.
<b>Trails development</b>	Develop recreational trails to connect people with natural landscapes, encouraging participation in outdoor recreation and promoting the natural assets of the region.
<b>Coastal to outback experience</b>	Increase time spent in the region through immersion in outdoor recreation activities.
<b>Adventure and nature-based tourism</b>	Support economic development and tourism through creating a strong outdoor recreation sector linked to the promotion of the natural attractions of the region.

The following sections describe each priority project and sets out the:

- Current Situation
- Agreed Direction
- Objective
- Strategies
- Proposed initiatives.

Kayaking, Francois Peron National Park, Shark Bay.  
Photo by Nick Thake Photography.



# An Active Community

## Current Situation

Research shows that being active outdoors at an early age increases the chances of continuing participation throughout a person's life stages. The Gascoyne region provides a vast array of opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation activities including hiking and walking, cycling and biking, paddling, surfing, sailing, fishing, boating, and 4WD driving. To maximise the benefits of outdoor recreation, strategies are required to introduce people to the outdoors and encourage continued participation.

One of the great attractions of outdoor recreation is that it is generally unstructured and people can participate at a time and place that suits them. Clubs, community groups and commercial operators, however, can play a role in introducing people to outdoor recreation and while several organisations do an excellent job in providing participation pathways through introductory events, skills training and public events, there is scope for more to be delivered.

A healthy and active community is a vibrant community. Outdoor recreation activities and events can bring a community together and can be a valuable tool in driving economic development.

## Agreed Direction

Encouraging more people to participate in outdoor recreation can assist the whole community to become healthier, more resilient, more cohesive, more inclusive and more environmentally aware. Achievable outcomes may include:

- People at all stages of their life, from early childhood to seniors, being physically active in the outdoors
- Families recreating together in the outdoors
- Schools and early childhood centres introducing young children to outdoor recreation
- Access to places and spaces across the participation spectrum
- Outdoor recreation being used to engage youth at-risk in physical activity.

To achieve these outcomes, organisations such as clubs and commercial operators will need to develop the capacity to deliver outdoor recreation programs to suit all ages and abilities.

The first step to developing capacity and prioritising development of services, infrastructure or facilities is consulting with the community to identify and understand their needs, and any barriers to participation. In addition, stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors must engage collaboratively to deliver high-quality, inclusive and accessible activities, services, facilities and infrastructure to sustain the growing demand of the community, to efficiently manage resources and protect the environment where activities take place.

## Objective

- Promotion of community-based and community owned initiatives that encourage active participation in outdoor recreation activities; and improve the overall health, wellbeing and quality of life among all sectors of the community.

## Strategies

- Promote the benefits of outdoor recreation as part of a healthy lifestyle
- Promote outdoor recreation initiatives that are inclusive and accessible by all people within the community
- Develop infrastructure which encourages and supports outdoor recreation
- Explore opportunities to develop outdoor recreation events for residents and visitors.

## Proposed initiatives

- Promote existing free or low-cost outdoor recreation activities (e.g. promotional maps of walking and cycling trails) and online access to information
- Develop a directory of outdoor recreation programs, services, and equipment providers, including commercial operators, community groups and clubs
- Create opportunities for outdoor recreation for people of all ages and abilities through promotion of targeted programs
- Encourage and support the development of outdoor recreation events and competitions
- Ensure appropriate supporting infrastructure, such as signage and wayfinding, toilets and water, seating, and shade is provided at outdoor recreation sites to enhance participant experience.





Yoga, Little Lagoon, Shark Bay.  
Photo by Nick Thake Photography.



# World-class Aquatic and Marine Recreation

## Current Situation

As one of the most alluring and diverse regions in Western Australia, the Gascoyne is rich in natural assets, home to a thriving ecosystem of marine flora and fauna and offers a temperate climate year-round. This provides a desirable context for aquatic and marine recreation to be pursued by residents and visitors alike.

It is not surprising that with three out of four of the local government areas adjoining the coastline of the Indian Ocean, much of the outdoor recreation activities undertaken by the region's population are focused on or around the ocean. There is significant value and demand for residents and visitors to engage in aquatic and marine recreation.

Surfing, kite surfing and wind surfing can be pursued all year round at various spots along the coastline extending from Shark Bay to Exmouth with some spots boasting world-class waves. The pristine coastal waters and coral reefs offer spectacular diving, snorkelling and enticing swimming conditions.

Boating and sailing tend to be closely linked to the aforementioned water activities and allows access to spots along the coast or offshore not accessible without some form of watercraft. Fishing is largely popular, with ideal marine conditions contributing to both successful commercial and recreational fishing.

However, not all residents and visitors have access, the capacity, capability or skills to enjoy these aquatic and marine activities. For many, the option of owning certain watercraft or equipment needed to partake in water-based activities is not viable due to cost and/or availability. Instead, other avenues to encourage participation include equipment hire or the option to partake in organised tours. Access to hire equipment may also open up opportunities for skills and safety training courses to be offered to residents and visitors.

Another important determinant of participation in aquatic and marine recreation, particularly regarding boating, is the development of suitable infrastructure and facilities. Fortunately, there are quality marinas, harbours and jetties located throughout the coastal centres of Carnarvon, Exmouth, Coral Bay and Shark Bay.

It is vital that the balance between development of infrastructure and use of the Gascoyne's natural environment is managed sustainably to maintain its attraction, uniqueness and to preserve its values for future users.

### What are we talking about?

- Aquatic – relating to water
- Marine – relating specifically to the sea

### Examples of activities include:

- Watercraft – boating, sailing, jet skiing
- Fishing – beach, boat and spear
- Swimming – open water
- Board riding – SUP, surfing, wind surfing, kite surfing, water skiing
- Diving – scuba, snorkelling, free diving
- Kayaking



## Agreed Direction

With two world-heritage listed areas and extraordinary natural assets, the Gascoyne region offers unparalleled aquatic and marine recreation opportunities which the whole of the community should be able to enjoy and engage in.

Recognising the community's strong association and value of these pristine ecosystems, as well as understanding and acknowledging the community's needs and expectations is important when planning and managing future development and use. In addition, observance of sub-region management plans and strategies is necessary as substantial areas of the Shark Bay and Ningaloo Coast are protected and managed through marine reserves and parks.

Recreational fishing and boating are immensely popular for visitors and locals to the region and there is potential to further develop associated marine infrastructure and facilities to offer a greater range of fishing, boating and other marine experiences. However, an increase in demand for participation in this activity must also prioritise its sustainability and protection of the natural environment in the ocean and adjoining coastal environments.

An increase in participation in other water-based activities such as diving and kite surfing is met by a relatively untapped market in areas such as Carnarvon and Shark Bay, opening opportunities for commercial enterprise to enter this space and satisfy this audience.

### Objective

- Promote the recreational qualities of the Gascoyne's unique aquatic and marine environment and its sustainable use by all sectors, to maintain its attraction and value as a desired setting for outdoor recreation pursuits.

### Strategies

- Offer a wide range of opportunities and experiences for aquatic and marine outdoor recreation and ensure access by all sectors of the community
- Develop sufficient marine infrastructure and facilities that meet the needs of recreational users
- Encourage sustainable, and culturally sensitive, participation in aquatic and marine outdoor recreation.

### Proposed initiatives

- Audit existing aquatic and marine infrastructure and its sustainability; and identify opportunities to advocate for investment in development of new or improved infrastructure
- Promote sustainable marine recreation practices, particularly for boating and fishing, and encourage environmental stewardship and care
- Liaise with the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land to manage to better understand sustainable practice and customs associated with marine areas in the Gascoyne region.





Scuba diving, Shark Bay.  
Photo by Nick Thake Photography.





# Trails Development

## Current Situation

Trails have been instrumental in connecting people with the outdoors for thousands of years and are recently attracting more interest with regards to investment and development opportunities.

All trails are unique in the purpose they serve, and the experience sought from the user. The Western Australia Strategic Trails Blueprint 2017-2021 acknowledges the important and valuable role trails play as a platform for encouraging and promoting participation in outdoor recreation. In addition, access to trails assists with stimulating economic development, leads to important health and wellbeing benefits, supports social and cultural connections and encourages protection and preservation of the environment.

Access to recreational areas throughout the Gascoyne is enabled in many areas using unformed, unsealed roads and tracks. With demonstrated increased demand, improved access needs to consider assessment of human activity, sufficient management of resources and infrastructure to ensure minimal degradation of the environment.

The Gascoyne enjoys a temperate climate allowing for participation in trail recreation to continue year-round, however, during the summer months, trail use sees a decline or may be restricted to certain periods during the day when conditions are more comfortable.

The Gascoyne region offers a variety of trails experiences from the Coral Coast inland to the Golden Outback which includes national parks, marine parks, rangelands and nature reserves.

The branding of 'Outback Pathways' is a current tourism drive uniting the whole region. This initiative is an example of ways which communities across the Gascoyne can be linked and promoted as a regional package.

There are limited trails across each local government area which opens up significant opportunities to build on development of different trail types, particularly hiking, urban walking and running, mountain biking, equestrian, driving and 4WD driving.

The Shire of Exmouth is the only local government area within the Gascoyne region which has a trails development blueprint – the Ningaloo Trails Masterplan. However, in each of the other three local government areas are a number of existing trails and potential trails which are in the early stages of planning. Unfortunately, many of these plans have not progressed past the initial stages. Barriers to development have been due to a number of factors including lack of investment and funding, lack of opportunities to build capacity in trails planning and project management, remoteness and accessibility, land tenure and ongoing management, development of supporting infrastructure and facilities, and sustainability measures.

## Agreed Direction

Recently, trails planning, and development has been a strategic focus of government and created a shift in community thinking.

As the appeal of undertaking recreation activities in the natural environment grows, so too is the demand in trail use and interest in trail development. In keeping up with both local and global demand, the Gascoyne is positioned to develop a wide range of trails providing residents and visitors with greater access to the outdoors, particularly more remote areas of the region. On the other hand, there is also a demand for a variety of experiences accessible within a short distance from where residents or visitors are staying. In providing greater access, trail development will

## What are we talking about?

Pathways or routes that are developed and/or used for commuting and travel, recreation, tourism and appreciation of nature and cultural values.

### Trails may be:

- Short or long
- Part of a trail network or a single journey
- Used for one activity or shared by several different uses
- Primarily used by residents or form a visitor attraction
- Purpose-built paths or routes designated by signage and information

### Trail types:

- Bush or urban walking/running
- Cycling
- Trail bike
- Fat bike
- Mountain bike
- Paddle (kayaking or canoeing)
- Snorkel and dive
- Equestrian
- Drive (4WD and 2WD)

also assist land managers and landowners to better manage existing trails including authorised and unauthorised trails (resulting from unmet demand).

From an economic and tourism perspective, trail development can be used as a means of highlighting the unique natural and man-made assets drawing visitors to the region, enabling each local government area to offer a collaborative, connected whole-of-region experience. The synergy between trails development, tourism and economic benefits is becoming better understood and opportunities enhanced by the development of clusters of linked trails, supported by regional trails centres providing services and information about different trail networks and experiences.

Trails can also be used as an instrument to educate and improve user's awareness and appreciation regarding the environment, culture and history through the provision of information and/or offering an interactive experience.

As an example, Indigenous cultural groups are able to educate users

regarding trails linked to connection to country and therefore, must have a voice in the development of cultural trails.

It is important that the construction of trails is of high quality and sustainable while remaining sensitive to the natural environment, cultural values and designed to meet the needs of the community. Protection of the natural environment is critical, especially in relation to 4WD driving trails where unmanaged access has the potential to cause significant environmental damage.

The Trails Development Series is a new comprehensive guide which can be used to assist the development of sustainable, quality trails in Western Australia.





Walking, Francois Peron National Park, Shark Bay.  
Photo by Nick Thake Photography.

## Objective

- Develop recreational trails to connect people with natural landscapes, encouraging participation in outdoor recreation and promoting the natural assets of the region.

## Strategies

- Develop a consistent and coordinated regional approach and clear processes for trail planning, investment, development and management
- Promote, encourage, and monitor use of trails and environmental stewardship
- Link trail development to tourism development to maximise economic benefit
- Develop capacity and capability of trails stakeholders.

## Proposed initiatives

- Form an advisory group to inform the development of trails across the Gascoyne region
- Identify opportunities to improve or develop trails to expand outdoor recreation opportunities and connections (environment, cultural, social)
- Review existing trail guides (or develop new materials) to ensure trail users are provided with relevant information, appropriate advice and safety tips
- Promote trails as part of the natural attractions of the region and encourage development of guided or self-guided experience packages that may include information about trail access and use, accommodation, transport, and equipment)
- Identify opportunities to develop and promote trail-based events and community activities
- Liaise with Traditional Owners to explore opportunities to integrate Aboriginal perspectives and stories through trail interpretation and experiences
- Support professional development experiences, such as trails forums and training programs, to increase skills and capabilities of local trail guides, planners and managers.





Yoga, Little Lagoon, Shark Bay.  
Photo by Nick Thake Photography.





# Coastal to Outback Experience

## Current Situation

The pursuit of many outdoor recreation activities in the Gascoyne often involves a lengthy and arduous journey to remote destinations and is a large reason why camping holidays or short getaways are a popular pastime across the region.

Camping is a popular recreational activity which forms part of an outdoor experience and encourages individuals to partake in other recreational activities, and for longer periods of time. While locals engage in regular overnight camping or day trips to recreational sites, across Australia and throughout the region, the emerging trend of camping holidays is increasing, with camping the top choice of accommodation for domestic and international visitors holidaying in the region.

The nature of camping in the region is as diverse as the landscape. Unlike other forms of accommodation, camping is permissible in areas where development of infrastructure is restricted, which also forms part of the appeal and experience of camping. The type of camping accommodation/sites ranges from Eco Lodge and homestead/station stays which provide basic amenities and infrastructure to a more remote and primitive camping experience where individuals are entirely self-sufficient.

Camping opportunities are provided in each local government area in the Gascoyne on commercial property, reserves, national parks and pastoral leases including popular sites such as Mt Augustus, Kennedy Range National Park, Steep Point, Blowholes, Gnaraloo, Quobba and Warroora Stations.

Camping grounds often exceed capacity for extended periods during peak months and with visitations increasing across the region, the enhancement of camping infrastructure and management of environmental assets needs to be considered in conjunction with one another to ensure the experience along the coast and in the outback is maintained.

As with camping, day use sites encourage individuals to 'get outdoors' through supporting participation in outdoor recreation activities. Infrastructure at day use sites along the Gascoyne coast and inland is provided at popular recreational sites, however, there is opportunity for further development.

Several management plans have been developed for specific locations which provide a framework to guide future development and management of recreation sites within State and local government managed conservation parks, reserves and popular recreation sites.

### What are we talking about?

**Camping** – a form of non-permanent accommodation which necessitates minimal built infrastructure. This includes swags, tents, caravans and campervans and involves at least a one-night stay in the outdoors at either a commercial site (caravan park, camping grounds, cabins, eco lodges) or a non-commercial site (national park, crown land, caravan or camping by the side of the road, or on private property).

**Day use sites** – An area which is designated and managed to provide visitor access and amenity for day use only e.g. parking facilities, barbecues, toilets and picnic areas.

## Agreed Direction

Camping is unique in its ability to support a wide range of nature-based recreational activities while being recognised as a recreational activity itself.

In addition to the importance of managing camping and its impact on the environment, it can also be used as a platform for managing other recreational activities. Management of camping needs to be a joint responsibility and partnership between pastoral leaseholders, relevant State agencies, local government, Aboriginal groups, residents and visitors. Adopting a coordinated approach will help reduce degradation of the environment (vegetation clearance, unsanctioned four-wheel drive tracks, poor waste management, etc) resulting from uncontrolled camping and other recreational activities and maintain the remote and natural character of the region.

Review of existing management plans and assessment of camping sites will help identify opportunities to upgrade or develop camping and day use facilities/amenities and enhance the overall appeal and experience of the outdoors. The need for new or existing camping and day use sites along the coastline and inland may also necessitate consultation with Indigenous groups, residents, tourism industry and possibly the wider community. Further development of sites that can withstand higher levels of visitation and recreation and separate potentially conflicting uses will help reduce visitor pressures and provide access to a wider range of recreational opportunities.

To cater to this increase and meet the demands of the caravan and camping sector, the capability and capacity of industry providers needs to be supported. This includes equipping industry providers with the tools necessary to deliver a strong conservation education message and provide information and interpretation opportunities that foster increased awareness and appreciation of the environment. In fact, people are already likely to develop a greater attachment to, regard for and understanding of the environment when they spend time recreating in it.

As an initiative to promote and encourage access to camping, there is a recognised gap in the market relating to private and commercial hire of camping equipment. Further promotion and support of this market should be explored.

### Objective

- Increase time spent in the outdoors and immersion in outdoor recreation activities.

### Strategies

- Increase access and opportunities for camping
- Promote/increase environmental stewardship
- Encourage visitors and locals to experience the outdoors.

### Proposed initiatives

- Promote existing camping opportunities and recreational activities available throughout the region
- Identify opportunities to expand camping infrastructure and day use facilities across the region
- Provide information to encourage campers/day site visitors to support sustainable and environmentally-friendly camping practices
- Develop partnerships between user groups, community organisations and government agencies to address conservation and other management issues.

Surfing in the Gascoyne.  
Photo by Scott Bauer.







# Adventure and Nature-based Tourism

## Current Situation

The Gascoyne region has many diverse and renowned natural attractions including two World Heritage Areas, rangelands, major marine reserves and state national parks offering unique experiences typically enjoyed by visitors and locals through a form of recreation.

Participation in recreational activities is often interrelated and complementary to economic development. Recreational activities support economic development directly and indirectly by promoting and attracting visitors to the area (events, products, experiences), encouraging private sector investment, providing local employment, supporting small business sustainability and promoting the development of regional and localised infrastructure.

Tourism represents the Gascoyne's most prominent and valuable industry sector. Unsurprisingly coastal and marine attractions are the primary economic driver offering remote nature-based recreation and tourism opportunities. Of the four local government areas, Exmouth, Carnarvon and Shark Bay are geographically situated to take advantage of coastal and marine attributes and opportunities related to sport and recreation for economic development. The Upper Gascoyne is the only local government area not adjoining the coast, however, is a model example of the remote wilderness experience, activities and products that can be offered throughout the region.

A wide variety of recreational tourism products, services and experiences are available across the region whether pursued independently or through a commercial operator. Regarding the scope of recreational activities and products offered, there are generally more coastal/marine based activities and products and fewer land-based activities/products available. In addition to the few land-based tourism activities is a lack of cultural recreational experiences. There is demand for the development of both these experiences, and similarly with other products, support is required to develop the capacity and capability of local people and businesses to have the confidence to establish new enterprises, operate sustainably and remain viable.

Although many of the same or unique experiences are available across the Gascoyne, there is a lack of synergy between each local government area with regards to providing an integrated and accessible tourism offering and is another opportunity for the region to capitalise on its valuable assets.

### What are we talking about?

#### Nature-based Tourism:

Leisure travel undertaken largely or solely for the purpose of enjoying natural attractions and engaging in a variety of nature-based activities – from scuba diving and bushwalking to simply going to the beach (Tourism Australia, 2017).

#### Adventure Tourism:

- Day hiking at Mt Augustus
- Swimming with whale sharks in Exmouth
- Kite surfing lessons in Denham
- Free surfing on Gnaraloo Station
- MotorX racing in the Gascoyne Dash
- Recreational fishing charters or competitive fishing during the GameX in Exmouth, CarnarFin in Carnarvon and Shark Bay Fishing Fiesta.

Participation in outdoor recreation activities does not necessarily require use of infrastructure directly, however, is generally supported indirectly i.e. roads, trails and marinas. Each local government area within the Gascoyne region provides a suitable level of infrastructure which supports tourism, however, there is the potential for further investment and development at recreational tourism sites.

Similarly to activities pursued independently, sport and recreation events are a key tool in driving visitation to the Gascoyne and encouraging participation in recreation activities. The value of sporting and recreation events and their contribution to economic development is considerable, attracting visitors either as spectators or participants. Annual events such as the Gascoyne Dash, GameX, Carnarfin and Carnarvon Windfest are well supported by the community and continue to grow in popularity.

With increased interest in sport and recreation events there is scope to develop existing events as well as establish new events in other domains such as triathlons, marathons, kitesurfing and windsurfing.

## **Agreed Direction**

A successful nature-based tourism industry is vital for the growth of the broader tourism industry and the Gascoyne is uniquely positioned, geographically, economically and culturally, to capitalise on new economic trends and meet the needs of its communities, investors and foreign markets.

Understanding the experience visitors are seeking would be of great advantage to local operators and the region as a whole. To effectively improve visitor experience, baseline market research around visitor perception/expectation and visitor experience needs to be supported by tourism operators across the region. This valuable information will in turn support business to be sustainable, viable and attract future investment to the region.

The development of facilities and infrastructure which support tourism is critical to the future growth of recreational tourism in the Gascoyne region whilst private sector investment is essential to leverage the costs of local and state government development of tourism sites.

It is imperative that existing and potential tourism opportunities are maintained and developed in a strategic and sustainable manner. To a large degree the Gascoyne economy is dependent on the region's significant environmental and heritage assets. Encouraging economic growth from these assets without damaging the assets themselves will be fundamental in ensuring ongoing sustainability and prosperity for the region on both economic and environmental fronts. This will require cooperation and good working relations between the State and Commonwealth Governments, local governments, and the community. A number of management plans exist which provide detailed processes for planning recreation and tourism in state managed conservation parks and reserves.

There is notable demand for the development of existing and new products and services, in particular those relating to land based and Indigenous activities and a desire to develop existing and new sport and recreational events to encourage increased visitation to the region and support economic growth. Increased visitation to the area will invariably lead to a progressive increase in the demand for services and products. Small businesses are vital to servicing the regional tourism sector and must be supported to ensure viability and sustainability. Regular capacity building opportunities and data collection would be effective in supporting new and existing entrants to the outdoor recreation industry. Private and public sectors, state and local government must adopt a unified approach to support economic development and capitalise on opportunities for growth.



## Objective

- Support economic development and tourism through creating a strong outdoor recreation sector linked to the promotion of the natural attractions of the region.

## Strategies

- Stimulate economic investment in the region
- Increase the number of land-based and water-based recreation and tourism activities and Aboriginal cultural experiences
- Expand regional support for outdoor recreation events
- Ensure outdoor recreation industry service providers are supported to operate safely and sustainably.

## Proposed initiatives

- Investigate current and future infrastructure requirements at recreation and tourism sites and identify opportunities to expand adventure and nature-based recreation experiences throughout the region; and attract public and private sector investment
- Advocate for land managers and Traditional Owners to prepare management plans for key sites to ensure current and future recreation and tourism needs can be met
- Identify opportunities for promotion and sponsorship of outdoor recreation and adventure-based events
- Support local tour operators and recreation services providers to access quality information, training and capacity building opportunities to maintain professional standards and service
- Develop the capacity and capability of community groups and organisations to develop and manage events through the provision of training opportunities for organisers and volunteers.



# COVID-19 Response and Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and unprecedented impact on communities, including those in the Gascoyne region. It has affected every sector within the community and will continue to have a long-term impact in the region. The outdoor recreation sector has not been exempt and will require support and guidance in the months and years ensuing the outbreak.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the importance of remaining physically active has been paramount to promoting positive physical and mental health. In turn, this has seen many people of all ages and backgrounds adopting or increasing the time spent outdoors engaging in outdoor recreation activities.

COVID-19 travel restrictions have resulted in a boom in local tourism within Western Australia. The Gascoyne region is experiencing greatly increased visitor numbers, and this has highlighted the need for expansion and improvement of outdoor recreation services and infrastructure.

The following recommendations are aligned with the strategies and initiatives identified in this Strategy and are aimed at providing short, medium- and long-term responses to ensure outdoor recreation is supported throughout the region.

At all times, these actions should be undertaken in line with whatever COVID-19 guidelines might be in place throughout the Gascoyne and other parts of Western Australia. These public health guidelines typically include rigorous health and hygiene practices, physical distancing measures and cleaning regimes.

## Safe participation in outdoor recreation

Each phase of COVID-19 restrictions has imposed a differing degree of limitations with regards to exercising and staying active during this period. Staying active is critical for both physical and mental health and is why when organised sports and activities were suspended and venues closed, activities pursued outdoors in nature-based environments have remained permissible in alignment with physical distancing guidelines.

As a result, communities have seen a noticeable increase in the uptake of individuals cycling, running, walking. These are activities which can be done independently, safely and avoid contact with other people or use of communal equipment.

This has highlighted the importance of public infrastructure which supports participation in physical activity outdoors, such as walking/cycling paths, trails, access to parks and beaches as well as ensuring facilities at these sites are kept clean and sanitized appropriately.

Individuals who do not usually engage in outdoor recreation activities, do not feel safe leaving their neighborhood or place of residence may not know how to remain active or have the capacity to do so. These community members would benefit from access to local information/resource packs, online information and ability to participate in online group challenges such as the 21-Day Push Up Challenge, The Great Backyard Campout or Teddy Bear Hunt for families. Campaigns such as Find 30 are a great source of inspiration for all fitness levels or spaces for working out in.



## **Management of increased visitation to the region**

The number of visitors to the Gascoyne region has increased significantly following the easing of restrictions and opening of regional towns and borders. Several reasons have led to this increase including restrictions on overseas and interregional travel, statewide campaigns such as 'Wander Out Yonder' encouraging intra-regional travel and a greater desire among West Australians to visit remote destinations where there are fewer people.

There are many benefits associated with increased visitation to the region including investment from Federal and State Government towards the development of infrastructure supporting tourism and an economic injection into regional communities benefiting many local businesses.

However, it is important to understand this sudden influx of visitors to regional communities is not always positive and may come at a cost. Businesses may be unprepared and lack the capacity or capability to cope with rapid growth and demand for their product or services which in turn could result in reduced quality, unmet demand or in some situations business closure.

In addition, increased visitation can place a considerable strain on the natural environment, particularly in areas such as coastal environments which are fragile and already struggling to cope with a growing number of users. The development and or management of infrastructure which encourages and supports outdoor recreation in these areas should review and investigate the current and future needs of recreational users. It is also important that the values of the local community are understood and taken into consideration.

## **A resilient sport and recreation sector**

The sport and recreation industry has been one of the hardest hit since the outbreak of COVID-19. Whether usual operations, events and activities have had to be cancelled, postponed or ceased indefinitely, the impact COVID-19 has had on small to large businesses, clubs and community groups has been significant. Some affected more than others.

Although financial support has been made available to eligible clubs, community groups and enterprise, not all groups can access this funding and those who do may only receive a small percentage of funding for losses incurred. To survive, these groups must be prepared to adapt to both short, medium- and long-term constraints. This has included modifying how products and services are delivered including using online learning platforms as opposed to face to face learning, BYO equipment to group activities, reduced class or tour size, single use or contactless hire of equipment and adopting rigorous hygiene and sanitisation practices.

Where possible support from both Federal, State and local government should continue during and proceeding this period to ensure private enterprise, clubs and organisations and community groups remain relevant and viable. Support may be offered in the form of free or subsidised training to build capacity and capability of staff or volunteers, provision of professional advice and guidance to groups to be able to confidently navigate any issues or challenges which may arise, or access to funding programs to help ease financial strain.

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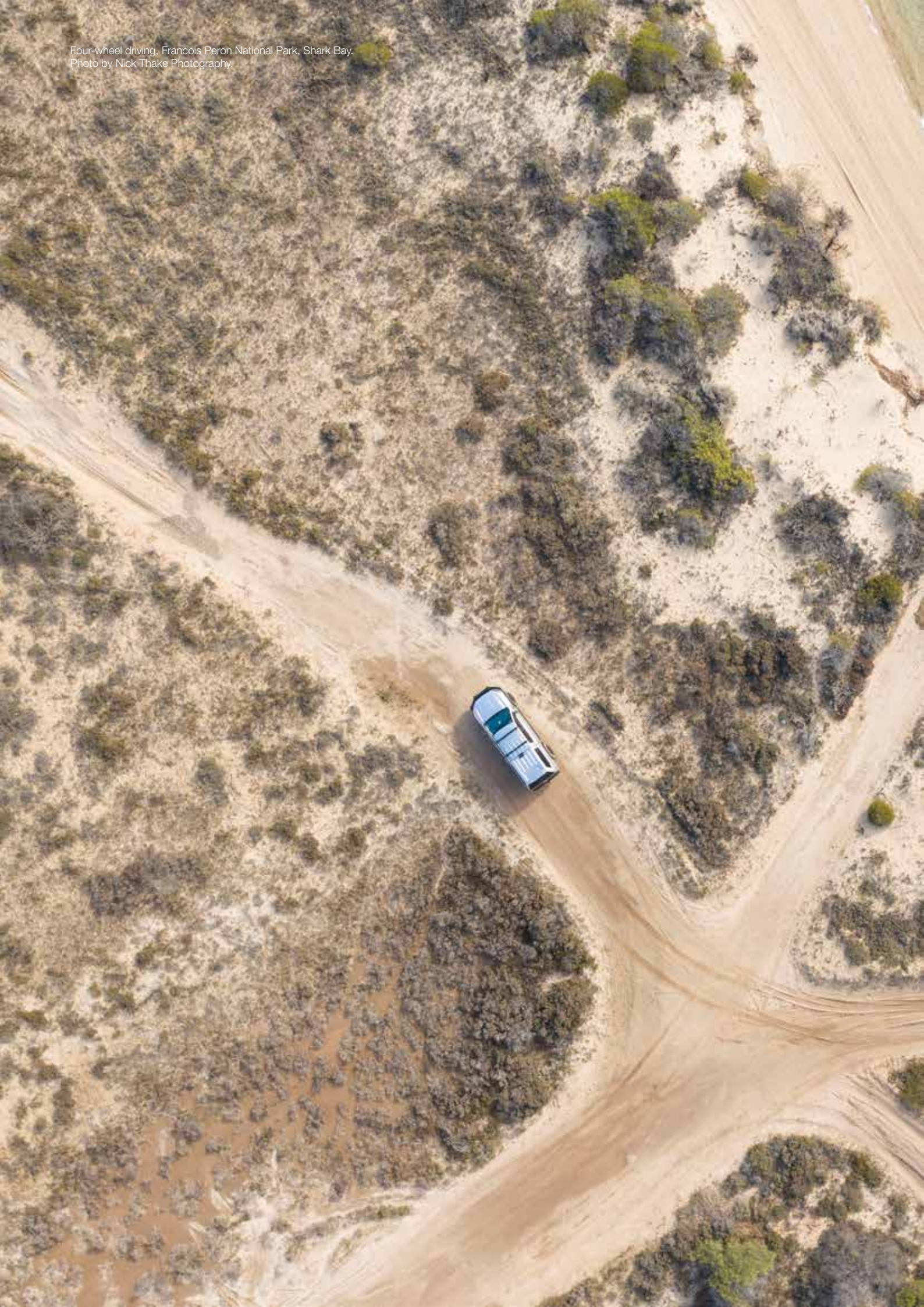
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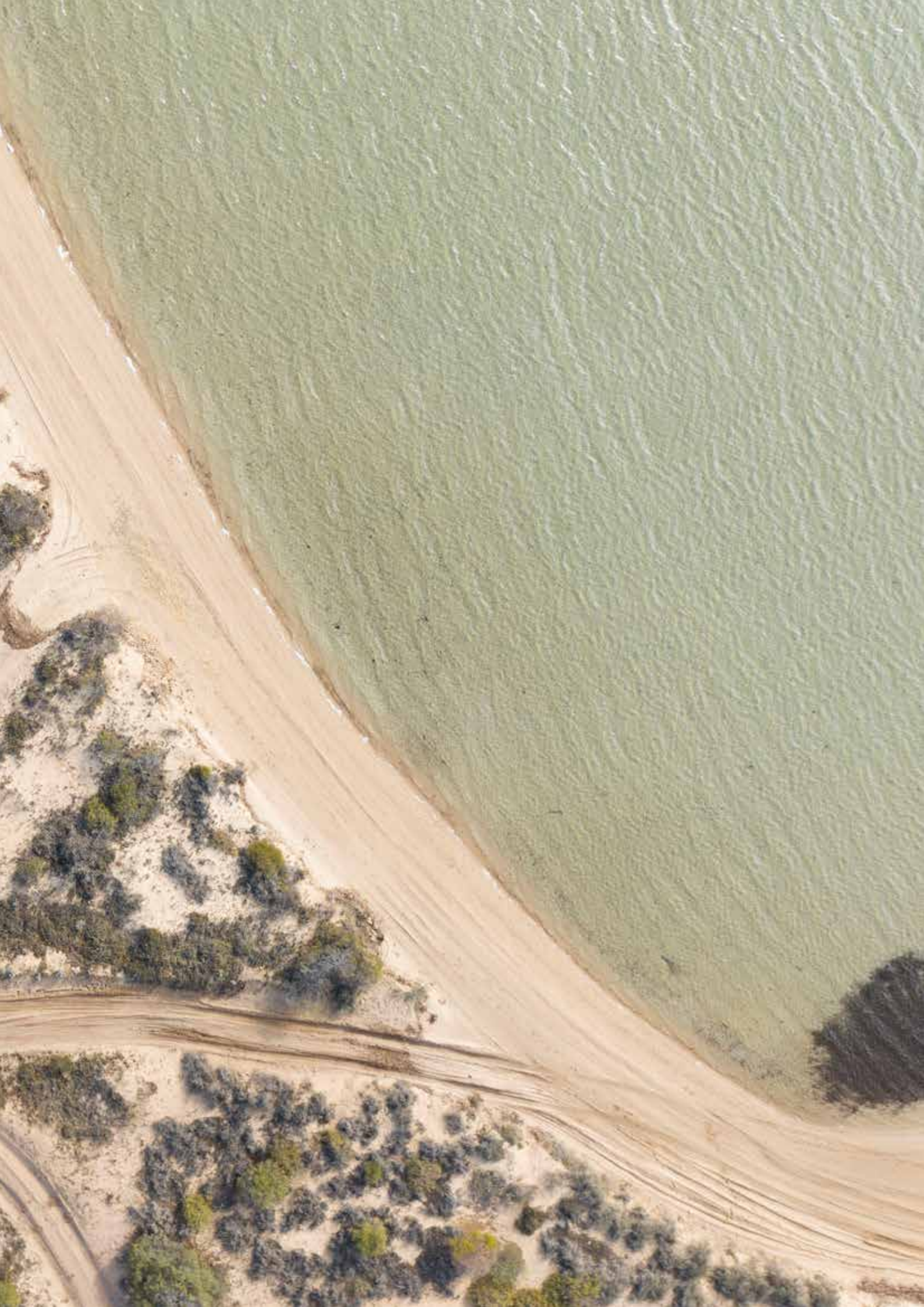
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Four-wheel driving, Francois Peron National Park, Shark Bay.  
Photo by Nick Thake Photography.











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