

# Recreation and tourism

## Vasse-Wonnerup wetlands

July 2015



Images courtesy Department of Water

**Improving water quality and visual aesthetics over summer months will be important for supporting future tourism opportunities**

The Vasse-Wonnerup wetlands are one of Busselton's best kept secrets. The diversity and large number of waterbirds that use the wetlands at different times of the year provide an opportunity to experience a unique ecosystem close to an urban setting. A large portion of the township is built on the outskirts of the wetlands allowing locals and tourists to enjoy this natural wonder. Their unique location of the wetlands (between the Tuart Forest National Park and Geographe Bay) opens a broad range of recreational and ecotourism opportunities that encompass each of the different ecosystems. Current use of the wetlands is relatively small compared to the other tourist and recreational activities on offer in the Geographe Bay region.

Image courtesy Department of Parks and Wildlife



## Bird watching

The Vasse-Wonnerup wetlands are home to one of the largest concentrations of waterbirds in Western Australia, so it is no surprise that bird watching is one of the main attractions. This has inspired the construction of a bird hide at Malbup Creek, in the heart of the wetlands, along with other bird hides and associated walk trails. The Geographe Bay Tourism association regularly promote the bird watching facilities and it is estimated that around 1800 people visit the hides each year. Bird watcher numbers have increased over the years, reflected in regular excursions by the Busselton Naturalists Club and other environmental and school groups.

### SNAP SHOT

- The Vasse-Wonnerup wetlands are one of Busselton's best kept secrets
- Bird watching and recreational fishing are the main activities
- Current recreational facilities include bird hides, walking trails and picnic areas
- The wetlands have untapped ecotourism opportunities

## Nature walks

There are a number of walking trails in and around the wetlands, associated with bird hides, boardwalks and possum spotting. The Malbup picnic area offers access to the Possum Spotting Trail and Malbup Creek Hide. Many other informal tracks exist within the vicinity of the wetlands that connect with the Tuart Forest National Park. Captain Baudin's Reserve, north-west of the Vasse Estuary, is connected to a number of trails that run through the dunes and onto the beach. Seasonal wildflower viewing is also popular at this site.



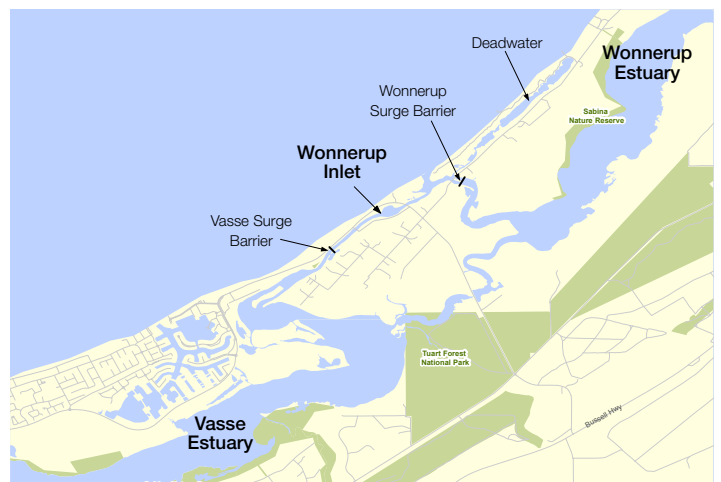
## Fishing and water sports

Recreational fishing is popular in the Wonnerup inlet and in the Deadwater. Species of interest to recreational fishers are Black Bream, Mullet and Blue Swimmer Crabs. Netting is prohibited in all wetland areas and fishing within the estuaries themselves is discouraged to avoid impacts to waterbird habitat. The use of watercraft on the wetlands is discouraged and limited due to extensive algal growth and potential impact on waterbirds. Canoeing or kayaking in the Wonnerup Inlet and Deadwater is undertaken over summer months.



## What the future holds

There is considerable opportunity for increased ecotourism of the wetlands, particularly capitalising on the abundance and diversity of waterbirds. Over the past 30 years, the City of Busselton and Department of Parks and Wildlife have explored proposals to develop wetland tourism attractions and interpretation centres. The economic benefit of a recent proposal was conservatively estimated at approximately \$700 000 annually. The development of recreation and tourism opportunities will be influenced by the health and aesthetics of the ecosystem - if it is not appealing, people will not visit. However, unplanned and unmanaged recreation and tourism may lead to pollution and disturbance of native wildlife and their habitats. Therefore, careful management will be vital to ensure recreation and tourism occurs in appropriate areas and sensitive wetland areas are protected.



## More information

More information about the Vasse-Wonnerup wetlands is available under Resources on the GeoCatch website.

[www.geocatch.asn.au](http://www.geocatch.asn.au)

## Be involved

Community members will have the opportunity to be involved in the development of a management plan for the Vasse-Wonnerup wetlands. Opportunities will be promoted on the GeoCatch website or contact GeoCatch.



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