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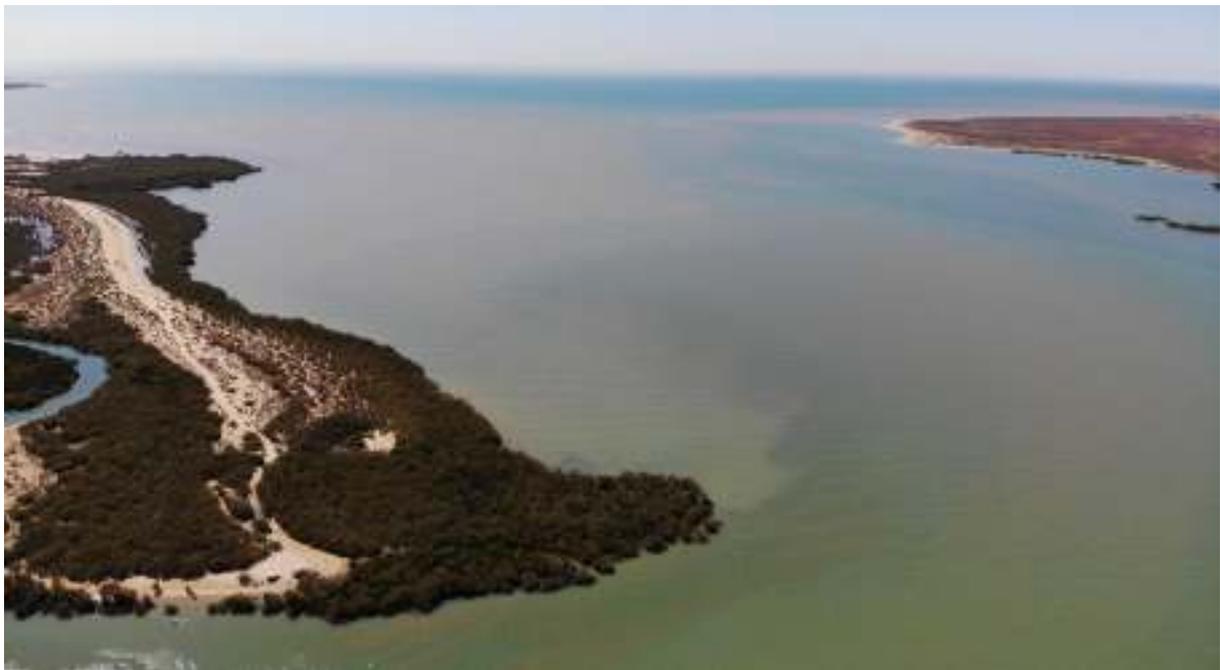
The science of everything

Earth Sciences 20 July 2019

<https://cosmosmagazine.com/earth-sciences/exmouth-gulf-has-more-fish-species-than-ningaloo>

EXMOUTH GULF HAS MORE FISH SPECIES THAN NINGALOO

Review findings coincide with calls for greater protection. Michelle Wheeler Reports



Bay of Rest, facing Exmouth Gulf in Western Australia (CREDIT: BEN FITZPATRICK)

Western Australia's Exmouth Gulf has more species of fish than the adjacent and World Heritage-listed [Ningaloo Reef](#), according to a review of the area's environmental values.

The once-in-a-generation [study](#) found Exmouth is home to at least 63 species of sharks and rays, 15 species of sea snakes and five species of turtles, as well as whales and dolphins that swim with tourists at Ningaloo and nearby Coral Bay.

It also acts as a nursery for the world's largest humpback whale population, a feeding and mating ground for dugongs, and a pupping habitat for two endangered sawfish species.

In all, there are 850 species of fish in the gulf, compared to 550 at Ningaloo, says the review's lead author, Ben Fitzpatrick, director of environmental sciences consultancy Oceanwise Australia.

The review's release comes as a proposal for a pipe bundling facility is being considered in the gulf, which is in a remote area about 1200 kilometres north of the Western Australian capital Perth.

Conservationists argue that the idea should be rejected, and that [Ningaloo Marine Park](#) should be extended to include the gulf.

The review was endorsed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) [Commission on Ecosystem Management](#), which says it agrees with recommendations of previous state and federal governments that Exmouth Gulf should be inscribed as a World Heritage Site and zoned a marine park.

A dozen scientists spent two weeks in the field, surveying the gulf on foot, from a boat, with drones and using underwater cameras. They also assessed all existing literature.

Fitzpatrick says this work revealed that the gulf has mangroves living at the extreme of their range, undisturbed vistas, fossil corals reefs and subterranean stygofauna – animals that have adapted to living in underground waterways.

“It’s actually got globally-unique ecosystem values, in that these things don’t occur anywhere else,” he says.

But, he adds, we still have a lot to learn about Exmouth Gulf. “This whole exercise has revealed just how little we know about the place.”

Links as they appear in this article

Ningaloo Reef

<https://parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/park/ningaloo>

Once-in-a-generation [study](#)

<https://www.oceanwise.com.au/exmouth-gulf-2>

Ningaloo Marine Park

<https://parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/parks/north-west/ningaloo/>

IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management

<https://www.iucn.org/commissions/commission-ecosystem-management>