

'Hero for the Planet picks Exmouth Gulf for global publicity campaign'

The Sydney Morning Herald

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/hero-for-the-planet-picks-exmouth-gulf-for-global-publicity-campaign-20190821-p52jha.html>

By Emma Young

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A world-renowned marine biologist has named Western Australia's Ningaloo Reef and Exmouth Gulf as an international "hope spot" in a move that will boost its international profile and lend firepower to an anti-industrialisation campaign.

Sylvia Earle has been called 'explorer-in-residence' for *National Geographic*, a Living Legend by the Library of Congress, '*Her Deepness*' by *The New Yorker* and Hero for the Planet by *Time*.



Now she leads Mission Blue, a global coalition of 200-plus organisations that inspires public support for a worldwide network of protected marine Hope Spots, through communications campaigns that promote its documentaries and research expeditions.

Dr Earle's naming Ningaloo and Exmouth Gulf a "treasure worth standing up for" follows last month's release of a landmark study from Ben Fitzpatrick's Oceanwise Australia, [revealing globally significant biodiversity beneath these waters, 1200 kilometres north of Perth](#).

"I want to salute you, Ben Fitzpatrick, and the champions you have gathered around you to be a voice for the Exmouth Gulf and the entire Ningaloo Coast," Dr Earle said in her introduction to a new video showcasing the interdependence of some of the Exmouth region's most spectacular species.

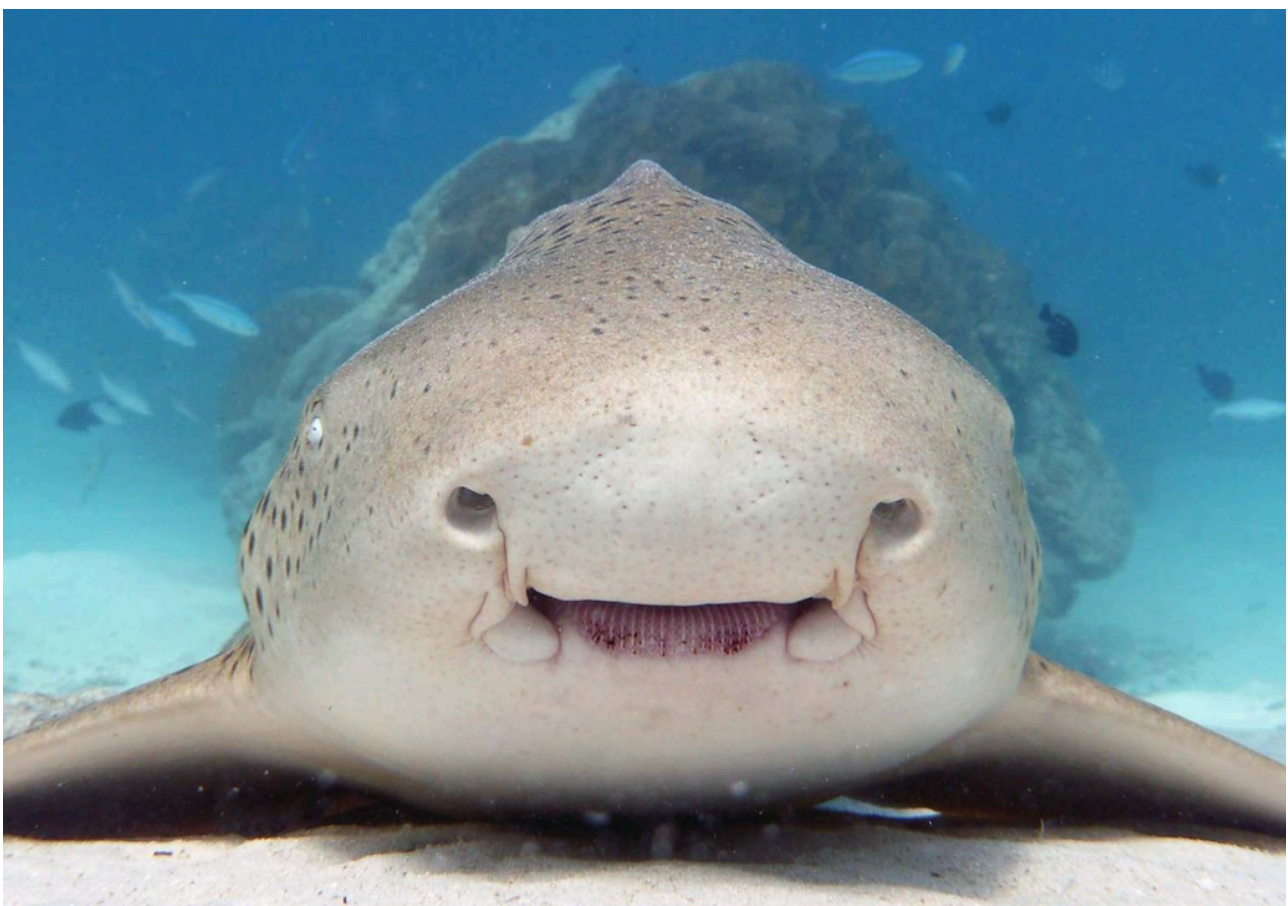
"This area really rocks. Looking at the world as a whole, humpback whales have chosen this place as a nursery area.

"What's not to love about this place? What can be done to ensure enduring protection as pressures mount?

"There still is time to maintain the integrity of a system which, once lost, is gone forever. "It's there now; and it is a reason for hope."

Dr Fitzpatrick said it was a big deal for marine science and conservation to get Dr Earle's endorsement.

"She has been around since the beginning of the discipline, when the advent of scuba first allowed people to study underwater," he said.



A leopard shark in Exmouth Gulf. BEN FITZPATRICK, ADJUNCT RESEARCH FELLOW, UWA OCEANS INSTITUTE

"She brings decades of perspective and experience on major marine science projects all over the world; she knows when she sees a special place.

"She pulls a lot of weight in international circles and this will be advertised by their organisations for the next few years."

Mission Blue released a statement saying that the region, and its ecotourism and fishing industries, were under threat from multiple industrial proposals, including an oil and gas pipeline manufacturing facility, a deepwater port for the fossil fuel industry and an evaporative salt mining operation.

"In the face of these threats, Mission Blue is highly supportive of the ongoing efforts by scientists, conservationists and community groups to protect Exmouth Gulf for environmentally sustainable use by future generations," it said.

Australian Marine Conservation Society chief executive Darren Kindleysides said despite its very high conservation values, Exmouth Gulf had disproportionately low conservation protection compared to adjacent Ningaloo.

"As one of the world's last intact arid-zone estuaries; a system supporting more than 850 species of fish and elasmobranchs; with many species listed as rare, endangered, or vulnerable including sea turtles, dolphins, dugongs, manta rays, sawfish, sea snakes and migratory birds; AMCS is determined to progress efforts to secure enhanced conservation status for this ecosystem," he said.

[The Oceanwise Australia report released last](#) month was the culmination of years of work by authors from the University of WA, James Cook and Curtin universities and Sharks and Rays Australia, to overview all existing knowledge of Exmouth Gulf, endorsed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

It identified a data deficiency so severe it suggested companies could not guess, nor governments properly assess, any proposed development's impact.

Yet, it said, even this inadequate existing body of research identified the Gulf - home to almost 2000 species, many of which are only found in WA - as a globally outstanding area qualifying for World Heritage status, as does Ningaloo.

The report advocated for a large-scale, multidisciplinary Exmouth Gulf Marine Research Program and a strategic assessment of the potential cumulative impacts that would arise from industrialisation of the coast.

The state's Environmental Protection Authority is conducting a Public Environmental Review into a Subsea 7 proposal to fabricate 10-kilometre pipelines in the area, then tugboat them through the Gulf and Ningaloo Marine Park for use at offshore oil rigs.

Links as they appear in this article

1. "Her deepness in New York" <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1989/07/03/her-deepness>
2. Dr. Sylvia Earle discusses the Exmouth Gulf and Ningaloo Coast World Heritage Area Hope Spot. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7uMLK5g3qA>
3. The Exmouth mystery: Where science has barely grazed the surface, by Emma Young. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7uMLK5g3qA>
4. The Oceanwise Australia report released last month <https://www.oceanwise.com.au/subscribe>