



WESTERN
AUSTRALIAN
GOVERNMENT

Gazette

ISSN 1448-949X

PRINT POST APPROVED PP665002/00041

6399



PERTH, TUESDAY, 24 DECEMBER 2013 No. 237 SPECIAL

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY JOHN A. STRIJK, GOVERNMENT PRINTER AT 12.30 PM

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Marine Animal Emblem for Western Australia Proclamation 2013

Made under the powers and functions conferred on His Excellency the Governor under Her Majesty's Letters Patent, by the Governor in Executive Council.

1. Citation

This proclamation is the *Marine Animal Emblem for Western Australia Proclamation 2013*.

2. Marine Animal Emblem for Western Australia

It is declared that the marine animal known as the Whale Shark, and more fully described as *Rhincodon typus*, is adopted and recognised as the marine animal emblem of the State of Western Australia.

M. J. McCUSKER, Governor.

L.S.

C. J. BARNETT, Premier.

THE MARINE EMBLEM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**WHALE SHARK***(Rhincodon typus)*

In the dappled light of the ocean,—*Rhincodon typus*—the Whale Shark can swim past almost unnoticed despite its size, due to its grey skin with yellow markings that act as camouflage. This pattern is unique to each animal and, much like a human fingerprint, can be used to identify them. These markings and its large mouth, up to 1.5 metres wide, distinguish the Whale Shark as a striking inhabitant of the ocean.

The Whale Shark is in many ways an animal of contradictions. Although it is the largest living fish at a length of up to 12 metres, it is a docile and gentle giant that eats the tiniest organisms of only millimetres in size. While it breathes through its gills like a shark, it filter feeds like a whale by pulling plankton, krill and crustaceans through mesh-like screens in its gills. Although it has thousands of tiny teeth placed in rows within its enormous mouth, it does not use them for feeding.

The species was identified and described in April 1828 by English doctor, Andrew Smith, who was living in Cape Town and watched as fishermen harpooned the giant creature. Over the years tall tales have been told about intrepid encounters on the sea with these enormous fish, with some unconfirmed stories of Whale Sharks up to 20 metres long.

The species originated approximately 60 million years ago and represents a link to the prehistoric past. Whale Sharks live for 70—100 years and do not reproduce until they reach approximately 9 metres long. It takes a Whale Shark pup up to 30 years to reach this size. Scientists in Western Australia are working to discover more as there is still much we do not know about the Whale Shark.

Although they are found in tropical and warm oceans across the equator, Whale Sharks have become famous for their gathering during Autumn and Winter in Western Australia and have been seen as far south as the Kalbarri cliffs. Whale Sharks are capable of diving to depths of 1,286 metres but usually spend their time swimming and surface feeding. This makes Western Australia one of the best places in the world to see these spectacular creatures.

The Whale Shark was recommended by the students of Forest Crescent Primary School following a State wide competition. Whale Sharks are a vulnerable species and in Western Australia they are respected and protected.

The Whale Shark was proclaimed the marine animal emblem of Western Australia on 12 November 2013.

