

Some Ningaloo Reef fish are 'homebodies'

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New research shows that some fish species in Western Australia's Ningaloo Marine Park spend most of their time close to home, staying on the reef rather than travelling significant distances, as was previously thought.

The research aims to identify what influences the movement patterns and habitat use of fishes in the park, which encompasses the majority of Ningaloo Reef, the largest fringing reef in Australia.

The new data on the long-term movement patterns of sharks and other fish in the park will have important implications for future management decisions on the size and placement of sanctuary zones. Currently 34 per cent of the park is reserved as sanctuaries designed to protect marine animals and their habitat from human disturbance.

To better understand fish movement patterns and habitat use within the park, the Ningaloo Reef Ecosystem Tracking Array (NRETA) was established in 2007 as part of the Integrated Marine Observing System's Australian Acoustic Tracking and Monitoring System. NRETA consists of 104 acoustic receivers along the Ningaloo coastline and is Australia's largest array of acoustic receivers.

Fish tagged with internal ultrasonic tags are then able to be accurately tracked around the study site. Over time, the information collected builds up a picture of the individual's movement patterns.

Project leader, CSIRO's Dr Russ Babcock, said many other previously

unknown aspects of the lives of fish on Ningaloo, such as where and when different species spawn, are being revealed.

"We're working on gathering information that will inform management to assist protection of individual species and groups of species," Dr Babcock said. "At the end of the study, we will be able to give the WA Department of Environment & Conservation a really good idea how fish and sharks use the marine park."

Source: CSIRO ([news](#) : [web](#))

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