

New species of stingray discovered at Ningaloo

Scientists conducting dive surveys off Western Australia have discovered a new species of stingray at Ningaloo Marine Park. The discovery highlights the importance of protecting and conserving the Park for the sake of the sharks and rays that inhabit the World Heritage-nominated area along the Ningaloo coast.



Credit: Kirk R Gastrich

Western Australian Environment Minister Donna Faragher said the new ray was part of the maskray family which has a maximum wingspan of 30 cm, making it much smaller than most other rays found at Ningaloo.

Since the ray was initially found, CSIRO's Dr Will White said researchers have been able to establish that this species, officially named *Neotrygon ningalooensis*, also exists 400 km further south in Shark Bay, suggesting that careful monitoring and management will be required to protect their habitat.

The dive surveys, conducted by CSIRO in collaboration with the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and the Western Australian Marine Science Institution, have so far documented 47 species of sharks and rays. According to Dr Peter Last (CSIRO), however, it is estimated that there could be as many as 118 species of sharks and rays in the marine park.

Dr Waples said the current research at Ningaloo Marine Park would add to the scientific knowledge now being gathered by DEC and will be used in the development of its broader marine monitoring program along the entire Western Australian coast.

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