



THE UNIVERSITY OF
**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

Centre for Environmental
Economics & Policy

**OCEANS
INSTITUTE**

Valuing and protecting Australia's Surfing Resources

Background

Recreational surfing contributes **\$2.7 billion annually to Australia's economy**, and is our second-most practiced water-based sport¹. Our previous research showed that over 90% of surfers experience **social, physical and mental wellbeing benefits**^{1,2}, translating into billions of dollars in public health benefits. Beyond economic measures, surf breaks also play an important role in natural ecological and geophysical processes.

Despite such benefits, surfing resources (surf breaks and the surrounding environments) are increasingly threatened by changes to the coastline, such as erosion, sediment movement and infrastructure developments.

Only a few of Australia's 1,230+ surf breaks have some form of formal protection or active management. In Western Australia, **surf breaks remain largely absent from coastal planning**, with no consistent policy framework for their valuation, management or protection. As a result, coastal decisions affecting surf breaks typically lack a sound understanding of surfing values, potentially leading to the loss of surfing amenity.

A few global examples exist where surf breaks are formally managed and protected. For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand, nationally important surf areas have direct statutory protection. In the Gold Coast, the Surf Management plan ensures wave quality is maintained through active sand nourishment.

Project scope

This project (2025-2028) aims to generate a systematic understanding of the value of surfing resources in Western Australia, and develop guidelines for their formal protection

The project's objectives are to:

- (i) establish a robust approach to assess the significance of surf breaks and the threats they face;
- (ii) generate economic estimates of the market and non-market values of surfing resources; and
- (iii) develop state-level surf management guidelines.

¹ Manero, A., et al. (2024). "A national assessment of the economic and wellbeing impacts of recreational surfing in Australia." *Marine Policy* 167: 106267 ² Manero, A., et al. (2024). "Understanding surfing as a 'blue space' activity for its contributions to health and wellbeing." *npj Ocean Sustainability* 3(1): 37



Yallingup, WA. Photo by Scott Bauer

Project plan

This research project will gather insights from local surfing communities across Western Australia regarding the significance of surf environments, perceived threats, and proposed changes to management systems to improve the preservation of surfing values.

Between mid-2026 and early 2027, the project will apply qualitative and quantitative methods to gain insights from local communities, through:



Focus groups with members of local surfing communities in Geraldton, Perth, Margaret River and Albany.



Surveys on-site and online to collect data on visitation frequency, travel patterns and expenditure across different surf spots.



Interviews with key informants, such as long-term residents, members of surf-based organisations, policy-makers and industry stakeholders.

Project team and collaborators

Funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC Early Career Industry Fellowship, IE240100163), this project is a partnership between Dr Ana Manero, Surfing Western Australia and The University of Western Australia.

The project is based at the UWA Centre for Environmental Economics and Policy, with support from the UWA Oceans Institute, and works with collaborators from the University of Canterbury, Bond University, the University of Hawai'i, and the Peruvian Society for Environmental Law.

In July–August 2026, the project will host Dr Leon Mach—one of the world's leading scholars in surf science and surf tourism—for a two-week community engagement program across Western Australia.



Dr Ana Manero,
Chief Investigator

Participate and stay in touch

If you are part of a surfing community and would like to contribute to the project, know more or provide any feedback, please do not hesitate to reach out.



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www.surfingeconomics.org
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Mettams Pool, WA.
Photo by Lachlan Ross

