

Bringing oysters back to Oyster Harbour



Remnant oyster reef in Tasmania © Dr Chris Gillies



Shellfish reefs provide nursery grounds for fish © Brent Womersley

In a Western Australian first, The Nature Conservancy Australia (TNC) has partnered with The University of Western Australia, Recfishwest and South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc. (South Coast NRM) to restore lost shellfish reefs in Oyster Harbour, Albany.

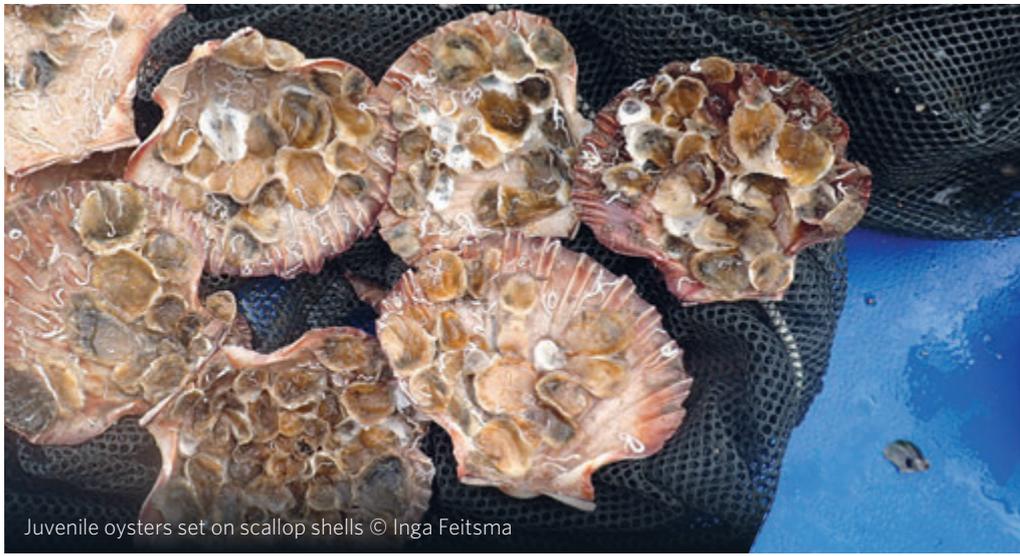
Native oyster reefs and mussel beds are nature's water filters and provide homes and food for a huge range of marine life including many important fish species. Sadly, 85% of shellfish reefs have been lost worldwide, making it the most threatened marine habitat on earth.*

In line with this worldwide trend, by the mid to late 20th century, shellfish reefs had virtually disappeared from Albany harbours and from most of our southern bays and estuaries. It is thought that this loss was related to over-harvesting by destructive dredge fishing, pollution and disease. With the end of dredge fishing and improvements in water quality, the time is now right to bring back these important habitats.

**Shellfish Reefs at Risk Report, TNC*



Dr Chris Gillies from TNC during restoration works in Victoria © Inga Feitsma



Juvenile oysters set on scallop shells © Inga Feitsma

“Oysters are nature’s water filter. A single oyster can filter at a rate of up to **4 or 5 litres an hour!** That’s enough to fill a bathtub in a day.”

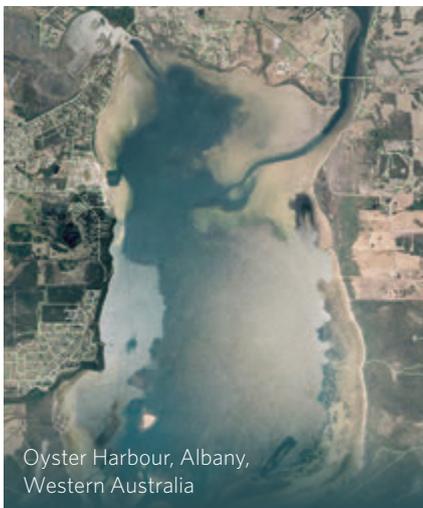
— Dr Boze Hancock
TNC, Marine Restoration Scientist



Oyster Harbour, Western Australia © Liz Tanner

“As this exciting project progresses, we will encourage local community involvement in restoration activities.”

— Dylan Gleave,
Coastal, Marine and Water Program Leader,
South Coast NRM



Oyster Harbour, Albany,
Western Australia

Returning shellfish reefs to Oyster Harbour

Bringing the experience from shellfish restoration projects around the world, we’re testing a range of innovative methods to re-establish native shellfish reefs.

As part of the reef restoration project, native flat oysters will be raised at Frenchman Bay hatchery in Albany. During the spawning stage, millions of oyster larvae will be released and settle on recycled bivalve shells.

The larvae are then left to grow into juvenile oysters for a 3–6 month period on commercial farming leases. During the early growth stage our team will prepare the restoration site by laying substrate onto the seafloor to provide a foundation for the juveniles to be placed and grow into reefs.

The shellfish reef restoration work in Oyster Harbour and the south west of Western Australia expands on project activities in Victoria and South Australia under TNC’s Great Southern Seascapes Program.

To find out more, please visit www.natureaustralia.org.au



Jonathan Bilton managing shellfish spat at Frenchman Bay hatchery © Liz Tanner



Iconic Sooty Oystercatchers depend on healthy harbours © William Creed

This project was made possible by The Thomas Foundation, the Recreational Fishing Initiatives Fund and is supported by Recfishwest and the WA Department of Fisheries.