

3 Uses of the Tamar Estuary

A summary map indicating the major uses of the Tamar Estuary is provided as Figure 8.

3.1 Population centre

The first settlement on the River Tamar was at York Town in 1804 (now known as West Arm), which was established by Lieutenant Colonel W. Patterson. A better water supply and more productive agricultural land upstream encouraged a gradual shift of the population southwards. By 1825, Launceston had become the centre of administrative and commercial activities in northern Tasmania and remains the largest city in the north of the State.

The Tamar Estuary supports the second largest concentration of people in Tasmania, with a total population of 92,260 living in the three separate council areas which border on the estuary (Figure 9, Table 6). The population is scattered down both sides of the estuary; but is concentrated at the southern end, in the metropolitan area of Launceston and extending down the western side of the river into the West Tamar Municipality. Another small concentration is also at George Town near the mouth of the estuary.

Table 6 Local government areas bordering on the Tamar Estuary

Local Government Area	1994 Population	Proportion of State (%)
George Town	7,111	1.5
Launceston	65,832	13.9
West Tamar	19,317	4.1
Total	92,260	19.5

(ABS, 1996)

With a population of this size, the Tamar Valley region has become a focus for institutions such as the University of Tasmania (Launceston Branch), Australian Maritime College (Launceston and Beauty Point) and the Australian National Underwater Training Centre (Beauty Point).

3.2 Recreation

The Tamar Estuary is widely used for recreation. Swimming in the upper reaches of the Tamar Estuary is mostly restricted to the First Basin in the South Esk River and St. Leonards in the North Esk River, although swimming at St. Leonards has been less common in recent years due to concerns over water quality. Swimming and various other activities such as diving, water-skiing, small boat sailing and windsurfing are also popular at beaches near the estuary mouth and at recreational sites in the middle estuary such as Hillwood, Paper Beach and Gravelly Beach. Recreation in the upper reaches near Launceston is generally restricted to secondary contact activities. Small boat sailing occurs at Rosevears and Home Reach and canoeing and rafting are popular in Cataract Gorge. Rowing and tourist cruises are common in the upper estuary, and large boating is popular throughout the Tamar. Recreational fishing is widespread in the middle and lower reaches, downstream from Tamar Island.

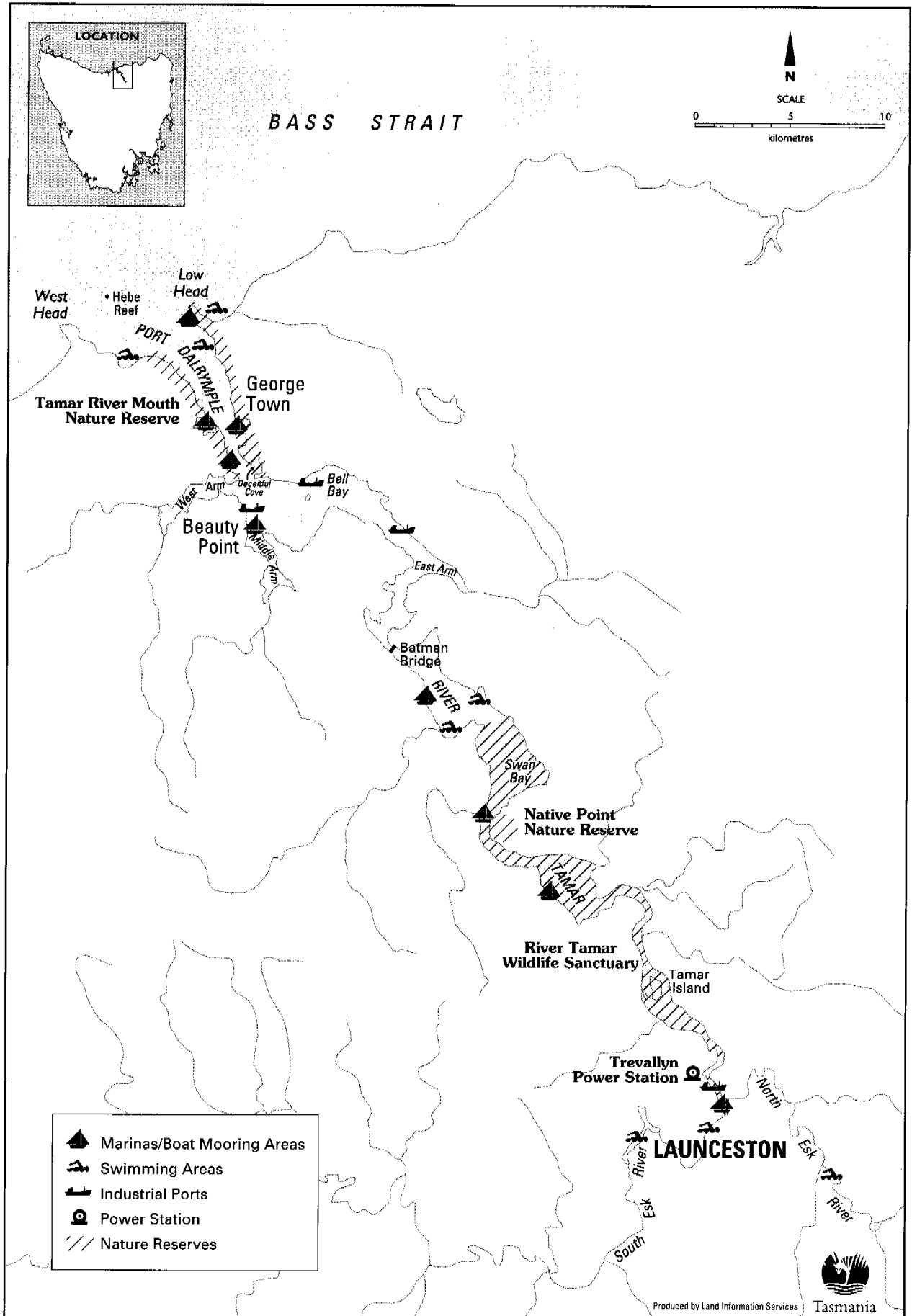


Figure 8 Uses of the Tamar Estuary

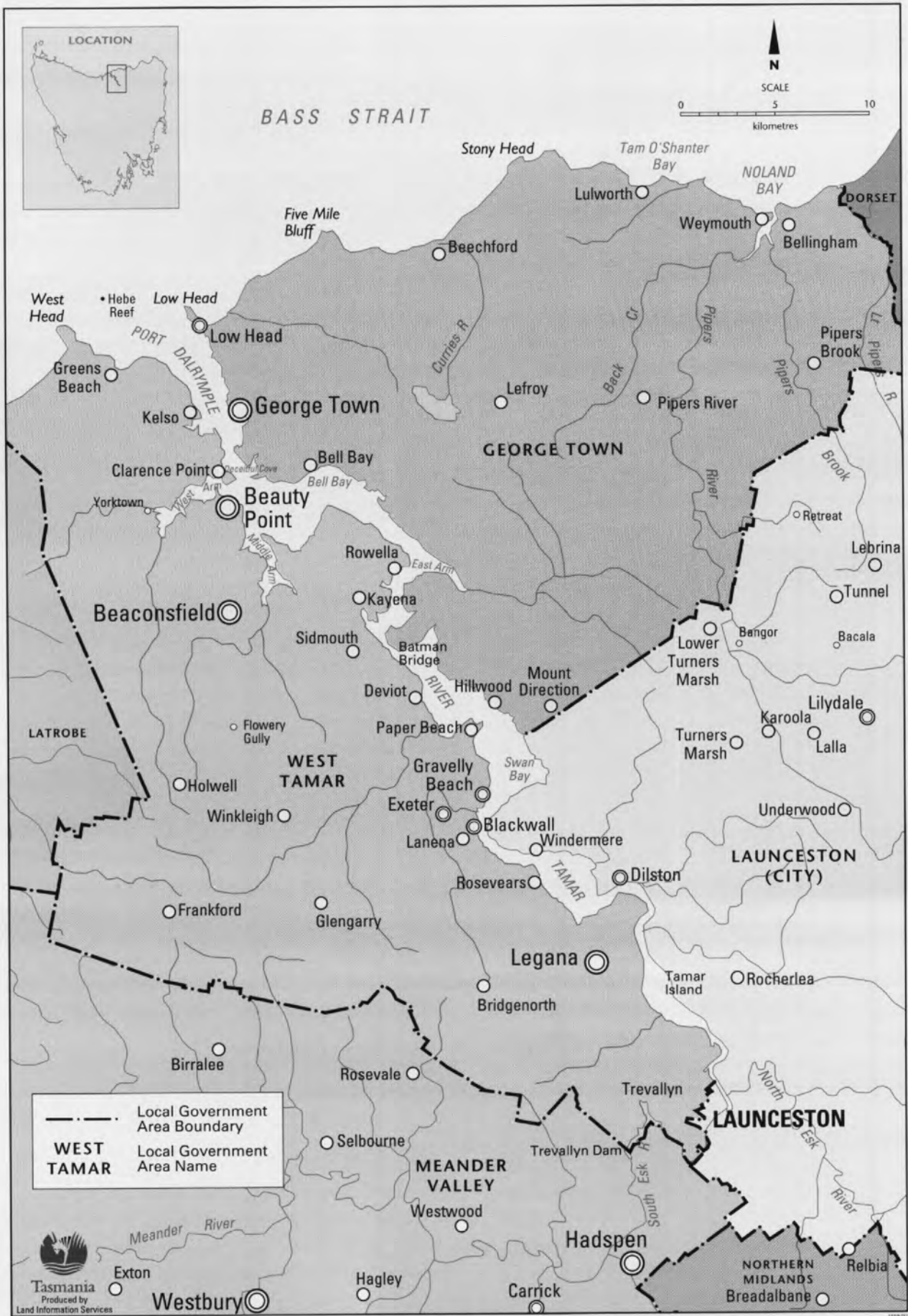


Figure 9 Local government areas

Foreshore recreation at Launceston occurs in areas such as Kings and Royal Parks. Several sporting venues and facilities are situated around this area. Use of the foreshore for picnicking and barbecuing is common in the lower reaches of the estuary at sites such as Batman Bridge, Hillwood, Paper Beach, Greens Beach, Gravelly Beach and Low Head.

Aesthetics are an important feature of any water body; however these values are diminished by the intermittent occurrence of litter and other visual pollution on the river banks and floating in the water near Kings and Royal Parks and by the odour and visual degradation resulting from exposed mud banks, particularly in the upper reaches.

Some regions of the River Tamar have significant tourism value. The Penny Royal and Ritchies Mill sites, situated near Launceston's foreshore are favoured by tourists, as is Cataract Gorge - one of the most visited tourist destinations in northern Tasmania. Several board-walks have recently been constructed in areas around the foreshore of the upper estuary and plans are currently underway to add to the board-walk system and to upgrade facilities at other sites throughout the estuary.

Several annual Tamar-based boating events occur on the estuary. These include the Three Peaks Race, the Bass Strait Challenge, the Top of the Tamar, the Launceston Regatta and the Henley Regatta. As well as attracting national and international competitors, these events promote the Tamar as a central focus for local sporting clubs and the general community.

Heritage values of the Tamar region are focused mainly on natural and European heritage. Investigations of areas immediately surrounding the Tamar Estuary have failed to find evidence of aboriginal inhabitancy, in contrast to the Derwent Estuary in the south of Tasmania. The density of scrub around the foreshores of the Tamar may have meant that food and other necessities were more accessible and more abundant in other areas, such as the Five Mile Bluff, which was inhabited by aborigines.

3.3 Fishing and aquaculture

A limited aquaculture industry operated in the Tamar Estuary for a short period in the 1960s, the legacy of which resides in two disused oyster leases at Deviot. Since the closure of these sites, there have been no other commercial fishing or aquaculture activities in the Tamar. However, the estuary does provide a breeding ground and nursery for many commercially fished species, particularly in the extensive seagrass beds in the lower reaches, which are important sources of food and shelter for juvenile fish. In addition, oyster spat is collected in the intertidal zone at a number of locations, including East Arm and Supply River. Spat collection is sporadic and depends on seasonal conditions. As previously mentioned, the middle and lower estuary is popular for recreational fishing.

3.4 Marine transport

With Launceston as the centre of commerce and industry in the north of Tasmania, the Tamar Estuary serves an important function in the conveyance of goods and services to the city, although the recent downgrading of Launceston port facilities has diminished the function of the upper and middle Tamar as a marine transport route. Bell Bay now serves as the main port in the north east of Tasmania and with major industries located at Bell Bay and Long Reach, large shipping is still frequent in the lower estuary. Approximately 1.2 million tonnes of cargo is imported into the State via the Tamar Estuary annually, and approximately 2.5

million tonnes is exported. The main exports include forest products, ferro-alloys, aluminium ingots and general cargo in shipping containers (Captain Black, PLA, Pers. Comm.). See Table 7 for details on imports and exports.

No cruise ships visit the Tamar at present, and on average, only one naval vessel uses the port per year. Boats using the middle and upper reaches of the estuary are now primarily pleasure craft such as tourist vessels and yachts. A major marina, owned by the Tamar Yacht Club, operates at Beauty Point and another has been proposed at Gravelly Beach. Recreational vessels are also moored up and down the length of the estuary as indicated in Figure 8, for example, at York Cove at George Town, Home Reach near the Tamar Yacht Club, Rosevears, Blackwall to Gravelly Beach, Supply Bay to Deviot, Kelso, West Bay, Pilots Bay at Low Head and Bryants Bay.

Table 7 Ten largest imports and exports to/from Tamar (1995/96)

Export Mass Tonnes		Import Mass Tonnes	
Woodchips	1,818,163	Manganese ore	386,886
Fe & Si manganese	251,410	Alumina - bulk	185,175
Aluminium	82,392	Coke-bulk-TEMCO	99,988
General cargo	69,720	General cargo	94,642
Pine logs	45,874	Petroleum-petrol	77,386
Timber	35,946	Petroleum-coke-Comalco	50,485
Vegetables	25,502	Coal-bulk-TEMCO	49,729
Newsprint	24,996	Petroleum-oils, distillates	42,728
Manganese ore	22,230	Wheat	29,277
Scrap metal	17,236	Empty returns	19,680

(PLA Annual Report, 1996)

3.5 Industrial and sewage discharges

The Tamar Estuary and its tributaries have received inputs of land based pollutants for over a century. These have included urban and agricultural run-off, sewage and industrial discharges (particularly from metal processing, wood processing, abattoirs) as well as drainage from mine sites. The addition of these contaminants to the river system has resulted in localised environmental degradation, particularly in the upper reaches of the estuary, and near industrial outfalls (e.g. Deceitful Cove). In 1995, a 300 tonne oil spill, occurred in southern Bass Strait, resulting in some contamination of the estuary's lower reaches.

3.6 Nature reserves

There are several nature reserves situated along the Tamar Estuary, as indicated in Figure 8. The Tamar River Wildlife Sanctuary, which extends from Tamar Island to the Batman Bridge, is an important wetland habitat and refuge for water fowl and other animals. The Tamar River Mouth Reserve contains a variety of saltmarsh to coastal vegetation habitats and provides a sanctuary for water fowl. Other important reserves include the Four Mile Creek Wildlife Sanctuary and the Native Point Nature Reserve.