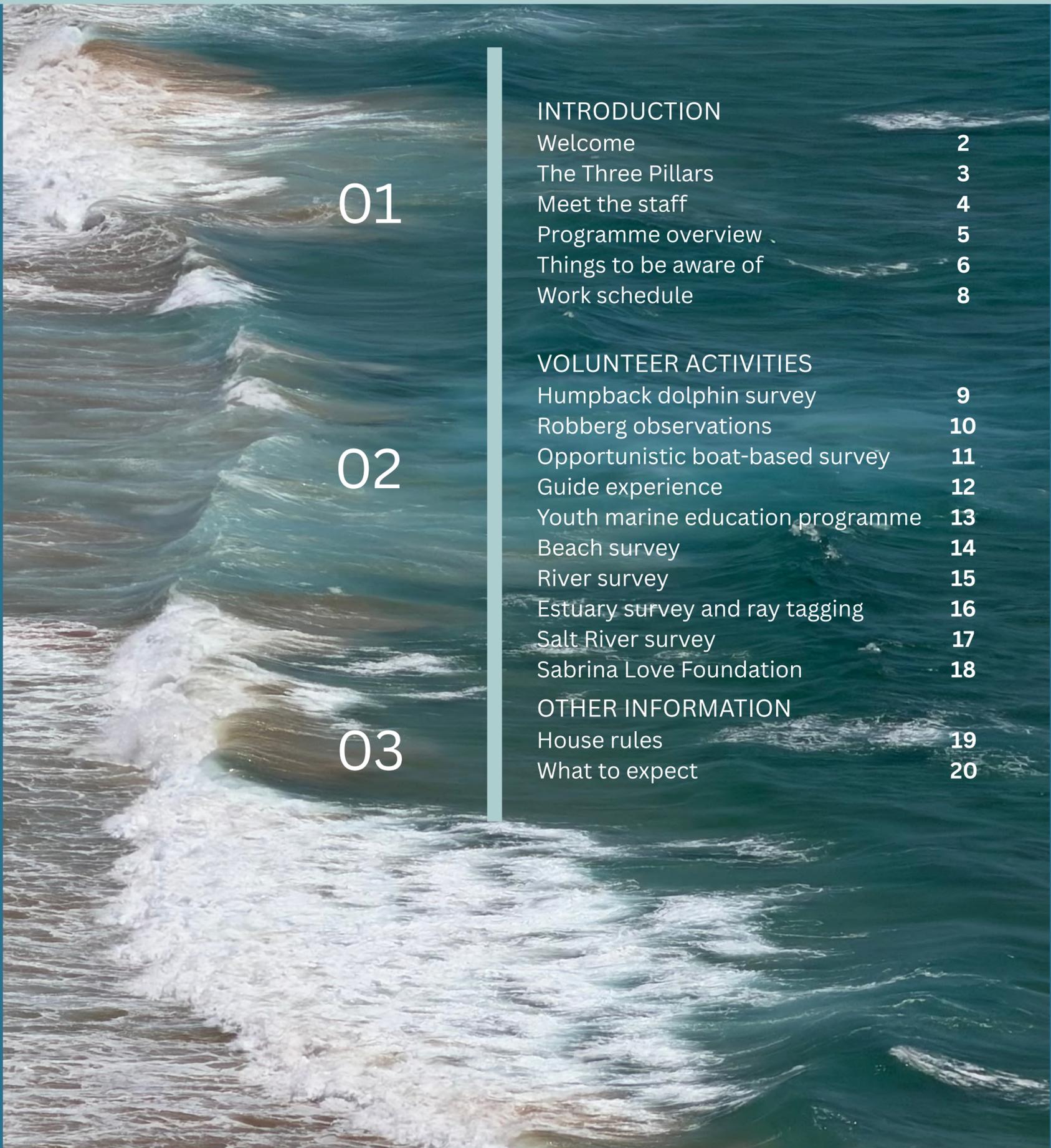


# Marine Conservation Orientation Guide

Matt Fermor, Eloise Grainger, Melissa Nel



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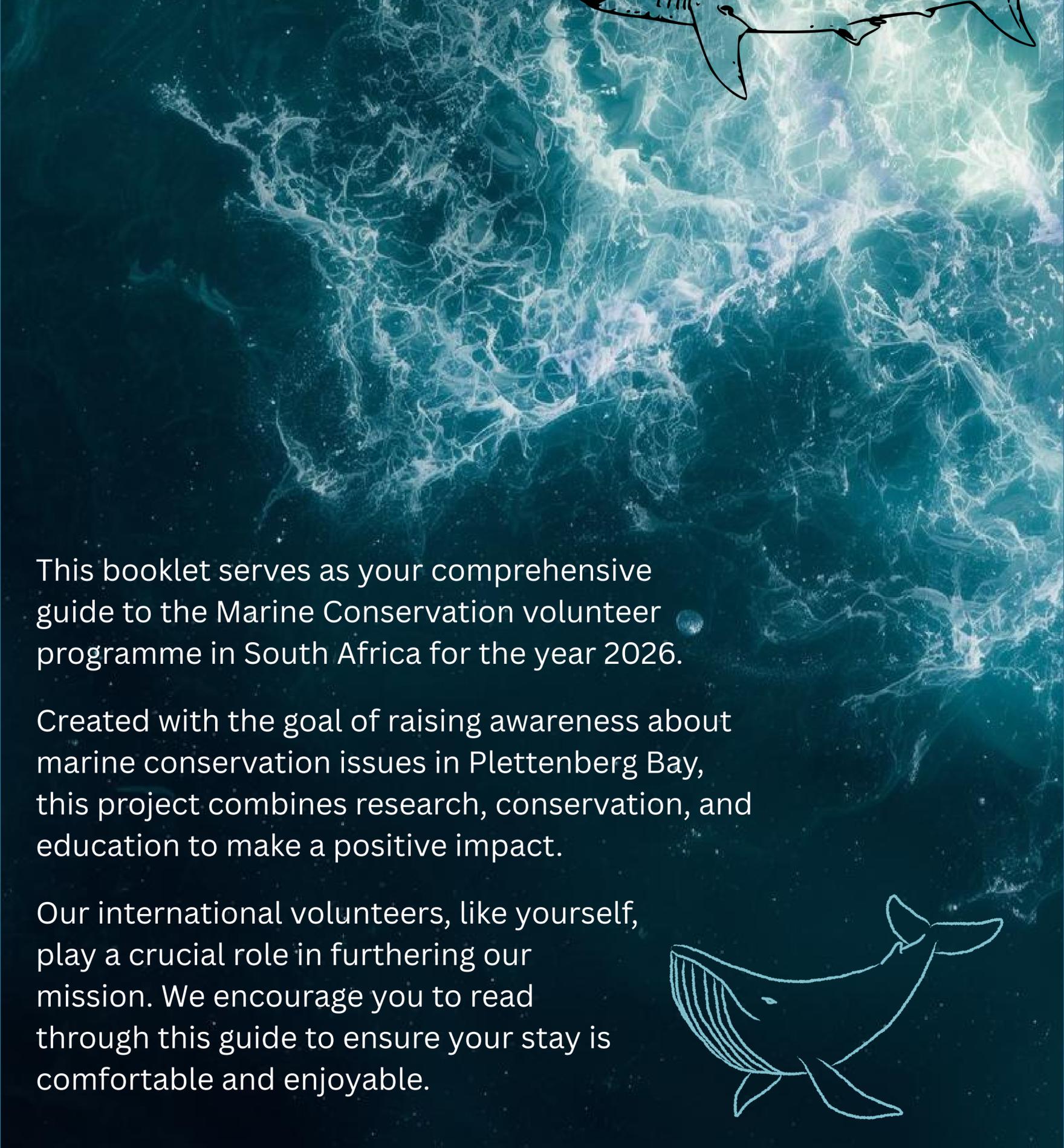
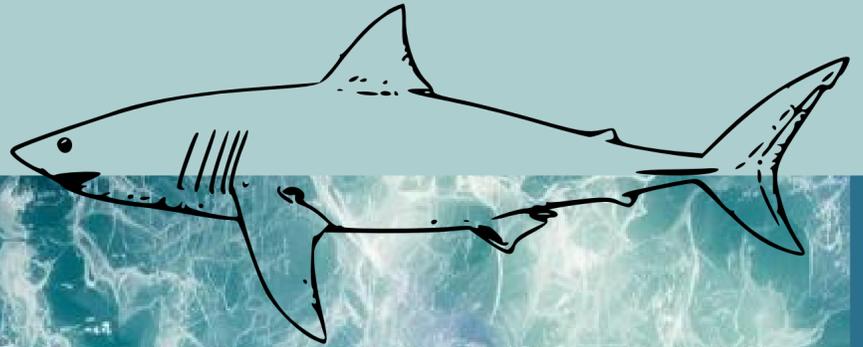
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# W E L C O M E



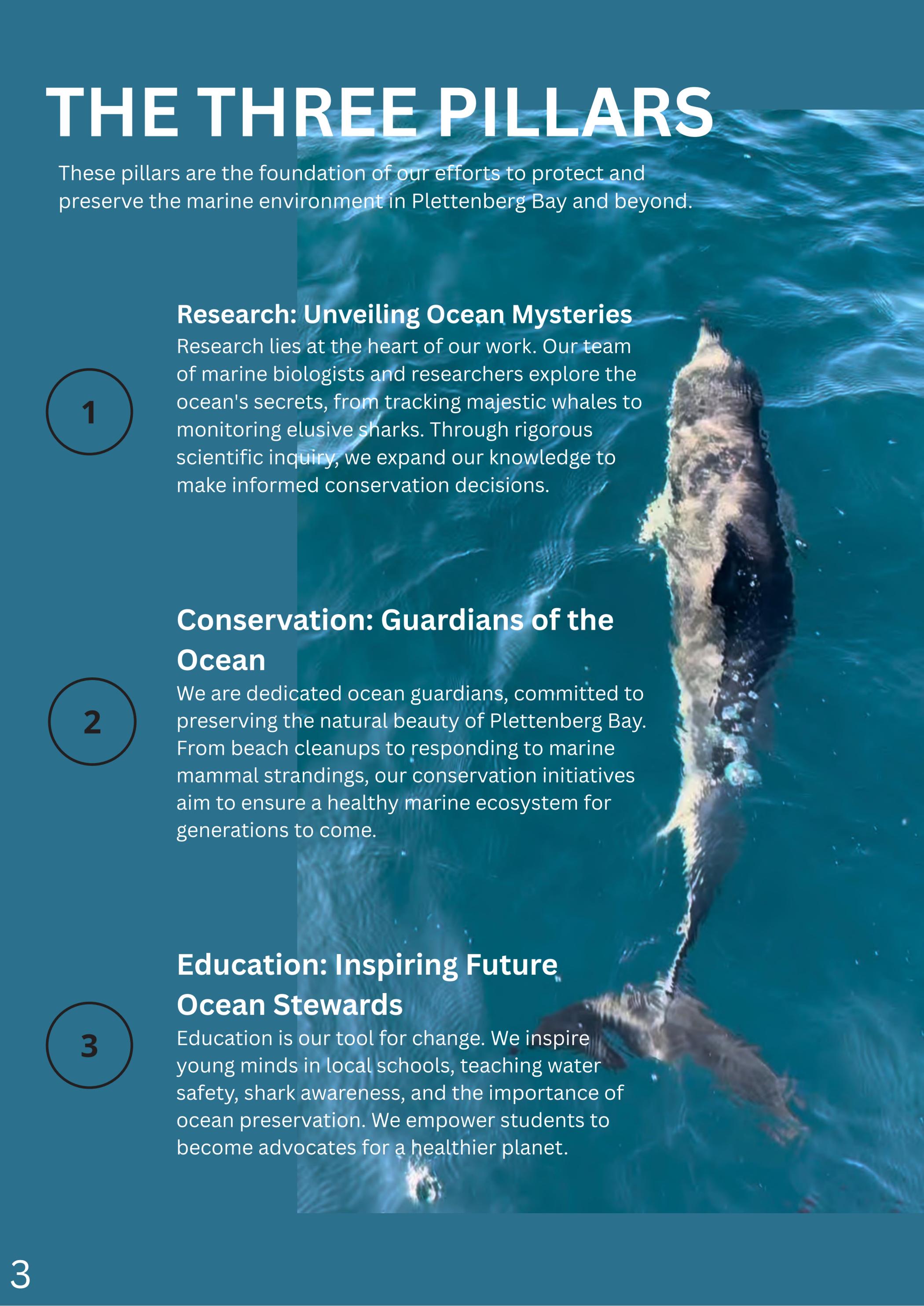
This booklet serves as your comprehensive guide to the Marine Conservation volunteer programme in South Africa for the year 2026.

Created with the goal of raising awareness about marine conservation issues in Plettenberg Bay, this project combines research, conservation, and education to make a positive impact.

Our international volunteers, like yourself, play a crucial role in furthering our mission. We encourage you to read through this guide to ensure your stay is comfortable and enjoyable.



# THE THREE PILLARS



These pillars are the foundation of our efforts to protect and preserve the marine environment in Plettenberg Bay and beyond.

1

## Research: Unveiling Ocean Mysteries

Research lies at the heart of our work. Our team of marine biologists and researchers explore the ocean's secrets, from tracking majestic whales to monitoring elusive sharks. Through rigorous scientific inquiry, we expand our knowledge to make informed conservation decisions.

2

## Conservation: Guardians of the Ocean

We are dedicated ocean guardians, committed to preserving the natural beauty of Plettenberg Bay. From beach cleanups to responding to marine mammal strandings, our conservation initiatives aim to ensure a healthy marine ecosystem for generations to come.

3

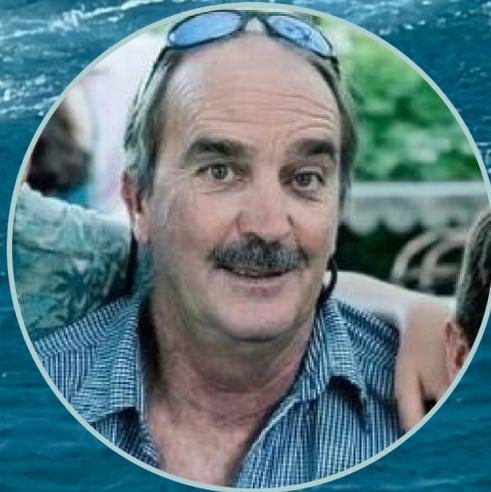
## Education: Inspiring Future Ocean Stewards

Education is our tool for change. We inspire young minds in local schools, teaching water safety, shark awareness, and the importance of ocean preservation. We empower students to become advocates for a healthier planet.

# MEET THE STAFF



Jared Harding  
Project Manager



Charlie Lilford  
General Manager and House Owner



Matt Fermor  
Conservation Manager



Kade Howorth  
Research Assistant



Melissa Nel  
Research Collaborator



Dr Chantel Elston  
Research Collaborator

# Programme Overview

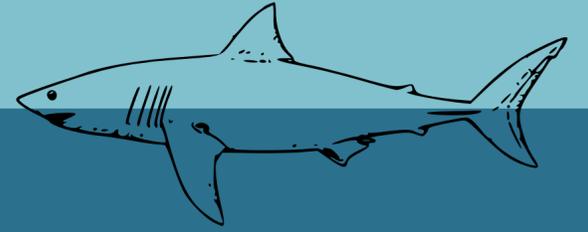
Our volunteer programme is dedicated to creating awareness about marine conservation issues in Plettenberg Bay. International volunteers from diverse backgrounds come together to contribute to our projects and increase their knowledge and awareness of local conservation efforts by integrating our core values.

## How Will I Help?

Get ready for hands-on experiences! As a volunteer, you'll actively participate in conservation and education projects that involve hiking, responding to strandings, and visiting local schools. You'll also assist in marine research projects, gaining valuable experience in boat-based and land-based field research methods.



# Things to be aware of...



## Level of participation

Your participation level may vary depending on the length of your stay and your experience. Longer stays may lead to increased responsibilities and potential training or supervision of new volunteers.



## Challenging work conditions

Be prepared for challenging conditions, such as boat-based fieldwork, hiking, and physically demanding tasks. Inform the volunteer coordinator of any limitations or conditions that may affect your participation.

## Weather dependent nature

Our projects are highly weather-dependent, and last-minute changes in the schedule are common. Marine mammal strandings take priority, and bad weather days may be used for data entry.



**No prior experience is required for our projects. However, we recommend that you possess the following qualities to make a valuable contribution:**

1. General interest in marine biology, research, conservation, and education
2. Enthusiasm, positivity, maturity, and independence
3. Willingness to learn and work well within a team
4. Adaptability and patience due to weather-dependent fieldwork
5. Moderate fitness for hiking
5. Attention to detail
6. Fluent English communication skills (both written and oral)



# WEEKLY OUTLOOK

Due to the weather-dependent nature of our work, we plan weekly activities in advance. The standard volunteer working week is Monday to Friday, from 08:00 to 16:00, with Fridays often ending earlier. We usually round off the week with a fun activity too! Weekend & evenings are your leisure time.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
AM ACTIVITY	Humpback dolphin survey + BRUVS	Estuary survey + stingray tagging	Youth marine education programme	Salt River survey	Whale and dolphin watching	Off	Off
LUNCH BREAK	Lunch in town	Farm stall lunch	Wednesday market lunch	Lunch in town	Lunch at home	Off	Off
PM ACTIVITY	Beach survey	Snorkelling excursion	Robberg observations	Snorkelling excursion	Data entry	Off	Off



# HUMPBACK DOLPHIN SURVEY & BRUVS

Humpback dolphins are an endangered species here in Plettenberg Bay, so by participating in a HBD survey, you'll be able to aid research and conservation efforts as well as get up close to these marine mammals.

## Your role

- **Photography:** Capture photos of the dolphins' dorsal fins, which will help to identify particular individuals within small pods as each one is unique.
- **Camera System Deployment (BRUVs):** You will assist in deploying a camera system known as Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems (BRUVS). These systems record all underwater species that pass in front of the camera's field-of-view.
- **Video Footage Screening:** After collecting video footage, you'll participate in screenings to identify the presence of sharks and rays.

## Project purpose

- a. **Photographs and Data Collection:** Contribute to the national census to help identify HBD populations and estimate their sizes.
- b. **Elasmobranch Population Discovery:** Understanding shark & ray species' diversity & community structure in Plettenberg Bay.

This adventurous and unique opportunity to board a boat with marine specialists and contribute to meaningful data collection is both as fascinating as it is important. These projects are permitted and done in collaboration with Plett Shark Spotters.

# ROBBERG OBSERVATIONS

Prepare for breathtaking hikes and observation sessions as you head to the Robberg Peninsula. This project involves monitoring marine wildlife from designated cliff-top sites, providing a unique perspective on the marine ecosystem.

## Your role

- **Observation Sessions:** You will hike to different sites on Robberg Peninsula, dedicating 3-4 hours to observe and record various aspects of the marine environment.
- **Data Collection:** Record environmental conditions and observe the presence and behaviour of marine life, including seals, sharks, whales, dolphins, tourism vessels, and shore anglers within the Robberg Marine Protected Area (MPA).

## Project purpose

a. **Unique and Non-Invasive Observation:** This project offers a unique and non-invasive way to observe wildlife, particularly sharks, and their natural behaviour within an MPA.

b. **Long-Term Dataset:** Since 2019, we have been conducting dedicated observations, contributing to a valuable long-term dataset.

c. **Baseline Data:** The observations have not yet been influenced by controversial activities such as cage diving operations or invasive research techniques, making them essential for establishing baseline data.

By participating in this project, you'll play a vital role in monitoring seal-shark interactions, assessing the importance of the Marine Protected Area to marine mammals and the tourism industry, and gathering crucial data to support marine conservation efforts in the region.

# OPPORTUNISTIC BOAT-BASED SURVEY

Joining commercial whale and dolphin watching boat trips is an exciting part of your volunteer experience. When available seats allow, you'll embark on these trips to actively contribute to our conservation efforts.

## Your role

- **Recording Sightings:** During these boat trips, you'll be responsible for recording sightings of various marine animals, including whales, dolphins, seals, sharks, and seabirds.
- **Deploying Hydrophone:** You will also get the chance to test out some amazing marine biology equipment - this underwater microphone allows you to hear dolphin and whale sounds and clicks more clearly.

## Project purpose

a. **Continuing Baseline Data for the Bay:** Your observations and data collection are essential for maintaining and enhancing our baseline data for Plettenberg Bay. This long-term dataset is invaluable for understanding the bay's marine ecosystem.

By participating in this project, you'll help us determine the distribution and movement of marine animals, monitor their population health, study human-wildlife interactions, and gather other critical ecological information. Your efforts contribute to the protection of these magnificent creatures and their habitat.

# GUIDE EXPERIENCE

Depending on the length of your stay with us, you'll have the opportunity to be certified as an assistant marine guide. Working alongside a local whale and dolphin watching company, you will be able to gain knowledge of local marine animals and history as well as get experience working on boats within the tourism industry.

## Your role

- **Studying:** Reading the training guide and asking questions to the Conservation Manager and Research Assistant will get you up to speed on the essential knowledge needed for leading boat tours.
- **Become Certified:** You will have the chance to take the Assistant Guide's written and practical exam to receive an official certificate.
- **Guide Marine Tours:** With experience, you could help lead whale and dolphin watching tours and spend even more time with these amazing animals.

## Project purpose

- a. **Studying:** Familiarising yourself with the incredible marine species in the bay is also useful for your time here as they're often the focus of our research and conservation work.
- b. **Certified Marine Guide:** Boost your CV and gain valuable hands-on experience and unique qualifications to strengthen your future career opportunities.

# YOUTH MARINE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

In collaboration with Plett Shark Spotters, our volunteers actively engage in an ongoing Youth Marine Education Programme conducted at local schools. This programme focuses on educating young students about the marine environment in Plettenberg Bay, with specific emphasis on water safety, sharks, and marine mammals.

## Your role

- Assisting in communicating with young students.
- Utilizing our informative posters and engaging educational games to convey valuable information about the marine environment.

## Project purpose

a. **Community Upliftment:** Contribute to the empowerment and education of local youth, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for Plettenberg Bay's marine ecosystem. Your engagement helps instill knowledge and awareness, ultimately strengthening the bond between the community and the environment they call home.

**Disclaimer:** subject to term time variability

# BEACH SURVEY

Beach surveys encompass three vital components: recording and reporting marine animal strandings, collecting shark egg cases, and conducting marine debris cleanup and site monitoring.

## Your role

- **Marine Animal Stranding Recording & Reporting:** You will collaborate with the local stranding network to record and report marine animal strandings. This can include a wide range of species, from seabirds and turtles to seals, dolphins, and whales.
- **Shark Egg Case Collection:** You will analyse the collected shark egg cases found along the coastline, contributing to research on these vital marine structures.
- **Marine Debris Cleanup and Site Monitoring:** Participate in cleaning up the beaches, ensuring they remain pristine. Additionally, monitor the condition of these sites and report any instances of abuse to the municipality.

## Project purpose

- a. **Assist Local Management Authorities:** Your involvement in recording and reporting marine mammal strandings helps local management authorities respond effectively to these events, contributing to the protection of marine life.
- b. **Shark Egg Case Research:** You contribute to understanding the distribution and health of shark populations, aiding in their conservation.
- c. **Community Upliftment:** Your participation in cleanups not only keeps beaches clean but also uplifts the community. Reporting abused sites ensures that these natural resources are protected for future generations.

Your contributions help protect the marine life and natural beauty of the coastal areas you serve.

# RIVER SURVEY

Prepare for unique and adventurous river surveys as you explore the waters for evidence of human and natural impacts on the estuary. This project involves boat-based observations.

Your role

- **Boat-Based Observations:** You will conduct observations from a boat, actively recording the presence of both humans and animals, most notably fishermen and seals.

Project purpose

- Seal Spotting:** This is to understand their behaviour in a novel ecosystem and gain knowledge of their spatial and temporal use of the estuary as well as information on predation, so you will record species and frequency of observed predations.
- Breeding Ground and Juvenile 'Safe Space':** Ongoing research suggests the possibility of the river serving as a breeding ground and juvenile "safe space" for certain species. Your contributions help validate these hypotheses and support conservation efforts.
- Human Uses of the Estuary:** Recording the amount of boat activity and fishing helps to understand the human impact in this ecosystem, particularly as the river mouth makes it an easily accessible place to visit.

Your efforts will contribute to expanding our knowledge of unique estuarine environments. This data is shared with the Keurbooms Estuary Advisory Forum to ensure we work towards keeping the river and its inhabitants healthy.

# ESTUARY SURVEY & RAY TAGGING

Get ready to hop on some paddle boards and paddle up and down the estuary. Non-motorised forms of observation are a fantastic, non-intrusive way of observing marine life, especially stingrays. Alongside Dr Chantel Elston, you will be able to get hands on experience observing, catching, tagging, and releasing two species of critically endangered eagle rays (common eagle rays and duckbill rays).

## Your role

- **Stingray Capture and Release:** Being quick and nimble is key to success here. Help out our biologists by working as a team to deploy large nets and smaller dip nets to gently capture a stingray, getting you very up close to marine life.
- **Stingray Operation:** Assist in passing surgical equipment to ensure the smooth implantation of a small microchip.

## Project purpose

a. **Implantation of Microchip:** This project uses a method called mark-recapture protocol, meaning that the microchip implanted can be used to see how long the ray has stayed in the estuary for, how far it has moved and how much it has grown, should it be recaptured at a later date. At the moment, we don't have a full understanding of which ecosystems are important to eagle rays, so this data will help us find out how and why these rays use the Keurbooms Estuary. Using some complicated mathematical models, we can estimate the number of individuals that live in the system - information which is vital for conservation efforts.

This will afford you the chance to work with local marine biologists to further our knowledge and understanding of understudied elasmobranch species.

**Disclaimer:** subject to time of year where tagging is optimal

# SALT RIVER SURVEY

By walking through the stunning nearby Nature's Valley, you will get to see first hand the sheer variety of fauna and flora led by our Conservation Manager. The hikes can be quite long, usually around 5-15km... but there will always be time to cool down in the river before conducting the survey.

## Your role

- **Beach Clean Ups:** Remove any rubbish, packaging, and fisherman's gear from the beach to keep it pristine.
- **Shark Carcass Survey:** Record any strandings of shark species, noting its length, sex and any injuries you observe.
- **Shark Egg Case Collection:** You will analyse the collected shark egg cases found along the coastline, contributing to research on these vital marine structures.

## Project purpose

- a. **Beach Clean Ups:** Preserve the environment of Plettenberg Bay and surrounding areas.
- b. **Shark Carcass Surveys:** Gives researchers a better understanding of how subsistence fishermen impact small shark species. Also gives a wider understanding of anthropogenically driven factors affecting our oceans.
- c. **Shark Egg Case Research:** You contribute to understanding the distribution and health of shark populations, aiding in their conservation.

Both the litter collected and the shark egg cases found will be sorted and analysed upon return to the volunteer house, where this data will be further explored by our researchers and collaborators at Plett Stranding Network.

# SABRINA LOVE FOUNDATION

The Sabrina Love Foundation envisions an inclusive society where children with disabilities and their families thrive alongside others - a society rooted in empathy, understanding, and shared opportunities. Volunteers have the opportunity to help out at the local school and assist in its wider outreach projects.

## Your role

- **'Morning Ring'**: Most Fridays, volunteers will spend time at the school participating in the 'Morning Ring'. This involves dancing and singing with the children as well as assisting the carers wherever needed.
- **Gardening**: Volunteers also contribute to the upkeep of the garden by rolling up their sleeves and joining the incredible grounds team at the Sabrina Love Farm.

## Project purpose

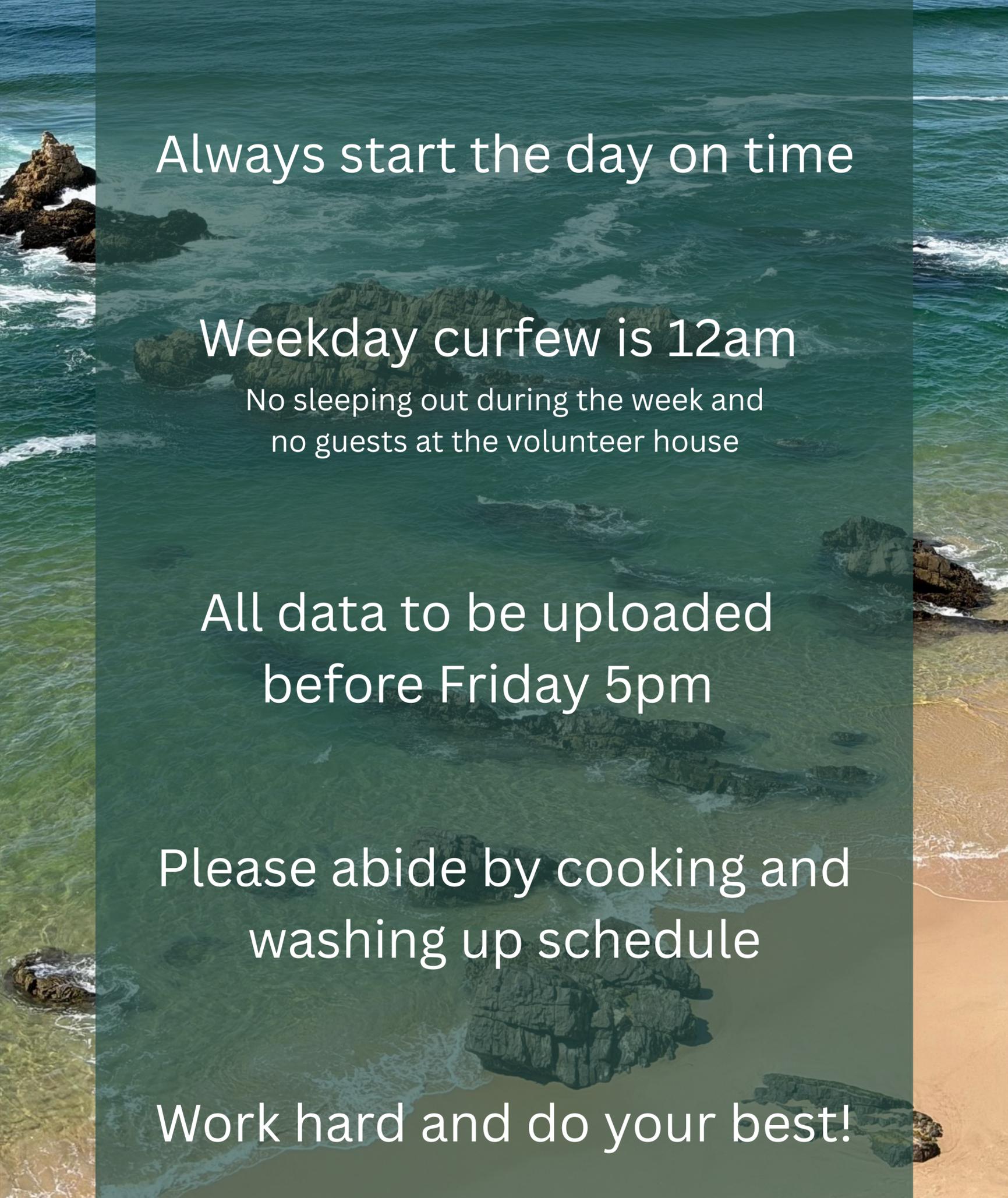
- a. The **'Morning Ring'** is a joyful space and a beautiful reminder of the power of presence, joy, and community.
- b. The **Sabrina Love Farm** garden is a living, breathing example of sustainability in action. Volunteers learn about composting, soil health, and mindful food production, gaining insight into how this thriving garden supports the foundation's daily operations.

Remarkably, the produce grown from this garden helps feed over 200 people every single day, making the garden a cornerstone of nourishment, dignity, and self-sufficiency. The Sabrina Love Farm garden is a powerful symbol of growth - not only of food, but of community, resilience, and care. It nurtures bodies, educates minds, and reflects the foundation's commitment to inclusion, sustainability, and shared responsibility... a place where hearts are lifted, hards are dirty, and meaningful change takes root.

**Disclaimer:** subject to term time variability



# HOUSE RULES



Always start the day on time

Weekday curfew is 12am

No sleeping out during the week and  
no guests at the volunteer house

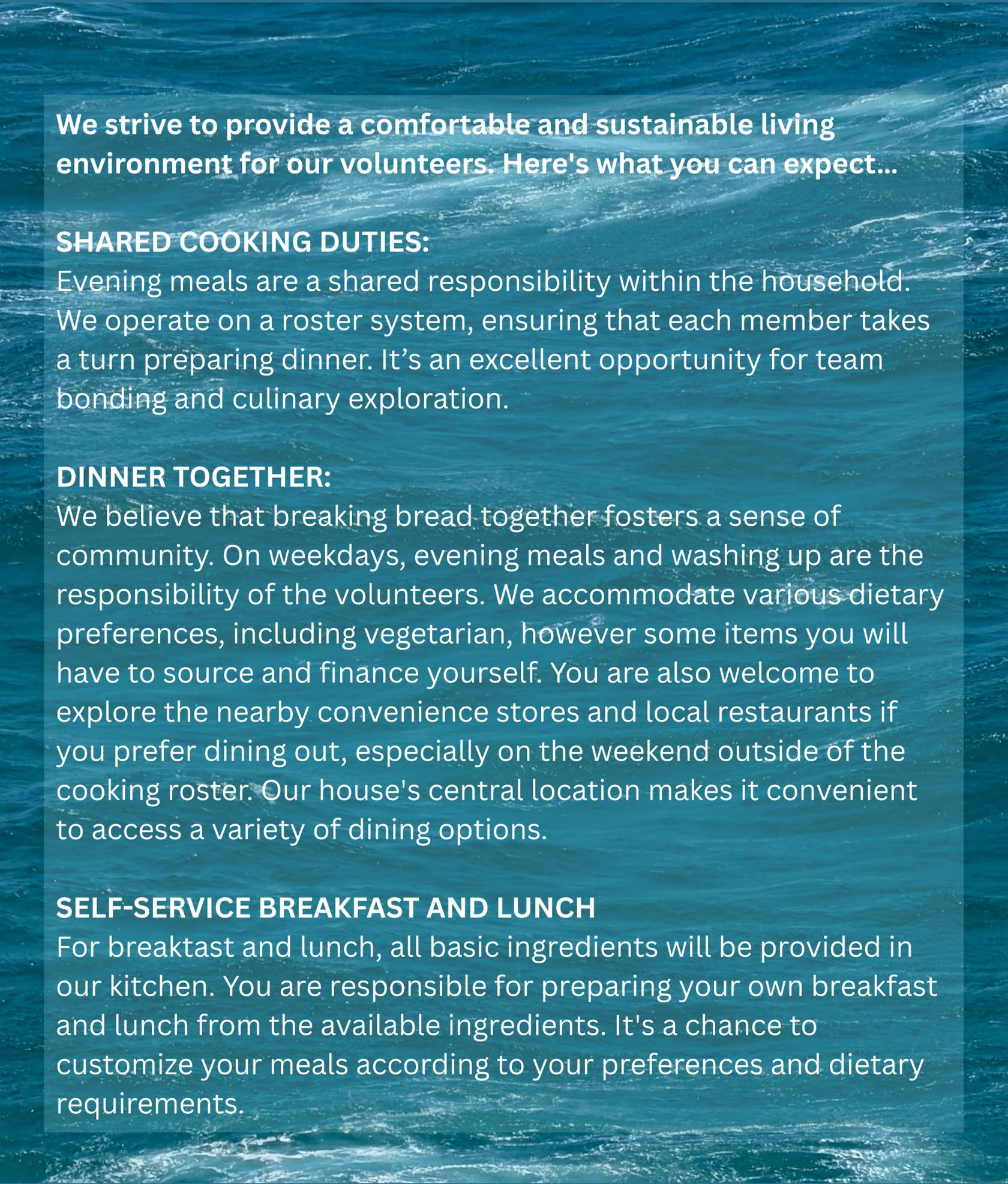
All data to be uploaded  
before Friday 5pm

Please abide by cooking and  
washing up schedule

Work hard and do your best!



# HOUSE FACILITIES AND MEALS



**We strive to provide a comfortable and sustainable living environment for our volunteers. Here's what you can expect...**

## **SHARED COOKING DUTIES:**

Evening meals are a shared responsibility within the household. We operate on a roster system, ensuring that each member takes a turn preparing dinner. It's an excellent opportunity for team bonding and culinary exploration.

## **DINNER TOGETHER:**

We believe that breaking bread together fosters a sense of community. On weekdays, evening meals and washing up are the responsibility of the volunteers. We accommodate various dietary preferences, including vegetarian, however some items you will have to source and finance yourself. You are also welcome to explore the nearby convenience stores and local restaurants if you prefer dining out, especially on the weekend outside of the cooking roster. Our house's central location makes it convenient to access a variety of dining options.

## **SELF-SERVICE BREAKFAST AND LUNCH**

For breakfast and lunch, all basic ingredients will be provided in our kitchen. You are responsible for preparing your own breakfast and lunch from the available ingredients. It's a chance to customize your meals according to your preferences and dietary requirements.



# HOUSE FACILITIES AND MEALS

## **DOMESTIC SERVICES:**

A dedicated domestic worker ensures the cleanliness of the house multiple times a week, promoting a clean and pleasant living space. Communal clothes washing is also arranged to conserve water resources, aligning with our commitment to sustainability.

## **ENERGY EFFICIENCY:**

Our house is equipped with solar panels, reducing our reliance on conventional power sources. This means that even during load shedding, you can expect uninterrupted access to electricity, enhancing your overall experience.

We aim to provide a harmonious living experience that aligns with our values of sustainability, community, and shared responsibility. We look forward to sharing meals, stories, and memorable moments as we work together toward marine conservation and education.

