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PLAN FOR OUR PARKS



Above Tjaltjiraak Rangers. Photo – Esperance Tjaltjiraak Native Title Corporation

Right Fieldwork. Photo – DBCA



Joint management partnerships between the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, and Aboriginal people in Western Australia

Joint management is a partnership between the State Government and Aboriginal traditional owners in Western Australia. It involves Aboriginal people who have a cultural connection with a park or reserve and wish to be involved in park management. This partnership is based on recognition, trust, mutual respect and shared goals.

Background and context

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) recognises that Aboriginal people are the traditional owners of the lands and waters it manages, and the importance this places on maintaining culture and heritage on those lands and waters.

Many Aboriginal people have native title rights and interests over areas of significant conservation value that are, or have been identified to be included in, WA's conservation estate. These rights and interests provide direction on which Aboriginal people speak for country

and influence the form and scope of management partnerships with Aboriginal people.

Traditional ownership may also be legislatively recognised through an Act of State Parliament; for example, the *Noongar (Koorah, Nitja, Boordahwan) (Past, Present, Future) Recognition Act 2016* (WA). This Act acknowledges that the Noongar People are traditional owners of land and waters in the south-west of WA and have cultural responsibilities in relation to those lands and waters.

In 2011, the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act) was amended to allow DBCA (via the Parks and Wildlife Service) to jointly manage land and waters with an Aboriginal Body Corporate. DBCA has a legislative obligation under the CALM Act to protect the value of the land for the culture and heritage of Aboriginal people on the lands and waters that it manages, and this can be most efficiently and effectively achieved through joint management.



The policy

DBCA operates in accordance with an endorsed policy in relation to joint management of land and waters with Aboriginal people in WA. The objectives of this policy acknowledge the important contribution Aboriginal people can make to the sustainable management of land and waters managed under the CALM Act.

These objectives are to:

- foster and facilitate Aboriginal involvement in the planning and management of lands and waters managed under the CALM Act
- protect and conserve the value of the land to the culture and heritage of Aboriginal persons
- utilise the combined knowledge and skills of joint management partners for improved land/water management
- develop the capacity of DBCA and Aboriginal partners for effective joint management of CALM Act lands/ waters
- provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to achieve economic and social benefits through the joint management of lands and waters
- provide opportunities for park visitors to experience and learn about the culture, history and aspirations of traditional owners.

DBCA's policy in relation to joint management with Aboriginal people applies regardless of whether Aboriginal people are traditional owners, native title holders, or both.



Closing the Gap

DBCA's policy supports two nationally agreed Closing the Gap targets:

- that by 2030, there should be a 15% increase in the area of land and sea covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests, achieved through maintaining a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters
- that by 2031, through strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, there should be an increase in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–64 who are employed.

Complementary activities

The State Government's Aboriginal Ranger Program (ARP) was announced in 2017 and enhances the capacity of Aboriginal people to manage land across WA in accordance with the policy, including where active management may not previously have been possible owing to resource constraints.

Aboriginal ranger groups already complement joint management partnerships in some areas of Western Australia including Broome (Yawuru Women's Ranger Project), areas adjacent to Eighty Mile Beach (Karajarri-Ngurrara Desert Fire and Biodiversity Project), Prince Regent National Park (Dambeemangardee Rangers) and near Fitzroy Crossing (Bunuba Rangers).

Where joint management partnerships are not yet formalised over parks and reserves (for example, Mt Augustus National Park, Collier Range National Park) Aboriginal ranger groups are undertaking activities with DBCA to protect cultural and natural values and develop land management skills to improve social and economic outcomes.

In a number of locations, Aboriginal ranger teams operate beyond the conservation estate and across a range of tenures, as well as in Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) which are areas of land and sea managed for biodiversity conservation by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people through agreements with the Federal Government. For example, in addition to the jointly managed parks and reserves referenced above, the Karajarri Rangers project extends land management outcomes from the Great Sandy Desert to the coastal waters of Eighty Mile Beach, including over an IPA of more than 2.4 million hectares.



Previous page Aboriginal people are active partners in conservation and land management in a variety of ways around the State.
Photos – DBCA

Above The Esperance Tjaltjiraak ranger group is one of more than 20 partners in the State Government's Aboriginal Ranger Program.
Photo – Esperance Tjaltjiraak Native Title Corporation



How does the policy benefit all users of land and waters and the local community?

As at May 2021, DBCA is successfully jointly managing over 40 parks and reserves across Western Australia with native title holders and traditional owners, and agreements to jointly manage further marine and terrestrial areas in the Kimberley, and the Ningaloo coastal reserves, are about to take effect.

Joint management brings with it additional human resources to manage the land or waters and combines traditional and contemporary land management practices. In the Kimberley DBCA and traditional owners conduct prescribed burning using modern equipment but traditional methods of lighting fire using wind and different ground fuels depending on seasonal availability. Traditional owners also advise on bushfire suppression tactics, including areas that are naturally grazed by native animals, and areas where moisture supports green fuels like creeks and rivers.

Joint management helps to leverage resources to manage country well, and collaboratively. Joint management funding in the West Kimberley enables collaboration with the Yawuru Women's Ranger Project, which in turn attracts Federal conservation funds through its IPA program.

Historical records show that traditional resource management and land use by Aboriginal people was undertaken sustainably; see for example *Dark Emu* (Bruce Pascoe), *The Biggest Estate on Earth* (Bill Gamage). Joint management partnerships foster knowledge sharing and enhance sustainable land management outcomes for all users. Cross-cultural exchange and knowledge sharing occurs through a wide range of activities undertaken together, including aerial and ground burning, weed and feral animal control, biodiversity and threatened species surveys, design of visitor facilities and signage, and management planning.

Through joint management, certified training is provided for Aboriginal people to develop transferable practical skills in conservation and land management, which enhances

workforce capability in regional and remote areas of WA and improves social and economic outcomes. This has wider personal and social benefits, with Aboriginal rangers saying they have pride in their work, more confidence and self-esteem, and respect within their communities. In some regions Aboriginal rangers have obtained conservation and land management qualifications and subsequently won other positions with DBCA through open selection processes, as well as transferring skills to the resources and private sectors.

The value of locally employed role models in regional communities is significant. Acquired skills such as first aid, governance, effective communication and natural resource management are directly beneficial to the whole community on a day-to-day basis.

Joint management enables Aboriginal cultural knowledge to be shared, which benefits tourism and contributes to the local economy. Visitors can enjoy an enriched experience through interaction with Aboriginal people and a better understanding of Aboriginal culture. The Esperance Tjaltjraak rangers are developing skills to provide cultural awareness experiences including bush food demonstrations. Esperance Tjaltjraak and Warmun's Kija rangers also deliver education programs and experiences in cultural awareness and land management to school groups

Joint management also plays a role in getting the broader Aboriginal community out on country, with DBCA facilitating trips for customary activities and sharing knowledge. Being on country is the best place for Aboriginal people to engage with their culture and for knowledge to be shared between generations. Accessing and maintaining connection to country is an important part of advancing reconciliation.

More information

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Header photos: Leafy seadragon. Photo – Peter Nicholas. Southern right whales. Photo – Peter Nicholas/DBCA. Fishing on the south coast. Photo – Tourism WA. Information current at September 2021. This publication is available in alternative formats on request.