



Conservation News

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DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
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WESTERN AUSTRALIA

JANUARY 2002

Staff help NSW to manage bushfires

TWENTY-FOUR Department of Conservation and Land Management staff along with six colleagues from the Forest Products Commission and others from the Fire and Emergency Services Authority have worked for more than three weeks alongside their counterparts in New South Wales to help combat that State's worst outbreak of bushfires on record.

The first contingent went to NSW in the days leading up to New Year and a relief team flew out early in the second week of January.

Department acting Executive Director Keiran McNamara said the decision to send the teams followed an approach by NSW fire authorities

by Nigel Higgs

for assistance with fire management specialists. "The fact that we were able to muster suitable personnel at short notice reflects the depth of experience that we have within the Department and the Commission when it comes to bushfire management," Keiran said.

"In particular, we were able to draw on staff who had a broad range of expertise, from control, planning, logistics and operations experience to specialist areas such as geographic information systems.

Continued page 3

Spotter planes ready for wildfire surveillance

THE State's seven spotter planes will spend more than 3,500 hours in the air during the next few months keeping a lookout for wildfires in the south-west forests.

Terry Maher, the Department's Senior Fire Operations Officer, said the fleet was backed by a network of fire lookout towers stretching from the Gngangara pines north of Perth to Mt Frankland in the Walpole Wilderness Area.

"Since the Department and its predecessors introduced aircraft to spot fires 30 years ago, the planes have flown more than 250,000 hours—the equivalent of 800 times around the Equator," he said.

"The planes are based at Dwellingup and Manjimup, and fly across areas set each day according to the forecast fire weather conditions."

Terry said aerial surveillance began as a trial with one Cessna 150 in the early 1970s. Piper Super Cubs were then used from the mid-1970s. In 1994 a trial

using Eagle aircraft was undertaken but this was not successful.

In 1997, the Department began a major replacement program and introduced the United States—made Champion Scouts which were faster and had a longer endurance time than the Cubs, making fire-spotting more effective and cost-efficient.

The Department now has six Scouts—including a new one introduced this season—and one Cub.

Terry said the combination of spotter aircraft and lookout towers was a significant factor in limiting the spread of forest wildfires.

"The Department has between 400 and 500 wildfires in the south-west forests each year but contains 95 per cent of these to less than 10 hectares.

"The fact that the pilots can relay information on the fire's behaviour and development means fire controllers can more readily assess suppression objectives and strategies.

It also assists in ensuring the safety of fire crews.

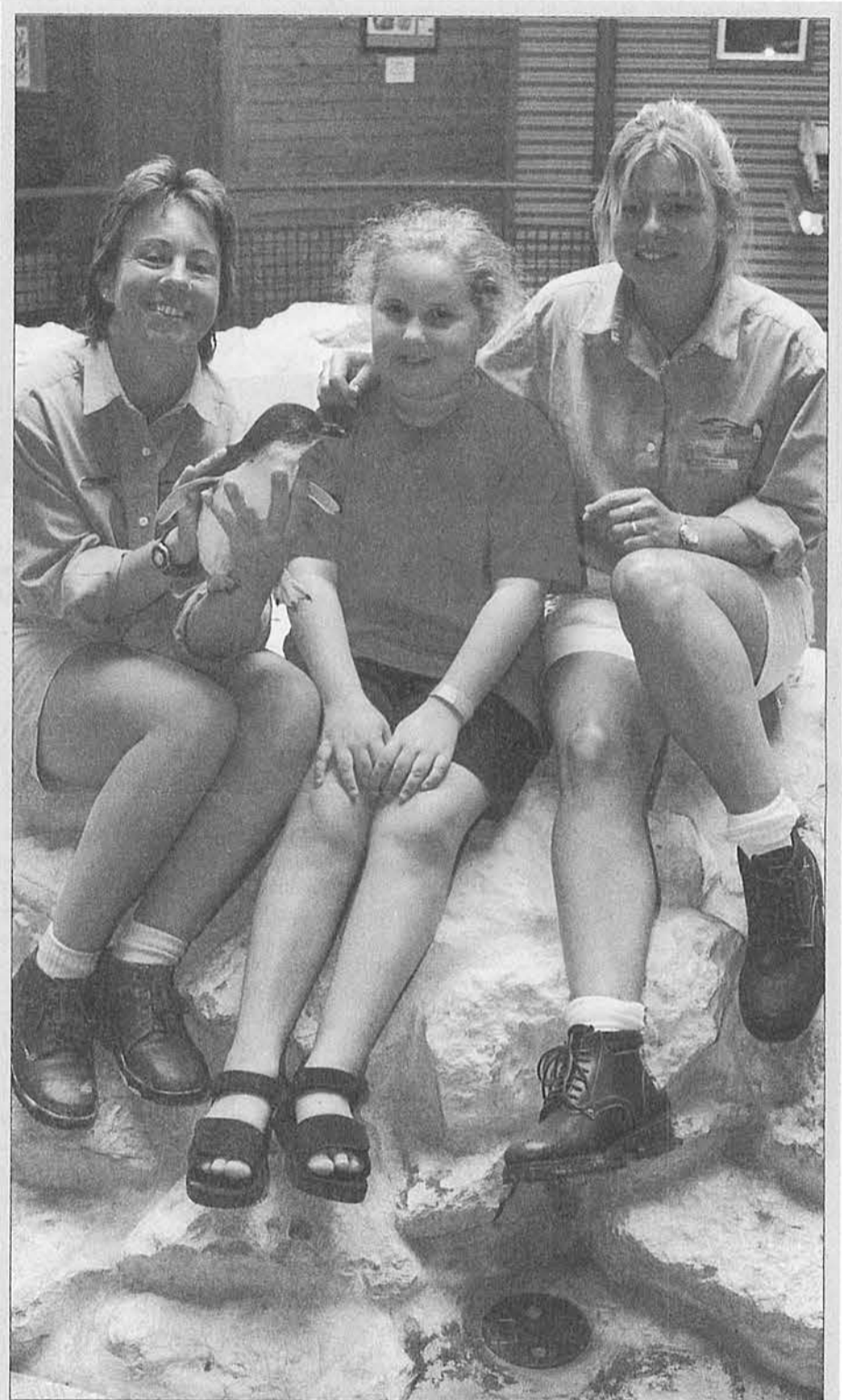
"Without this rapid detection and response system, many more wildfires would escalate into extensive blazes that would have severe impacts on biodiversity values, as well as threaten private property and forest communities."

Terry said the fire lookout tower network was an essential part of the detection system.

"In the past few years, the department has upgraded several older towers and installed new ones at places such as Bickley in the Perth hills and in the Blackwood River Valley between Balingup and Nannup," he said.

"The Diamond Tree south of Manjimup—which is a popular tourist attraction in the area—has been upgraded so that it can be used as a lookout if planes are grounded because of severe weather.

"The lookouts also provide constant surveillance when aircraft are diverted to assist in controlling wildfires or are over other parts of the forest."



Department of Conservation and Land Management officers Jody Mayes (left) and Jo Usher (right) with Ayesha Patterson at the Penguin Experience on Penguin Island.

Youngster's dream comes true

VISITING Penguin Island has been a dream come true for nine-year-old Ayesha Patterson.

The young Mandurah girl, who is starting to go blind with the eye disease, retinitis pigmentosa, had wished to see the penguins before her eyes became worse.

To her delight, her mum Sharon Patterson along with Marie Mitchell, a volunteer with the Shoalwater Islands Volunteer Group, helped to make her wish become a reality.

Sharon said Ayesha had

made a list of things she wanted to do and visiting Penguin Island had been one of them.

She organised the island trip as a surprise for her daughter.

"It was really great," Sharon said of the day's adventure.

Ayesha was so thrilled with the day that she wrote to the Department.

"I loved seeing the two-day old penguin chicks and the two-week old penguin chick. I really loved watching the penguins get fed and swimming in their pool,"

she wrote.

"I saw seagull chicks hatching as well. Mum bought me a soft toy penguin from the kiosk. I have named it Leeuwin after my favourite penguin at the Penguin Experience."

She concluded: "Thank you everybody for making my wish come true."

Shoalwater Islands Ranger in Charge Terry Goodlich said the Department was pleased to help Ayesha fulfil her dream by providing her with the complimentary trip to the island.



Environment Minister Dr Judy Edwards inspected the Department's fire spotters at Collie recently. She is pictured with Wellington District staff Charlie Chapman, Emma Slapp and Caroline Brocx.

Working Together

The NSW bushfires have generated debate across the country about prescribed burning. On 3 January I sent the letter below to The West Australian. It wasn't published, so I repeat it here:

"The suggestion that regular burning will create a greater fire hazard in areas of native vegetation ("Prescribed burns are a fire hazard: green groups", The West Australian, 31/1/02) is not one that would be generally supported by experienced fire managers, fire fighters and researchers. Indeed, the evidence is that fire behaviour and intensity increase as fuel volumes increase. Prescribed burning is one practical and effective method of reducing fuel volume, thereby reducing fire hazards.

Prescribed burning is one of the most important tools available to land managers to effectively reduce fire hazards. A fire regime with a variety of seasons, intensity, scale and patchiness can reduce fire hazards and help maintain biodiversity in the face of intense wildfires.

The Department is organising a three day symposium on Fire in South-Western Australian Ecosystems in April this year. This will provide an excellent opportunity for a range of scientific and community views to be presented and debated.

Dr Judy Edwards, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, has committed to a public review of fire management in our south-west forest region. The Environmental Protection Authority and the Department are currently discussing how this review will take place. This will be a timely exercise in view of the unfortunate circumstances currently being faced in NSW."

The WA contingent who flew to NSW to assist with the bushfire emergency has included 24 Departmental staff. Our thanks (and I'm sure those of the people of NSW) go to those staff and their families, particularly for the sacrifices many have made during what otherwise might have been a holiday period. We look forward to learning from their experiences.

The NSW fires are a timely reminder of the community service the Department provides in a range of emergency situations, not just fire fighting, and of the importance of sound training, preparation and attention to safety in all that we do.

Keiran McNamara, Acting Executive Director



Tree mapping in Goldfields

by Tammie Reid

DIEBACK interpreters are known for their field work, dedicated work ethic, excellent plant identification and eye for detail – all invaluable when running an inventory.

So it's not surprising that members of the Bunbury interpreter team were chosen to contribute to a national program to map the tree cover in the Goldfields and Murchison using satellite imagery.

The work involved two two-month stints in 2001, camping out during the week, working daylight hours and returning for data downloads every Friday at the Kalgoorlie office.

"We were able to do about 30 sites per day," said Bunbury dieback interpreter Tony Raudino.

Up to 12 sites were monitored each day, characterised by "some fantastic country, sweeping horizons plus some amazing camp-fire steak and eggs breakfasts.

The project leader was Graeme Behn (from the Department's Geographic Information Services Section) who is based at CSIRO.

Nine people were involved in the fieldwork – Leigh Sage and Nola Withnell from the Forest Management Interpretation section, Sacha Pop-Markov, Meagan Bardon, Mark Laming and Paul Davies from the Information Management Branch, Melissa Wood from the National Forest Inventory and Nicolas Peter, a French exchange student based at Murdoch University.

They had to "ground truth" the satellite images by assessing the forest structure,

canopy density and foliage cover.

The work is a high priority for Australia's international commitment to the Montreal Process to capture an accurate database and map the forest cover of the entire continent.

The partnership between the Departments of Conservation and Land Management, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia and the CSIRO gave better information on the extent and location of forests and woodlands. It also has implications for national and state statistics, forest policy development, reserve system planning and ongoing land management.

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Munda Biddi bike trail from Perth to Albany launched



Ben Thorman (10) gets some tips on the Munda Biddi bike trail from ranger...

AROUND 60 people and a zillion flies attended the launch of the Munda Biddi Mountain Bike Trail at Jarrahdale in early December by Martin White MLA, Member for Roleystone.

The trail—destined to be one of the world's greatest mountain bike trails—is the latest in a long line of successful nature-based tourism projects developed and managed by the Department.

The Munda Biddi—meaning "path through the forest" in Noongar—when completed will stretch 850km from Mundaring to Albany.

Project Manager Therese Jones said the Munda Biddi Bike Trail was an ongoing co-operative effort between the Department, private sector companies and the commu-

by Mitzi Vance

nity. Great support and assistance was also received from the Munda Biddi Trail Foundation, which is expected to follow in the footsteps of the Friends of the Bibbulmun.

The Munda Biddi history began in September 1998 when the Lotteries Commission funded a proposal to develop a long distance mountain bike trail from Perth to Albany.

It took another two years before the plan was completed.

When finished, the trail will pass through towns and rural communities, taking in the most beautiful sites in the South West and traversing national parks and conservation reserves.

It will be built in three stages: from Mundaring to Collie (stage one), Collie to Pemberton (stage two) and Pemberton to Albany (stage three).

Therese said the trail used forest roads, old rail formations and management tracks to reduce the impact on the natural environment.

Alcoa Australia, WA Lotteries Commission, the Department and local government funded the first section of the trail. Other supporters include the Munda Biddi Trail Foundation, Western Australian Mountain Bike Association, cycling organisations, Department of Sport and Recreation, Regional Development Commissions, Department for Planning and Infrastructure, Water and Rivers

Commission and the Water Corporation.

"Families can enjoy peaceful cycling along relatively flat terrain of old railway alignments while experienced and competitive cyclists will enjoy the more challenging sections.

"A total 'bush' touring experience will also be available to touring cyclists with the wide forest tracks and gentle slopes of the trail," Therese said.

Therese said trail guides with maps and trail notes describing the terrain, surfaces and facilities would be produced to make trips easy to plan and navigate.

Stage one of the trail should be completed in October this year. The first section to Dwellingup is expected to open in April this year.

Perth District two years lost time injury free

STAFF from Swan Coastal District gathered to celebrate the former Perth District's achievement of two years lost time injury free work.

Acting Executive Director Keiran McNamara and the Regional Services Director Alan Walker attended the celebration and awarded a Departmental District Safety Achievement Award to Work Centre Co-ordinator Clayton Sanders and safety certificates to District personnel Tony Dehnel and Sam Greer.

Keiran said the District's two-years lost time injury free record was remarkable for a number of reasons, especially given that only three years ago the Perth District was responsible for 23 per cent of all Departmental workers' compensation claims. Currently, the District is responsible for only 0.2 per cent of all Departmental claims.

"During the period covered by this achievement the Perth District staff attended more than 500 wildfires, completed more than 10,000 hectares of prescribed burning and travelled more than a million kilometres per-

forming a wide array of duties associated with land management," he said.

"Other activities have included cave fauna recovery work in arduous conditions, fauna and flora management patrols, and extensive recreation facility construction and maintenance."

In congratulating the District, Keiran specially thanked the representatives on the safety committee and safety co-ordinators – Myles Mulvay, Roger Markham and Julie Male. He also acknowledged the contribution of former Swan Region Manager Bruce Harvey who had a strong commitment towards the safety program.

Alan Walker praised the District's achievement and those responsible for turning around the safety performance.

"I remember well the dark days in the mid-1990s when 20 lost-time injuries were recorded in a 12-month period," he said.

"Within a very short time this has turned around and the District can now be recognised for the right reasons."



Left to right: Keiran McNamara, Alan Sands, Clayton Sanders and John Ireland at the awards presentation.

Alan said the strategy of seeking and celebrating milestones in small increments also had proven successful as it reinforced the lost-time injury free message.

District Manager Alan Sands said that the District's success was based on a culture of safety and respect for team mates' welfare, a

culture of looking out for each other and one of recognising risks.

"All team members accept personal responsibility in taking action to rectify risks and this reflects the strong sense of purpose towards meeting our objectives," he said.



Department Acting Executive Director Keiran McNamara (back left) and FPC General Manager Paul Biggs (back right) farewelled the Department/FPC contingent at Perth airport on 11 January. The team was (back row) Neil Worrell (FPC Albany), Peter Fishwick (Moora District), Charlie Downs (Wellington), John Brealey (FPC Manjimup), Greg Broomhall (South Coast Region), Murray Mitchell (FPC Blackwood), Stephen White (Environmental Protection Branch). Front row from left: Neil Gibson (Swan Coastal), Melissa Robinson (IMB Kensington), Mick Zwart (Blackwood), Donna Green (Frankland), Peter Beatty (FPC Manjimup) and John Vodopier (ISS Kensington).

From page 3

"It shows that not only do we have a very broad array of expertise within the Department and the Commission, but that the effort the Department's Fire Management Services Branch has put into training programs is providing real benefits for our overall fire management objectives.

"These programs have involved a series

of comprehensive courses on general fire management and specialist courses on the various incident control system functions of control, logistics, planning and operations.

"The feedback we have received from NSW indicates that the crews the Department and Commission sent over were held in high regard and that their efforts were greatly

appreciated by the NSW authorities and in particular the incident management teams with which they worked."

Keiran said the decision to send staff to NSW would build on the experience gained when seven Department and Commission staff went to the United States in August-September 2000 to help that country manage a swag of wildfires.

"The experience our staff gains on these operations not only helps their own development as fire managers, it also gives us an insight into what we are doing right and what we can do better," he said.

Keiran and FPC General Manager Paul Biggs welcomed home the first contingent on 11 January. The second team was due to arrive home on 17-18 January.

A day in the life . . .

MELISSA Robinson (IMB), Donna Green (Frankland), Peter Beatty (FPC) and I arrived in Moruya, a coastal town about 300km south of Sydney, on Wednesday morning after a 45-minute flight from Sydney.

We were greeted by a very weary Rural Fire Services volunteer who drove us to the control centre. Things that caught our attention on the way through town to the control centre were the row of four large tents on the oval.

Three of these tents sleep about 450 people in dormitory style accommodation while the fourth is used as a mess tent. Two semi-trailers have been set up to provide the ablutions. The second interest was the seven helicopters parked on the soccer pitch next to the control centre.

Lyndon Piggott and Alan Briggs (FPC) met us looking like you would after extended night shifts and briefed us on what to expect with fire behaviour and unfamiliar aspects of the Incident Control System and inter-agency operations in NSW.

After being shown around and introduced to key local staff it was decided that Melissa, who proved to be the most sought-after with everyone asking on introduction who was doing the mapping, and I would do the night shift and Donna and Peter the day shift.

The fire, Deua, runs north-south for 30km and east-west for 25km through some extraordinarily pretty but very rough forested country in the Great Dividing Range.

The burnt area is about 32,000 hectares but the ultimate size, excluding future escapes or 150mm of rain over four or five days, will be about 88,000ha. The fire was probably started by lightning on 3 December and trickled around doing very little in very difficult inaccessible country for 18 days, including being rained on heavily at one stage.

On 26 December, after three days of extreme weather the fire spread rapidly to

Stephen White reports from NSW in December

the east and on the 27th another lightning strike started a fire further east. The fire is now at a stage of low activity as it burns in country that is inaccessible and strategies for long term control need to be considered.

Aircraft have been used extensively for reconnaissance and to control spot overs and fire within the containment lines. The effort within the containment lines has been to slow the progress towards the breaks in the hope that the fire will be controlled by nature.

Melissa has spent the past two nights updating and producing maps for use on the day shift including for aircraft operations. I spent the past two night shifts in Situation and Planning Officer roles preparing Incident Action Plans for the day shift. Donna has filled the Situation Role and Peter has assisted both Situation and Resources sections.

ICS forms are similar and on the comput-

er which made the task reasonably straight forward. We are all well and fitting into the team quite easily. Everyone is really friendly, helpful and very surprised to hear we're from WA.

What has impressed us has been the high commitment of volunteers at all levels. Some of these people have been involved everyday with little time off - they're making coffees, driving people and gear around, fire fighting and so on. They are very tired but still come back day after day - smiling and keen!

As I write this, we have been gearing up for a major back-burning operation in the northern divisions of the fire. This means about 30km of edging in steep rugged country. This is proposed to take 2-3 days and 20,000 capsules.

The scaling up operation looks like requiring about 75 personnel in the field and a number of aircraft for aerial ignition and water suppression operations. Peter and Donna were able to fly in the helicopter this morning and see what these contours really close together look like! In a word - steep.



Acting Premier Eric Ripper (right) was at the airport to welcome back Michelle Widmer and David Rawett (FMS, Bunbury) and Jeff Bennett (Donnelly District).

Fire symposium in April

THE Department of Conservation and Land Management's fire, fauna and flora experts will congregate at a symposium covering burning programs in forests and other areas of south-west Western Australia.

Organised by the Director of the Department's Science Division, Neil Burrows, and Science Adviser and Senior Principal Research Scientist, Ian Abbott, the symposium is expected to attract up to 150 fire-fighters, academics, environmental experts, students and interested members of the public.

Presented papers will be published in a book.

Two international speakers will attend. They are Dr Stephen Pyne, from the Arizona State University's Biology Department, and Dr Michael Huston, a Collaborating Scientist at the University of Tennessee's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

Dr Pyne has published several books on the behaviour of fire and will introduce the symposium.

Dr Huston, has published a book on biological diversity and is also a Senior Scientist at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory's Environmental Sciences Division. He will speak on theories about disturbance and species diversity.

Other speakers include the Department's fire, flora and fauna experts; and botanists, zoologists and ecologists from CSIRO, UWA, Curtin University, Murdoch University, Edith Cowan University, Queensland University, Northern Territory University and Kings Park.

There will also be representatives from community and fire management agencies to provide a wider community perspective on fire management.

Glen Kelly, from the Aboriginal Lands Trust (WA) will speak about the Aboriginal use of fire.

The symposium—titled *Fire in South-Western Australian Ecosystems: Impacts and Management*—will be held at the Technology Park function centre in Bentley on April 16, 17 and 18.

For more information contact Glenda Lindsey on 9334 0463 or by email at glendag@calm.wa.gov.au

Conservation briefs

Greater Kingston National Park

A new national park will be created in the jarrah forest and wandoo woodlands north-east of Manjimup.

The proposed 21,000 hectare Greater Kingston National Park is one of 30 new national parks to be created. It will link to the proposed 52,000 hectare Perup Nature Reserve.

The new park will create a continuous conservation network extending across more than 72,000 hectares.

Wellington National Park expanded

The Wellington National Park near Collie will be expanded with an additional 14,500 hectares being added around Wellington Dam, bringing the total area to more than 17,500 hectares.

Carnac Island draft plan released

The Carnac Island draft management plan prepared by the Department has been released.

Carnac Island is located south-west of Fremantle and is a popular nature-based tourism destination.

The draft plan promotes sympathetic and ecologically sustainable management to protect Australian sea-lions, penguins, wedge-tailed shearwaters, pied cormorants, pied oystercatchers and terns.

The plan is open for public comment for five months.

Turquoise Coast plan open for comment

A draft management plan for 40 island nature reserves along the Turquoise Coast between Lancelin and Dongara has been released for public comment.

The islands extend along more than 150 kilometres of coast and are breeding sites for the Australian sea-lion, dibbler, grey bellied dunnart and 16 species of reptiles (including the Lancelin Island skink which has only one population on an island off the Lancelin coast).

The plan is open for public comment for two months.

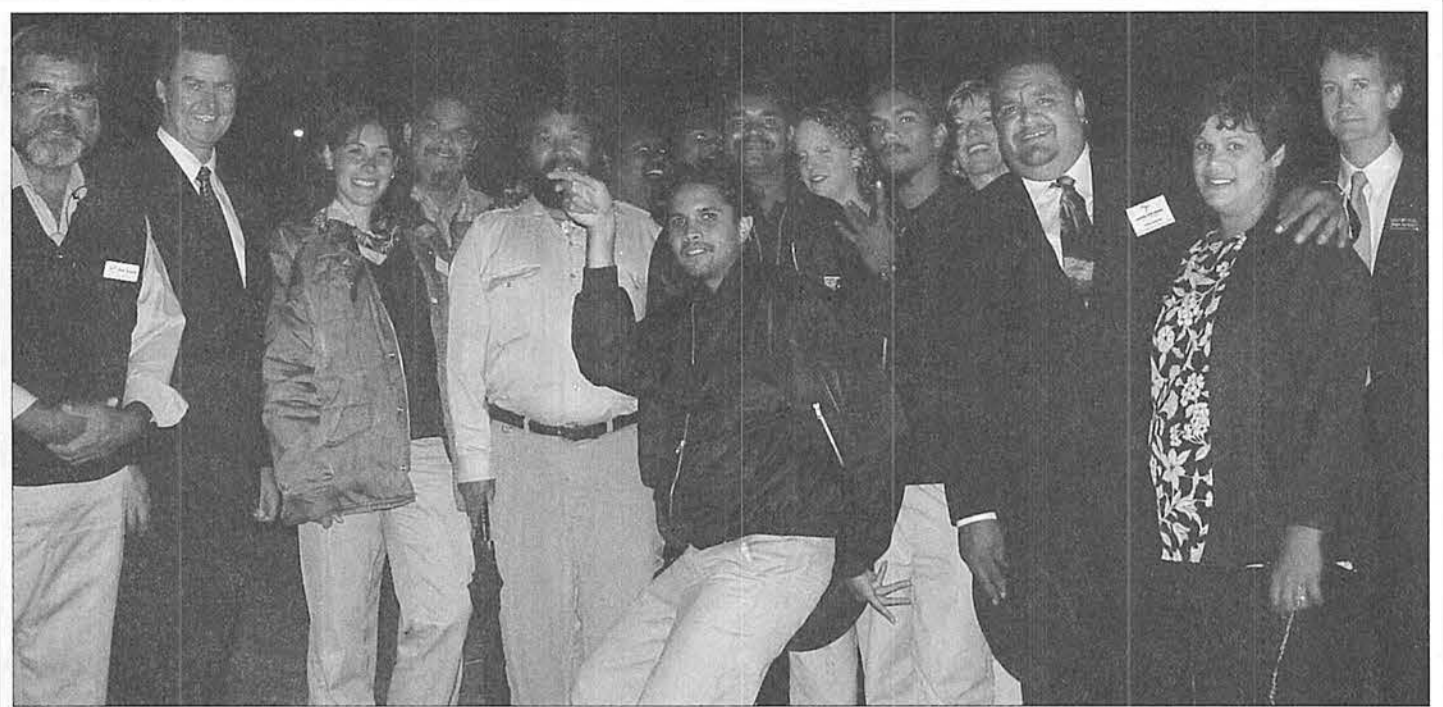
Biosecurity

Biosecurity—the KGB for the environment—is a new term being used to describe protecting a country from an influx of exotic weeds, pests and diseases.

New Zealand now has a Minister for Biosecurity, a Biosecurity Council and a Biosecurity Strategy. It is understood Australia is considering a similar process.

Keep tuned since it has been said that biosecurity should have the same priority as defence.

The website is www.biostrategy.govt.nz



Pictured (left to right) are the Manager of the Department's Aboriginal Heritage Unit, Noel Nannup, Tony Baker from Captain Cook Cruises, Chontarle Pitulej, Robert Thorne, Terry (Koodah) Cornwall and Marissa Maher from AHU; Cherie Boundary (Koordaboorda Dreamtime Tours); Vincent Nelson (Koordaboorda Dreamtime Tours); Kirsty Wood (Koordaboorda Dreamtime Tours); Vincent Lewis (Koordaboorda Dreamtime Tours); Denise Griffith (AHU), James Kearing and Christine Nichols (Koordaboorda Dreamtime Tours) and Jack Hanbury from Captain Cook Cruises. In the front row is Jonathon Walley from Koordaboorda Dreamtime tours.

Aboriginal heritage tour handed over

AN initiative to create employment for Aboriginal people turned full circle last month when a Departmental tour developed for Point Walter was handed to a private Aboriginal tour company.

The Aboriginal Heritage Tour around Point Walter was created by the Department's Aboriginal Heritage Unit several years ago.

It was officially handed to Koordaboorda Dreamtime Tours at a special evening cere-

mony last month on the basis that the land was not Department of Conservation and Land Management-managed land, but was managed by the Melville City Council.

The ceremony was attended by about 200 people and featured dancing, singing and some fine story telling by the Department's Aboriginal Heritage Unit Manager, Noel Nannup.

The Aboriginal Heritage Unit's Project

Officer Denise Griffith said it was always the intention to hand the tour—once established—to an Aboriginal group.

The Department has had a contract with Captain Cook Cruises to provide the heritage tour, which is a historical and bush tucker tour between Point Walter and Blackwall Reach, for tourists.

Departmental staff who used to run the tour are now working on several other projects.

Staff changes . . . Staff changes . . . Staff changes . . . Staff changes . . .

Promotion

Kate Hassall, to Parks Policy and Tourism Branch.

Contracts

Ewan Buckley, research officer GIS Kensington; Kate Elzinga, project officer, Fire Management Services; Li' Shu, systems analyst, Fire Management Services; Jolene Wallington, officer, The Hills Forest Discovery Centre, Mundaring; Gina Woods, officer, Regional Services, Broome; Vicki Carter, officer, Jarrahdale office, Perth Hills.

Permanent appointments

Pauline Southgate, wildlife officer, Wildlife Branch Kensington; Jeff Daubney, trainee ranger, Pemberton District Office; Kim Kershaw, field officer, Narrogin.

Contracts ceased

Louise Burch, design studio officer from Planning and Visitor Services, Kensington; Margaret Wilkie, communication officer, Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs, Crawley; Wade Robinson, graphic designer, Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs.

Resignations

Ann Rick, Land for Wildlife Officer, Wildlife Branch, Kensington; Shaun Molloy, technical officer, Narrogin District; Michael Christensen, computer services officer, Manjimup.

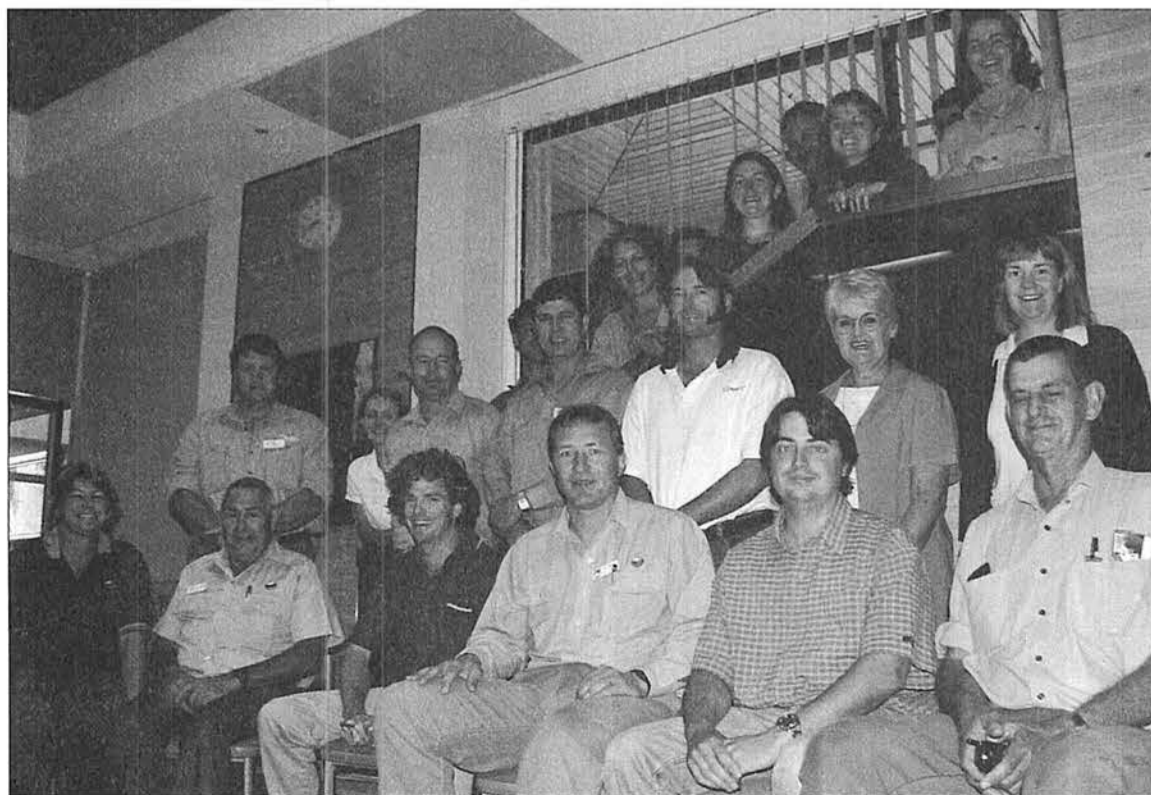
Transfer

Roger Hearn, regional ecologist, to Manjimup.

Temporary deployment

Cheryl Tonts, marketing and customer services co-ordinator, to Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs, Kensington.

A year of organising our volunteers...



The 20 participants plus Marg Buckland (second from right, second row) at the recent training for Volunteer Management at Kensington. Photo by Tammie Reid

A THIRD volunteer management training course was held at Kensington, with 20 staff from all over the state attending a jam packed program of internal and external presenters.

Spanning three days, the course aims to support staff who manage and plan volunteer projects and who seek ways to involve the community in the work of the Department.

The course was organised by acting volunteer coordinator, Marg Buckland of the Parks and Visitor Services Division and is based upon the new manual compiled by Therese Dimascia.

"We have some very dedicated staff", says Marg, "who get great conservation results from their programmes. We have had about 60 people enroll for this training so far. Volunteer programmes form a major part of the public participation commitment of the Department."

Other volunteer training and support events organised by Marg over the past 12 months include an inaugural Campground Host Information Day that attracted 36 people interest-

ed in working as hosts around the state. There was a supporting information kit issued and briefing sessions from nature conservation, parks and visitor services and health and safety sections.

Two wildlife carers courses were run and 94 people attended. It was the first time such training was offered. The program supports the Wildcare Help Line established 12 months ago and staffed by volunteers, seven days a week based out of Kensington. The HelpLine also produces a regular newsletter again all done with volunteer effort.

The Volunteer of the Year and Outstanding Service Awards for the Department's volunteers were held in December and were co-ordinated by Marg based on nominations from the field.

Last year was an active, initiative-filled year for Marg and her team in the Year of the Volunteer and it's clear she enjoys her job.

"I'm just in awe for what people will do, to help us in our work," she says with a warm smile.