

WMC contributes to new research centre

ONE of Australia's biggest mining companies has weighed in to help conserve the delicate fairy penguins, sea lions, birds and seagrasses that inhabit Perth's coast.

Western Mining Corporation Limited is providing \$120 000 to CALM to build a research and management centre on Penguin Island.

Environment Minister Kevin Minson announced the facility, which became a regional base for important marine, island and coastal research, on December 15.

"The proposed Western Mining Research and Management Centre is a vital part of CALM's plan to create a unique nature-based tourism experience on Penguin Island, while protecting the island environment," marine operations manager Peter Dans said.

by Carolyn Thomson

"Because of its close proximity to the metropolitan area and its coastal attractions, Penguin Island attracts more than 70 000 visitors each year, including many from interstate and overseas."

Penguin Island supports the biggest breeding population of little penguins on the west coast of Australia.

About 50 species of birds also breed, feed and roost on the islands off Rockingham, including migratory species covered by international treaties. The Australian sea lion uses nearby Seal Island to rest between fishing trips.

"CALM and academic institutions have ongoing research projects based on Penguin Island and its unique flora and fauna," Peter said.

"Research into the sta-

tus of the penguin population on the island is already under way. Further research projects will focus on detecting any impacts of tourism on the island's flora, fauna and landscapes."

In recent years, the State Government has spent a substantial amount of money developing visitor facilities on Penguin Island and on rehabilitating the island's environment.

"The success of this rehabilitation demonstrates how with proper management you can accommodate people without damage to the environment," Peter said.

The Executive General Manager of Western Mining's WA Operations, Andrew Michelmore, said the plans for Penguin Island had captured the imagination of all at Western Mining.

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The Executive General Manager of Western Mining's WA Operations Andrew Michelmore with CALM's Terry Goodlich and a little penguin. Photo by Jeremy Dunnette

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"This is an exceptionally important and exciting project and one we are delighted to give our full support," he said.

"Western Mining has had a strong regional presence through its Kwinana Nickel Refinery for 25 years.

"Therefore, we see our active involvement in the Penguin Island project adding another dimension to our already substantial commitment to the local

community and the region."

The proposed research and management centre will provide the staff accommodation and work areas essential to manage the whole island environment and become a field base for visiting research staff.

Its construction will allow CALM to remove three makeshift asbestos cement buildings that are remnants of past uses of the island.

Peter said the areas occupied by these buildings would be rehabilitated, providing additional habitat for the wild penguin population.

The penguins burrow tunnels into the dense vegetation that naturally covers the island, so any increase in the vegetated area available for nesting will benefit the population.

"The architecture of the new facility reflects the natural contours and col-

ours of the island, and composting waste systems and solar power will be used," Peter said.

"Because of the fragile nature of Penguin Island's environment and the surrounding Shoalwater Islands Marine Park, no heavy equipment can be used on the island or transported across the shallow seagrass beds that surround it.

"As a result, the centre will be built from materials that can be loaded and

easily transported by hand."

The Western Mining Research and Management Centre is part of a series of developments on Penguin Island aimed at improving nature conservation management of the island and enhancing experiences for visitors.

A new composting let block, a raised boardwalk and grassed picnic area have already been built.



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The Executive ~~Officer~~ General Manager of Western
Mining's WA Operations Andrew Michelmore
with CALM's Terry Goodlich and a little penguin.

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