



PLAN FOR OUR PARKS

by Emma de Burgh





The future of Western Australian conservation has never looked brighter, thanks to a bold and ambitious long-term plan to achieve the biggest single increase in conservation estate in Western Australia's history and one of the biggest in the nation.



Western Australia's natural environment is a wonder to behold. The State has some of the most unique and diverse ecosystems in the world, which protects 244 mammal species or subspecies (including 60 that are found nowhere else), and more than 400 reptile, 1600 fish and thousands of invertebrate species. WA also contains one of the most diverse and unique collections of flora on Earth. And the State's natural areas encompass special social, cultural and spiritual values, including for Aboriginal people, who have had a connection to these lands for at least 40,000 years.

WA PARKS ON THE MAP

Many of WA's precious areas, and the species they house, are afforded protection within the State's 100 national parks and 17 marine parks, as well as in marine reserves, nature reserves and State forests. The lands and waters protected extend over more than 28 million hectares, an area bigger than Victoria, and include spectacular coastlines, reefs teeming with marine life, rugged rangelands, magnificent gorges and ancient forests. Last year alone, these areas received more than 20 million visits.

Many of our parks are nationally and internationally recognised, with World Heritage status already awarded to the Ningaloo Coast, Purnululu National Park and Shark Bay area. A nomination for the World Heritage listing of Murujuga and its culturally significant rock art in the Pilbara is currently being prepared. World Heritage status is shared by global icons such as East

Africa's Serengeti, the Pyramids of Egypt and the Great Barrier Reef.

EXPANSION ON AN HISTORICAL SCALE

Creating a lasting, positive environmental legacy for future generations in a State as large as WA is an ambitious task. In response, the State Government has developed a new plan to increase WA's conservation estate by five million hectares, or 20 per cent, over the next five years. *Plan for Our Parks* is part of the government's 'Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity' program, which aims to address important issues facing WA.

The objectives set out by *Plan for Our Parks* are on a scale never before achieved in WA and include the delivery of a number of previously announced commitments and existing priorities. It will see new and expanded parks from the Kimberley in the north, across WA's Midwest and Goldfields, through areas from Perth to Bunbury, to the south-west forests and a potential new marine park on the southern coastline. Areas that have been identified in the plan have high conservation and cultural heritage values, and pave the way for enhanced tourism and Aboriginal joint management.

In the Kimberley, the remote Buccaneer Archipelago and its surrounding islands and fringing reefs will become a marine park. And the proposed Fitzroy River National Park will recognise the area's cultural and environmental significance. In the Pilbara, there is an opportunity to incorporate an area from the Burrup Peninsula industrial



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Main Under the plan, an opportunity has been identified to create a national park at the Helena Aurora Range.

Photo – Marie Lochman

Inset A national park at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands would protect the land-based values of this spectacular area.

Top A marine park and island national park in the Buccaneer Archipelago will afford this area greater protection.

Photos – David Bettini






Above Jarrah Lowland Block, Wellington.

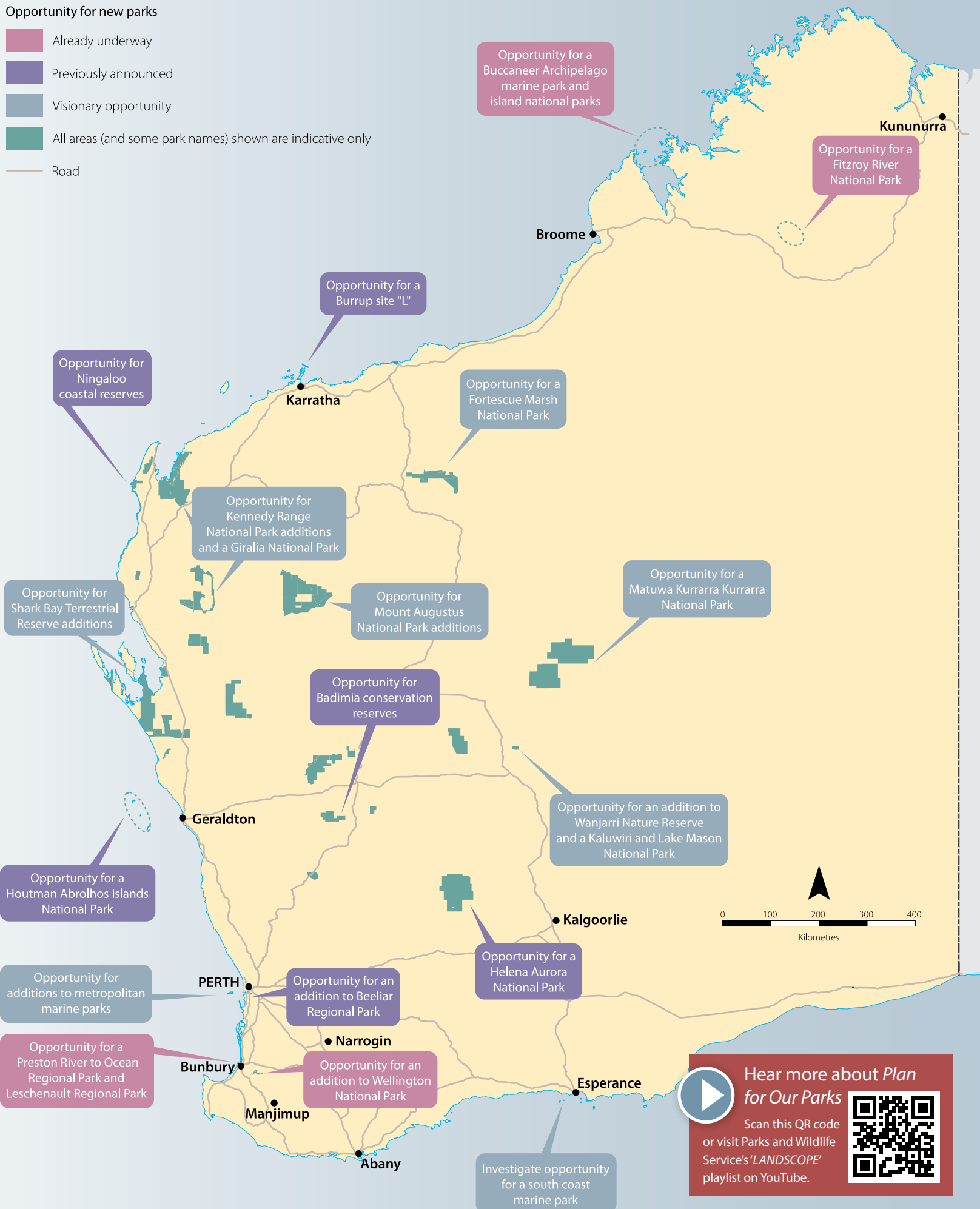
Photo – Cliff Winfield

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estate into Murujuga National Park, while additions to reserves along the Ningaloo Coast will ensure the area is protected, and remains accessible to the public for future generations. In the Midwest, the Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park is being established to offer world-class tourism experiences, and the creation of a national park at the Helena Aurora Range will help protect its unique banded iron formations. Wellington National Park is being expanded

Opportunity for new parks

-  Already underway
-  Previously announced
-  Visionary opportunity
-  All areas (and some park names) shown are indicative only
-  Road



 **Hear more about *Plan for Our Parks***

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife Service's 'LANDSCOPE' playlist on YouTube.



New national park for the Fitzroy River

The Fitzroy River is one of the jewels in the crown of the West Kimberley. Spanning more than 700 kilometres, the river, its tributaries and gorges were laid down in an ancient sea that covered a large part of the Kimberley some 350 million years ago.

In recognising the immense spiritual, cultural and environmental significance of the Fitzroy River, the State Government is creating a national park representing the Bunuba, Gooniyandi and Kija (Yurriyangem Taam) traditional owner groups. The park will span from Dimond Gorge in the north, to Geikie Gorge in the south and through to Margaret Gorge in the east.

Supported by the *Plan for Our Parks* initiative, joint vesting arrangements and Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) are being developed in consultation with traditional owners. Discussions are progressing with neighbouring pastoralists, environmental groups and other stakeholders.

Once the park boundaries are finalised, and ILUAs are agreed, it is intended that the national park will be given a traditional name. The national park is expected to be completed by 2020, creating the highest possible level of protection for the area's cultural heritage, landscapes, wildlife and habitat for species that rely on the river.



Above There are plans to expand Beeliar Regional Park.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

Left A proposed national park will take in the magnificent Fitzroy River.

Photo – Cliff Winfield

to enhance tourism in the Collie region, and the proposed Preston River to Ocean Regional Park and Leschenault Regional Park will improve recreational, social and cultural values for the residents of Bunbury and surrounds. In Perth, the incorporation of Class 'A' reserves into Beeliar Regional Park in Perth will ensure the sensitive wetland area is protected as a site of regional ecological significance

The plan also includes new, visionary proposals, including a marine park on the south coast of WA, between Bremer Bay and the Recherche Archipelago. New opportunities have been identified for additions to reserves in the Shark Bay World Heritage area, and national parks in iconic locations including Fortescue Marsh, Kennedy Range, and Mount

Augustus in the Pilbara and Midwest. New opportunities in the northern Goldfields include a national park at Matuwa and Kurrara Kurrara (formerly Lorna Glen and Earraheedy), additions to Wanjarri Nature Reserve and a national park over the former Kaluwiri and Lake Mason pastoral leases.

THE FOUNDATION FOR THE PLAN

Since the late 1990s, the State Government has purchased multiple pastoral leases for the purpose of converting them into national parks and conservation reserves. These pastoral leases, most of which are in the Pilbara, Midwest, Murchison and Goldfields regions, have remained unreserved until

now. Under *Plan for Our Parks*, many of these areas will be reserved and included in the conservation estate. No new land or pastoral leases are being purchased as part of the expansion plan. Enhancing the conservation status of previously unreserved areas and bringing them together into the national park and reserve system will result in improved fire and feral animal management, better opportunities for research and conservation work, and enhanced tourism. Above all, it paves the way for Aboriginal joint management on a scale not seen anywhere else in Australia.

The former pastoral leases identified under the new plan are hotspots for threatened species and support unique ecosystems. By consolidating groups of adjacent properties and creating national parks, there can be improved protection of the native plants, animals and ecosystems that make these lands so important to WA's conservation network. This includes



Above The plan is centred on providing opportunities for Aboriginal people to manage land and sea through joint management opportunities.

Left An opportunity has been identified to create a national park at Matuwa and Kurrara Kurrara.

Photos – DBCA

Matuwa and Kurrara Kurrara, which were once thriving pastoral stations but are now an Indigenous Protected Area managed by the Martu traditional owners in partnership with DBCA. Here, managed reintroductions of bilbies, brushtail possums, mala, golden bandicoots and boodies together with feral cat control have made it a haven for wildlife that once roamed the rangelands, before European settlement. While Matuwa and Kurrara Kurrara's pastoral legacy will be respected, its proposed future as a national park is a fitting recognition of its importance in rangeland biodiversity conservation.

The creation of parks from former pastoral leases has also been a priority because this addresses the recommendations from the findings of previous enquiries into the management of pastoral acquisitions. In addition, the south coast has long been earmarked for possible marine parks due to a 1994 report into a representative marine reserve system in WA, and a 2016 Auditor General's report on the management of marine parks and reserves. Both these reports suggested the south coast should be represented in the State's marine reserve network. Identifying this area for a future marine park will provide the recognition and protection this special wilderness area warrants.

NEW ERA OF ABORIGINAL MANAGEMENT

Our parks protect social, cultural and spiritual values and provide opportunities for Indigenous Western Australians to connect with Country and their identity as the original custodians of this land. At the heart of *Plan for Our Parks* is the opportunity to involve Aboriginal people in managing land and sea through joint management arrangements. Traditional owners will be working with the State Government to make decisions about planning and implementation of land management activities in parks.

Co-designing new national and marine parks with Aboriginal groups, and jointly managing them, builds on the growing partnerships that are being implemented with traditional owners elsewhere in WA. This includes successful existing joint management arrangements with the Yawura, Miriuwung and Gajerrong, Bunuba, Dambimangari, Karajarri, Balangarra, Murujuga, Nyangumarta and Ngarla groups.

The demand for on-Country jobs for Aboriginal rangers continues to grow, propelled by the creation of the Aboriginal Ranger Program in 2017, which in its first round provided \$8.45 million to 13 groups across the State, creating 85 new jobs and

80 training opportunities for Aboriginal people (see 'Collecting seeds and capturing culture', *LANDSCOPE*, Spring 2018). In its second round, \$9 million over three years is being offered to Aboriginal groups to manage Country. This ongoing program is complemented by *Plan for Our Parks* as they both leverage the social, economic and environmental benefits that Aboriginal employment provides in regional and remote areas. The new national parks will provide opportunities for local Aboriginal people to create sustainable enterprises in partnership with private and government entities. In particular, new national parks in areas such as Shark Bay, Kennedy Range, Mount Augustus and the Fitzroy River will enable Aboriginal people to establish and operate tourism ventures and other enterprises on their Country.

Any opportunities for the creation of national parks, marine parks or other conservation reserves proposed under *Plan for Our Parks* will only be progressed if they are supported by the relevant native title groups.

GETTING CLOSER TO NATURE

WA's national parks are continuing to attract more tourists from Australia and around the world. Authentic, meaningful, nature-based experiences rank highly as the reason people choose to visit WA. The



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development of Wi-Fi at campgrounds, adventure activities such as zip-lining through the forest, a growth in camping and glamping, more mountain biking and walking trails and infrastructure projects such as at The Gap and Natural Bridge and the soon-to-be-opened Kalbarri Skywalk, are helping to secure this State’s future as an international tourism destination.

By providing national park status to these areas, there will be enhanced opportunities for nature-based and cultural tourism and recreation. And, importantly, it will help protect and secure WA’s unique biodiversity, including habitat for threatened native animals and plants. By providing enhanced management and access through the expansion of conservation land, DBCA can work with the community to facilitate more public involvement, visitation and appreciation of the natural and cultural environment.

A CONSULTATIVE APPROACH

A thorough and comprehensive consultation process has started with traditional owners, the resources sector, pastoralists, commercial and recreational fishers, conservation groups, local government and other key stakeholders and

interest holders. From this, specific park proposals and boundaries will be refined before the individual parks and reserves are created over the next five years.

There is some flexibility in the design of a final *Plan for Our Parks*. The first step in the expansion plan is to consult with key stakeholders about the plan as well as specific park proposals. Feedback gathered from the initial consultation phase will be used to refine and update the plan. In late 2019, a final *Plan for Our Parks* will be determined.

Indigenous Land Use Agreements will be negotiated with traditional owners while further management planning and stakeholder consultation takes place. As prescribed by legislation, the planning process for each new park will provide an opportunity for the public and stakeholders to comment on draft management plans. A final *Plan for Our Parks* will be determined by a Ministerial Council comprising the Ministers for Environment, Aboriginal Affairs and Mines and Petroleum. It is estimated that reservation proposals identified in *Plan for Our Parks* will be completed by 2024.

The entire process will be guided by the motivation to create a comprehensive

Above left An opportunity has been identified to expand Kennedy Range National Park.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

Top Maidens Reserve has been earmarked for possible inclusion in a regional park near Bunbury.

Photo – Cliff Winfield

Above Middle Island, Recherche Archipelago.

Below Former Burnerbinmah pastoral lease.
Photos – DBCA

and accessible reserve system on a scale never-before seen in WA. And to protect and conserve our natural areas for future generations.

Emma de Burgh is DBCA’s media and communications coordinator and can be contacted on (08) 9219 9999 or by email (emma.deburgh@dbca.wa.gov.au).

For more information on Plan for Our Parks, visit pws.dbca.wa.gov.au/planforourparks

