



# DEC battles fires across the State

DEC staff from across the State have finally returned home after a mammoth firefighting effort last month.

DEC crews flocked to fire-stricken areas including Dwellingup, Albany and Karijini in an effort to bring fires under control.

Most attention focused on Dwellingup where DEC crews joined volunteer bush fire brigades, staff from the Forest Products Commission (FPC), the Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA), State Emergency Service and the shires of Murray and Waroona to battle the flames.

Acting Director of Regional Services Rick Sneeuwjagt said although 14 homes were destroyed and three were damaged in the Dwellingup fires, fire crews saved many more homes and properties.

"This is a great effort by everyone involved," he said.

"The tremendous support from departmental staff as well as a wide range of individuals and businesses was a critical factor in facilitating the fire suppression task."

The Dwellingup fires covered an area of about 13,700 hectares and involved about 550 DEC staff, as well as 70 FPC staff and 150 volunteer brigade members.

More than 6000 meals were provided and 800 rooms booked to accommodate firefighting and support staff.

Meanwhile, as flames subsided in Dwellingup, bushfires burnt more than 4800 hectares near Albany, including 2500 hectares in Porongurup National Park.

Crews took care to minimise the impact of suppression operations on recovery sites for noisy scrub-birds and on recreation areas. Unfortunately this fire also destroyed one house, numerous outbuildings and fences and impacted on local vineyards in the area.

The containment effort involved more than 200 personnel from DEC, both local and other bushfire brigades, local shires, police, FPC and FESA.

Pilbara crews were also put to the test, battling fire in the central part of Karijini National Park.



Keith Low, Fire Incident Controller and FPC's Manager of Corporate Affairs Branch, giving a community briefing at the Dwellingup fires. Photo - West Australian Newspapers

## Bright futures for DEC graduate recruits

By Samille Mitchell

A TEAM of 30 DEC graduate recruits has emerged from a rigorous selection process to take on roles throughout DEC.

The recruits are being groomed as future leaders within the Department for roles as national park rangers, management planners, policy writers, researchers and environmental impact assessors and land management, conservation, reserves and regulatory officers.

DEC's Learning Program Consultant Peter Hill said the strict and lengthy selection process ensured the Department had a top quality pool of dynamic professionals from whom to choose.

"We received 182 applications this year, from which we short listed 51 for interviews," he said.

"Thirty-two of these people were then invited to a three-day, live-in selection school where we assessed everything from fire fitness and aptitude to key work skills like working with others, communication skills, presentation, attitude, safe work practices and ability to work in a team.

"From these 32, 30 were selected as graduate recruits for the Department."

The recruits will also complete 12 weeks of competency-based training in their first 18 months of employment.

The training will include departmental specific courses like professional development about safety, health and fitness, driver awareness, cross cultural awareness, firefighting, conversing with the community, project management and team leadership.

## Good forecast for this year's WeatherWatch

WHILE students were getting ready for the start of the school year, staff of DEC's Sustainability Division were gearing up for *WeatherWatch*.

Airwatch Coordinator Mena Gilchrist said more than 50 schools around the State were taking part in the *WeatherWatch* program this year.

"*WeatherWatch* enlists WA students to record data for Channel 7 News, which weatherman Jeff Newman announces during his weather report, crediting the schools of course," she said.

"Five schools are rostered each week for the 10 weeks of term to record details such as temperature, rainfall and pollution levels."

Students gather the information using equipment positioned on the roofs of their schools. The information is fed into a console hooked up to a classroom computer.

"The program requires commitment from the schools to purchase the equipment and to make sure they report their data to Channel 7 each day of their rostered week," Mena said.

*WeatherWatch* is one of a number of environmental education activities that schools take part in through DEC's Airwatch program.

"The schools' programs are designed to give students the opportunity to learn through hands-on activities," Mena said.

"They do everything from monitoring carbon dioxide and haze levels to understanding ozone and researching the viability of hybrid electric vehicles.

"A great thing about the program is that it's available to schools all around the State. Thirty-eight per cent of the schools involved this year are regional or remote and there aren't many projects like this that they can take part in."

## Tackling climate change

By Samille Mitchell

TACKLING drought, rising ocean levels and extreme weather events may seem a Herculean task but it is a job Steve Waller is taking on with vigour.

Steve has been appointed as DEC's Greenhouse Policy Assistant Director.

The newly created position is aimed at developing Government policy to address the many facets of climate change.

"There has been a huge amount of community interest in climate change lately and the need for Government to continue to have sound, innovative and effective policy advice to respond to this issue is essential," Steve said.

"We've had eight of the warmest years on record in the last decade, glaciers are melting and we're feeling the effects of drought - we are really starting to see the effects of climate change now. It's not just theory any more."

Steve's position will involve reviewing existing policy for effectiveness and developing new policy directions to enable the Government to continue to reduce WA's greenhouse emissions while also preparing the State for the climate change

already locked in by past emissions - a process called adaptation.

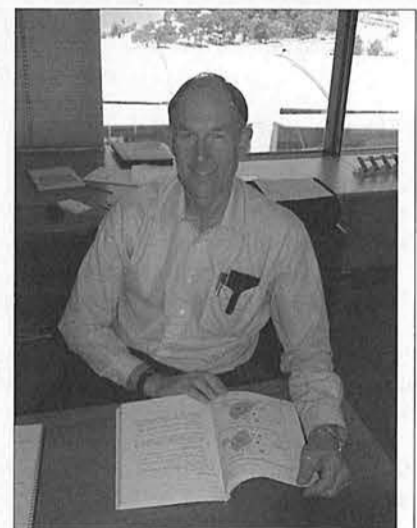
He will also press on with developing the recommendations of the recently released Greenhouse and Energy Taskforce report and the State Greenhouse Strategy. In addition, he will provide policy advice and support for a number of significant upcoming Government statements on climate change.

Steve expects the role will require conversations across a broad range of stakeholders from governments, industry and community to ensure all policy options are canvassed and their effects analysed and included in final recommendations.

The job is also broad in that it tackles everything from greenhouse gas emission control to educating the community.

In spite of the diverse nature of the role, he is confident the unit can make a difference.

"We've got some great people in the Strategic Policy Division and the wider Department who provide a real combina-



New Greenhouse Policy Assistant Director Steve Waller is taking on the challenging role of managing climate change policy.

tion of talents - I'm confident we can meet the challenge," he said.

Steve has been involved in greenhouse policy since 1997 and left a six-year position at Woodside as Greenhouse Opportunity Manager to take on the new role with DEC.

# Working Together

The month of March began with the appointment of the Member for Mandurah, Hon David Templeman MLA as the new Minister for the Environment and Climate Change. The next edition of *Environment and Conservation News* will include a story on our new Minister, and we welcome him to the portfolio and look forward to working with him as we tackle new opportunities and challenges.

The intense coverage given to the recent Corruption and Crime Commission public hearings serves as a reminder to all of us in the Department and the broader public sector that we have a special responsibility, as public officers, to uphold the highest standards of honesty and integrity in the work we do on behalf of the Government and the community.

DEC's Corporate Executive has completed its review of the corporate plan and the codes of conduct of each of our two predecessor departments, and the finishing touches are now being made to both documents before their distribution to every staff member. The corporate plan espouses values such as honesty and integrity; acting ethically, lawfully and in the public interest; treating people with impartiality; and openness via having decision-making processes that are fair, transparent and understandable. The code of conduct will provide clear guidance to all staff as to what is required of them in their behaviour towards each other and the public we serve.

I expect there to be a strong focus among all staff on the standards and expectations detailed in the corporate plan and code of conduct, and directors, managers and supervisors in particular will be expected to discuss issues of integrity, honesty and proper conduct with their work groups so that everyone has a common understanding of what is expected.

**Keiran McNamara,**  
Director General



# Boost for wild dog control efforts



Greg and Maxine Beaton have made a significant contribution to controlling dogs in the wheatbelt. Photo – Rhianna King

**EFFORTS to control wild dogs in the wheatbelt have been boosted with the recent appointment of a trainee dogger through the State Government's *Saving Our Species* initiative.**

DEC's Merredin District Manager Paul Blechynden said Gordon Anderson had been awarded the trainee contract for the region.

"Gordon will join a small number of people working throughout the State in the specialised field of wild dog control," Paul said.

"He has completed the Department of Agriculture and Food's dogger training program and has gained experience controlling wild dogs in the Gascoyne."

Gordon will work with experienced dogger Greg Beaton in establishing and maintaining a dog-free buffer adjacent to agricultural properties in the wheatbelt.

"Wild dog control requires an intimate understanding of dog behaviour and the skills associated with safe and effective use of trapping, baiting and shooting," Paul said.

Over the past two years Greg and his wife Maxine have made a significant contribution to elevating the standards of wild dog control in the wheatbelt, destroying more than 160 dogs.

Their success has seen many aspects of the control program being applied to other areas in the State.

Greg lures wild dogs into traps, which he sets without any evidence of his presence.

"Dogs are so clever and their sense of smell so good that they can teach their pups to avoid traps or baits," Greg said.

"The difficult ones can be a real challenge to catch and you need to plan your moves very carefully."

Paul said the wild dog control program aimed to minimise the impact of dingoes, domestic dogs that had gone feral and crossbreeds on livestock adjacent to unallocated Crown land.

"The current level of wild dog control in the wheatbelt is a reflection of Greg's incredible skill and experience and demonstrates the positive outcomes of Government agencies and landowners working closely together," he said.

The wheatbelt wild dog control project is one of 70 strategic projects funded through *Saving Our Species*, a two-year \$15 million biodiversity conservation initiative designed to boost efforts to protect Western Australia's unique plants, animals and ecosystems.

# Aerial view in camel count

**STAFF from DEC, the Department of Agriculture and Food and a team of volunteers have conducted an aerial survey of feral camels in the State's north.**

They surveyed an 85,000 square kilometre area that included Rudall River National Park, surrounding unallocated Crown land and part of Balfour Downs Station as part of the *Saving Our Species* program.

The survey aim was to count the number of feral camels that live in the area and follows a similar survey that occurred north-east of Wiluna in 2005.

DEC scientist and survey team leader Bruce Ward extended thanks to Newcrest Mining which provided valuable support for the survey by flying the team to Telfer and providing food and accommodation.

The survey estimated that there were 20,400 camels in the study area in herds of between 50 and 100.

Bruce estimated there were up to 728,000 camels in Australia – the world's largest wild population, half of which is in WA.

Feral camels are a threat to native species as they are the largest grazer in the desert and can significantly damage vegetation when in big herds.

Camels have been known to damage and degrade waterholes and wetlands, which are

critical to many of our native species as well as having great significance to Aboriginal people.

Through its *Saving Our Species* program, DEC recently carried out a control program where more than 1400 pest animals were removed from the Earaheedy and Lake Carnegie areas.

More projects to minimise the impacts of feral camels are planned under this program including the fencing of Dragon Tree Soak in the Great Sandy Desert.

## Environment and Conservation News March 2007

Published by the Department of Environment and Conservation's Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs Division, Cygnet Hall, (cnr) Mounts Bay Road and Hackett Drive, CRAWLEY, Western Australia 6009

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Printed on 100% recycled paper



DEC's Daryl and Amanda Moncrieff experienced a different climate in Canada.

# From Canadian cold to the WA north

**ASK DEC's Daryl Moncrieff about what he learned from a year's work exchange in Canada and he's quick to reply: "The ice is slippery".**

Sporting a slight limp from a mishap on the ice, Daryl has returned from an 11-month exchange with British Columbia's Integrated Land Management Bureau (ILMB).

The bureau's team leader of planning in the Northern Interior Region, Robin Hoffos, exchanged places with Daryl, DEC's Planning Coordinator based in Perth.

Daryl's wife Amanda, Senior Project Officer with DEC's Environmental Management Branch, accompanied him, taking on a work placement with British Columbia's Ministry of Environment and completing project work for the Invasive Plant Council of British Columbia.

Daryl's work centred on planning, especially in regard to a grassland restoration project, while Amanda worked on habitat restoration projects and invasive plant management.

They left Perth in January last year when temperatures were in the high 30s and

By Samille Mitchell

arrived in Canada when the temperatures dropped to a frosty minus 28 degrees.

Besides learning about the slippery properties of ice, Daryl also gained insights into differing management structures.

He was particularly interested in the way the activities of Canada's 'dirt ministries' such as Forestry, Mining and Environment are integrated by ILMB and answer to a board of ministers to ensure the independent industries are working in unison.

"They all have a really good understanding of what each other are doing," Daryl said.

"We don't have such formal forums here whereas in British Columbia they meet once a month to work out common goals and it seems to work pretty well."

Daryl and Amanda were based in the timber town Williams Lake, which has a population of 11,000.

The duo has headed for warmer climates in Kununurra where Daryl is taking on the role as DEC's Kimberley Regional Manager.

## Plan to move 'Towards Zero Waste'

DEC staff have developed a plan to help local government move 'Towards Zero Waste'.

Staff from the Waste Management Branch have been working closely with local government representatives and staff from the Municipal Waste Advisory Council in the Zero Waste Plan Working Group.

The DEC team includes Project Coordinator James Milne, Senior Project Coordinator Jenny Campbell, Senior Project Coordinator Anne-Marie Bremner and Waste Management and Recycling Fund Section Manager Tony Beeson.

The Zero Waste Plan is a strategic waste management plan that identifies an organisation's goals and sets out the strategies required to achieve them.

During the next 12 months, local governments across the State will be encouraged to produce a Zero Waste Plan with the help of a new funding scheme – The Zero Waste Plan Development Scheme.

The scheme will provide funding assistance to local government to help align their waste management and recycling activities and strategies to the State's vision of 'Towards Zero Waste'.

It was developed after intensive State-wide consultation with local government and industry in September last year.

The scheme has two stages. Phase 1 is a data-gathering exercise during which local governments will complete a survey on their current waste management and recycling activities.

The survey results will identify gaps and establish baseline characteristics for municipal waste management in WA and will be used in Phase 2 of the scheme to set goals and targets and develop strategies to achieve them.

Ensuring ongoing improvement to Zero Waste Plans, continuous data collection, evaluation and reporting of results will also occur during Phase 2.

In a special effort to provide support for non-metropolitan local governments, DEC recently appointed Cathy Campbell as Rural Regional and Remote Coordinator.

Cathy, who is based at DEC's Bunbury office, will be a valuable asset to not only local governments in the region, but also to the broader community in making the behavioural changes that are necessary in working 'Towards Zero Waste'.

## Rare video of endangered western ground parrot

DEC staff have captured some rare video footage of the critically endangered western ground parrot in the Fitzgerald River National Park, north-east of Albany.

DEC Western Ground Parrot Recovery Program Project Officer Mike Barth said they took several hours of footage and dozens of photographs of an adult bird feeding during the day and feeding his mate.

They also took photographs of a recently fledged juvenile.

"We will use the video footage and photos for research purposes," Mike said.

"It will help to identify food resources and habitat requirements and give us an insight into juvenile morphology. It's also important to know they're successfully breeding.

"We had only indirect evidence of their diet before and now we have proof of what they eat. There were also some new behaviours that we had not seen before."

Mike said he had been monitoring the western ground parrot in the Fitzgerald River National Park since last July with DEC Technical Officer David Chemello, Brent Barrett (former Project Officer) and contract Biologist Franny Cunningham.

"I believe that because we had been working and monitoring in the same area with such an intense focus on these birds that our efforts paid off," he said.

The recording caused great excitement among the monitoring team, particularly Mike who had only been in WA for a year.

Originally from California, he joined DEC hoping to learn more about this critically endangered bird.

## Sharing Australia's stories in Yanchep National Park



The opening day for the 'Sharing Australia's Stories' interpretive signage was enjoyed by DEC staff and volunteers, WA cavers and speleologists. Wanneroo MLA Dianne Guise (fourth from left) unveiled the new trailhead at the start of the Dwerta Mia Trail. Photo – Ian Collette

VISITORS to Yanchep National Park can learn more about its cave system through new interpretive signage, thanks to a partnership between DEC and members of the WA Speleological Group.

The signage in Boomerang Gorge was funded through a federal National Heritage grant called 'Sharing Australia's Stories'.

Yanchep Park Manager Ray de Jong said the vast cave and karst system found throughout the park provided the perfect setting to develop interpretive material outlining cave and karst formation processes and unveil the mystery of the unique environment.

"The new signage gives park visitors a better understanding of how the limestone environment formed over hundreds of thousands of years and also looks at how the park's caves and their formations have been shaped through the ages by the flow of water," he said.

"They have been installed along the park's Dwerta Mia Trail which meanders through Boomerang Gorge – an old collapsed cave system."

The project has received positive feedback from visitors.

For more information about the WA Speleological Group and its involvement with caves, visit [www.wasg.org.au](http://www.wasg.org.au).

## To be, or not to be?

**TO be, or not to be?**

That is the question.

For years there's been some confusion about what plant and animal species are extinct and what are threatened at the Commonwealth and State levels.

A number of species listed as being extinct by the Federal Government are listed as threatened by the State Government.

Similarly, a number of species are listed as threatened in WA but not so by the Commonwealth, and others are listed by the Commonwealth, but no longer regarded as being threatened by the State authorities.

This mismatch of whether plants and animals are regarded as being extinct or

threatened or not threatened has resulted in a streamlining process that will sort out, once and for all, what should be listed for conservation action and what should not.

Ken Atkins is DEC's Species and Communities Branch Manager and the person in charge of the project to realign the lists.

He said more than 340 plants and animals had different Commonwealth and State classifications, including some 170 differences in listing and 170 differences in ranking.

"The problem has arisen because the State has been regularly updating its lists, but this information has not flowed to the Commonwealth, and so its lists have been gradually getting outdated," he said.

"We've been concentrating on aligning the listing differences first, and have prepared information sheets which the Commonwealth requires as the first step in changing their listing of plants and animals.

"Nineteen species (18 plants and one animal) were removed from the Commonwealth list as they are no longer considered to be threatened.

"Eight plants and two animals have been added as threatened species, while eight species were transferred from being extinct to other threat categories."

He added it was a long process to change species listing, particularly at the Commonwealth level.

## Fishy tale

THE latest 'species realignment' has resulted in two south-west fish species, the pygmy perch and the mud minnow, being placed on the Commonwealth's Threatened Species list, synchronising with the WA Threatened Species list.

The fish had been on the State Threatened Species list for several years.

As well, the Commonwealth has listed another fish species, the western trout, as critically endangered. The fish exist along a four-kilometre section of the Goodja River which runs into the Angove River.

### New complaints man in town

One of DEC's newest recruits is a former crime analyst who has replaced criminal investigations with complaints registered with the Department.

Intelligence Analyst Lennon Hopkins is the new Incident and Complaints Management System (ICMS) administrator and will administer the system that records and tracks all complaints reported to the Department. Since it was introduced in March 2004, it has processed more than 8000 complaints.

Lennon will use his experience as a crime analyst from the State Intelligence Division of the WA Police where he was involved in the analytical support investigations into armed robberies, abductions and suspicious deaths.

### Study of Midwest acacia species

A new DEC project to study acacia species in WA's Midwest region has started.

Mining company Gindalbie Metals Ltd is contributing \$50,000 towards the DEC study in its mining lease area on DEC's Karara Station, 150 kilometres east of Perenjori.

The one-year study is part of DEC's *Saving Our Species* program and will look at plant species in the Midwest region's banded ironstone ranges where about 15 new native plant species were collected in the first year of this floristic survey. Six of them had never been seen before.

Senior DEC Research Scientist Bruce Maslin will coordinate the acacia project.

On Karara Station there are six species of acacia that are of particular interest and these will be collected, studied and, if necessary, described as new.

Conservation biology graduate Carrie Buscumb, is assisting Bruce's work on the new species.

### Places still available for Moon over the Murchison

If Comet McNaught whetted your interest for astronomy then take a journey of a lifetime with *LANDSCOPE* Expeditions.

*LANDSCOPE* Expeditions, DEC's community-supported research program, is running a trip to Ninghan Pastoral Station in the Murchison Region from 20 to 26 May. Participants of Moon over the Murchison will explore the southern sky in all its glory with astronomers from Perth Observatory. They will collect data from overnight astronomical experiments and, by day, will carry out botanical activities and search for rare and poorly known plants in the area.

For more information about this and other *LANDSCOPE* Expeditions, contact Expeditions Administrator Rohan Swan on 9334 0401 or by email (rohan.swan@dec.wa.gov.au).

# Big Day Out for DEC staff

By Rhianna King

**THE annual Big Day Out drew 40,000 revellers to Claremont Showgrounds in February as well as staff from DEC to keep the noise levels in check.**

Armed with sound level meters, the five-strong DEC Environmental Noise Management Section worked in shifts to monitor noise levels in and around the showground.

DEC Environmental Noise Officer Emma Bridgeman said the Big Day Out had evolved over many years to become a concert event of national importance.

"It visits all the mainland states of Australia and represents an important social event for the youth of WA," she said.

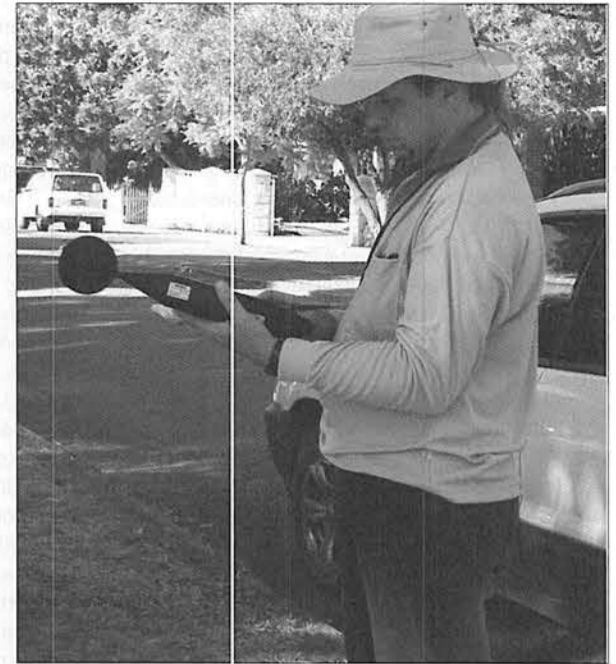
"Sporting, cultural and entertainment events like the Big Day Out are approved under noise regulation 18 by DEC and local governments, even though the noise from these events might not meet the normal, everyday standards of amenity."

Emma said the event had to comply with strict noise level limits written into these regulations and the promoters were required to submit a report detailing results from noise monitoring at various locations.

"Wind speed and direction played a large part in the control of noise from the event this year," she said.

"The Big Day Out consists of up to six stages operating at any one time, so identifying and isolating specific noise problems can often prove difficult on the day.

"We received fewer complaints about noise than in past years, which is good. We had a couple of incidents, including the use of foul language by one of the artists, but we liaised closely with the promoters on the day to ensure the problem was quickly resolved."



DEC Environmental Noise Officer Peter Popoff-Asotoff monitoring noise levels around Claremont.

## Turtle tagging trip a huge success

**THE most recent *LANDSCOPE* Expeditions turtle tagging trips run by DEC have been hailed an outstanding success.**

DEC has received glowing testimonials from participants on the two expeditions to Dirk Hartog Island in Shark Bay in January.

Four *LANDSCOPE* Expeditions travellers took part in the first trip, while nine joined the second.

They joined DEC expedition leaders Tim Grubba, Ross Mack, David Charles and Cheryl Cowell in tagging and monitoring loggerhead turtles as part of an ongoing research program that has occurred since 1994.

Trip participant Dr Ian Kerr was particularly impressed with the professionalism of DEC personnel.

"Their organisational and leadership skills coupled with their knowledge and expertise, which they willingly shared with participants, made for a unique and interesting experience for all expeditioners," Ian said.

"And the combination of living in luxury on the charter boat and the all round nature of the trip was just excellent."

Aside from night-time turtle tagging, participants also had the chance to explore the region's beaches and snorkel the reefs. They also visited sites of historical interest.

Expedition leader Tim Grubba said the services provided by the



*LANDSCOPE* Expeditions offer rare opportunities to take part in important research. Photo - Linda Reinhold/DEC

By Samille Mitchell

charter vessel MV *Odyssey* and the opportunity to participate in hands-on research with intriguing animals had contributed to making the trip a success.

*LANDSCOPE* Expeditions Coordinator Kevin Kenneally agreed that turtles made for

captivating research subjects.

"People love working with turtles," he said.

"They are blown away by these huge animals that come out of the sea and lay their eggs before disappearing again - there's a real mystique about them."

Kevin also paid tribute to the work of the expedition leaders in making the trips a success.

"These officers are conducting valuable research in remote areas and often others don't realise what they are doing," he said.

"*LANDSCOPE* Expeditions help show the public what our staff are doing and the researchers involved act as excellent ambassadors for the Department. It's a very important role they are playing."

## Public help in Ningaloo marine monitoring

**DEC is working with the public to gather information that will contribute to a better understanding of the marine environment of the Ningaloo Marine Park.**

DEC Nature Conservation Officer Brooke Halkyard is implementing the Department's Marine Community Monitoring Program in Exmouth by encouraging people to participate in marine and coastal monitoring activities. The recruitment drive includes community information days during March and April, field induction days, mail-outs, tour operator alerts and the development of monitoring packs for visitors to take away from the district office and visitor centres.

By Samille Mitchell

Brooke hopes to enlist valuable assistance from short-stay visitors, longer-term visitors and residents (including school groups, tour operators and community groups) in documenting the health of the Ningaloo Marine Park. DEC staff who visit the area with their friends and families are also encouraged to get involved.

Brooke said the program had dual aims of gathering information on the health of the park's marine environment and increasing opportunities for locals and visitors to partici-

pate in the park's protection and management.

She said anyone interested in participating in the program could take part in monitoring activities which catered to people from non-scientific backgrounds.

"The types of involvement vary from quite complex observations like monitoring changes in seabed communities over time to opportunistic recording of marine mammal sightings," she said.

The contributions help DEC collate information that it would be otherwise unable to collect in such volumes.

"Community monitoring plays an important role as an early warning system for

detecting change in our marine and coastal environments," Brooke said.

She believes that tour operators in particular would benefit greatly from involvement in the program.

"Offering clients a way to actively participate in the conservation of natural resources is becoming a popular tourism trend," she said.

"It can prove a great investment for the future of their business."

Anyone interested in finding out more about the program in Ningaloo should visit the NatureBase website at [www.naturebase.net](http://www.naturebase.net) or contact Brooke Halkyard at DEC's Exmouth office.