



Frankland celebrates milestones

THE environmental spotlight has fallen on the Frankland District this month with two major milestones – the celebration of the 2.5 millionth visitor to the Tree Top Walk and the announcement of the Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park.

Environment Minister Donna Faragher visited the area to celebrate the Tree Top Walk success and to announce the State's newest marine park.

Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk Business Manager Julie Ross said the 2.5 millionth visitor was a major milestone for the site.

"Since being built in 1996, this iconic tourist attraction has successfully provided visitors with a unique experience while minimising the impact of increasing visitor numbers on the tingle trees in the Valley of the Giants forest, between Denmark and Walpole," Julie said.

"The Tree Top Walk is an icon of the local region and one of the most sustainable forest tourism facilities in the world. It impacts on just three square metres of the forest floor, which is an engineering achievement."

The Minister paid tribute to the DEC staff, tourism representatives and community members

who worked to make the site so special.

The Minister also participated in the celebration for the recent creation of the Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park and the release of its management plan.

Marine Policy and Planning Branch Acting Manager John Lloyd said the plan would guide management of the marine park and the conservation of its important ecological values including seagrass, fish, sharks, rays and seabirds, along with social uses and values.

"The new marine park encompasses the 100-hectare Walpole Inlet, the 1,300-hectare Nornalup Inlet and the tidal reaches of the Frankland, Deep and Walpole rivers and is zoned for recreation," he said.

"The marine park will continue to provide great opportunities for recreational fishing, nature-based tourism and public enjoyment.

"As new information is gathered, important areas for fish spawning may be identified and may require special management so that fish populations remain healthy and support sustainable fishing opportunities.

"A monitoring program will be established to support appropriate management of the marine park."



The Tree Top Walk's 2.5 millionth visitor Liz Fletcher of Melbourne and her partner Ben Bonollo with Environment Minister Donna Faragher.

12 months in Industry Regulation

DEC environmental officers Sara McAllister and David Weir and licensing officers Lauren Fox and Elizabeth Bonner have recently completed their first 12 months of work in Industry Regulation after beginning their careers with DEC in early 2008.

These keen officers have experienced a taste of the huge diversity of roles available to them through the department.

In August 2008, the group attended one of DEC's Regulatory Officers Training Courses (ROTC), where they completed investigation scenarios to become Authorised Persons under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*.

The initial duties undertaken by the four officers ranged from issuing registrations and general licensing duties, with Lauren, David and Sara working together at DEC's Kwinana office.

Since completing the ROTC training they have been able to take on some variation in their roles and placements in the department.

Each of the four officers is currently involved in investigations that may lead to prosecution if adequate evidence can be gathered to prove the allegations.

"Twelve months ago I would never have expected I would be investigating organisations and building a case of evidence – it's a great experience and gives me a good opportunity to get out into the field and work in the regions," Elizabeth said.

Elizabeth now works in the Major Projects Regional Support Section,

assisting the South Coast, South West and Goldfields regional offices with licensing projects, including mining developments.

"The licensing team has noticed that sites under investigation have shown improved environmental management practices, indicating positive outcomes from the pro-active regulatory enforcement," she said.

This investigative process, along with an ethics training course that the new recruits have undertaken, is earning the officers units towards qualifications in Certificate IV in Government Investigation.

Many training opportunities have been available to help build their skills and knowledge base. Sara, Elizabeth and David have completed Senior First Aid courses and Lauren and Sara have had their noses calibrated to help them respond to odour complaints.

"The calibration consists of passing a series of odour tests held over three days to determine whether you have a reliable sense of smell, that isn't oversensitive," Lauren said.

"I am now able to respond to odour complaints and I'm looking forward to using these skills in the field."

After successfully gaining a position in the Pollution Response Unit (PRU), David attended a two-week training course run by the US Environmental Protection Agency, which provided essential skills in hazardous materials (hazmat) response.

"The course was really well done with four guys flown in from America to provide us with training in hazmat response actions," David said.

"The course introduced me to how breathing apparatus work – which enabled me to enter the hazmat incident 'hot zone' and carry out testing at a large pesticides fire in Northam."

The four officers agreed that mentoring from fellow officers at work had contributed significantly to their skills and knowledge development.

Due to the high risk nature of work undertaken by the PRU, David said he was particularly grateful for the extra time his colleagues spent mentoring him.

"The support provided by staff in the PRU has been really great," he said.

Sara and David also have had the

opportunity to respond to incidents and complaints of pollution and environmental harm working in the regional on-call offices for up to 24 hours at a time.

"Being part of the after hours response team has given me a great opportunity to experience a wide range of environmental issues and my last on-call shift included involvement with bird deaths, fertiliser dumping and the Canning Vale Recycling Plant fire," Sara said.

Recognising the training and experience that they have gained in their first 12 months has put them in good stead, Sara, Lauren, David and Elizabeth look forward to their future careers with DEC.



Left to right: David Weir, Sara McAllister, Lauren Fox and Elizabeth Bonner.

Victorian awards for DEC wildlife officers

DEC Nature Protection Manager David Mell and Senior Investigator Rick Dawson were recently acknowledged with two appreciation awards from the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

The awards follow more than 20 years of successful cooperation between DEC and DSE wildlife officers, particularly in working on large covert operations to stop animal smuggling in Australia.

Dave and Rick said they were surprised but proud to have received the recognition out of the blue from the Victorians, who they keep in contact with on a weekly basis.

To commemorate the long-standing relationship, two plaques were prepared for Dave and Rick coupled with a letter from the Victorian Director of Statewide Services Ian Voigt.

Ian acknowledged the excellent working relationship between the two states and

expressed his gratitude to Dave and Rick for their commitment and support.

"Rick's dedication in a number of specialist areas is admirable and an invaluable asset to wildlife crime prevention," Ian said.

Ian also noted a recent operation, ALEXIS, where a joint operation of WA, SA, NSW and Victorian officers worked to successfully diminish soft-bill bird trading in a synchronised approach.

"I was really chuffed with the award, it really demonstrates the great relationship that has built up between Western Australian and Victorian wildlife officers," Rick said.

DEC's Nature Protection Branch has more than 200 years of collective experience in flora and fauna natural history and investigations, making it an excellent resource for counterparts in other states.

Environmental crime has no borders and interstate routes from WA are well used by

animal smugglers.

DEC's strategic approach to nature protection has led them to work together, build relationships and coordinate approaches to tackle wildlife crime across Australia.

Rick and Dave both noted the satisfaction they derived from their work that enabled them to make a difference.

"I think that in the long term, our work with black-cockatoos including DNA profiling, investigating illegal shooting and trapping, helping orchardists to protect their crops without killing cockatoos, the captive breeding program and the rehabilitation program – we are really well positioned to make a difference," Rick said.

Two Victorian wildlife officers are planning to come to WA soon to take part in black-cockatoo conservation and protection training with the Nature Protection Branch.

The branch also is participating in an ABC documentary featuring the work with these endangered birds.



Left to right: Rick Dawson and Dave Mell with their recognition awards.

Forest red-tailed black cockatoos released into wild

DEC wildlife officers and volunteers recently conducted WA's largest release of forest red-tailed black cockatoos into the wild.

Seven forest red-tailed black-cockatoos (*Calyptorhynchus banksii naso*), which were added to the Commonwealth Threatened Species List by Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett in June, were released at the Black Cockatoo Rehabilitation Centre in Martin.

DEC Wildlife Officer Rick Dawson said the cockatoos all originated from the same area and had been at the

rehabilitation centre for up to a year.

"Six of the cockatoos were brought in after being hit by cars, and two had been disentangled from barbed wire fences and brought to the centre," he said.

"These birds have now recovered to the extent that they can be returned to the wild, and we are confident that they will make this transition smoothly."

The forest red-tailed black-cockatoo is known to exist only in Western Australia, with populations distributed through the Perth Hills, north to Gingin, south-east to Mt Saddleback and south to Rocky Gully.

"This species is declining in abundance, and to be able to give these birds a second chance at life while hopefully boosting the local breeding population is positive," Rick said.

Prior to release the birds were micro-chipped and DNA samples were taken.

"This will ensure we can identify the birds if we encounter them again. It also provides us with genetic information about this species of cockatoo so we can learn how to better protect them in the future," Rick said.



DEC and Keep Australia Beautiful staff Rob Cauchi, Jennifer Weston, Maureen Maher, Jennie Anderton, Gail Dodd and Anna McGlynn at the Adopt a Spot launch.

KABC litter prevention launch

THE DEC's Keep Australia Beautiful Council of WA (KABC) has launched a new litter prevention strategy.

The strategy guides the work of the council and builds on work started with the previous Litter Prevention Strategy 2006-09.

KAB Program Manager Jennie Anderton said the strategy aimed to provide a strategic and coordinated approach to the prevention and management of litter with the aim of working towards a litter-free State.

"While we are not there yet, much work has been done towards tackling the issue of litter in WA," Jennie said.

"The recently launched 'Adopt a Spot' program is one initiative of the new strategy that aims to engage the broader community in tackling litter issues."

Jennie said 45 groups had registered with the new program so far, including 29 Bunnings stores.

"Under the Adopt a Spot program, participating

groups choose a spot to keep clean and conduct four clean-ups a year for two years," she said.

"We provide them with tools, gloves and bags for cleaning and they do the clean ups.

"It's a great way of removing litter while also raising awareness of the importance of keeping our State litter-free."

Jennie said litter posed serious social, economic and environmental costs.

"Not only is litter aesthetically displeasing, it is a potential threat to human and ecological health and it incurs a huge impost on local and State governments which have to spend time and money to clean it up, she said.

"Litter also has social implications, in that littered areas tend to attract anti-social behaviour such as petty crime, vandalism and graffiti.

"The impacts are real, the issue is genuine and litter is increasingly being recognised as an important component of the mainstream environmental agenda."

New southern sanctuary for the woylie

ONE of WA's most critically endangered species, the woylie, will soon be provided a 400-hectare predator-free zone after \$600,000 was promised to better protect the animal.

The woylie has an uncertain history in Australia and has recovered from near extinction after being the first Australian vertebrate to be removed from State and Federal endangered species lists due to successful conservation action in 1996.

However, in 2001 the population began to rapidly decline again. In 2000, there were an estimated 20,000 woylies in the Upper Warren Region, but the number is now estimated to be less than 1,000.

The cause of the sudden decline is not known and DEC scientists have been investigating the species in a

major collaborative research program, but have been unable to isolate the specific cause or causes.

Environment Minister Donna Faragher said maintaining WA's biodiversity was an important part of responsible natural resource management.

"The woylie has made a spectacular recovery once before and we are taking decisive action now to give it a chance to do so once again," she said.

The funding was provided through the Natural Resource Management project with \$500,000 to be spent on prime woylie land in the Perup Nature Reserve. This will be fenced off to keep an emergency colony of 500 woylies safe while investigations into their health continue.

Ms Faragher said another \$100,000 would be

spent establishing captive breeding and other woylie conservation programs at the Perth Zoo.

"The captive breeding program is expected to involve a dedicated keeper at the zoo and will use woylies that remain in wild populations for breeding," Ms Faragher said.

Woylies once occupied most of the Australian mainland south of the tropics, including the arid and semi-arid zones of WA, the Northern Territory, NSW and Victoria. By the 1970s their occupancy was reduced to just three locations in WA.

They live on seeds, bulbs, and their clear favourite, underground fungi. Woylie is their Nyoongar name, referring to their ability to carry leaves and sticks with their curled-up tail.

Ngalpa warran, ngalpa marrngu – healthy country, healthy people

MARINE specialists in DEC's Marine Policy and Planning Branch (MPPB), have traversed more than 2,000 kilometres to build relationships with the Nyangumarta people, who have recently proven an 11-year Native Title claim for traditional country adjoining Eighty Mile Beach.

Marine Conservation Officer (Planning) Matt Fossey said DEC had begun an engagement program to establish and strengthen existing partnerships with Native Title claimants or holders. MPPB staff travelled to the area to have introductory meetings with seven Native Title groups and detailed discussions with three of these.

"We have worked closely with the Nyangumarta people, including an on-country visit at Eighty Mile Beach and follow-up meetings in Broome and Port Hedland where ideas about reserve design and management options were explored," Matt said.

The Nyangumarta people now have Native Title determined over a large portion of the intertidal parts of the proposed Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park and adjoining land.



Members of the Nyangumarta working group sharing a story with Matt Fossey on-country at Eighty Mile Beach. Picture by John Lloyd.

Matt said the group hoped to increasing people's understanding about their culture and the connection they have with the land and sea.

"Aspirations for their coastline and sea country are best summed up by the phrase 'Ngalpa warran, ngalpa

marrngu', which translates to 'healthy country, healthy people'," he said.

"They regard looking after plants and animals in their coastal and sea country as a priority – as well as the protection and respect of cultural sites, stories and songlines."

Matt was invited to attend their Native Title determination, along with movie director Baz Luhrman who formed a relationship with the young Nyangumarta actor Brandon Walters during his debut in the movie 'Australia'.

DEC Principal Marine Planner John Lloyd wrote to Nyangumarta elder Nyaparu Rose congratulating the Nyangumarta people on their determination and thanking them for their contribution to DEC's planning process. John also noted that DEC was looking forward to developing a working partnership with the group to help look after coastal and sea country.

"Nyaparu chose to read the letter out when making her speech on the day. It was highly emotional and Nyaparu reflected on the many elders that had passed away during the 11-year determination process," Matt said.

Munda Biddi complete within three years

DEC and the Munda Biddi Trail Foundation have secured \$3 million to complete the Munda Biddi Trail, the State's premier off-road cycle touring trail.

The new funding from the State Government's Royalties for Regions program will see the long-distance cycle trail stretch from the Perth Hills to Albany. The trail is currently half complete, finishing at Nannup.

Both the Great Southern and South West regional development commissions are supporting the project and will provide \$500,000 each year for the next three years.

DEC Recreation Activities Coordinator Stuart Harrison said the funding would see the trail completed within the next three years.

"We received \$3 million over three years, which means we can get started on finishing the remaining trail between Nannup and Albany," Stuart said.

"We'll have planning and building teams working at both ends of the trail simultaneously so they will eventually meet in the middle.

"It's estimated that there will be five dedicated Munda Biddi campsites within the new stretch of the trail."

Stuart said the new section would cover more than 500 kilometres of national park, State forest and other crown lands.

"This is really exciting news for the trail," he said.

"Mountain bike riders across the State should be very pleased with this announcement."

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