



# New Dirk Hartog Island National Park

**DEC will soon manage a national park on Western Australia's largest island, Dirk Hartog Island in the Shark Bay World Heritage Area.**

In Shark Bay to announce the new national park, Environment Minister Donna Faragher said the new national park covered almost the entire area of the 63,000-hectare island, protecting its unique environmental, cultural and historical assets, and creating a drawcard for nature-based tourism.

"Dirk Hartog Island forms the western-most point of Australia and is an incredibly biodiverse area with outstanding natural values including more than 250 native plant species, three endemic threatened bird species and a number of threatened reptiles," she said.

"The park is nationally significant as Dutch sea captain Dirk Hartog's landing on the island on 25 October 1616 is the first evidence of European arrival in Australia.

"The State Government's vision is to turn Dirk Hartog Island National Park into one of the world's premier national parks showcasing its significant history and scientific value.

"The park's declaration will help to create national and international awareness of this

amazing location within a World Heritage Area, enabling the tourism industry to market the island as an important attraction alongside the world-famous dolphins of Monkey Mia.

"Creating the national park will open it up to tourists under carefully managed sustainable tourism arrangements.

"It will also provide a pathway for the traditional owners of Dirk Hartog Island, the Malgana people, to engage in the ongoing management and conservation of the region."

The Minister said management of the national park would also include sheep and feral goat removal from the island followed by a major project to restore its natural values.

"Native animals on Dirk Hartog Island have suffered from feral goats and cats, with 12 of the 15 original native mammal species now believed to be locally extinct on the island," she said.

A small piece of freehold land will be retained for nature-based tourism facilities by the Wardle family, who have been operating the pastoral lease on the island since 1968.

A reserve will also be created at Tumbledown Point for the use and benefit of the Malgana Aboriginal people.



*(Left to right) DEC Director General Keiran McNamara, Project Officer Shark Bay World Heritage and Shark Bay Shire President Cheryl Cowell, local Malgana man and owner of Wula Guda Nyinda tours Darren 'Capes' Capewell, Environment Minister Donna Faragher and Netherlands Consulate-General for Western Australia Arnold Stroobach.*



*Fire Management Services Branch Acting Manager Keith Low (left) and Busselton District Manager Greg Mair take some time out in Lillooet, British Columbia.*

# A brighter future for fire management

**NOW back on Australian soil, members of the DEC and Forest Products Commission contingent who travelled to British Columbia to help fight fires have reflected on their experiences and the lessons they learnt, which are being examined for possible implementation in WA.**

While the Canadian fire management systems are very similar to those used in Australia, they also presented different techniques and tools.

Fire Management Services Branch Acting Manager and Incident Controller at the Canadian fires Keith Low said one significant variation between the countries was fatigue management practices, as the Canadian teams took on deployment lengths of 14 days, as opposed to WA's deployments of five days.

The coordination of incidents through a multi-agency regional coordination centre

was also seen as a significant advantage to effective incident management.

Keith said the Canadians also had very different practices in finance management, including carrying out an estimated total fire cost in the early stages of each fire.

"The Canadian team we handed over to on departure had a finance team of seven!" Keith said.

Some of the other Canadian practices that were of interest included using the skills of retired fire managers and multi-agency management of evacuations.

"If I required it, the deployment affirmed for me the value of our Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System, or AIIIMS, and the capacity of the agreements between Australia and New Zealand and the USA and Canada to be mutually beneficial," Keith said.

"It also affirmed that WA remains at the forefront of fire management and fire suppression but can always learn from others."

## Formation of the Office of the EPA

**PREMIER Colin Barnett and Environment Minister Donna Faragher have announced the formation of a new Office of the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to meet the growing complexity, size and demands of development assessment in the State.**

The new agency will be provided with its own General Manager, staff, budget and administrative capability.

DEC Director General Keiran McNamara and EPA Chairman Paul Vogel together announced that the new agency would have responsibility for parts of the Environmental Protection Act dealing with policy development, environmental impact assessments and compliance monitoring of Ministerial conditions.

DEC will retain responsibility for conservation and environmental regulatory matters such as clearing of native vegetation, natural resource management, pollution, licensing and works approvals.

Environment Minister Donna Faragher said the changes were based on recommendations in a number of reports, including The Role and Structure of the Environmental Protection Authority by the Minister's Environmental Stakeholder Advisory Group, chaired by former EPA chairman Dr Bernard Bowen.

"These changes will result in increased transparency and independence, leading to greater community and industry confidence in the activities of the EPA," the Minister said.

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DEC Senior Research Scientist Anne Cochrane with feather-leaved banksia seedlings.

## Seed bank celebration

**THE international Millennium Seed Bank (MSB) partnership is celebrating collecting and conserving 10 per cent of the world's wild plants by banking its 24,200th species.**

Since 2001, DEC's Threatened Flora Seed Centre has contributed more than 14 million individual seeds to the MSB, founded by the Royal Botanic Gardens in the United Kingdom, from more than 1,000 Western Australian plants.

DEC Senior Research Scientist Anne Cochrane said the centre conserved seeds of threatened species and used the banked seed to re-establish plant populations in the wild.

"The Threatened Flora Seed Centre is WA's principal seed banking facility and it has collected seed from more than 70 per cent of the State's threatened plant species, many of which have been used in recovery actions," she said.

"Located in Perth in the State's south-west – one of the world's biodiversity hotspots – the centre aims to store sufficient genetic

material from each species to ensure successful reintroduction if extinction occurs in the wild."

The MSB project is the most ambitious international conservation project in the world and part of the Royal Botanic Gardens' Breathing Planet program.

Anne said the partnership with MSB, which also involved the Kings Park and Botanic Gardens Authority, had enabled DEC's Threatened Flora Seed Centre to double its collecting capacity, which had led to the identification of new taxa, threatened flora populations and range extensions.

"The partnership has made a huge achievement for global plant conservation since its launch, establishing partnerships in more than 50 countries and securing 10 per cent of the world's wild flowering plant species," she said.

"This project plays a vital role in helping people meet the environmental challenges we are facing today through saving threatened plants, restoring habitats and improving the quality of life for people."

## Paving the way for national park accommodation

**DEC-managed national parks may soon boast more and varied accommodation options thanks to the new *Naturebank* program.**

Launched by Tourism Minister Liz Constable and Environment Minister Donna Faragher, *Naturebank* paves the way for the release of land for low-impact accommodation, mostly within national parks and reserves.

*Naturebank* works by identifying potential visitor accommodation sites and undertaking due diligence required to make a site ready for release.

DEC Tourism Branch Manager Rod Quartermain said applications for accommodation would still go through a strict approvals process, but *Naturebank* would make the process more streamlined.

"It's not a short-cut for approvals, but it gets as many clearances as possible for new sustainable accommodation outlets out of the way ahead of their release," Rod said.

"We can now invite expressions of interest to develop the first site at Kurrajong (within the World-Heritage listed Purnululu National Park) before the end of the year and a second site is expected to be released early in 2010."

Rod said the process would result in a broader range of accommodation in national parks and reserves using triple-bottom-

line sustainability criteria pioneered by DEC to assess proposals.

"This will ensure that the developments will adopt world's best practice standards of operation and create socio-economic opportunities in regional areas, especially for Aboriginal people," he said.

"And a broader range of accommodation means we can attract a broader range of visitors while also closely managing the impacts.

"The operations will have key performance indicators measuring environmental and social performance and will be audited regularly.

"The leases will encourage and reward best practice rather than just setting minimum standards."

The accommodation will be environmentally and culturally sensitive, similar to the State's already successful nature-based facilities – such as Eco Retreat in Karijini National Park, the safari camps in Purnululu National Park and Sal Salis at Ningaloo Reef.

*Naturebank* is intended to be an ongoing program with new localities and sites added as they are identified. Sites would be released as performance-based leases, providing financial resources to benefit the management of the park and the period of lease set to help ensure a reasonable return on investment.

# Kimberley field work nears completion

## DEC field work on the ambitious Kimberley islands biological survey is almost complete.

The survey of 22 of the largest islands in the Kimberley, designed to sample groups of mammals, reptiles, frogs, land snails, birds and plants at most risk of threats such as too frequent fire, weeds, human activity and cane toads, started in late 2006 and is due for completion in 2010.

The project is a collaboration between DEC, the Western Australian Museum, the Australian Museum and the Kimberley Land Council.

Survey Coordinator Lesley Gibson said the bulk of field work was now complete.

"We've made two wet season visits and three dry season visits sampling the flora and fauna on 22 islands off the Kimberley coast," Lesley said.

"Highlights for mammals this year have included finding northern quolls and golden bandicoots for the first time on Storr Island and finding golden-backed tree

rats and golden bandicoots for first time on Lachlan Island.

"We also discovered that Storr Island has high biodiversity for an island its size – its 1,950 hectares are home to at least 25 species of reptiles, five species of frogs and 11 species of mammals.

"The work has also confirmed that the Kimberley is one of Australia's diversity hotspots for ancient camaenid land snails. So far, 84 species of snails that are unique to the islands have been recorded as part of the survey and all but 12 of these have never been formally described.

"There will be some resampling during the wet season in early 2010 but any more survey work would be funding dependent.

"Then it's a matter of collating all the findings into a report, which we expect out late next year."

Results from the survey will provide baseline information on biodiversity values of the islands to help with future management and development decisions.



*DEC Research Fellow Andrew Burbidge with a quoll on Bigge Island in the Kimberley.*

## New plant species discovered in remote Kimberley

### **MORE than 100 new species of plants have been recorded in the Kimberley as scientists begin to discover more about the relatively unknown botanical life of the far reaches of north-west Western Australia.**

Of the 104 new species, 88 were not previously known to exist, while 16 have been recorded for the first time in WA. They will be lodged at the WA Herbarium.

DEC Herbarium curator Kevin Thiele said the Kings Park and interstate botanists who made the recordings had built up an extensive collection of undescribed plants in the Kimberley, mostly using a helicopter to access remote locations.

He stressed the importance of processing the specimens through the herbarium.

"Because of its vast, inaccessible landscape, there

is a great deal of plant life in the Kimberley that we don't know about, and the addition of 104 new species provides us with an extraordinary amount of new information about the area," Kevin said.

"Some of the plants, although interesting to botanists, are relatively small and obscure, but others are spectacular, such as a new species of hibiscus growing more than two metres tall with large, bright yellow flowers.

"This species has only recently been discovered because it only grows in a very small area in a special habitat.

"Another new species is a type of bladderwort, a small carnivorous plant that catches water creatures in special underwater traps.

"It grows and flowers in the wet season, and has been found in just one creek in a remote area."

Kevin said although new species were regularly discovered in many parts of WA, it was rare to add such a large number at once.

"Over the last 30 years, one new species has been discovered in the Kimberley for every 30 specimens collected, and this is the highest rate in any region in the State," he said.

"This is even more pronounced during the wet season, where on average one new species is discovered for every eight specimens collected.

"This is an indication of how unexplored many parts of the Kimberley are, especially in the wet season.

"The latest additions to the herbarium are the first step towards a more comprehensive assessment of the fascinating and rich plant life to be found in the Kimberley."