



DEC's Barrow Island team ready to fly over uncharted waters

IN a WA public sector first, six DEC staff have been appointed on fly-in fly-out rosters to maintain a permanent presence for the duration of the Gorgon Project on Barrow Island.

The two senior reserves officers and four reserves officers, together with Pilbara Regional Manager Allisdair MacDonald and Gorgon Project Coordinator Fran Stanley, came together for the first time recently to get to know each other and prepare themselves for the journey and their roles on the island.

Fran said the new officers were briefed on the Gorgon project, the history of Barrow Island, reserves management, working in the Pilbara region, employment conditions for fly-in fly-out, training, handovers, debrief models and the allocation of work areas.

Presentations at the workshop were made by Director General Keiran McNamara, Chevron, Acting Director Regional Services Kelly Gillen, and staff from People Services, Organisational Learning and Development and the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority.

"The DEC staff based on Barrow Island will be responsible for ensuring the

nature reserve and smaller surrounding island nature reserves are managed in order to protect their very high biodiversity conservation values," Fran said.

"This includes monitoring the implementation of the strict quarantine requirements that apply to all goods, people and materials brought to Barrow Island Nature Reserve and ensuring compliance with the CALM Act, Wildlife Conservation Act and Environmental Protection Act.

"Educating the Barrow Island construction and operations workforce on the importance of Barrow Island Nature Reserve to conservation will also be a key task.

"The workshop was the only opportunity the Barrow Island team had to get together before they start their fly-in fly-out rosters during July and early August. After this, some of the group will only see each other for two or three hours on their handover day.

"This is the first resource project for which DEC will have a permanent presence and the first time staff have had the opportunity to take up fly-in fly-out positions, making this an exciting initiative."



DEC Fly-in fly-out staff (back row, from left) Paul Connolly, Peter Kendrick, Wes Manson and (front row, from left) Kim Onton, Fran Stanley, Misty Shipway and Brad Daw. (Absent from the photo was Allisdair MacDonald)

REFIRING the industry regulation business

DEC's licensing processes are being reviewed as part of a strategy to continuously improve the industry regulation business.

A Re-Engineering for Industry Regulation and the Environment (REFIRE) team has been established to oversee the project, which will run until the end of December this year.

Environmental Regulation Director Alan Sands said the project objective was to ensure licensing processes were consistent, administratively efficient, legally sound, environmentally effective, reasonable and necessary.

"The benefits to industry, the community and the environment will be widespread," he said.

The project will review and improve existing licensing processes — from the proponent's initial enquiry through to the issuing of a licence or works approval.

The work directly relates to areas such as licence and works approval application forms, guidance, works approval and licence templates, licence condition setting, environmental assessment report content and structure.

Leading the REFIRE project team is Industry Regulation Manager Tony Wynne.

Tony said that this year's project outputs aimed to improve the efficiency and consistency of the licensing process across the State.

"As industry expands throughout

the State, DEC industry regulation officers are required to work harder to effectively manage the numerous facets of their work," he said.

"I think that everyone will appreciate the need for streamlining, clear direction and improvements to processes that the REFIRE project aims to bring about."

Tony said it was hoped the changes would provide a clearer and more transparent process that would give greater certainty to industry.

"Responsibilities will be clearer so that industry will know what is expected in an application for a licence or works approval," he said.

"There will be clearer guidance for proponents as to the form and content of an application for a works approval or licence."

Tony said licence generation and conditions themselves would be standardised as far as practicable to ensure greater consistency across industries and would be easier to understand.

"The community can expect transparent, legally sound and environmentally effective regulation of industry," he said.

"The project aims to bring about positive outcomes for DEC, industry, the community and the environment and I look forward to seeing the benefits of this project being realised."

For more information, contact environmental.regulation@dec.wa.gov.au.

Recovery program gives world's rarest tortoise a fighting chance

THIRTY western swamp tortoises are being prepared for release this week into habitat at Moore River Nature Reserve.

The tortoises were bred at Perth Zoo as part of the Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Plan which aims to bring one of the world's rarest tortoises, and Australia's rarest reptile, back from the brink of extinction.

Chairman of DEC's Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Team Craig Olejnik said 30 tortoises would be released on 31 July following the success of a release carried out in August 2009.

"We are very pleased with the success of previous Moore River translocations," he said.

"Fifteen of those animals were fitted with radio transmitters and have recorded growth of 1.4 per cent every week, which is considered above average.

"We will continue to monitor the progress of the tortoises as they mature."

Craig said western swamp tortoises took seven to 12 years to reach reproductive maturity and had a lifespan similar to humans.

"This means progress can be relatively slow," he said.

"However, thanks to the efforts of many people and many organisations, we now have a good chance of bringing this species back from the brink of extinction."



Swan Coastal District Conservation Officer Melissa Okely with a western swamp tortoise at the August 2009 release.

The Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Program is coordinated by DEC in partnership with the Perth Zoo, the Federal Government,

Perth Region Natural Resource Management Group, World Wide Fund for Nature and the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise.

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DEC showcases whale shark program to international visitors

A DELEGATION from the State of Gujarat in India visited WA last month to look at DEC's whale shark management program in Exmouth.

Gujarat has a fledgling whale shark tourism industry and the delegates, who regard DEC's program as world's best practice, were keen to see how the industry operates in WA.

DEC, together with CSIRO and the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), coordinated the visit which involved Mr Pradeep Khanna, who holds the equivalent position of Director General for the only Indian state government organisation that manages a marine park in India.

Tourism Branch Manager Rod Quartermain accompanied the group and said the Gujarat government was trying to develop a whale shark ecotourism industry on the west coast of India as a way of protecting whale sharks and creating an economic alternative to harvesting.

"The trip was an opportunity for us to showcase DEC's management program, which includes a comprehensive tour operator licensing system, the tour operator training program, electronic log book data collection system and operational management procedures," he said.

"It was great to be able to demonstrate how WA is a world-leader in its whale shark management and it is a credit to DEC and its partner organisations that WA is sought out as a world authority on best of practice management."

Rod said the group also had the opportunity to talk with Perth-based DEC staff involved in whale shark and other protected area management programs. They also visited Cape Range and Yanchep national parks.

"The feedback we received from the delegates was extremely positive and the intention is for all the agencies to work together to progress conservation and social outcomes through ecotourism in India."

New fungi identified in WA

MYCOLOGISTS from DEC's State Herbarium, the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority and volunteer members of the Perth Urban Bushland Fungi project have used DNA technology for the first time to compare hundreds of new species of fungi currently being identified at Kings Park and Bold Park.

Brightly coloured cups, discs, truffles and mushrooms are among hundreds of new records being catalogued at the parks.

DEC Senior Research Scientist and Mycologist Neale Bougher said the team had been comparing features such as colour, size and shape using microscopes and, in a first, DNA technology.

"Last year we identified 144 new records at Kings Park and Bold Park, including the stinkhorn fungus found at Kings Park which produces a foul odour and attracts blowflies to disperse its spores," he said.

"Recent discoveries included species previously unknown to science, like the gregarious bells and Judy's pixie cap as well as several dozen species that have never before been recorded in Australia or in WA.

"But we've only just scratched the surface. There are an estimated 140,000 species of fungi—more than 10 times the number of plants in WA, and only five to 10 per cent of these have been discovered and named so far.

"These fungal treasures can be tiny, large, hairy, smooth, tasty, poisonous, intricate and beautiful, and many species are unique to Australia, including about 95 per cent of our estimated 1,000 truffles."

Scientists at King Park have been studying WA flora for more than a century but in the last decade have extended their focus to building native fungi knowledge, with the help of Neale and volunteer members of the Perth Urban Bushland Fungi project.

"Fungi are not vegetables, as many people believe, but belong to a different kingdom that is an essential part of bushland ecosystems, vital in the nutrient recycling process that helps to feed plants and animals," he said.

"We know that fungi are among the most ancient members of any bushland but we still have much to learn about the hidden world under our feet and these largely unknown organisms."

Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority bushland manager Steve Easton said staff and volunteers had uncovered about 437 species of fungi in Bold Park during the past 10 years with the number of new records increasing each year.

"These exciting discoveries have contributed significantly to our knowledge of fungi in Kings Park and Bold Park, which is the first step in understanding the complex role they play in native ecosystems," he said.



DEC issues warning following cane toad discovery

DEC issued a reminder to the community last week to remain vigilant of hitchhiking cane toads.

The reminder followed the discovery of a live cane toad inside a shed in Broome's light industrial area by a member of the public.

DEC District Nature Conservation Coordinator Sharon Ferguson said it's believed the cane toad was inadvertently transported to the area.

"It's possible that the toad may have hitched a ride by hiding in road freight, a caravan or another vehicle," she said.

"There are vehicle checks in place at the WA-NT border but the toads are not always easily found as they are very good at hiding in small spaces.

"That is why it's important for people to do thorough checks of their vehicle and camping equipment if they are coming from areas where cane toads are present."

Sharon praised the person who handed the cane toad in to DEC and urged anyone travelling from the Northern Territory or near the WA border to be on the lookout for toads hiding in freight and the underbody of vehicles.

"As cane toads continue to advance further west in

Western Australia, the chances of cane toads hitching lifts on vehicles or freight are likely to increase," she said.

The toad has been humanely euthanased by DEC and officers thoroughly inspected the area for other possible toads, however none were found.

State Cane Toad Initiative Coordinator Corrin Everitt said DEC was working with the Department of Agriculture and Food, community groups and local residents to monitor the movement of cane toads in WA and to slow their advance.

"To date, explorer cane toads have been sighted in the northern end of the Ord River Irrigation area and five kilometres to the east of Kununurra," she said.

"Breeding populations are established around the WA-NT border, with significant numbers of toads found on the north-eastern shore of Lake Argyle."

Anyone who finds a suspected cane toad should isolate the animal and report the sighting to DEC immediately on 1800 084 881 (freecall) or 9168 4200.

For more information about cane toads visit www.dec.wa.gov.au/canetoads.



Cane Toad Technical Officer David Woods toadbusting.

Rowley Shoals Marine Park moorings the key to ensuring long-term safety and sustainability

DEC staff have successfully completed maintenance on the 15 moorings installed at Rowley Shoals Marine Park, which has ensured long-term safe and sustainable operations for visitors.

The DEC-managed marine park is located approximately 170 nautical miles west-north-west of Broome, and is made up of a chain of three coral atolls on the edge of one of the widest continental shelves in the world.

Marine Operations Officer Teresa Coutts said the moorings were an important management tool in protecting the coral reef environment of the Rowley Shoals.

"Mooring eliminates the need to anchor, provides vessel security, certainty of access to sought-after locations and convenience for craft operating close to reefs," she said.

"At least 233 species of coral and 688 species of fish inhabit the shoals, many of which are not found on any other reefs in Western Australia.

"At high tide, the reefs disappear beneath the sea with only the sandy islands of Bedwell and Cunningham visible. Bedwell Island, at Clerke Reef, is home to one of the only colonies of red-tailed tropicbirds, a near-threatened species in WA. The island is also used by many migratory birds as well as hawksbill and green turtles.

"As the moorings are largely utilised by licensed commercial operators, it is vital for us to ensure continued maintenance of the infrastructure—therefore we have established an ongoing mooring maintenance program.

"At the end of May, we successfully completed the annual mooring maintenance trip. All 15 moorings were assessed and re-certified by commercial dive company of Pacific Marine Group. This year's maintenance included replacing all of the gear above the sub sea float, on nine of the moorings.

"Next year's trip will involve replacing the top gear on the

remaining six moorings, and replacement of bottom gear will begin then also.

"Given the remoteness of the Rowley Shoals and the impracticality of DEC effectively managing mooring and anchoring regulations on a daily basis, we would like to thank all of the marine commercial tour operators who access the Rowley Shoals for the invaluable information that they provide DEC regarding mooring maintenance requirements.

"The information assists us greatly with management of the Rowley Shoals and the conservation of the moorings."

Since the installation of the moorings at the Rowley Shoals, no anchoring is permitted in the marine park unless in an emergency.

For information on mooring availability, locations and usage guidelines, please call DEC's Broome office on (08) 9195 5500 or email rsmp.broome@dec.wa.gov.au.

