



# Aboriginal staff conference develops leaders for the future

**MORE than 40 DEC employees attended the Aboriginal Heritage Unit's (AHU's) second Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff conference held at the Point Walter Recreation and Conference Centre last week.**

The three-day conference was opened in front of a picturesque backdrop by Aboriginal Elder Aunty May Maguire, who conducted a traditional Welcome to Country. AHU Cultural and Community Coordinator Koodah Cornwall then invited three trainees to light the conference flame and take on the prestigious role of keepers of the flame for the duration of the conference.

In the welcoming address, Director Parks and Visitor Services Peter Sharp spoke about the major progress of the Conservation Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 that was introduced to Parliament last November. The amendment, which currently sits with the lower house, aims to fulfil long-standing aspirations of Aboriginal people to be involved in the management of land, and to be able to carry out traditional activities 'on country'.

Deputy Director General Parks and Conservation Jim Sharp said rapid progress was being made towards reaching a target of 15 per cent Aboriginal employees working with the department.

"Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff have a unique opportunity to work with

traditional landowners and engage in joint land management," he said.

"The desired outcome is not just about DEC involvement but getting Aboriginal people involved in caring for country at any level through shared experience, encouragement and understanding."

The conference attendees were joined for dinner that night by Environment Minister Bill Marmion and Director General Keiran McNamara for the announcement of the Eugene Winmar Award for Excellence, which was awarded to Dr Stephen Van Leeuwen.

The next morning began bright and early as Aboriginal Heritage Officer Belinda Cox put staff through their paces during a health and exercise program.

Aboriginal Elders Dr Rosemary Van Den Burge and Peter Yu shared their life journeys during an 'inspirational talks' session, allowing staff to gain some perspective about where they've come from and what they hope to achieve through the shared experiences of their elders.

Belinda said following reports from DEC directors, staff had the opportunity to raise questions and discuss a wide range of issues via panel discussion and a suggestion box that had been set up by AHU staff at the beginning of the conference.

"The afternoon session on day two focused on joint management—DEC's roles and



*(Left to right) Environment Minister Bill Marmion, Eugene Winmar, DEC Principal Research Scientist Dr Stephen Van Leeuwen and DEC Director General Keiran McNamara following the presentation of the award for excellence.*

responsibilities, the Aboriginal employment strategy and MATES scheme, as well as joint land management and proposed CALM Act amendments presented by Peter Sharp and Planning Officer Judith White," she said.

"After enjoying a formal dinner at the Point Walter complex, staff and conference organisers let their hair down with an award and quiz night.

"We kicked off the third and final day with another round of health and fitness, followed

by a hearty breakfast.

"Regional presentations were made from the East Kimberley and South West districts and the final workshop session saw myself and fellow AHU staff conduct a session on implementation of acknowledgment."

As the curtain fell on a jam-packed three days, a closing ceremony was held and the keepers of the flame handed over the fire to the Goldfields Region, where the next conference will be held.



# Testing continues at historic Lake Mealup

**A NEW round of groundwater and sediment sampling was recently conducted at Lake Mealup—part of the Ramsar-listed Peel-Yalgorup system south of Perth.**

Environmental officers from DEC's Contaminated Sites Branch carried out the investigation as part of a recovery program for the lake which is historically valued for its waterbirds and surrounding bushland.

Declining rainfall since the mid 1970s has affected the lake's capacity to maintain water levels on a permanent basis. Since 1993, Lake Mealup has dried out each summer, resulting in extreme acidification. The lake recorded a pH of 2.9 in November last year.

DEC Environmental Officer Steve Clohessy said the lake's deterioration was exacerbated by an extensive agricultural drainage network that was designed for flood mitigation.

"Some of these drains appear to intersect the watertable and impede groundwater flow towards the lake," he said.

The Lake Mealup recovery program involves the

construction of a weir at the Mealup Main Drain, south of Lake Mealup, in order to restore some natural groundwater flow into the lake.

It is a joint initiative between the federal government, DEC, Department of Water, Lake Mealup Preservation Society and Peel Harvey Catchment Council.

Steve said DEC carried out soil, groundwater and surface water investigations between 2008 and 2010, in an effort to characterise the acidity risk associated with acid sulfate soils and declining groundwater levels.

"The seasonal drying out of the lake over the past 17 years has exposed pyritic minerals including monosulfidic sediments that had accumulated in the system, creating an acid store capable of causing extensive soil and water acidification," he said.

Further groundwater and surface water monitoring will be undertaken in order to assess changes in water quality following construction of the weir, which is scheduled to be completed by May 2011.



*Environmental Officer Jarrod Abrahams desperately seeking water.*



*Yawuru ranger Luke Puertollano and Luke Kent search for invertebrates in the mud sampling activity.*

## Coastal Capers holiday fun for all

**THE Easter school holidays were packed with outdoor activities for little and big kids alike at DEC's Kimberley Coastal Capers holiday program in Broome.**

Participants enjoyed activities such as exploring rock pools, face painting and sand sculpting, as well as having the opportunity to get up close and personal with native mammals and reptiles.

DEC Yawuru Interpretation and Education Coordinator Querida Hutchinson said the program was a great success.

"The reptile talk was a definite favourite and the community art mural really showed that Yawuru country is special to so many people," she said.

"Working alongside the Yawuru rangers was also a big hit with the kids."

"The biggest highlight of the program was seeing the kids engaging with the environment by simply getting outside and having fun."

The next Kimberley Coastal Capers program is planned for the July school holidays.

"There is already anticipation for the next program, so keep a look out and book in early!" Querida said.

For more information on the Kimberley Coastal Capers school holiday programs contact Querida on (08) 9195 5515.

DEC would like to thank Broome Boulevard, Willie Creek Pearls, Astro Tours and Malcolm Douglas Crocodile Park for their generous support.







Students from Yallingup Steiner School on their visit to the Cape to Cape Track in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park.

## Students enjoy learning in the field

**DEC staff have helped students at a south-west school learn about user groups and management planning in national parks as part of a persuasive writing program.**

Students from Yallingup Steiner School's Year Six class visited a section of the Cape to Cape Track in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park near their school with Ranger Grant Phelan recently. There they looked at examples of unmanaged vehicle access and when user groups in a park conflict.

Grant discussed the problem of four-wheel-drive users crossing the walking track, showing students some of the issues it created.

"We had a situation where vehicles were accessing the national park in an unmanaged way through private property, then crossing over the Cape to Cape Track," Grant said.

"The rapidly widening road on fragile limestone was degrading the whole area, especially for Cape to Cape walkers. It is a similar situation in many sites in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park, where increasing recreational vehicle use is degrading the coastline and cliffs.

"By putting in appropriate barriers and signage, we have alleviated the problem at this site.

"Public education, such as this school activity, is also an important part of managing the problem."

Grant said it was great to meet the students and show them around the site.

"There were many interesting perspectives and the kids raised some good ideas for overcoming this and other issues. I think they got a lot out of this excursion," he said.

The students also received a visit from DEC Planning Officer Sophie Bishop who talked about the overall management plan for Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park.

"It was great to meet the students, who were genuinely interested in the national park and appreciated how important it is to look after our natural areas," Sophie said.

"The students were keen to talk about why the national park was special to them and were particularly interested in what is being done to protect coastal vegetation from visitor impacts."

Teacher Paul Raymond said the class used the information gained during the visit and from guest speakers—including the DEC staff and users such as a local surfer—to write letters about caring for and managing parks and walking tracks, which were then sent to a local newspaper.

## New campground makes Easter a breeze

**THE new Warlu Loop campground at Karijini National Park was a great success over Easter.**

The overflow campground was opened in time for the busy Easter weekend, following a two-year project by DEC to increase camping capacity at the popular park.

DEC Pilbara Operations Officer Dale Fitzgerald said park staff advised that camping at Karijini was at capacity at times over the long weekend and the new campground allowed staff to accommodate more campers than in the past.

"Having a well laid-out facility for campers made it easier to manage visitors to Karijini at one of the busiest times of the year," Dale said.

The new camping bays at Warlu Loop are connected by paths to the popular camp site at Dales Recreation Area, where facilities include toilets, picnic areas and barbecues.

DEC Pilbara Senior Operations Officer Geoff Passmore said the Warlu Loop site provided 44 new camping bays, increasing the park's capacity to almost 150 bays.

"Because of its spectacular scenery, ancient geological formations and recreational opportunities, Karijini is one of the most popular national parks in WA, and these new camping bays help to accommodate growing visiting numbers," he said.

The new Warlu Loop campground replaces the old overflow campground which was 12 kilometres away and lacked the appropriate management and facilities.

The project to build the new campground was part of the Remote Regions Nature Conservation Program, where DEC employees based in the south-west visit remote regions to help implement on-ground parks and visitor services, nature conservation and infrastructure initiatives.





# Combining forces to corner Pacific rat

**DEC fauna research officers are continuing their efforts to eradicate the Pacific rat (*Rattus exulans*) from Adele Island in northern WA, with the Department of Agriculture and Food recently issuing an official national pest alert for the vertebrate.**

Senior Principal Research Scientist Keith Morris said the alert was part of a wider program aimed at eradicating the extreme threat the rat poses to Adele Island's nesting seabird populations.

"Adele Island is unique in that it is the only island in WA waters where the Pacific rat exists. Black rats and house mice occupy several other WA islands," he said.

"In 2004, DEC's Broome District Office attempted to remove the rats from Adele Island, only to have their efforts foiled by the cyclone season and lack of follow-up baiting.

"This year we have scheduled the initial baiting in May ahead of cyclone season and will conduct follow-up visits to

the island in August and October, and again next year once the cyclone season is over.

"If we are successful in removing Pacific rats from the island, the next task will be to ensure they do not re-invade.

"Pacific rats are all-round pests, preying on sea birds—both chicks and their eggs—vertebrates and invertebrates, which is particularly worrying as Adele Island is home to important sea bird rookeries and some turtle nesting.

"Public awareness programs will be set in place for visitors to the island including the Department of Transport and Regional Services who maintain the navigation light on Adele Island."

The Pacific rat is well established in Asia, and has had a major impact on New Zealand islands where it has contributed to the extinction of a native bat and the decline of ground-nesting birds, reptiles and large flightless invertebrates.

In Australia, Pacific rats could affect a wide variety of agricultural crops and compete with indigenous animals, as well as consume a wide range of indigenous plants and animals.

As the rats often live in close association with humans, they could also spread diseases such as leptospirosis, which can cause serious illness.

It is important that people travelling into Australian waters maintain strict quarantine measures against rodents, and immediately report any Pacific rats found, and that people visiting Australian islands that currently have Pacific rats do not transport them to other islands or to the mainland.

Pacific rats are small mammals with reddish to grey-brown upper parts and dark grey belly fur with light tips. The pest alert includes information that will help distinguish them from other species found in Australia.

The alert is endorsed nationally by the Vertebrate Pests Committee and was developed with government and non-government groups. It has been produced with support from the Australian Government's Australian Pest Animal Management Program administered by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES).

The Pacific rat pest alert is on the Department of Agriculture and Food's website [www.agric.wa.gov.au](http://www.agric.wa.gov.au) and any sightings of rats should be reported to the department's Pest and Disease Information Service on freecall 1800 084 881.



*Pacific rats eating seeds. Photo by Dick Veitch.*

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