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MEDIA STATEMENT
GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

December 10, 1997

Numbats return to the woodland

Native animal translocations under the Western Shield project have stepped up a phase with the second release of 23 numbats into wandoo woodland, east of Mt Dale.

Environment Minister Cheryl Edwardes said the second release followed last year's reintroduction of 20 numbats into the same area, indicating the success the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) was having with fauna recovery programs.

The Minister said the translocation was part of the Numbat Recovery Plan funded by Environment Australia and CALM under Western Shield.

Western Shield - the world's biggest campaign against feral predators – aims to bring back from the brink of extinction threatened native animals species by controlling the threat of introduced predators such as the fox and feral cat.

Mrs Edwardes said that in the last week CALM scientists had released 17 numbats into forest along Topher Road in Nockine and Qualen blocks to the east of the Mount Dale area, with a further six individuals to be released in the area on Wednesday.

"The 17 numbats released last week were captured from the wild at Dryandra where comprehensive fox baiting during past years has seen the species population rise," she said.

"Of the six to be released this week, four were captured as young from the wild at Dryandra and raised in captivity, while two are from a captive breeding program – a collaborative project between CALM and the Perth Zoo.

"Once reintroduced, the numbats will be closely monitored by CALM scientists with the use of radio tracking equipment."

The Minister said the area of the release had been the subject of comprehensive baiting program for foxes since 1993 under Operation Foxglove, a joint initiative between CALM and Alcoa of Australia.

She said the second release would give CALM the opportunity to compare the dispersal and survival of captive-raised numbats against numbats raised and caught in the wild.

"This will significantly help in the development of captive breeding programs for species whose populations have diminished significantly in the wild," Mrs Edwardes said.

The Minister said the Numbat Recovery Plan aimed to establish at least nine populations of the distinctive marsupial within its 10-year term.

Translocation in November and December mimics the natural dispersal of young and takes advantage of the only time of year when female numbats do not have dependent offspring. Both adults and juveniles establish new home ranges within days of release.

The numbat (*Myrmecobius fasciatus*), Western Australia's faunal emblem, was a critically endangered species only a few years ago, but CALM scientists have since established new populations and given greater protection to existing populations through fox baiting.

Numbats are active during the day and in a few areas such as Dryandra are now seen more often. They were once found across most of southern Australia, including the desert regions but are now confined to a few small pockets in WA's south-west.

The Minister said that through captive breeding and reintroductions CALM was attempting to restore native species populations in abundance to areas where they once thrived before the onslaught of introduced predators.

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