

Chuditch

HON MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

BRIEFING NOTE: RELEASE OF CHUDITCH AT CAPE ARID NATIONAL PARK

The release of chuditch at Cape Arid National Park is the first time that the species will be reintroduced into this part of the State. This translocation is a significant milestone in recovery plans for the species and underlines the achievements being made under the *Western Shield* wildlife conservation program.

Background summary

The Chuditch *Dasyurus geoffroii*, is the largest carnivorous marsupial found in WA. At the time of European settlement it was widespread and abundant in all mainland states and the Northern Territory. By the mid to late 1800s it had disappeared from Queensland, NSW and Victoria. Chuditch are now restricted to the south-west of WA and are generally found in an approximately 75km belt from Gingin/Moora areas to the south coast in predominantly Jarrah forest and woodland habitat. They are also known to occur patchily and at lower densities in woodlands of the southern Wheatbelt region. Prior to broadscale fox baiting the total chuditch population was estimated at 6,000 animals.

In 1992, a recovery plan for the species was established. The objective of the recovery plan was to improve its conservation status, currently Endangered, through maintaining and increasing its abundance in the jarrah forest and translocating it to parts of its former habitat. In 1992 a trial translocation of Chuditch was undertaken in the fox baited jarrah and wandoo woodlands at Julimar Conservation Park. This trial was successful with the chuditch population establishing and expanding into adjacent areas.

Extensive surveys failed to locate any presence of significant chuditch populations in conservation reserves in the southern Wheatbelt region. It was decided that in order to maintain at least one population in the Wheatbelt, it was necessary to translocate the species to a suitable area after intensive feral predator controls. A translocation of chuditch to Lake Magenta was done in 1997. Extensive monitoring during the first 12 months suggests that the translocation has been successful. The aim of this translocation to Cape Arid NP is to establish at least one self-sustaining population

outside the current chuditch distribution in an area where introduced predators are controlled.

Translocation site

Cape Arid NP is located 120km east of Esperance and comprises nearly 280,000 hectares. It adjoins Nuytsland Nature Reserve creating a continuous area of nature conservation land stretching to the border. Much of the vegetation is coastal heath and mallee or mallee heath on sandy soils. No chuditch has been recorded in the area in recent times.

Predator control

As part of *Western Shield*, fox baiting operations began at Cape Arid in May 1996. The region is aerial baited four times per year. Feral cats are believed to be at reasonably low levels in the park and it is anticipated that fox numbers have been reduced by 80 per cent.

Chuditch source

The 40 animals used for the translocation are from the captive breeding program at Perth Zoo, which is run in conjunction with CALM. More females will be released than males with at least 25 of the animals being under two years of age.

Post release monitoring

Following the release, radio-collared chuditch will be tracked extensively by ground radio-tracking. Long-term monitoring will be undertaken by CALM District staff as part of *Western Shield* monitoring.

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MEDIA STATEMENT

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

May 12, 1998

Chuditch reintroduced to Cape Arid

Effective fox control has led to the reintroduction of the chuditch into an area where it has not been seen for more than 50 years.

Environment Minister Cheryl Edwardes today said that 40 chuditch had been reintroduced into Cape Arid National Park, 120km east of Esperance – the first time the species had been reintroduced into its former home range.

She said the reintroduction followed successful comprehensive baiting for foxes under the [Western Shield](#) program.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) program, aims to bring native animals back from the brink of extinction by controlling introduced predators, the European fox and feral cat.

The chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroii*), the largest carnivorous marsupial found in WA, used to be widespread and abundant throughout Australia. The introduction of predators such as foxes and feral cats has contributed greatly to its decline and it can now only be found in limited numbers in the South-West.

Mrs Edwardes said that through Western Shield, CALM was stopping the decline and bringing native animals, such as the chuditch, back from the brink of extinction.

"Through successful fox baiting operations at Cape Arid during the past two years, CALM has been able to significantly reduce fox numbers paving the way for this historic re-introduction of the chuditch," she said.

"The release at Cape Arid is part of a detailed recovery plan jointly funded by CALM, Environment Australia, Perth Zoo and Alcoa to improve the endangered conservation status of the chuditch by translocating it to parts of the State where fox control has been achieved.

"The chuditch reintroduced into Cape Arid were translocated from the captive breeding program at Perth Zoo – a joint project between the Zoo and CALM.

"Extensive post release monitoring by CALM science officers will commence immediately with long-term monitoring being undertaken by CALM district staff."

Mrs Edwardes said Cape Arid National Park was an excellent site for the reintroduction as fox numbers were under control and it provided the vegetation required for the chuditch habitat.

"Its 280,00 ha size, remoteness and close proximity to other nature reserves makes its an ideal site for the species to re-establish itself into its former home-range," she said.

The Minister said the reintroduction of chuditch at Cape Arid National Park augured well for the future of the species and WA's conservation efforts in saving native animals from extinction.

"This reintroduction follows the announcement last week that the tammar wallaby and the quenda would soon be de-listed from the State's Threatened Species List," she said.

"Recovery plans for the chuditch are right on track and it is hoped that in the future the chuditch may also follow suit and its threatened classification status be removed."

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