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## MEDIA STATEMENT

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

29/3/99

### Eat chocolate. Save wildlife.

Western Australians were today encouraged to buy chocolate bilbies this Easter to help raise funds for the conservation of the State's real life bilbies - an endangered native species.

Environment Minister Cheryl Edwardes said that by buying chocolate Easter bilbies from Coles Supermarkets, Western Australians would be helping conservation efforts to bring the bilby back from the brink of extinction.

"Bilbies were once common throughout the State, but the introduction of predators such as the fox and feral cat after European settlement greatly contributed to the species' decline," Mrs Edwardes said.

"Through the wildlife recovery program Western Shield, the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is helping to restore the population of species such as the bilby by controlling introduced predators through broadscale baiting programs.

"By buying a chocolate Easter bilby people are helping fund bilby captive-breeding projects - a vital part of recovery plans for this species."

Mrs Edwardes said this was the fourth year that Coles Supermarkets had supported the 'Save the Bilby' initiative by donating a percentage of the funds from the sale of chocolate Easter bilbies towards conservation programs.

"The funds raised are used for construction of breeding facilities, maintenance and food resources for the animals," she said.

"With the help of these funds, CALM has been able to fast-track its bilby recovery plans, with two breeding facilities already established around the State.

"Breeding programs are now in operation in Peron Peninsula in the Shark Bay region and at Dryandra Forest, near Narrogin.

"Already more than 12 bilbies have been born in captivity since the breeding programs began in 1996."

The captive-bred bilbies are kept in feral predator proof enclosures. The animals are



monitored to ensure they are adapting well to life in the enclosures. Once the numbers increase, the plan is to reintroduce bilbies into other parts of the State where there is suitable habitats and fox control programs are in place.

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