



PARKS AND WILDLIFE NEWS

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Biodiversity legislation introduced

Environment Minister Albert Jacob recently introduced a modern, updated Biodiversity Conservation Bill to Parliament to replace Australia's oldest conservation legislation.

Mr Jacob said the long-awaited Biodiversity Conservation Bill 2015 was a momentous step forward in the conservation of the State's biodiversity.

"This Bill will replace the inadequate *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950* and *Sandalwood Act 1929* and will significantly improve the Government's ability to conserve the environment," he said.

"Previous governments have been trying to update this legislation for many years without success, so introducing the Bill to Parliament is a very significant achievement."

Important changes include the increase of maximum penalties for killing or smuggling critically endangered species from \$10,000 to \$500,000, and from \$4000 to \$50,000 for non-threatened species. Harming or killing whales, dolphins and dugongs will attract maximum penalties of \$500,000.

The penalties for illegally harvesting wild sandalwood will rise from \$200 to \$200,000 for individuals and \$1 million for corporations, and the trade will be made more accountable and transparent.

The Bill will also provide formal processes for preparing conservation programs and recovery plans, promoting private landowner biodiversity conservation initiatives as well as streamlining environmental approvals for developments.

The Bill is open for public input and will be debated in Parliament next year. The final Biodiversity

Conservation Act and accompanying regulations are expected to be implemented in stages once the Bill is passed by Parliament.

The Bill can be viewed at www.parliament.wa.gov.au.



Some of WA's native animals that will receive greater protection under the Bill: numbat, western ground parrot and humpback whales.
Photos – John Lawson, Alan Danks/Parks and Wildlife and Rick Dawson/Parks and Wildlife

Published by the Department of Parks and Wildlife's Public Information and Corporate Affairs Branch

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Department of
Parks and Wildlife



Fires strike early

It has been an early start to the bushfire season, with staff across the department stretched to capacity responding to damaging fires in a number of locations around the State.

During November Parks and Wildlife firefighters and their counterparts from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Forest Products Commission, volunteer bushfire brigades and local government authorities attended more than 120 bushfires with a combined area of approximately 684,000ha. This included major incidents in Albany, Esperance, Perth Hills and Swan Coastal districts as well as other fires around the State.

Many fires were sparked by lightning strikes and exacerbated by unseasonably hot and windy conditions.

The Esperance area experienced multiple fires, some of which tragically led to the deaths of four people and caused significant damage to farming properties and crops. Others impacted conservation lands, including the habitat of several threatened species.

Esperance District manager Rob Blok said all of Mullet Lake Nature Reserve and 147,000ha – or about half – of Cape Arid National Park was burnt by two successive fires a month apart.

“But we had a major save at Cape Le Grand National Park where staff put in a massive effort to keep the fire out, with suppression and back burning on the western and northern boundaries,” Rob said.

Staff on the fire ground and in support roles experienced extended periods of high-pressure work, with several incidents requiring emergency warnings to be issued and suppression efforts ongoing for many days.

Albany District manager Peter Hartley said it was a 10-day effort to control and mop up fires at Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve (1232ha burnt) and Torndirrup National Park (616ha burnt).

“Fortunately, all of the major infrastructure at the recreation sites within Torndirrup is undamaged,” he said.

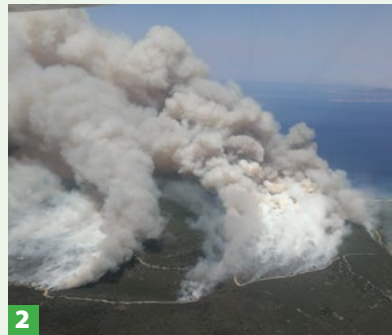
“We are still assessing the situation at Two Peoples Bay but we know that threatened species habitat has been impacted.”

Fires in the Perth hills led to the multi-day closure of part of Albany Highway, and north of Perth another blaze that started near Yanchep pine plantation closed Brand Highway several times.

Director General Jim Sharp acknowledged the hard work of all Parks and Wildlife personnel involved in the recent fires.

“The professional and responsive way they have handled these significant challenges prior to the summer season is to be commended,” he said.

Firefighting crews were also supported by Main Roads WA, WA Police, local governments and other agencies.



1. Crews build fire breaks to help contain the north Bannister fire. Photo – Steve Bradfield/Parks and Wildlife **2.** Fire at Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve. Photo – Jenny Schmidt/Parks and Wildlife **3.** A helitac drops water on the fire at Muchea, north of Perth. Photo – Leigh Sage/Parks and Wildlife **4.** Deputy incident controller Greg Broomhall, fire operations officer Mick Rose and Esperance District manager Rob Blok. Photo – Steve Bradfield/Parks and Wildlife

Aerial reloader training

The State’s fixed-wing water bombing fleet is already in hot demand, but who reloads the aircraft after each drop?

Answer: volunteers from local bushfire brigades, the Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service, Volunteer Marine Rescue WA, State Emergency Service, local government and Parks and Wildlife staff. They all recently took part in aerial reloader training sessions.

There are more than 40 forward bases from Kalbarri to Esperance, which rely heavily on volunteers to keep the fixed-wing water bombers delivering water to the fire line as efficiently as possible.



SES volunteers practice reloading a water bomber. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

Teams ready to respond

Each year Parks and Wildlife typically responds to more than 600 bushfires and it takes a team of people with all sorts of skills to help ensure the process runs smoothly. That’s where the Department’s pre-formed incident management team roster comes in.

Members of the five pre-formed teams are generally deployed to large or complex fires as a group to undertake important roles in logistics, operations, planning and public information. If you work for Parks and Wildlife, Forest Products Commission or a local government authority or volunteer with local bushfire brigades and would like to be on a team, view the video online for more information here.



Exciting find for Kimberley staff and Dambimangari rangers



Olive ridley hatchling. Photo – Danny Barrow/Parks and Wildlife

A joint patrol of Parks and Wildlife staff and Dambimangari rangers in Lalang-garram / Camden Sound Marine Park discovered an olive ridley turtle nest – one of only six ever recorded in Western Australia.

Parks and Wildlife senior marine ranger Danny Barrow, Dambimangari ranger Raphael Matos, and Parks and Wildlife marine ranger and Dambimangari traditional owner Adrian Lane were monitoring turtle nesting beaches in the marine park when they came across some bizarre tracks in the sand that looked quite different to the flatback turtle tracks elsewhere on the beach.

“We carefully examined the nest to determine its hatching success rate and found five olive ridley turtle hatchlings still stuck in there,” Danny said.

“They look quite different to most other turtles in WA but I recognised what they were straight away from my time spent in East Arnhem Land, where they are common.

“We recorded the hatchlings, took some DNA samples for genetic mapping and then released them into the water,” he said.

“The DNA sample will help researchers understand the genetic relationships between WA olive ridleys and those elsewhere in Australia.”

The olive ridley is the smallest of Australia's sea turtles and only grows to about 70cm long.

It has only recently been discovered that olive ridley turtles nest in WA, at Cape Leveque and elsewhere in the Kimberley, but they are very scarce.

Lalang-garram / Camden Sound Marine Park was established as part of a huge network of Kimberley marine parks under the State Government's *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy*.

It is part of Dambimangari sea country and is jointly managed with Dambimangari people.



Mountain bike master plan released

New purpose-built mountain bike trails will be built across the south-west as part of a plan to develop areas for one of the world's fastest growing sports.

Opening the first section of a new trail in Bramley National Park near Margaret River on the weekend, Environment Minister Albert Jacob also launched the *South West Mountain Bike Master Plan*.

“This master plan has identified Collie, Margaret River and Pemberton as high priority areas for trail development,” he said.

“As the draft master plan was being developed, Bramley National Park near Margaret River rose to the top as a priority area, and I am delighted that the first part of an initial 8km network has already been delivered, with more planned.

“The State Government will continue working with the mountain biking community to build more trails across the south-west, which will attract tourists and mountain bikers from all over Australia and the world.

“There has been increasing demand for purpose-built facilities and a more

managed approach towards mountain biking in WA, and we are responding to that demand, particularly since releasing the *WA Mountain Bike Strategy* earlier this year.”

The master plan was prepared by WA's peak cycling body WestCycle with support from Parks and Wildlife and the Department of Sport and Recreation and the WA Mountain Bike Association. A master plan for the Perth and Peel regions is currently in development.

1. Environment Minister Albert Jacob (centre) opens part of a new mountain bike trail at Bramley National Park, joined by Louise Wallace, John Dingey, Bob Hagan, Barry House, Rod Annear and Dave Willcox. Photo – Stuart Harrison/Parks and Wildlife **2.** Dion Baker tests out the new trail. Photo – Rod Annear/Parks and Wildlife **3.** Check out the Minister's video.



Go to video



Stage set for tourists to swim with whales

Work is progressing to make swimming with whales in Ningaloo Marine Park a reality come mid-2016, following an announcement made by Environment Minister Albert Jacob recently.

Parks and Wildlife staff are working closely with commercial operators who currently offer whale shark tours in the area to seek interest in running whale swim tours and refine the operational procedures that would govern the experience.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said he was excited to offer a new wilderness experience and expand the World Heritage area's tourist season by providing the trial.

"Whale watching is an extremely popular recreational activity and this trial will allow people to gain further appreciation and understanding of humpbacks and also provide another world-class tourist attraction at Ningaloo," Mr Jacob said.

The Minister said the safety of whales and

participants was a key consideration of the program and there would be strict guidelines for in-water interaction with humpbacks.

Parks and Wildlife will closely monitor and evaluate the trial program with real-time information from electronic monitoring systems already installed on vessels for whale shark operations.

"The results of the trial will determine how tours can become a permanent feature of Ningaloo and other areas of the State. I am keen to see if this has the potential to grow in the way that swimming with whale sharks has developed as a major attraction on the Coral Coast," Mr Jacob said.

Swimming with humpback whales is offered in only a handful of countries including Mexico and Tonga. It has also recently been introduced in Queensland.

Tourists will have the opportunity to get one step closer than on a whale watching tour. Photo – Rick Dawson/Parks and Wildlife



200th captive-bred numbat released into wild

Fifteen numbats born at Perth Zoo have been fitted with radio collars in preparation for their release into the wild as part of State Government efforts to arrest the decline of this endangered species.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the release of the 10 juveniles and five adults meant that more than 200 numbats bred at Perth Zoo had been released into the wild as part of a collaboration between Perth Zoo and Parks and Wildlife.

"The captive-bred animals will be released into the Dryandra Woodland near Narrogin, which is

home to one of the last original wild numbat populations," Mr Jacob said.

"With wild numbers estimated to be as low as 1000, the animals being released will help maintain genetic diversity and boost the Dryandra population."

Conservation of numbats at Dryandra is also supported by extensive baiting for foxes and feral cats under the successful wildlife recovery program *Western Shield*. The State Government is implementing feral cat baiting using the newly approved *Eradicat*® bait.

The small radio collars, funded



Parks and Wildlife scientist Dr Tony Friend and Perth zookeeper Dani Jose radio collar a numbat. Photo – Perth Zoo

by the community group *Project Numbats*, enable Parks and Wildlife scientists to follow the numbats' progress. Staff will monitor female numbats after the breeding season to determine if they have reproduced.



Parks and Wildlife is on Instagram

Follow us at @WAParksWildlife for a stunning online portfolio of images showcasing the State's incredible array of animals, plants and landscapes. Tag us in any photos of WA's natural wonders you may be sharing.

