

SHARK BAY WORLD HERITAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Communiqué

Meeting 13
26/27 November 2018

The thirteenth meeting of the Shark Bay World Heritage Advisory Committee (SBWHAC) was held in Denham on the 26 and 27 November 2018. Seven of the 11 committee members were newly appointed. The following matters were included in Committee discussions.

National Reserve System

The National Reserve System (NRS) was established in 1992 to build a national system of protected areas based on the cooperation of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and is the cornerstone of Australia's efforts to protect terrestrial biodiversity, although the Commonwealth ceased funding the NRS in 2013. Significant gaps need to be addressed to build a representative system which is truly comprehensive and adequate.

Currently, there are three parcels of land in Shark Bay – Nanga (ex-pastoral lease), Edel Land (part ex-pastoral lease and proposed national park) and South Peron (Unallocated Crown Land) – which are under Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) management control and should be formally gazetted as conservation estate within the World Heritage Property.

The SBWHAC has previously written to the State Environment Minister stating that these three land areas are already managed consistent with NRS values and gazettal will provide a more appropriate tenure for these significant parcels of land totaling almost 250 000 hectares which were acquired by the State Government between 1990-2008.

The Minister expressed concern with regard to the then pending native title application by the Malgana Shark Bay People. Following the Committee's advice that the Native Title determination became official on 4 December 2018, the Minister responded that DBCA will now engage with the Native Title holders to reach agreement for reservation and management of new conservation reserves within the Shark Bay World Heritage Area.

Feral Cat Declaration

The Committee previously noted that despite Australian Environment Ministers endorsing a national stance in July 2015 regarding feral cats being declared as a pest species, Western Australia (WA) had not validated the declaration, with a consequence that leg-hold traps could not be used as a capture method for feral

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cats. The Committee wrote to both the State Ministers for Agriculture and the Environment urging enactment of the declaration. Subsequently, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) sought comment and feedback from the SBWHAC on the proposed pest declaration and technical assessment.

DPIRD has now advised that the technical assessment and recommendations have addressed the policy, with all five of the criteria for declaration as a pest species under the BAM Act being met. Therefore, a recommendation has been made to declare feral cats as a pest, given that they have played a major role in the extinction of many of Australia's threatened species.

Aesthetic Values of the Shark Bay World Heritage Property

Committee members resolved at previous meetings to adopt a methodology to identify the aesthetic values of the World Heritage area and produce a document which defined those values. The Executive Officer identified the values and compiled the document and summary which have been endorsed by the Committee.

Climate Change Workshop

Resolutions to pursue options and funding avenues for conducting a climate change workshop (to formulate mitigation and adaptation strategies for the preservation of the World Heritage values) were made at Meetings 11 and 12.

In collaboration with the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy (DEE), the National Environmental Science Program (NESP) Earth Systems and Climate Change hub (ESCC), CSIRO and Scott Heron from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a workshop was held in mid-September 2018 with over 20 participants from a broad cross-section of agencies across Australia.

Shark Bay was the first World Heritage property to 'road test' the Climate Change Vulnerability Index – CVI, a rapid risk assessment tool which provides a method for systematically assessing the vulnerability of values to climate change. Focusing on the potential impacts to Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), the CVI has identified areas for the development of a climate change adaptation and action plan for the Shark Bay World Heritage Property. A Workshop Report and Summary document have been produced by CSIRO.

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The ESCC Hub is also working with the SBWHAC to conduct a case study using CSIRO climate change science information to determine and assess the impacts to Shark Bay's seagrass meadows. The final draft of this impact assessment should be available in May 2019.

Shark Bay Research Node

In June 2018, The WA Marine Science Institution (WAMSI) coordinated a collaborative workshop to develop a series of actions to address issues associated with ecosystem change in Shark Bay. The outcome of this, and the recent Climate Change workshop, highlighted a critical need for increased focus on knowledge-based adaptive management to provide greater capacity to adapt and respond to increasing and more frequent environmental changes.

The WAMSI Chief Executive Officer advised that there was strong support from scientists and the State Government to establish a Shark Bay research node. In conjunction with the recently endorsed science plan, the WAMSI Board is eager to form a strong collaborative partnership with the SBWHAC which supported the formation of a research node and also nominated members as representatives on the Shark Bay Research Node Steering Committee.

Review of the Monkey Mia Dolphin Provisioning Program

DBCA recently commissioned a review of this program as an independent appraisal of current operations to assist in the development of new management guidelines. The report and recommendations from the review were referred to the SBWHAC for comment and feedback.

Members acknowledged that the dolphin experience at Monkey Mia generates significant public enjoyment and has provided long-term economic benefits to Shark Bay. However, given that the feeding of wild animals is not considered international best practice for wildlife interactions, members agreed that a target should be set for transitioning to a future where this experience is not dependent upon feeding dolphins as this action is in conflict with regulations prohibiting the general public feeding dolphins from boats, etc. Future opportunities to interact with the dolphins in their natural environment should therefore be explored.

Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC)

The Committee was provided with an update on AWHAC's activities and outcomes from a recent Canberra meeting which included;

- Review of cultural values contained in WHPs listed for natural values,
- Australian World Heritage tourism/visitor management, and

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- Adapting to a Climate Change future.

Members discussed these key issues and agreed to support the need for a national World Heritage Climate Change response and also to write to relevant State and Federal ministers regarding AWHAC's proposal to develop a Tourism Master Plan and overarching Sustainable Tourism Guidelines for all Australian WHPs.

Dugong Population and Abundance Survey

As DBCA was unable to secure external funding to undertake the five yearly dugong survey scheduled for 2017, the SBWHAC contacted the NESP Marine Biodiversity Hub seeking priority project funding for a dugong population and abundance survey.

The provision of this funding allowed CSIRO and DBCA staff to conduct surveys of Shark Bay and Ningaloo Reef Marine Parks and Exmouth Gulf in June 2018. The results of the survey appear to suggest that numbers of dugong in Shark Bay (around 10 000) have not altered significantly since the previous survey and there has been no large-scale emigration northward, with dugong population trends across the Bay largely unchanged since the seagrass dieback event of Summer 2010/11, despite the loss of 30% of their grazing areas.

Members stressed the requirement for continuity of data collection and the long-term importance of the survey being conducted every five years and considered DBCA Marine Science should flag these surveys as a priority research project to ensure funding was secured in the future.

Further Information:

If you require further information on any of the above topics please contact Cheryl Cowell, Executive Officer, Shark Bay World Heritage Advisory Committee cheryl.cowell@dbca.wa.gov.au or (08) 9948 2210

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* Shark Bay World Heritage Advisory Committee – Membership as at November 2018