

Meeting 24 Communiqué

Denham / Gathaagudu, Western Australia

The Shark Bay World Heritage Advisory Committee met in Denham / Gathaagudu from 30 November to 2 December 2025 to consider matters relating to the protection and management of the Shark Bay World Heritage Area and its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

Global Significance

Shark Bay is internationally recognised for its exceptional natural beauty, biological diversity and ongoing ecological and evolutionary processes, including extensive seagrass meadows, stromatolites and globally significant fauna. The Committee acknowledged the enduring cultural connection of Malgana, Nanda and Yinggarda Traditional Owners to Country and the importance of continued collaboration in caring for this globally significant place.

IUCN World Heritage Outlook 2025

The Committee considered the findings of the 2025 IUCN World Heritage Outlook, which assessed Shark Bay as being of “Significant Concern.” While the property’s core values remain largely intact, the assessment reflects increasing cumulative pressures, particularly climate change impacts, invasive species, and complex governance and resourcing challenges.

Members emphasised the need for coordinated and timely responses across jurisdictions to ensure that management arrangements remain fit-for-purpose under accelerating environmental change. Updating strategic and statutory management frameworks, strengthening ecological monitoring, and improving cross-agency coordination were identified as priorities.

Migratory Shorebirds and Coastal Habitats

During an on-Country visit to Herald Bight in Francois Peron National Park, the Committee was accompanied by Traditional Owners and together inspected critical habitat for migratory shorebirds, including internationally listed species such as the curlew sandpiper. These intertidal areas form part of a globally significant network of migratory flyways.

Protecting Shorebirds

Shark Bay forms part of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway, one of the world’s most significant migratory corridors for shorebirds. Each year, species such as the curlew sandpiper, bar-tailed godwit and red-necked stint depend on Gathaagudu’s productive coastal habitats to rest and refuel during their long migrations.

Members noted that recreational disturbance including informal tracks in sensitive coastal areas and off-leash dogs continues to degrade the quality and safety of critical feeding and roosting sites. The Committee supports strengthened habitat protection, ranger-led monitoring and adaptive management to safeguard these ecosystems while maintaining appropriate visitor access.

Many priority shorebird areas span multiple land tenures, requiring coordinated management between DBCA, the Shire of Shark Bay, Traditional Owners and other partners to ensure consistent protection.

The Committee acknowledges and supports DBCA's ongoing shorebird conservation initiatives, including:

- development of low-impact visitor infrastructure such as bird hides
- consideration of seasonal access restrictions in sensitive locations
- improved multi-tenure management approaches
- expanded community education on responsible coastal recreation and drone use
- increased ranger presence and monitoring in high-value habitats

Together, these actions help protect Shark Bay's Outstanding Universal Value and safeguard the migratory species that rely on its coastline.

Marine Park Management Planning

Members noted that the current plan predates many contemporary pressures, including the scale and pace of climate change impacts and increased visitation.

The Committee supports the development of an updated plan that integrates contemporary science, cultural knowledge, and joint management approaches to ensure long-term protection of Shark Bay's marine ecosystems.

Research, Monitoring and Inter-Agency Collaboration

The Committee received updates from State and Commonwealth agencies and research institutions regarding marine monitoring, seagrass and mangrove ecosystems, fire management, and cultural heritage initiatives. These programs contribute to understanding cultural values, ecological change and informing adaptive management.

Members reiterated the importance of sustained investment in monitoring and compliance to detect change early and support evidence-based decision-making.

Conclusion

Meeting 24 reaffirmed both the enduring global significance of Shark Bay and the increasing pressures affecting its natural and cultural values. The Committee remains committed to providing informed, place-based advice to support coordinated action that safeguards Shark Bay's Outstanding Universal Value for present and future generations.

The Committee welcomes any comments, insights, or observations from stakeholders and community members to help strengthen shared stewardship of these important habitats.

The Shark Bay World Heritage Advisory Committee remains committed to protecting and promoting the World Heritage values of Shark Bay / Gathaagudu and will continue to provide advice to government, stakeholders, and the community.

NEXT MEETING

The committee will hold a brief virtual session on 25 February 2026

In-person Meeting No.25 is scheduled in Denham for 24 – 26 May 2026

Contact

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The Committee welcomes community and stakeholder engagement.