

Concept Plan SP 2020-018

Evaluating the effectiveness of the community engagement activities of the Dirk Hartog Island National Park Ecological Restoration Project (DHINPERP).

Ecosystem Science

Project Core Team

Supervising Scientist	Andrew T Knight
Data Custodian	Andrew T Knight
Site Custodian	

Project status as of May 20, 2020, 3:46 p.m.

New project, pending concept plan approval

Document endorsements and approvals as of May 20, 2020, 3:46 p.m.

Project Team	granted
Program Leader	required
Directorate	required

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Biodiversity and Conservation Science Program

Ecosystem Science

Departmental Service

Service 7: Research and Conservation Partnerships

Background

Dirk Hartog Island (DHI) is Western Australia's largest island and predominantly comprises 620 km² of sand dunes occupied by tall open heath and low closed/open heath. Historically, it had a diverse fauna and flora (over 250 species recorded, including several local endemics). Sheep and goat pastoralism degraded the island's vegetation and promoted at least eight invasive weed species. Invasive alien fauna, notably cats and rats, decimated the native mammal fauna.

DHI is located within the traditional lands of the Malgana Aboriginal People and the Shark Bay World Heritage Area. It was gazetted as a National Park in 2009. Funding for a 20-year ecological restoration initiative through the Net Conservation Benefits Fund in 2008 allowed. Thousands of sheep and goats were eradicated by 2017. Cat eradication began intensively in 2012 with DHI declared cat-free in October 2018. These activities prepared the island for fauna reintroductions which began in 2017 with two hare-wallaby species with 11 more species planned for reintroduction over the next 10 years.

A community engagement project has comprised one element of the ecological restoration of DHI. Its primary objective is to communicate the project to stakeholder groups and gain community understanding and support for the project. Stakeholders include neighbouring landholders on Dirk Hartog Island, Shire of Shark Bay, Parks and Wildlife Service District staff, Shark Bay Community, all DHI visitors including DHI Lodge visitors and national park visitors, key contributors including NCBF, Volunteers, special interest groups including Birdlife Australia, the tourism community, as well as WA visitors to Shark Bay.

Community engagement activities have included: signage on the island and mainland and biosecurity signage at Edel Land, the DBCA Explore Parks website, creation and maintenance of the Sharkbay.org website, biannual newsletter (Wirruwana News), updates through "Inscription Post" four times annually, social media via DBCA Facebook page, permanent interpretive display at Monkey Mia, community artwork projects, children's activities in local schools, school holiday activities, DHI visitor and biosecurity brochures, stalls at community events, Denham markets, and biosecurity welcome packs for island visitors.

No evaluation has been undertaken as to the effectiveness of the community engagement activities. Understanding stakeholder's values, attitudes and behaviours is fundamental to ensuring an effective program and for adapting future communication and engagement activities, as required.

The methodology to be applied by this research comprises seven stages: 1) strategic review of relevant literature; 2) scoping interviews with key DBCA staff linked to the DHINPERP; 3) identification of potential participants using a stakeholder analysis; 4) design and review of an online survey; 5) development of the online platform; 6) distribution of the survey to potential participants via email and social media; 7) analysis of the survey data using appropriate software; and 8) reporting of the findings, in the first instance to the DHINPERP Management Committee, and subsequently to relevant stakeholders.

Aims

The objectives of this research are to provide benchmark information to the DHINPERP on stakeholders: 1) understanding of the goals and activities of the DHINPERP; and 2) level of support for the DHINPERP.

Expected outcome

Benchmark information on the knowledge and attitudes exhibited by stakeholders towards the DHINPERP that is useful for determining the effectiveness of the initiative's community engagement activities, potentially including an ongoing post-visit survey of visitors to the island.

Strategic context

Recognising the importance of, and engaging with, stakeholders in biodiversity and its conservation is a core responsibility of DBCA, as it permeates through both the 'DBCA Strategic Directions 2018-21' and the 'DBCA Science Strategic Plan 2018-2021'. People and their communities are directly or indirectly relevant to most of the business processes of the department, as people either implement, fund or are affected by both internal and/or external DBCA activities.

The development and implementation of an evaluation of a community engagement programme supports achievement of five 'Strategic Directions' including: 'Biodiversity and conservation'; 'Natural and cultural values'; 'Attractions'; and 'Our community and partners'. An evaluation can be enacted in many ways and has multiple benefits that contribute directly to DBCA core business, including, for example, to inform: 1) determining the effectiveness of DHINPERP community engagement activities; 2) the building of partnerships between DBCA and stakeholder groups, including Traditional Owners, tourists and the public; 3) the design and evaluation of future community engagement activities that can educate and inspire the broader public, and; 4) the management of conservation reserves as tourism sites.

The proposed research aims to directly complement the ecological restoration work that is currently being undertaken by BCS and Regional and District staff, and that undertaken by Parks and Visitor Services staff under the direction Dr Amanda Smith and her group. Ultimately, this type of social science can assist with ensuring resources are invested for the best public outcome and value, which is a core responsibility of DBCA.

Expected collaborations

Research relationships that underpin the effectiveness of this research include: Dr Andrew Knight (BCS), Dr Karl Brennan (Project Manager, DHINPERP), Ms Wendy Payne (Regional Interpretation Officer, Midwest Region/DHINPERP), John Asher (Manager, Ecosystem Health Branch, CEM), Steve Nicholson (District Manager, Shark Bay), Sue Hancock (Regional Leader Parks and Visitor Services), Midwest Region), stakeholders including mainland local residents, island residents such as those from DHI Lodge, and visitors to the island.

Proposed period of the project

March 2, 2020 – July 31, 2020

Staff time allocation

Role	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Scientist	0.4	N/A	N/A
Technical	N/A	N/A	N/A
Volunteer	N/A	N/A	N/A
Collaborator	0.05	N/A	N/A

Indicative operating budget

Source	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Consolidated Funds (DBCA)	0	0	0
External Funding	0	0	0