

ARAR REPORT

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title and summary

Version created on Aug. 19, 2014, 1:32 p.m.

Last Modified on by

Report Status

Status	Last Updated
Planning -	

Science Project Overview

Part	Checklist Last Updated
Part A - Summary & Approval	bla

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Director's Message

The Department has primary responsibility for protecting and conserving the state's natural assets on behalf of the people of Western Australia. Western Australia is a large state with unique biological diversity including internationally recognised terrestrial and marine biodiversity hotspots, 12 internationally significant wetlands and eight of the 15 national biodiversity hotspots. We have a large number of national parks and nature reserves that protect biodiversity and provide superb natural environments for community recreation. Integrated scientific and management expertise is essential in order to provide the depth of knowledge required to effectively manage these complex and diverse ecological systems. While knowledge in other sectors can be obtained from national and international spheres, the explicit knowledge required to manage Western Australia's unique environments and natural assets requires local expertise.

Investment in strategic research develops the understanding, capacity and innovation necessary to identify and respond to emerging issues before they develop into major environmental pressures that impinge on conservation and sustainable development, and have costly long-term impacts on the environment, the community and the economy. Environmental research is a critical activity that supports the Western Australian economy through the mining, agricultural, oil and gas, urban development and tourism industries. Scientific information is required to value the natural assets of the state and to effectively and efficiently manage those assets for the benefit of all Western Australians. Scientific knowledge creates tourism opportunities and enables community enjoyment of our unique natural environments while supporting management of these areas for future generations.

A coordinated science and research capacity integrated with policy and management functions is a strength of the department, and reflects the vital role of science and information in conserving the state's biodiversity and managing its natural assets. An expert science capability embedded in the agency has significant benefits including:

- end-user, risk-based priority setting and funding allocation processes that ensure investment in research is relevant to Western Australia, and that it is feasible, beneficial, cost effective and directly linked to government needs;
- rapid incorporation of up-to-date knowledge to support the department's immediate policy and operational requirements through effective and efficient technology transfer and research uptake;
- the ability to undertake vital strategic long term science essential for government decision making;
- availability of science based knowledge and information to provide accurate and timely scientific, technical and policy advice to government.

The department's internal research capacity is extended and leveraged through attracting external investment to address state priorities, and through strategic collaborations and partnerships with external research agencies and end-users where this provides access to relevant expertise.

There is a clear need for substantial levels of research for effective management of our natural assets, but the resources to carry out such research are limited. This reality necessitates rigorous priority setting and efficiency of operations. The department undertakes this through a risk-based process where research priorities are driven by government and legislative obligations and strategic planning processes. The immediate, broader and longer-term benefits of investment in science are maximised through a departmental Science Policy.

In 2007 the Science Division prepared A Strategic Plan for Biodiversity Conservation Research for the 10-year period 2008-2017. In early 2013 the Science Management Team reviewed progress on the first five years of the strategic plan. It is very pleasing to see major progress against actions identified under the five key strategic goals that cover (1) understanding the composition of and patterning in biodiversity, (2) understanding the threats to biodiversity and developing options for amelioration, (3) monitoring condition and trends in ecosystems, (4) providing scientific concepts and tools for best practice management, and (5) improving knowledge of how people respond to and interact with the natural environment.

I can only highlight here a few of the many achievements completed over the past five years. We have undertaken planning processes to guide terrestrial and marine biological survey, plant taxonomy, and plant molecular genetics research and survey to provide an informed basis for management decisions. We developed major understanding

of the biology of the Pilbara region and Kimberley Islands through biological survey. We have undertaken a large number of plant and animal translocations to improve the conservation status of threatened species, including doubling the number of individuals of Gilbert's potoroo—Australia's rarest mammal—and establishing five mammals at the Lorna Glen Rangelands Restoration site. We have exceeded the global conservation targets for translocations of threatened plants and germplasm collections.

The FORESTCHECK monitoring program completed two rounds of five-yearly monitoring and a full analysis of the first round provides a baseline on which to assess change. We have completed investigations into the effects of timber harvesting activities on forest ecosystems as required under the Forest Management Plan 2004-2013.

We developed a departmental Science Policy that was endorsed by Corporate Executive in 2011 and guides science activities across the department. We established the Western Australian Conservation Science Centre and further developed our partnerships and collaborations with academia, industry and community groups. We are a foundation partner in the Western Australian Biodiversity Science Institute and have engagement with the Western Australian Marine Science Institution. A review of publications showed an 86% increase over the five year period 2006-2011, demonstrating increased effectiveness in communication.

The main actions to achieve further progress in implementing the key strategic goals for the next five years from 2013-2017 have been articulated in a revision of the strategic plan.

The scientific work of the Division that has led to the achievements made over the past five years is a credit to all staff, including scientists and technical officers, and would not be possible without the efficient support of the administrative staff, the work centre managers and library staff. I thank all staff for their ongoing dedication to undertaking and supporting science and research to underpin conservation of Western Australia's unique natural assets. I also take this opportunity to honour the memory of past Director General, Keiran McNamara, who provided great leadership in the application of science to conservation policy and operation.

At the end of June 2013, the Department of Environment and Conservation ceased and the conservation aspects of our business will now continue with renewed focus under the strategic directions of the Department of Parks and Wildlife. I look forward to continuing to provide excellent world-class science and research to support the work of the new department in protecting, managing and enhancing Western Australia's natural assets.

Dr Margaret Byrne Director Science June 2013

Vision

We envisage a society where scientific enquiry is highly respected and forms an objective basis for environmental decision making and policy development.

Focus and Purpose

Provision of up-to-date and scientifically sound information to uphold effective conservation of biodiversity and sustainable natural resource management in Western Australia. We strive to provide excellence in science and technology based on internationally recognised best practice. We operate research centres that foster, promote and reward creativity and innovation.

Role

- To provide a scientifically objective and independent source of reliable knowledge and understanding about conserving species and ecological communities in Western Australia, managing the public lands and waters entrusted to the Department of Parks and Wildlife, and carrying out the Department's other legislative responsibilities.
- To ensure that Science and Conservation Division is responsive to the needs of policy makers and end users in the Department by bringing science to bear on the solution of the state's most pressing problems relating to conservation and land management.
- To work in partnership with the department's managers, research institutions and the broader community to increase knowledge underpinning conservation and land management in Western Australia.
- To advise the Department on sustainable resource development opportunities and to promote the conservation of biological resources through their sustainable utilisation.
- To communicate and transfer to managers in the Department, and to the broader community, knowledge, information and other insights obtained through scientific investigation in Western Australia and elsewhere.
- To attain a worldwide reputation for excellence in science by publishing knowledge obtained through scientific research in premier national and international scientific journals and through electronic means.
- To contribute, as an integrated part of the Department of Parks and Wildlife, to meeting the need for knowledge on conservation and land management matters by the public of Western Australia.
- To undertake and participate in astronomy research, information and education for the benefit of local, national and international communities.

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Current Collaboration with Academia (Student Projects)

Project name
No projects.

External Partnerships

Project name
Collaboration project 2014-15 WAMSI Project 1.2.2. Key biological indices required to understand and manage nesting sea turtles along the Kimbelrey coast
Collaboration project 2013-51 Fast track critically endangered flora recovery
Collaboration project 2013-50 Age structure of <i>Callitris</i> in the Carnarvon Range
Collaboration project 2013-49 Species distribution modelling in the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2013-48 Great Western Woodland vegetation map reconciliation project
Collaboration project 2013-47 Jartaku bilby enclosure proposal
Collaboration project 2013-46 Biodiversity assets and landscape-scale management of the Fortescue River catchment
Collaboration project 2013-45 Genetic studies of Pilbara EPBC Act listed vertebrate fauna
Collaboration project 2013-44 A review of subterranean fauna assessment in Western Australia
Collaboration project 2013-43 Ecology and management of northern quoll in the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2013-41 Landscape scale management in the central Pilbara
Collaboration project 2013-39 Ecology and management of bilby in the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2013-37 Western Australian black spot biological survey campaign
Collaboration project 2013-36 Pilbara groundwater dependant ecosystem study
Collaboration project 2013-35 Cost-effective conservation decisions to mitigate threats to Pilbara biodiversity
Collaboration project 2013-33 Biodiversity modelling for BHP Billiton Iron Ore's Strategic Environmental Assessment in the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2013-32 Invasive <i>Passiflora foetida</i> in the Kimberley and Pilbara: understanding the threat and exploring solutions
Collaboration project 2013-31 Biological survey of the Birrilburru Indigenous Protected Areas: phase 1 - Carnarvon Range
Collaboration project 2013-30 Floristic survey of the Fortescue Marsh

Project name
Collaboration project 2013-29 Ecology and management of Pilbara olive python in the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2013-27 Ecology and management of the Pilbara leaf-nosed bat
Collaboration project 2013-26 Strategic weed assessment for the Chichester subregion of the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2013-25 Investigating the interactions between feral predators in the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2013-24 Strategic weed risk assessment and implementation plan for the Chichester and Fortescue subregions of the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2013-23 Ecology and management of the northern quoll in the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2013-22 Sponsorship of the 'Research directions for Pilbara leaf-nose bat' workshop
Collaboration project 2013-17 TERN: ecoinformatics facility and development of ecological databases and portals
Collaboration project 2013-14 Phylogenetics and floral symmetry development of the core Goodeniaceae
Collaboration project 2013-11 Phylogenomic assessment of conservation priorities in two biodiversity hotspots: the Pilbara and the Kimberley
Collaboration project 2013-10 Restoring natural riparian vegetation systems previously infested by blackberry along the Warren and Donnelly Rivers
Collaboration project 2013-9 Identifying threats to marine biodiversity of the Ningaloo World Heritage Area: deeper water fish community surveys within the Ningaloo Marine Park
Collaboration project 2012-495 Taxonomic studies on Burrup flora
Collaboration project 2012-494 Pilbara biological survey
Collaboration project 2012-493 NatureMap: data sharing and joint custodianship
Collaboration project 2012-492 Kimberley island biodiversity asset identification
Collaboration project 2012-491 Using well managed habitat to rescue woylies from the brink of extinction
Collaboration project 2012-486 Contemporary ecological factors and historical evolutionary factors influencing the distribution and abundance of arid-zone reptile species in space and time
Collaboration project 2012-485 Hands-On Universe: internet telescope
Collaboration project 2012-484 Wetland monitoring program: rotifer and cladoceran identifications

Project name
Collaboration project 2012-483 Susceptibility of frogs to declining rainfall in a biodiversity hotspot
Collaboration project 2012-482 Assessing the vulnerability of honey possums to climate change and habitat disturbances in south-western Australia
Collaboration project 2012-481 Understanding the early offshore migration patterns of turtle hatchlings and the effects of anthropogenic light: a pilot study
Collaboration project 2012-479 Variable star observations
Collaboration project 2012-478 Genetic diversity of corals in the Montebello and Barrow Islands MPAs
Collaboration project 2012-477 Assessing fish communities in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park
Collaboration project 2012-476 Assessing fish communities in Marmion Marine Park
Collaboration project 2012-475 TERN multiscale plot network: AusPlot Rangelands and SWATT
Collaboration project 2012-472 PLANET: Monitoring gravitational microlenses
Collaboration project 2012-470 Increasing native habitat through protection of EPBC species and ecological communities (dibbler recovery)
Collaboration project 2012-469 Astronomy education
Collaboration project 2012-468 Factors associated with western ringtail possum (<i>Pseudocheirus occidentalis</i>) persistence within retained habitat at development sites
Collaboration project 2012-467 Molecular assessment of morphological species of <i>Cortinarius</i> (Fungi) as used in field surveys by analysis of the ITS barcode region
Collaboration project 2012-466 Bilby conservation and management in the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2012-465 Fire-mulga study: post-burn monitoring and tussock grassland survey of the Hamersley Range
Collaboration project 2012-464 Resolving the systematics and taxonomy of <i>Tephrosia</i> in Western Australia
Collaboration project 2012-463 Seed collection zones for the Pilbara
Collaboration project 2012-462 Identification Botanist position at the Western Australian Herbarium
Collaboration project 2012-461 Systematics and Biogeography of the Inocybaceae

Project name
Collaboration project 2012-459 Building the climate resilience of arid zone freshwater biota: identifying and prioritising processes and scales for management
Collaboration project 2012-458 A risk assessment and decision framework for managing groundwater dependent ecosystems with declining water levels
Collaboration project 2012-454 Woylie conservation research project
Collaboration project 2012-453 Taxonomic studies of Western Australian marine plants
Collaboration project 2012-451 Fishes and invertebrates of the Vasse-Wonnerup Ramsar Site
Collaboration project 2012-450 Fish populations and invasive species of Vasse-Wonnerup Ramsar Site
Collaboration project 2012-448 Monitoring gravitational microlenses
Collaboration project 2012-447 Seed collection, storage and biology
Collaboration project 2012-446 Imaging and spectrophotometry of comets
Collaboration project 2012-441 Imaging and CCD photometry of transient objects
Collaboration project 2012-440 Cat eradication on Dirk Hartog Island
Collaboration project 2012-439 Management of weed and genetic risk in perennial landuse systems
Collaboration project 2012-438 Baiting feral cats on the Fortescue Marsh
Collaboration project 2012-437 Spatial and temporal patterns in benthic invertebrate communities of the Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park
Collaboration project 2012-436 Monitoring movement patterns of marine fauna using Vemco VRAP Acoustic tracking system
Collaboration project 2012-435 PAPP toxicosis and cat bait pellet development
Collaboration project 2012-434 Christmas Island cat and rat management plan (stage 2B)
Collaboration project 2012-432 Explaining and predicting the occurrence of night parrots (<i>Pezoporus occidentalis</i>) using GIS and ecological modelling
Collaboration project 2012-431 What is the role of predators at Ningaloo and how are they impacted by human use?

Project name
Collaboration project 2012-430 Climate-resilient vegetation of multi-use landscapes: exploiting genetic variability in widespread species
Collaboration project 2012-429 Pilbara biological survey biodiversity GDM modelling/gap analysis: terrestrial fauna and wetland flora and fauna
Collaboration project 2012-427 Translocations of mammals from Barrow Island: offset program
Collaboration project 2012-426 Assessing spatial and demographic structure of anthropogenic mortality on Australasian marine turtles
Collaboration project 2012-425 Assessment of genetic processes in <i>Lepidosperma</i> sp. Parker Range and <i>Lepidosperma</i> sp. Mt Caudan
Collaboration project 2012-424 Western Desert fire project
Collaboration project 2012-423 Eradication of exotic rodents from six islands of high conservation value
Collaboration project 2012-422 Bushfire occurrence and fire growth modelling
Collaboration project 2012-418 Identification Botanist position at the Western Australian Herbarium
Collaboration project 2012-416 Establishment of translocated populations of critically endangered <i>Acacia imitans</i> and <i>A. unguicula</i>
Collaboration project 2012-413 Temporal and spatial variation in coral cover on Western Australian reefs
Collaboration project 2012-411 Ningaloo seasonal seaweeds
Collaboration project 2012-410 Coral reef fish recruitment study
Collaboration project 2012-408 Bush Blitz: ex-Credo Station survey
Collaboration project 2012-407 Bush Blitz: Cane River Conservation Park survey
Collaboration project 2012-405 Automation of species recognition and size measurement of fish from underwater stereo-video imagery
Collaboration project 2012-404 IdentifyLife, a new platform for collaborative development of identification tools
Collaboration project 2012-403 Defining biologically significant units in spinifex (<i>Triodia</i> spp.) for improved ecological restoration in arid Australia

Project name
Collaboration project 2012-402 Managing genetic diversity and evolutionary processes in foundation species for landscape restoration in the midwest of Western Australia
Collaboration project 2012-401 Predicting the ecological impact of cane toads on native fauna of north western Australia
Collaboration project 2012-400 Protecting the safe havens: will granite outcrop environments serve as refuges for flora threatened by anthropogenic climate change?

Summary of Research Projects

Project name
No projects.

Research Activities

Student projects - Progress Reports