

Department of Environment, Water and Natural
Resources

Witjira National Park
Co-management Board
Annual Report

2014–15



Government
of South Australia

www.environment.sa.gov.au

Annual Report of Witjira National Park Co-management Board 2014-15

September 2015

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Presented to Parliament by Hon Ian Hunter MLC, Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation, pursuant to section 19D of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

30 September 2015

Hon Ian Hunter MLC
Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation
Parliament House
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Dear Minister

In accordance with the requirements of section 43L of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* and the *Public Sector Act 2009*, I have pleasure in presenting the annual report of the Witjira National Park Co-management Board for the year ended 30 June 2015.

For further information on this matter please contact Wendy Webb on 8648 5303 or wendy.webb2@sa.gov.au.



Grant Pelton
Chairperson
Witjira National Park Co-management Board

WORKING PARTNERSHIP

Witjira National Park was the first reserve in South Australia to have formal joint management arrangements between Traditional Owners and the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation.

The Co-management model provides the framework for the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) and the Traditional Owners to share responsibility for the Park. In 2007, the Witjira National Park Co-Management Board was established following the Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation (IAC) and the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation entering into a formal agreement, over Witjira National Park.

Witjira National Park is an area of 768,853 hectares (7,690 km²) and is located in the far north of South Australia.

The Witjira Co-management Board (the Board) has a challenging agenda - managing the cultural landscape, still known and understood by its Aboriginal Traditional Owners, in a way that also protects and conserves the Park's outstanding natural and cultural features. The Board seeks to:

Conserve its natural and cultural heritage, using both **Traditional** and **scientific** knowledge to **better manage** the land

Respect the rights, interests and needs of the Traditional Owners and **create** social development and economic opportunities for Lower Southern Arrernte and Wangkangurru families and communities

Provide **great experiences** for visitors

This is the eighth Annual Report of the Board and covers the period from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. It is prepared to fulfil requirements of section 43L of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*, Regulation 16 of the *National Parks and Wildlife (Witjira National Park) Regulations 2007* and section 12 of the *Public Sector Act 2009*.

This report highlights the Board's achievements over the past 12 months.



Back Row: Marilyn Ah Chee, Grant Pelton, Tony Magor, Valerie Naylon Fuschtei, Wendy Webb. Front Row: Janet Walton and Arthur Ah Chee.

Strategic Planning for the Park

Visitor Management:

- Improving Aboriginal and European interpretation.
- Reviewing infrastructure and campground requirements.
- Reviewing public tracks to ensure protection of Aboriginal sites and artefacts, as well as providing a better visitor experience into the future.

Strategic priorities and achievements for 2014-15

The Co-management framework meets a number of the State's Strategic Plan Targets, including:

Aboriginal wellbeing – Target 6

- Reconciliation, Cultural and Traditional Lands
 - Number of National Park Co-management Agreements (indicator 19)
 - Native title claims resolved (indicator 21)
- Governance and Leadership
 - Number of Aboriginal people on government boards and committees (indicator 17)

Aboriginal lands native title - Target 44

- Resolve 80% of native title claims by 2020

Improving visitor experiences

An interpretation plan that outlines a framework for interpretation in the Park was developed in consultation with the Board in 2010. Interpretation is designed to showcase the natural, cultural and historic stories associated with people, places, flora and fauna. There is a wealth of stories to tell in Witjira National Park;

- *through interpretation, understanding;*
- *through understanding, appreciation;*
- *through appreciation, protection.*

Work continues to develop new interpretive signs along two walking trails at Dalhousie.



Improving Park Infrastructure

The Board inspected areas of the Park to discuss Park management strategies. This included the review of visitor management and associated infrastructure in line with the Park Concept Plan. The Plan guides future visitor services in the Park and ensures European and Aboriginal culture is conserved and managed in a sustainable manner.

Developing Partnerships

Friends of Simpson Desert Parks

The Board and DEWNR recognise the valuable contribution to Park management by the Friends of Simpson Desert Parks (FoS). The volunteer organisation undertakes a wide range of on-ground works that have been endorsed by the Board.

The Irrwanyere Spring (Dalhousie Spring) steps were installed over 10 years ago and required replacement. In a partnership arrangement between DEWNR and FoS, the May 2015 working bee included the installation of the new steps. The project was marked with an opening ceremony. A commemorative plaque will be installed highlighting the partnership.



FoS members installing the Irrwanyere Steps.



Conservation results through partnerships

The Park is part of a broader natural and cultural landscape. The Board supported ongoing feral animal and pest plant control programs, including;

- **Date Palm Control**

Date Palm control allows native plants to recolonise in the springs. It removes shading effect and chemical release by Date Palms allowing terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna to survive such as White Tea-tree, Broughton Willow, Dalhousie catfish, Dalhousie hardy-head fish and various crustaceans. Follow up control at previous sites and control at new sites has been undertaken, assisted through funding from the Caring for our Country Desert Jewels project.

- **Large Feral Animal Control (camels, horses and donkeys)**

Feral animal control reduces total grazing pressure allowing for habitat recovery and native species to flourish. Camels cause significant damage to the fragile desert ecosystem by trampling and consuming native vegetation. They also degrade natural waterholes and impact on Aboriginal heritage sites (disturbance to stone arrangements), and are very destructive on boundary fencing. Judas collar monitoring and ground control has been conducted.

- **Managing invasive weeds (Mimosa Bush)**

New herbicide control trials have been undertaken. During a recent spray trial 4,378 Mimosa bushes were treated. Although this is a lower priority weed species, it has the potential to form thickets in creek lines and displace native vegetation.

- The conservation and threat abatement initiatives conducted throughout the Park continue to benefit a wide range of species, some of which are particularly important to Aboriginal People (eg, Ruby and Thorny Saltbush).

Management of Dingoes

The Board provided comment for the South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resource Board (SAAL NRM) Draft Wild Dog Management plan which was endorsed by the SAAL NRM Board in early December 2014.

The plan is an operational plan, developed to guide the implementation of the SAAL NRM Wild Dog Management Policy.

The definition 'wild dog' refers to dingoes (*Canis lupus dingo*), domestic dogs that are wild-living or wandering at large (*Canis lupis familiaris*) and their hybrids.

Traditional Owner input from Co-management Boards and Advisory Committees stated the recognition of linkages between cultural and ecological significance of the Dingo within Aboriginal Culture, and that outside the Dog Fence, populations are to be safeguarded.

The Dingo has been a great significance to Aboriginal people for a very long time - long enough for it to have come an integral part of camp life, the diet, oral literature, beliefs and practices.

The Board implemented a range of strategies to manage Dingoes in Witjira National Park. Educating park visitors regarding the nature of the Dingo and their place in the ecosystem has been a key priority for the Board. DEWNR staff monitor human interaction and Dingo behaviour and provide regular updates to the Board.

The native Dingo is culturally significant to Lower Southern Arrernte and Wangkangurru people and many sites and stories are linked across the broader landscape.

Firewood Management

The sustainable use of firewood in Witjira National Park has been of concern to the Board. The natural vegetation is home to a vast array of native mammals, birds and reptiles, which are culturally important to Aboriginal people.

In January 2013, the Board determined that wood fires and the collection of firewood would be permanently banned to protect the sparse arid vegetation. The Board implemented a number of strategies to enforce the ban. Monitoring compliance is ongoing and visitors have been respectful of the ban. Under the Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA), Traditional Owners are still permitted to use wood fires for traditional purposes.

Water/Drought – sustainability focus

The Board have implemented water monitoring strategies in consultation with the National Water Initiative (NWI) Project, South Australian Arid Lands Region.

The Board recognised the importance of the Date Palm removal project, which resulted in a significant increase in environmental flows. Currently it is estimated that approximately 442 mega litres of water per year will be returned to the mound springs area, since the project commenced.

The Board's decision to halve the flow rate into the Purni Bore wetlands, was completed with work undertaken on the well head in March 2014. This is a water saving of 94.6 mega litres per year.

Second Ranger Position

The Board continue to explore funding for the second Ranger position for Witjira National Park, as a high priority. Working in partnership with South Australian Native Title Services has been unsuccessful to date in securing the additional funding.

Governance

The Board tabled the Premier of South Australia, Hon Jay Weatherill correspondence regarding the South Australian Governments Boards and Committees reform after the August 2014 meeting.

The Board contributed to the correspondence forwarded to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation providing an overview of the Boards important role with Traditional knowledge and methods utilised for park co-management.

The Witjira National Park is of great significance to all Traditional Owners. The Co-management Board has a long history in engaging with and representing the views and

interests of the Aboriginal community, and ensuring the strong cultural and spiritual values of the park are conserved and protected.

The important partnership between the Traditional Owner Board members and the Department has been strengthened through building capacity and working together over a considerable period of time.

The Witjira National Park Co-management Board was retained. The full report is publically available on the "Your Say" website.

Promoting Co-management

State-wide Co-management Workshop

The inaugural workshop was held in November 2014 to bring together Co-management Boards and Advisory Committee across the State to share co-management experiences. There are now 12 co-management agreements, covering two-thirds of the protected area systems in South Australia.

The workshop identified a number of key issues, challenges and opportunities that will be progressed by both DEWNR and the Traditional Owners.

The Board continues to maintain an active role in promoting the park and co-management. The Traditional Owner Board members also provide regular updates to group members of the Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation (IAC).

MEMBERSHIP

Under Regulation 5 of the *National Parks and Wildlife (Witjira National Park) Regulations 2007*, the Board consists of seven members appointed by the Minister, of whom:

- (a) two must be Lower Southern Arrernte persons appointed on the nomination of IAC; and
- (b) two must be Wangkangurru persons appointed on the nomination of IAC; and
- (c) two must be officers of the Department; and
- (d) one must be a person nominated by the Minister who has qualifications or experience that may, in the opinion of the Minister, be of benefit to the Board.

The full membership of the Board of Management is as follows.

Chairperson

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Mr Grant Pelton | (5)(c): officer of the Department (Director Regional Coordination, DEWNR) |
|-----------------|---|

Members

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Mrs Marilyn Ah Chee | (5)(a): nominated by IAC (and Deputy Chairperson) |
| Mr Daryl Doolan | (5)(a): nominated by IAC |
| Mr Arthur Ah Chee | (5)(b): nominated by IAC |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Ms Valerie Naylon-Fuschtei | (5)(b): nominated by IAC |
| Mr Tony Magor | (5)(c): officer of the Department (Manager, Public Lands and Co-management, DEWNR) |
| Ms Janet Walton | (5)(d): qualifications or experience that may, in the opinion of the Minister, be of benefit to the Board (degree in Natural Resource Management) |

Deputy Members

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Mr Trevor Naismith | Deputy to Mr Pelton |
| Ms Christine Lennon | Deputy to Mrs M Ah Chee |
| Vacant position | Deputy Position also Vacant |
| Mr Paul Ah Chee | Deputy to Mr A Ah Chee |
| Ms Janet Whitehouse | Deputy to Mrs Naylon-Fuschtei |
| Mr Ken Anderson | Deputy to Mr Magor (DEWNR) |
| Ms Lucy Dodd | Deputy to Ms Walton (DEWNR) |

The appointments are for a four-year period expiring on 30 October 2015.

MEETINGS

The Board held three meetings in the reporting period:

- 4 August 2014, Coober Pedy, South Australia
- 12 December 2014, Port Augusta, South Australia
- 28 May 2015, Coober Pedy, South Australia

Attendance at Meetings

| Member | 4 August 2014 | 12 December 2014 | 28 May 2015 |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Mr Grant Pelton | Y | Y | Y |
| Mrs Marilyn Ah Chee | Y | Y | Y |
| Mr Daryl Doolan | Y | N | N |
| Mr Arthur Ah Chee | Y | Y | Y |
| Mrs Valerie Naylon-Fuschtei | Y | Y | Y |
| Mr Tony Magor | Y | Y | Y |
| Ms Janet Walton | Y | N | Y |

*denotes deputy member attended

FUNCTIONS

The functions and powers of the Board are set out in Regulation 10 of the *National Parks and Wildlife (Witjira National Park) Regulations 2007* as follows:

- (1) The functions of the Board are—
 - a) to carry out the functions assigned to the Board by or under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*; and
 - b) to carry out the functions assigned to the Board by the co-management agreement; and
 - c) to carry out other functions assigned to the Board by the Minister.
- (2) The Board has the power to do anything necessary, expedient or incidental to the performance of its functions.
- (3) Without limiting the generality of subsection (2), the Board may enter into any form of contract, agreement or arrangement.
- (4) The Board must perform its functions, or exercise a power, in a manner that is consistent with the co-management agreement.

Regulation 12 (1) of the Regulations states that 5 members (of whom at least 3 must be Lower Southern Arrernte or Wangkangurru and at least 2 must be members appointed under regulation 5 (1) (c) or (d)) constitute a quorum. This requirement was met at the majority of each Board meeting held during the reporting period.

Regulations

The following information addresses annual reporting requirements established under Regulation 16 of the *National Parks and Wildlife (Witjira National Park) Regulations 2007*.

(a) Information relating to traditional hunting activities in the park carried out in accordance with section 68D of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*.

An Aboriginal resource-use zone has been incorporated into the management plan for the Park, which was developed in consultation with the Board.

Aboriginal resource-use practices include the collection of plants, animals and minerals for food, craft and ceremonial activities. The continuation of these resource-use practices and methodologies is important to maintain Aboriginal culture and to share Aboriginal knowledge.

Aboriginal resource-use practices will be permitted in the Conservation Zone and Dalhousie Mound Springs Zone; they will not be permitted in the Public Access Zone given the presence of visitors in this area.

(b) Information relating to the effect of traditional hunting activities in the park carried out in accordance with section 68D of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* on native plants and protected animals, or the eggs of protected animals (and in particular those species that are scheduled as rare, endangered or vulnerable under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*).

A log book station has been placed at Dalhousie, Oodnadatta and Finke to record the traditional hunting activities that have occurred in the Park. The Board will further discuss and develop additional procedures and consult with community members over the next twelve months.

(c) Information relating to the operations and work programs undertaken by or on behalf of the Board.

The Board has implemented a works program based on the obligations under the Co-management Agreement (CMA), ILUA, Management Plan and legislative requirements.

The works program addresses the strategic priorities that have been identified by the Board. These priorities will be progressed over the next twelve months.

DEWNR officers present a report on management activities undertaken in the park at each Board meeting. The report includes visitor management, biodiversity programs, cultural management matters, asset maintenance, projects, planning, training and development, Work Health and Safety and welfare and funding applications. Every three years, DEWNR officers submit a three year draft work program for the Board's consideration and approval.

(d) Information relating to park infrastructure.

Park infrastructure is managed through the DEWNR asset management program to ensure appropriate maintenance of infrastructure/assets on park. The Board is provided with an overview at each meeting as part of the DEWNR management report.

(e) Any other information required by the Minister.

No additional information was required by the Minister during this reporting period.

ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION STATEMENT

The Board would like to acknowledge that the land on which it has jurisdiction are the traditional lands for the Lower Southern Arrernte and Wangkangurru people.

In fulfilling its functions, the Board is cognisant of the cultural and natural heritage of traditional owners and strives to achieve positive outcomes wherever these matters are concerned.

HUMAN RESOURCE MATTERS

Members are paid sitting fees in accordance with the recommendation from the Chief Executive, Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC).

In accordance with DPC, Circular 016: *Remuneration for Government Appointed Part-time Boards and Committees*, Government employees do not receive remuneration for their services to the Board.

Staffing

The Board has no staff of its own. Ms Wendy Webb, from DEWNR's South Australian Arid Lands Region, provides executive support to the Board. The Board will continue to seek opportunities to facilitate Aboriginal employment on country through the CMA.

Disability Action Plans

The Board uses the facilities and services of DEWNR. The members of the Committee are aware of and abide by their obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* (SA). Reporting on this matter is contained in the DEWNR Annual Report 2014-15.

Whistleblowers Protection Act 1993

Reporting requirements against the *Whistleblowers Protection Act 1993* require the Board report on the number of occasions on which public interest information has been disclosed to a Responsible Officer of the agency. There were no disclosures made during the 2014-15 financial year.

Equal Opportunity Employment Programs

The Board has no staff of its own and is serviced by staff of DEWNR. Members are aware of and abide by equal opportunity policies and programs of DEWNR. Reporting on this matter may be viewed in the DEWNR Annual Report 2014-15.

Gender Reporting

The gender balance of the Board is always taken into consideration when members are appointed. Within the reporting period there were four male and three female members.

Work, Health and Safety

There have been no instances of Work Health and Safety issues arising within the reporting period. Induction is carried out for new members and appropriate precautions are taken if field trips are undertaken. As a user of DEWNR facilities and equipment, the Board is aware of and abides by DEWNR's Work, Health and Safety policies. Reporting on this matter may be viewed in the DEWNR Annual Report 2014-15.

Use of Consultants

The Board did not engage any consultants during the 2014-15 financial year.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

DEWNR administers the budget for the Witjira National Park, on behalf of the Board, and provides a financial report to members at each meeting. Expenditure has been maintained within the budget allocation.

Finance

The costs associated with the administration of the Board are met from within the existing resources of DEWNR. Members are paid sitting fees in accordance with the recommendation from the Chief Executive, DPC which states;

- Chair: \$221.00 per 4 hour session
- Members: \$177.00 per 4 hour session.

Government employees are not entitled to sitting fees.

Account Payment Performance

DEWNR provides administrative resources for processing account payments for the Board. Reporting on the Board's account payment performance is contained in the DEWNR Annual Report 2014-15.

Contractual Arrangements

The Board did not enter into any contractual arrangements exceeding \$4 million in value during the reporting period.

OTHER REPORTING ITEMS**Energy Efficiency Action Plan Reports**

The Board uses the facilities and services of DEWNR. Reporting on this matter is contained in the DEWNR Annual Report 2014-15.

Overseas Travel

No member of the Board has travelled overseas on the business of the Board during the reporting period.

Fraud

There were no instances of fraud detected in the activities undertaken by the Board during the financial year. Financial services are provided to the Board by DEWNR and reporting on strategies to detect instances of fraud are reported in the DEWNR Annual Report 2014-15.

Regional Impact Assessment Statement

No Regional Impact Assessment Statements were undertaken by the Board in 2014-15.

Freedom of Information

In cooperation with DEWNR, the Board participates and abides by the arrangements outlined in the DEWNR Freedom of Information regime. Reporting on this matter is available on the DEWNR internet site. Please visit www.environment.sa.gov.au to view the FOI Statement.

Urban Design Charter

No events occurred in 2014-15 that required the Board to consider the principles of urban design contained in the South Australian Urban Design Charter.

Asbestos Management in Government Buildings

The Board does not own any non-residential buildings and therefore is not required to develop an asbestos risk reduction program.

Greening of Government Operations (GoGo) framework

The GoGo Framework encourages and supports environmentally sustainable and eco-efficient practice in the operations of Government.

In accordance with the State Greenhouse Strategy, the Witjira National Park power supply is generated from a Hybrid Power System.

The Board uses the facilities and services of DEWNR. Further reporting on this matter is contained in the DEWNR Annual Report 2014-15.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Board appreciates the support and encouragement it received over the past year from the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation Hon Ian Hunter MLC.

The Board records its appreciation for the assistance provided by senior DEWNR staff, including Sandy Pitcher Chief Executive, John Schutz Group Executive Director, Partnerships and Stewardship, Stuart Paul Regional Manager South Australian Arid Lands Region, Tony Magor Manager, Public Lands and Co-management, Frank Lyman Ranger-in-Charge, Central Outback, Dean Ah Chee, Cultural Ranger and Wendy Webb Executive Officer, Co-management.

The Board acknowledges key stakeholders including Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation (IAC) Board members, Mrs Marilyn Ah Chee and Mr Arthur Ah Chee (IAC Co-Chairperson's), Mrs Valerie Naylor Fuschtei (IAC nominated representative) DEWNR South Australian Arid Lands Region staff of DEWNR and the Native Title holders.

The Board is working collaboratively and advancing partnership arrangements between DEWNR and IAC to achieve shared objectives for future conservation management in Witjira National Park.

