

Palya!

Strong people, healthy Country and water

Anangu kunpu, Ngura kunpu munu kapi



Coastal cleanup

Plastics and predators targeted on the Yalata coast

Consultation for Country

Listening and learning on the path to a new plan



From the General Manager



As 2025 draws to an end, we look to the new year with optimism as we prepare to unveil the new regional landscape plan

that will guide our work for the next five years.

Much of this year has been focused on consulting with the communities of our region. With the support and participation of board members, we have met with land management and ranger teams to better understand their priorities for healthy Country.

We're grateful for the time communities have given to these conversations, and we value the richness of the information they have shared.

I am also grateful for the focused attention that AW's staff have given to hear and listen, and to incorporate what we heard into a meaningful plan.

I look forward to sharing the draft plan with you in the new year.

I'd like to thank the board for their ongoing leadership, strategic direction

and creative thinking as we look to redefine our role to deliver positive outcomes for our region.

A new service delivery model known as *Tjungungku Palyalpai* has been endorsed by the board – expect to hear more about this in 2026 as we refine and establish this new approach that embraces the value of working together.

An early example of this approach can be seen in a new disaster resilience program funded by the Australian Government's Disaster Ready Fund (see story p5).

Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge the incredible team at AW who demonstrate their dedication every day.

It's a privilege to work with people who truly care about their work and do all they can to make their corner of the world a better place.

I wish everyone a happy and safe festive season and look forward to a bright and productive 2026.

Kim Krebs
General Manager

See you on our socials



We keep you up to date with news from the AW region on our Facebook, LinkedIn, Bluesky and Instagram. Click or scan the QR code to see our Facebook page.

Learn more about AW



For more information on AW's programs and projects, head to our website. Click or scan the QR code for information about our board and region.

Remote weather stations



Solar-powered weather stations provide vital weather information to remote communities across the region. Click or scan the QR code for updates.

Where we are and what we do

The Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape region covers the northwest quarter of South Australia.

In Pitjantjatjara, *alinytjara* means north and *wilurara* means west.

The region spans over a quarter of a million square kilometres, and has a population of approximately 3000 people, many of whom identify with the Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra, Kokatha, Mirning or Wirangu peoples.

As the only all-Aboriginal board in Australia responsible for managing a natural resource management region, the AW Landscape Board's aim is the protection of the land for the mutual benefit of the Country and its people.



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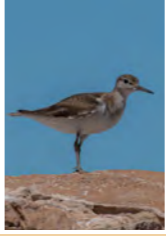
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Welcome and farewell



From the Chair

Welcome to the Summer 2025 issue of Palya.

This year has been a busy one for the board, as we look back over the past five years and ahead to the next five, which will be guided by our new regional landscape plan.

Through our reviews and the consultation process, the board has used insights into the evolving priorities of communities to consider how we can best serve our region in the future.

A key focus of the board is to diversify how we deliver natural resource management outcomes, imagining new ways of effecting positive impact, while ensuring our statutory obligations are met. An exciting example of this is *Tjungungku Palyalpai* (the way we all work together), an innovative service delivery model that elevates the principles of collaboration and acknowledges the ever-growing capacity of ranger teams and land managers.

This new concept will deliver a greater ability for the board to respond to emerging landscape solutions and initiatives in assisting our landholding authorities to better understand their potential and continue to build capacity, and I look forward to rolling it out in the new year.

An example of this new approach can be seen in the \$2.45M disaster resilience grant (see story p5). This grant will enable our organisation to support communities in designing their own roadmap to resilience in response to preparing for an unfortunately growing number of natural disasters that impact their livelihoods and cultural practices.

Disaster resilience is an area the board has identified as an emerging priority and a way of future-proofing the way we look after Country with our partners, facilitating planning and engaging on the environmental aspects while connecting communities with other opportunities and cementing AW's position as a trusted helper.

I wish you all a safe and happy festive season and look forward to building on our momentum in 2026.

Brenz Saunders
Presiding Member





Les Mundy demonstrates a Felixer for the board

Meeting 21: June 2025

The Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board gathered at Ceduna’s new Mintbush Gallery for Meeting 21.

Damon Ezis, AW’s Manager, Strategy and Sustainable Landscapes, presented the draft Business Plan 2025-26, a key document that informs the Minister on the board’s budget, proposed expenditure for regional projects and priorities, and an overview of staffing arrangements for the year ahead. After discussing elements of the plan, including the nganamara (malleefowl) and sustainable agriculture projects, and funding for the upcoming Landscape Plan 2026-31, the board endorsed the document for submission to the Minister.

General Manager Kim Krebs discussed a proposed new service delivery model that reflects the way the board works with communities in the region. Named *Tjungungku Palyalpai*, which translates as “the way we all work together”, the proposed model reflects the growing capacity and evolving needs of the region’s ranger teams.

The *Tjungungku Palyalpai* proposal would focus on knowledge and information management, and align with Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) principles and the board’s Landscape Plan. A key element of the proposal



Taylah Pitfield demonstrates trail camera images to Wanda Miller (left) and Debbie Hansen

would be delivery of bespoke capacity building to assist ranger teams with government reporting requirements, accountability and transparency. The proposal was approved by the board.

Damon also presented on the development of a new Landscape Plan for 2026-31, and the board discussed the importance of education programs, acknowledgement of Elders, and the need to be prepared for climate change and natural disasters.

Other board discussions centred on recruitment of new board members, mining tenements in the region, disaster resilience and Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property principles.

Following the meeting, the board travelled from Ceduna to Googs Track, where staff gave a demonstration of a Felixer and camera grid installed as part of the nganamara project, and checked out a malleefowl mound.

Meeting 22: September 2025

Acting on the board’s stated desire to meet on Country within the Alinytjara Wilurara region, Meeting 22 was held at Maralinga Village in September.

Built in the 1950s to support the British Government’s nuclear weapons testing program, the village once housed 2000 people and had its own power station, swimming pool, cinema and international airport.

Ahead of the meeting, AW staff and board members Debbie Hansen, Duane Edwards and Jeremy Lebois met with Oak Valley Rangers to consult on the forthcoming Landscape Plan 2026-31.

While the consultation took place, the remaining members and staff took the opportunity to join a guided tour of the nuclear test site. The tour was a sombre reminder of the displacement and loss experienced by Anangu, with the damage to Country clearly evident decades after testing ceased in the 1960s. Less visible was the human cost – in spite of strict security aimed at keeping Russian spies away, many Anangu were still present on the land and it is estimated that around 600 people were unaccounted for following the tests.

A powerful and moving experience, the tour highlighted the importance of working together to protect the future health of both Country and culture.

At the board meeting the following day, GM Kim Krebs presented a draft business plan for *Tjungungku Palyalpai*, the proposed service delivery model endorsed at Meeting 21. The discussion included how the model can contribute to achieving Closing the Gap targets by focusing on two-way knowledge and skills, the importance of appropriately compensating Elders for their cultural knowledge, and developing an Anangu standard for managing buffel grass.

Kim also presented a draft green economic plan aimed at diversifying the board’s funding streams to include corporate investment aligned with the World Health Organisation’s Sustainable Development Goals. The board heard that Kim has met with banks and corporate investment firms to inform future steps, and the plan was endorsed by the board.

The board had intended to discuss two projects on the Nullarbor, one proposing National Heritage listing for the region’s



Peter Burgoyne and Wanda Miller on the tour



Warning sign at a cleanup site

limestone karst cave system, and the other a research proposal from the University of Adelaide assessing the unique natural values of the caves.

By chance, Steven Milner from the Australian Speleological Federation was attending the Maralinga tour. Steven has extensive knowledge of both proposals and agreed to give a presentation to the board. The presentation was informative and insightful, providing the board with important context on the proposals.

The board decided to award this year’s Grassroots Grant to a project called Keeping Women’s Culture Strong: Kalka - Pipalyatjara IPA women’s on-country tjukurpa work. They agreed with the suggestion that the project include invitations to women from Yalata, Oak Valley and Tjuntjuntjara.

Other board discussions included updates on programs operating with Australian Government funding, and options for



Tapaya at Maralinga Airfield

improving buffel grass control on road and rail vectors.

The board, which currently has two vacancies, also endorsed a new flyer and video promoting board membership. The video features board members talking about the importance of their work, and the need for Anangu voices to keep Country strong.

[Click or scan the QR code to watch the board’s video.](#)

Board business



Kicking off consultation

AW’s Chair and General Manager held discussions with landholding authorities ahead of consultations for a new five-year regional landscape plan.

Chair Brenz Saunders travelled to the APY Lands with GM Kim Krebs and board member Tapaya Edwards in July to meet with APY Executive, and to visit land managers in the region to learn about their conservation and caring for Country aspirations, helping to ensure that our plan aligns with community priorities.

Brenz was joined by Acting GM Damon Ezis for a meeting with Antakirinja Matu-Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal Corporation (AMYAC), and discussions were also held with the executives of Yalata and Far West Coast to ensure that the planned consultations included the right people and groups for each LHA.

A plan for Country

AW board members and staff have been busy developing a new landscape plan for the region to guide our work for the next five years, from 2026-31.

The current Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Plan 2021-26 comes to an

end in June 2026. To ensure the new plan aligns with the aspirations and needs of Anangu and Country, AW is consulting with landholding authorities, Anangu ranger teams and other stakeholders in the region.

The consultations are intended to help AW understand the priorities of the different communities in the region, identify opportunities to work together, and ensure that the board continues to work in harmony with Anangu communities.

Much has changed in the last five years. Ranger teams have grown in size and capacity, and the board is keen to ensure the region is well placed to benefit from changes in the NRM sector, such as emerging carbon and nature repair markets.

Information gathered in the consultations will inform the drafting of the new plan, which will then go back to stakeholders for review before the plan is finalised. While there will be changes in the detail, one aspect of the plan is sure to endure – the board’s vision of a healthy and valued region, managed responsibly now, for the future benefit of people and Country.



NRM networking

The NRM Regions Australia National Knowledge Conference was held in Cairns in September, bringing more than 400 delegates together from around Australia.

AW was represented by Chair Brenz Saunders, General Manager Kim Krebs and Adam Wood, Coordinator, Data & Information Management. Brenz spoke on a panel discussing Indigenous leadership and Kim delivered a presentation on the need for a national strategy on buffel grass.



The King and Tapaya

King Charles met with Anangu leaders in London in October to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Uluru-Kata Tjuta being returned to Anangu ownership.

Among the Anangu delegation was AW board member Tapaya Edwards, in his role as chair of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park’s board of management.

“Our vision for the national park is that it is a place where Tjukurpa – Anangu

law and culture – can be kept strong for future generations,” Tapaya said.

“There is still much work to be done and, over the next 40 years, we look forward to seeing our young people carry this flame forward as they learn Anangu traditional knowledge and western knowledge to care for Country and keep Tjukurpa strong.”

We’re not sure what Tapaya said to the King, but they both enjoyed a good laugh.



Funding for forum and water

AW has received grants for two new projects under the South Australian Government’s Landscape Priorities Fund.

The board will host a forum for Indigenous rangers from across South Australia in 2026.

The South Australian Aboriginal Ranger Land and Sea Conference will bring ranger teams together to share stories, successes and challenges, and develop

new ideas to ensure healthy Country in the future.

The ‘water in the desert’ project will install rainwater harvesting and storage in key locations to assist in buffel grass control.

Please contact arnsa@enarah.com.au for more information about the Aboriginal Ranger Land and Sea Conference, which will be held in Hahndorf, March 24-26.

Dollars for disaster resilience

Disaster-ready funding from the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has been granted to the board to lead disaster resilience planning across the region. Funding will be to 2028/29.

The board’s efforts to secure this funding came from a few recent events that pointed to a region-wide need. Through the AW Emergency Response and Preparedness Plan (funded by the Australian Government), the state of disaster planning and resilience was seen as very limited. In September 2024, the Chair and GM were at a presentation by NEMA at a National Indigenous Disaster Resilience gathering. The presentation featured a map showing disaster risk for Indigenous communities around Australia and the AW region was blank – the agency had relied on local government data to create the map, leaving a gap in their data.

Then, earlier in 2025, discussions with some land management teams suggested that AW was well placed to lead disaster resilience planning in the region. AW then partnered with Indigenous Energy Australia to develop a project concept plan that could gauge the region’s social, infrastructure and environmental resilience to disasters and develop a pilot program to ensure business continuity planning for landholding authorities in the face of potential disasters such as flash floods, heatwaves and fire.

This work will start by mid-2026 and will become a useful tool for the landholding authorities of the region, to be prepared for the inevitable occurrence of natural disasters. The board also see this work as an example of how its new service delivery model, *Tjungunku Payalpai*, is able to provide healthy Country and healthy community outcomes.



AW staff roundup



NAIDOC Family Day

AW joined forces with Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation to celebrate NAIDOC Week at the annual Family Day in Ceduna in July. There were activities for all ages, including painting pots and planting everlasting daisies, and making Junior Ranger and Junior Ecologist badges.



Kim in Canberra

AW General Manager Kim Krebs joined with the seven SA general managers and 45 other state CEOs from NRM organisations around Australia in Canberra in July. The annual forum, hosted by NRM Regions Australia, was an opportunity to share some of the diverse successes and challenges from regions across the country. It also saw the start of being included in designing the next round of Australian Government investment into the environment.

GMs and chairs gather

Damon Ezis represented AW at the Landscape SA GMs and Chairs Forum in August. Key themes of the forum included strategic planning and governance, regional priorities and upcoming opportunities, with many discussions around collaborations, initiatives and insights from across the sector. A key focus was acknowledging the commitment, resilience, and wellbeing of staff.



Back to school for Brett

AW Ecologist Brett Backhouse dropped in to Fregon Anangu School while he was doing fieldwork in the APY Lands. He caught up with Fregon Junior Rangers to thank them for making some new dingo-safe fox control devices for an upcoming project (more on this story to come).



Whale of a day

AW's Paul Gregory and Taylah Pitfield travelled to the Head of Bight Whale Watching Centre in September for a Whale of a Day. This annual event is run by Marine Parks Coordinator Luke Skinner, and was attended by Yalata and Far West Coast ranger teams, Yalata Anangu School, Tullawon Health Service and National Parks and Wildlife SA.



Pest plant parley

The Pest and Weed Management Society of South Australia's biennial conference in September was a great opportunity for new recruit Jess Burdon to connect with other people and learn more about other groups working in the weed space. Jess was pleased to see the level of interest in buffel grass, although she was surprised how many people in this space weren't aware of the extent of the issue.



Safety matters

AW's Health and Safety Representatives, Dalin Song and Paula Modra, attended a three-day training session in Adelaide in November.

Following on from their initial training in 2024, the course covered recent and upcoming changes to the WHS Act and regulations.

They also learned to apply a systemic approach to managing and controlling multiple WHS risks to better represent the staff and minimise risks to the board.



Working with our EP neighbours

AW's Planning and Reporting Coordinator Leah Kyriacou travelled to Port Lincoln and Ceduna in October for Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board's healthy country conferences. Leah delivered a joint presentation with Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation about planning and strategic alignment at the events, which were conducted to enable Aboriginal community members across Eyre Peninsula to have input into EPLB's new landscape plan.



Procurement conference

Dalin Song attended the Procurement Live conference in November. The event covered the increasing challenge of cyber security and what can be done to mitigate the risk when government procures goods and services.

South Australian Government agencies came together to discuss the challenges faced when engaging with businesses supporting vulnerable groups, including Aboriginal communities.



Off the road again

AW staff spend a lot of time at the wheel travelling in our large and remote region, so it's important that they undergo regular training to ensure their off-roading skills are on track. Damon Ezis, Jess Burdon, Taylah Pitfield, Noel Probert and Ashley Walker were put through their paces in October, preparing them for safe travels in the field.



Training began with theory tests and basics such as performing vehicle inspections before heading out for some practical exercises including water crossings and sand recovery.



Spreading the word on weeds

Jess Burdon

I travelled to the NT in September to support the Invasive Species Council (ISC), Indigenous Desert Alliance (IDA), and Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) in working with the ABC to produce a story for Landline focused on buffel grass. After collecting Traditional Owners for Watarrka, Tim McNamara and Norman Impu, we travelled out to meet the other groups. Di Bowman, a park ranger at Watarrka National Park, showed us an area that had recently been burned for buffel control and pointed out the species returning as a result of their work.

We then had a group discussion at the rangers' station where a lot of buffel control had taken place, it was a pristine environment and an amazing sunset. The next day there was some filming of John Liddle, another Traditional Owner from Watarrka, reading the Umuwa Statement on buffel, before heading back to Alice Springs. There was some more filming with Richard Swaine from ISC speaking about his experience as an Indigenous man who had only heard stories about buffel's impact on central Australia, as he lives on the east coast.

It was great to be involved in the process and assist in bringing knowledge and bringing out passion from individuals regarding buffel's impact. The Landline story is expected out in February 2026, with other news articles to be presented earlier in advance of the Weeds of National Significance decision which is due by the end of the year.



Coastal cleanup

Coming together to remove beach debris



Many hands make light work – Yalata Anangu School students pitch in to clean up

The Yalata coast is constantly pounded by high-energy waves from the Southern Ocean, littering the beaches with an astonishing variety of waste from fishing boats and freighters, and everyday rubbish carried for long distances on ocean currents.

AW's Paul Gregory and Taylah Pitfield joined Yalata Rangers and students from the Yalata Anangu School in November for a marine debris survey, removing the waste, which can pose a danger to wildlife as well as creating an unsightly mess on the pristine coastline.

On the first day, Paul and Tayla worked with rangers Andrew, Teddy and Neville to cover a one-kilometre transect, collecting 599 individual items weighing in at 43.3kg.

With the survey transect completed, the team continued to do a general cleanup, collecting another 70.1kg of debris.

Yalata Anangu School joined in on the second day, scouring a second one-kilometre transect and removing a further 449 items from the sand, weighing 46.3kg.

Debris from the formal survey transects was taken back to Ceduna for sorting and analysis.

Data from the survey was reported back to Yalata IPA and added to the Australian Marine Debris Initiative database.

Altogether the combined efforts of AW and Yalata community removed 159.7kg of marine debris over the two days, a terrific team effort.



Paul weighs the day's haul

Testing traps



Setting up a trap

Coinciding with the beach cleanup efforts, Paul and Taylah took the opportunity to conduct the first live tests of the Celium feral predator trap network on the Yalata coast.

AW staff and Yalata Rangers had previously installed communications masts and a network of 15 traps at selected locations in the dunes along the coast, to protect vulnerable bird species such as hooded plovers and other beach-nesting species from foxes and cats.

Previously, the traps had been baited, but wired open, to allow the animals to get used to the new object in their territory and prevent them from becoming 'trap-shy'. Each trap is monitored by a motion-sensing camera and these had captured both cats and foxes showing interest in the traps.

This time the traps were baited with chicken wings and tuna oil, and set to capture any predator attracted by the baits. Sand in front of the traps was swept so any animal activity would leave clear tracks, and any vegetation that could catch the wind and set off cameras was trimmed.

The two eight-metre communications masts were inspected to check for any

damage, following winds of 100kmh recorded on the coast in the week before the test trip.

Both masts were intact and upright, showing no signs of damage.

One challenge Paul and Taylah encountered in managing the traps was that the online dashboard that monitors traps requires 4G connectivity, which can only be accessed at two known high points in the dunes.

The back and forth driving required is significant, and the team is examining options for boosting signal strength to minimise this.

No traps were triggered during this test, with only one trap showing signs of cat activity, with fresh footprints in the sand.

At the conclusion of the test, Paul and Taylah removed the baits and closed the traps before heading back to Ceduna.

Future trips may need to be longer to provide a greater opportunity for animals to notice the baits and enter the traps.

Although no feral predators were caught, the test was informative, with connectivity troubleshooting a valuable learning experience with the new technology.



Traps are connected through 4G

[Click or scan the QR code to see trailcam video of foxes and cats checking out the traps.](#)

Seaside survey



Taylah setting out on the survey

Paul Gregory and Taylah Pitfield conducted AW's annual shorebird survey along the Yalata coast in November.

Hooded plovers have been declining in the area across recent surveys, with only two birds spotted in the 2024 survey and none at all this year. It's the first time no hoodies have been seen since 2008. Hooded plovers are especially vulnerable to threats including feral predators and human activity because they lay their eggs directly on the beach – their nest is a simple scrape in the sand.

The survey covered the same six transects as previous surveys, varying from 5km to 8km in length. Paul and Taylah travelled the beach on an all-terrain vehicle, allowing them to complete all transects in a single day.

Shorebird numbers were down across the board, with normally common species such as sooty and pied oystercatchers appearing in low numbers. Red-capped plover numbers were lower than usual, but there were still a good number of breeding pairs with chicks.

One section of beach that is known as a hotspot for hoodies was busy, with the mulloway season underway and lots of quadbike activity.

A large bull sea lion was discovered hauled out on the beach, and fishers along the

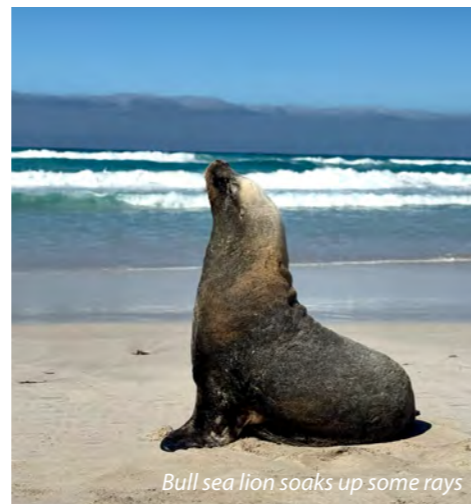


Red-capped plover chick

beach reported that he'd been hanging around the area for at least a week.

Threat assessments conducted during the survey continued to reveal the presence of foxes and dogs on the beach, however, the number of footprints observed was significantly lower compared to the previous count in November 2024.

One theory suggests that the recent extensive rainfall has caused many predatory animals to spread out into the wider region, rather than remaining near campsites and fishing beaches in search of food, as they did during the 18-month dry spell leading up to July 2025.



Bull sea lion soaks up some rays

Dance of dedication



By Emily Hicks and Fione Love

Students from Yalata Anangu School worked hard and dealt with disappointment to deliver a dance performance with deep connections to history this year.

The school had entered the Ernabella Dance Competition, a culturally significant event that brings together students from schools across Anangu lands. This annual competition fosters community pride, intergenerational knowledge-sharing, and cultural expression through dance.

The students worked with a professional choreographer who guided students through the process of developing and performing a choreographed piece for the competition. Working in close collaboration with local Elders and Aboriginal educators, the choreographer helped students explore and interpret a theme grounded in Anangu history, culture, and tradition. The project was supported by a grant from the Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board, which helped fund the choreographer's work.

This year's dance centred on the story of Maralinga, a narrative identified by Anangu educators as a powerful and unifying theme. It draws on the personal journey of Elder Rita Bryant, who recounts the community's walk from their



homeland to Yalata following the impacts of nuclear testing. This story formed the foundation for a dance that not only honours the resilience of past generations but also strengthens cultural identity and storytelling among youth.

The students practiced their dance with great dedication all term and showed incredible bravery and pride when a last-minute logistical hitch prevented them from making the two-day journey to the APY Lands. Although they were unable to attend the Ernabella Dance event, the students made the most of every opportunity to share their hard work, performing their dance multiple times for family, community, at Koonibba Aboriginal School and the Ceduna foreshore.



Their passion, excitement, and commitment to learning truly shone through in every performance.

Biosecurity on the line

Buffel surveillance on the transcontinental railway



Paul Gregory

The transcontinental railway that runs through the AW region is a major vector for buffel grass. The Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board has been carrying out buffel management in the rail corridor since 2008. Management operations have been conducted in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation, and previously with the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC).

AW conducts regular inspections of the rail corridor to monitor the growth and spread of buffel infestations spread by trains and maintenance vehicles. This September, I traversed almost 500km of the rail line to monitor known buffel grass locations and evaluate any changes since the previous inspection in 2024.

The inspection was triggered by two key factors. Firstly, substantial winter rainfall along certain sections of the rail corridor, combined with warmer than usual weather conditions from late winter into early spring, provided ideal growing conditions for buffel grass. Established plants, which may have been dormant during the colder months, will particularly

thrive in these conditions due to their robust root systems, encouraging new growth.

Secondly, recent Telstra works to upgrade fibre optic cable within the rail corridor involved soil disturbance, which can create favourable conditions for buffel spread and growth. The movement of machinery, vehicles, and equipment during the upgrade may have facilitated the spread of buffel seeds, increasing the risk of further infestation.

Except for the drier sections of the rail corridor, the majority of known buffel grass locations comprised plants with seed, with many already shedding their seed. Plants varied in size from mostly small to medium sized plants, to extra-large plants growing in the ballast of the railway line.

The section of rail corridor from Cook to Watson was the only area where newly germinating plants were found, consistent with the higher rainfall record at Cook.

AW will continue to monitor the rail corridor and ensure that infestations are appropriately treated.



Workshop unites buffel battlers



Paula Modra

The annual Buffel Grass On-Ground Operations Workshop, hosted by the Far West Coast Rangers in September, brought together a diverse group of participants including Arabana Rangers, Dieri Rangers, Oak Valley Ranger Coordinators, and representatives from the Indigenous Desert Alliance, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board.

The day was filled with lively conversations and valuable knowledge sharing, reinforcing the collaborative approach needed to tackle buffel grass across South Australia's landscapes.

A highlight of the workshop was the Oak Valley Rangers' case study on buffel

control. The presentation sparked robust group discussion around practical strategies and lessons learned from on-ground operations. AW staff also led an engaging session on the importance of surveillance, exploring different methods and techniques for early detection and ongoing monitoring. Participants shared tips on identifying buffel grass at various growth stages, integrating survey work into busy schedules, and using tools such as Fulcrum apps and weather stations to improve data collection and communication.

The workshop theme encouraged open dialogue, starting with introductions and reflections on current buffel work across regions.



Sessions covered mapping current infestations, treatment options including burning, chemical application, and manual removal, as well as equipment sharing and technology solutions like QuikSpray units and backpack sprayers.

The week-long exchange between the Arabana and Dieri Rangers and the Far West Coast Rangers further strengthened collaboration, deepened relationships, and promoted practical knowledge-sharing across teams.

The energy and commitment shown by all attendees underscored the importance of working together to manage buffel grass effectively and protect our unique landscapes.

Weed control – hold the onions

Buffel grass is the main priority when it comes to weed control in the AW region, but it isn't the only threat.

Onion weed is encroaching on the dunes along the Yalata coast, posing a threat to native vegetation.

In September, AW engaged weed spraying contractors to treat onion weed, which is largely spread by vehicles.

The contractors found that onion weed was actively spreading from tracks to

dunes and applied a standard herbicide mix to infestations, as well as beginning a trial using pine oil.

Onion weed in the trial area was treated with the same herbicide blend, with the addition of pine oil.

Pine oil has been effective in buffel grass control, as it coats the seeds and prevents germination.

Follow-up visits will measure the effectiveness of the pine oil treatment on onion weed.



Warru wonderland



Bagging a captured warru

Brett Backhouse

In 2022, warru (black-footed rock-wallabies) were reintroduced to Kulitjara in the Everard Ranges, where they had previously become locally extinct. The animals were sourced from either the fenced *Pintji* population or wild groups in the northern Musgrave Ranges.

Since the initial release of 40 animals, APY Land Management (APYLM) has translocated more warru to the site. These efforts strengthen the population, improving its chances of survival and long-term re-establishment.

Kulitjara sits on the western end of the Everard “Mt Illbillie” Range and is a granite boulder warru wonderland, offering extensive habitat across many kilometres. Neighbouring hills and mountains with suitable habitat lie within a stone’s throw, continuing south and west for almost 50km. This makes the area ideal for the species and should allow a core population to spread into surrounding landscapes.

Groundwork at Kulitjara has focused on reducing threats from feral animals and invasive weeds. Control measures such as



A warru on the rocks at Kulitjara

ground-based shooting have been carried out around the release site, while buffel grass reduction has targeted key areas close to warru habitat. This has been led by the Antara Sandy Bore IPA Rangers, who also undertook the warru survey in 2025.

Until recently, the population had not been formally checked, aside from occasional trail camera monitoring at *kapi* (waterholes) and *mai* (food stations). To gain a clearer picture, APYLM conducted a trapping survey in late September 2025. The survey was supported by Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board and Zoos SA, with three distinct trap lines established and monitored over the course of a week.



Caves like this make for ideal warru habitat

Choosing where to trap was a challenge due to the vast size of the sprawling granite outcrop. Ultimately, traps were set in areas where warru had been translocated most recently – a decision that proved successful.

By the end of the survey, 20 animals were trapped, including three individuals never previously recorded. These results are encouraging.

While the number may seem modest, the extensive habitat suggests that many more warru are likely living across the landscape, offering hope for the species’ continued recovery in the Everard Ranges.

Reptiles star in Kalka Pip survey



Brett with a desert skink

Brett Backhouse

Monitoring wildlife is an essential way to check the health of species across Australia. Over the past 230+ years, introduced animals such as red foxes and feral cats have taken a heavy toll on small vertebrates – mammals, reptiles, and birds – particularly those weighing under 100 grams.

Alongside these predators, invasive weeds also pose a serious threat. In the Alinytjara Wilurara region, buffel grass is one of the most destructive introduced weeds. It rapidly transforms landscapes, colonises disturbed areas, and spreads after fire, making it one of the worst weeds in central arid Australia.

In 2018, Dr Ellen Ryan-Colton and the APY Land Management team surveyed an area within the Kalka Pipalyatjara Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). Using pitfall traps and small Elliott traps, they assessed the impacts of buffel grass on small vertebrates. The site had previously been surveyed in the 1990s by the Department of Environment and Heritage, allowing comparisons across decades to see how buffel grass invasion may have changed local wildlife.

In 2025, AW assisted APY in repeating the surveys to build on this knowledge. The work not only helped track the impacts of

buffel grass over the past seven years but also gave rangers from Kalka Pipalyatjara the chance to work on culturally significant country and reconnect with the small vertebrates found there.

The specific survey site is a diverse and fascinating landscape. In the north, large granite hills rise above sand and silt plains covered in native grasses and shrubs. To the south, dark red sand dune plains are dotted with dense spinifex grass, shrubs, and the impressive desert kurrajong trees standing tall on the horizon.

Unfortunately, some granite and sand plain shrublands have been heavily impacted by buffel grass, with pitfall sites now dominated by this invasive species. The desert kurrajong also show signs of stress from feral camels, with browse lines visible on the lower branches and smaller trees suffering significant damage from grazing.

The 2025 survey took place in hot conditions, with daytime temperatures in the high 30s and nights staying in the mid-to-high 20s. While challenging for the team, these warm conditions were ideal for reptiles, which are more active in such weather. Over 100 individuals were captured, measured, marked with a texta, and released at their capture sites.



The team processing the day's catch

In total, 22 reptile species were recorded, along with just two mammal species.

Compared to 2018, reptiles were more abundant but mammals were fewer, partly because Elliott traps were not used in 2025 due to the heat.

Overall, the survey was a success, though buffel grass in the study area appears to be worsening. This increase was also reflected in the capture rate, with buffel-infested sites having lower diversity and abundance, especially when compared to buffel-free sites such as the intact native spinifex grasses, which stood out as the most diverse and abundant. These results are similar to 2018 and highlight the importance of protecting spinifex habitats and keeping buffel grass out to safeguard small vertebrate communities.

Nganamara at Walalkara

Searching for malleefowl in the APY Lands



Brett with the Walalkara Rangers and community members on the search for nganamara

Brett Backhouse

Nganamara have long been an important species for Anangu in the Walalkara Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). However, the birds were poorly understood by western science in much of the APY Lands until surveys in the 1990s conducted by Dr Joe Benshemesh, a leading figure in malleefowl research and conservation across Australia.

These surveys formed a basis of a scientific understanding of the species in the most northern reaches of its range, its habitat and life history, and obtained information of the importance of the species to Anangu. The surveys continued into the 2000s, however much of the original Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the species has since been lost, with Traditional Owners passing on and then subsequent surveys being undertaken in a sporadic and disjointed manner. Later surveys tended to focus on long-known but disused mounds, however, they did keep the connection to Country and the species alive.

In September 2025, the first of many systematic searches for nganamara in old and new areas began, in partnership with the Walalkara Rangers and members of the community. These focused on attempting to locate any old mounds, assess habitat, and simply look for signs, in the form of footprints, of the species. The surveys and searching occurred in areas which have long-unused mounds, which are likely to still be the most appropriate areas for searching for the species due to the habitat being once suitable.

This particular survey focused on two distinct areas, on the track running to the north through the Walalkara homelands, and then the track running south past the Ililya Rock hole. These areas were chosen due to old mounds that have been historically visited, and guided by the desires of the Walalkara IPA Rangers for the trip. Both areas were quite overgrown, and it was difficult to locate the tracks used in the past. However,

persistence prevailed, and the search parties managed to enter habitat which is conducive to nganamara.

These foot searches revealed some suitable habitat and facilitated numerous discussions about nganamara in the Walalkara IPA.

Although no signs of nganamara were encountered on this survey, one major beneficial outcome was the high level of interest and participation in the surveys from Anangu. We had expected 10 people to come out and ended up with a busy camp of 26 people.

This level of interest builds momentum and will ensure the project continues into the future.

Assessing the buffel threat

As part of the malleefowl project, we conducted surveys in the Walalkara IPA with the Walalkara Rangers and community members to assess the distribution of buffel grass and its



potential threat to local nganamara populations. The surveys focused on two access roads leading to known malleefowl habitats.

Buffel grass was observed along the main road connecting Fregon to the Walalkara homelands, primarily confined to the roadside margins within the IPA boundary. It was present along the northern track leading to the homeland and in the immediate vicinity of the homeland itself, but did not extend westward beyond this point.

Further observations revealed buffel grass along the route following Officer Creek toward Ililya. However, it was notably absent from the western track leading to Mount Ililya and the designated

malleefowl habitat areas.

At present, the majority of plants within the area are in a dormant state, with only a small number showing limited green growth. A qualified contractor will be engaged to undertake buffel grass control once conditions are suitable for effective herbicide application.

These findings are encouraging, as they suggest that buffel grass infestation remains limited outside of key ecological zones.

This presents an opportunity to implement targeted management strategies aimed at preventing further encroachment into critical malleefowl habitats and preserving the ecological integrity of the Walalkara IPA.



Nganamara habitat, Walalkara IPA

Photos and Felixers



Brett sets up a trail camera

AW's Ecologist Brett Backhouse and Senior Project Officer Paul Gregory went to Immarna in October to check on the Felixers and the associated trail camera grids. These automated devices can detect and identify animals passing in front of them and target feral predators to remove them from the environment.

These checks are conducted every six months, ensuring that batteries and image storage cards are fresh and functioning, and reloading the Felixers.

Brett and Paul began the trip by checking on known nganamara mounds. There are only three known mounds near Immarna, as much of the suitable habitat was burned in 2012 and has not yet grown enough to support malleefowl.

Although none of the mounds was active, fresh footprints were seen near one of the camera grids, showing the birds are still present.

A further three mounds were inspected at Mungala, and none of these showed signs of activity.

One set of cameras is aligned with sandhill dunnart monitoring sites established in 2024, with cameras aimed towards the ground to capture sandhill dunnarts and other small animals. Another set of cameras face horizontally to capture a broader range of wildlife. In addition to changing batteries and cards, another important job is making sure that no branches are in the camera's path, as they can trigger the cameras when they move in the wind.

Brett and Paul also set up a third Felixer near the site where multiple sandhill dunnarts have been observed in recent pitfall trapping surveys.

Maralinga Tjarutja Land Management update

Sam Doudle



Burning

Winter and spring are our burning seasons. We use fire to help manage land and keep it healthy, including protecting important areas, vegetation types, and infrastructure. We also use fire to refresh hunting grounds.

It hasn't been a good year in 2025 for hunting burns because it has been extremely dry, and there is no dry grass at all in many hunting areas. In Oak Valley, we've only had 69mm of rain up to the end of November, and spring has brought big dust storms rolling up from the northern Nullarbor Plain.

Despite these challenges, the Oak Valley Rangers have done some valuable burning this year, starting a long firebreak in the spinifex and mallee country to protect Oak Valley township from wildfires coming from the north-west.

Buffel

The buffel grass in the central MT Lands, including Oak Valley, hasn't yet woken up from its winter sleep because of the continuing dry. However, we've seen buffel action in the western, northern, and eastern MT Lands after a few spring storms.

We were so happy to see that there isn't much buffel growing in these areas now, even with the warm-season rainfall. It's an amazing feeling when you start to see that years of hard work are paying off.

Managing these areas is tricky now because we have to look really hard to find and treat every single buffel plant before it drops seed into the soil. Sometimes we feel like detectives looking for buffel grass criminals hiding in our beautiful country!



Far West Coast Rangers update

Words and pictures: The Far West Coast Ranger Team



Rangers travelling the Cook Road, Nullarbor Plain

Happily, we can report that the Far West Coast Ranger Program has met the employment expansion target we set for ourselves. We now have a team of four female and four male Rangers, a Head Ranger and two Ranger Coordinators.

With this capability, we can support a broader range of activities caring for country and developing a cultural framework for those activities. We have also commenced an intensive training schedule to develop knowledge and skills.

As part of that training we included personal development and to that end we engaged media coaches over two days in September. Our aim here was to build confidence in the team for presenting and public speaking. With the help of the coaches the team had tips on delivering effective presentations, creating their own speeches, all delivered in front of a camera.

Practical sessions included the team producing their own "on location" video, participating in mock interviews and Q&A sessions. The training proved immediately useful in several recent activities.

We attended a Ranger Gathering hosted by the Arabana Rangers at Finnis Springs in the Lake Eyre region. Here several groups from northern SA came together for workshops and outdoor activities over the course of four days.

With reciprocal spirit we hosted a visit from the Arabana and Dieri Rangers in October. Both our teams then made visits to country, discussed projects and

activities. As part of the exchange, we conducted a buffel grass workshop here in Ceduna, which was also attended by representatives from Maralinga Tjarutja, Parks and AWLB.

Cooperation and building of relationships with other ranger groups from within and outside the region has been recognised as shared experience to strengthen knowledge of country and build friendships.

A highlight for the whole ranger team is always interaction with schools and school groups. While the opportunity to present their Healthy Country work to younger school students is always fun, the excursions out on Country are where the rangers can really share the knowledge.

A tour of Maralinga Village and atomic testing sites was made with Year 12 students from Ceduna Area School in September. In early November, the rangers hosted students from the Clontarf Academy and the Youth Hub for a campout and a range of activities at Fowler's Bay CP. Meeting the young Yalata school students out at Head of the Bight for a "Whale of a Day" was special, with all being able to view many southern right whale cow and calf pairs up close in clear blue water. Close enough to smell the breath of the whales when they blew!

There are many other activities, far too many to list in detail, but having an expanded team means we are constantly busy, learning and caring for country.



Sea lion survey in the Great Australian Bight



Western pygmy possum caught during survey work in Yellabinnia CP



Suited up for chemical handling accreditation



Friends and flora in the GVD

Words and pictures: Friends of the GVD

Uwa (yes) and *palya* (good) were words some of us learnt from Auntie Colleen Tschuna in the 1980s while working in Ceduna.

The same words in many languages start conversation and understanding between people and their country. To visit another's country is also a privilege and to do so with Anangu in their Country is an honour.

The Friends of the Great Victoria Desert was formed in 1994 with the aim of providing voluntary support and assistance to the managers and custodians of this unique region of Australia. Since that time, maps have changed, names have changed and the idea of what constitutes a desert has evolved as we learn more about Australia's vegetation.

The far west of South Australia is well known to botanists for its unique vegetation communities. The abrupt transition between mallee woodland and Nullarbor shrublands is a famous bio-geographical edge, while to the north lie the many woodland types of the Mamungari sandhill country.

Our group currently has 41 families, almost half of whom have held 15 years of continuous membership. We are a diverse group eager to support the gathering of information that can assist



the community in protecting the health of the shrubs and trees that make this area special. Last year our group produced the second edition of *'Field Guide – Shrubs and Trees of the Great Victoria Desert'* for the added knowledge and enjoyment of visitors.

This year the Friends of the Great Victoria Desert had two teams undertaking survey work.

The photographic vegetation survey team photographed 60 sites, mainly along the Aboriginal Business Road from the Maralinga gates to the Western Australian border and the Voakes Hill Corner Road. Through this visual process it can be seen how dynamic and alive this country is across the seasons and years, assisting in the passive and active management towards healing the Country of damage resulting from man-made and natural disruption.

Meanwhile, the wayanu (quandong) health survey team undertook the usual inspections of four previously defined transects. Unfortunately, for the second year in a row it appears that those areas experienced poor growing conditions with only a handful of surveyed trees having fruit. It was a stark difference compared to 2023 which was one of the most productive fruit and flower surveys that our group had been involved with.

Our photos and survey data gathered each year are forwarded to the Department of Environment and Water and to the Oak Valley community to support their continued management of the land.

[To find out more about the Friends of the Great Victoria Desert, and to order a copy of their book, visit their website: fgvd.org.au](https://fgvd.org.au)

Welcome Jessica Burdon and Ashley Walker



Jess Burdon has joined the AW team as our new Program Coordinator.

Originally from Queensland, Jess was inspired to work in land management after seeing koalas displaced by land clearing on her father's farm.

With a diploma in horticulture and conservation land management, she worked at the Alice Springs Desert Park before returning to study for a science degree focusing on evolutionary biology and ecology.

She then began working with the Central Land Council, firstly around Tennant Creek, then in the Uluru region, before working as Regional Land Management Coordinator for the Tanami Desert.

Welcome to AW, Jess.



Ash Walker was raised on a farm in northern Victoria, developing a strong grounding in agriculture before operating his own laser-levelling business for 24 years. He later completed a degree in Environmental Science at Southern Cross University in Lismore and spent

many years on the NSW Mid North Coast working in forestry across ecology, project management and harvest planning.

Ash also contributed internationally through Australian Volunteers International, working in the Philippines on an irrigation and organic agriculture project. Most recently, he served for three years as a Senior Park Ranger at Punamii-Uunpuu (Mitchell Falls) in the northwest Kimberley with the WA Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

Welcome to AW, Ash.

Farewell Alex Mitchell



Project Officer Alex Mitchell began working with AW in January 2024 and is now moving home to Western Australia to take on a new role with Bush Heritage as Reserve Manager for south-west WA.

Throughout his time with AW, Alex built strong, respectful, and collaborative relationships with rangers and ranger coordinators across multiple projects,

contributing to successful on-ground outcomes and meaningful knowledge exchange.

With a keen interest in botany, Alex brought a genuine passion for native flora to his work, often taking the time to share his botanical knowledge with colleagues, Indigenous rangers and visiting school students. His enthusiasm for plant identification and ecology added great value to project discussions and he drafted plant identification resources for field use.

Alex took part in fieldwork across the region, including assisting with warru trapping and translocation in the APY Lands and sandhill dunnart surveys at Immarna and Yellabinna.

Good luck with the exciting new role, Alex.



Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board

Serving the people, Country and water of the Alinytjara Wilurara region

Brenz Saunders
Presiding Member



Jeremy Lebois
Maralinga Tjarutja



Peter Burgoyne
Far West Coast



Debbie Hansen
Maralinga Tjarutja



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