

# Palya!

Strong people, healthy Country and water  
*Anangu Kunpu, Ngura Kunpu munu Kapi*

## Protecting plovers

New tech traps for Yalata Rangers

## Dunnarts by the dozen

Tiny predators star in sandhill survey



## From the General Manager



As winter continues to bring cooler weather and hopefully even some rain to the AW region, AW staff are out working on Country

to deliver our LPF and NHT projects. It's humbling and satisfying to work alongside ranger teams and community members to make a difference on the ground.

I'd like to congratulate our landholding authorities for their successes in the latest round of Australian Government funding for IPAs and ranger groups. The capacity that is being built in the region is testament to the strength of the region's communities and this will be influential in how we work together into the future.

Our board has been deliberating over how our role in the region is shifting. Front of mind is determining what cultural intellectual property means for us and for our communities, and the role of staff in managing that safely.

With the growing capacity in our region, we are starting to reimagine how our future role can best serve Anangu. Over the next year, our consultations with landholding authorities on the

development of our new five-year Regional Landscape Plan will be pivotal in charting this course.

In closing I would like to acknowledge the contributions of two wonderful women to the Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board.

Julie O'Toole has resigned as a board member after serving for many years, beginning in 2018 with the then-AW NRM Board. Julie has been a guide for the AMYAC region, providing a strong voice for her Country and people. Her warmth, optimism and commitment will be missed by board members and staff alike. (see story p4)

Working for AW often feels like being part of a well-connected family, so when someone leaves, there's a hole in our team. Aude Loisier has been a dedicated member of AW staff for almost 15 years, beginning as a marine scientist working on projects on the Yalata coast, and more recently in Adelaide in the vital role of monitoring, evaluating and reporting on our programs. In that time Aude's commitment and consistent efforts to serve the AW region earned the respect and friendship of her colleagues and community members, and we wish her all the best as she returns to the sea in her new role (see story p21).

Kim Krebs  
General Manager

### See you on our socials



We keep you up to date with news from the AW region on our Facebook, Twitter 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.

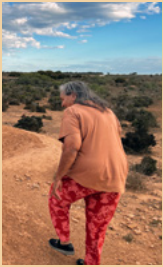
As the only all-Aboriginal board in Australia responsible for managing a natural resource management region, the AW Landscape Board's aim is the protection of the land for the mutual benefit of the Country and its people.



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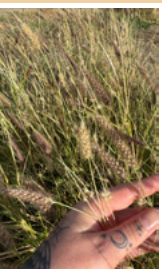
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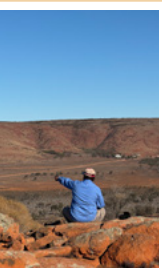
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## From the Chair

Hello Alinytjara Wilurara community and welcome to the Winter 2025 edition of Palya.



It's been a busy start to the year for the board, with an extra meeting in February making up for our postponed December meeting, and the Landscape SA Forum, which took place in May.

A big focus for the board this year is the development of our new five-year Regional Landscape Plan, due to take effect in 2026. Preparing this plan requires extensive consultation with landholding authorities across the region to ensure that our plan aligns with their caring for Country aspirations and strategic priorities.

The board has approved an engagement strategy that will help guide the Regional Landscape Plan consultations. Board members will join with staff in meeting with landholding authority leaders to learn about their needs and continue to strengthen relationships with our regional partners. We will be doing a lot of listening over the coming months to ensure we are working in harmony with landholding authorities.

For the board itself, the development of our new Regional Landscape Plan is an opportunity to strengthen our capability in supporting landholding authorities achieve their Healthy Country Plan objectives, as well as establishing new operational mechanisms that will allow our board to deliver sustainable services. We'll be exploring new ways to ensure our board finds the best practical outcomes to assist the region's landscapes, caring for Country and people.

In conclusion, I would like to bid farewell to long-serving board member Julie O'Toole, who announced her resignation earlier this year (see story p4). Julie was appointed to the then-AW NRM Board in 2018 and was a dedicated representative for her Country, the Antakirinja Matu-Yankunytjatjara area on the eastern boundary of the AW region.

Julie was instrumental in the process of developing the Healthy Country Plan for the AMYAC region and a staunch supporter of AW's work throughout her tenure. On behalf of the board I thank her for her contributions and wish her all the best for the future.

Brenz Saunders  
Presiding Member



Meeting 19: February 2025

The Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board was unable to reach a quorum for the planned meeting in December, so board members met in February to ensure they were up to date ahead of the next scheduled meeting in March.

With members in Adelaide, Ceduna, Coober Pedy and Hermannsburg, the board was separated by distance but united in purpose, and made the most of videoconferencing technology to work through a busy agenda.

Chair Brenz Saunders reported to the board on his activities since chairing his first meeting in September. It was a comprehensive report, including trips across the country to Yulara, Lismore and Canberra (see Palya, Summer 2024). Brenz noted that in meetings with NRM chairs and Indigenous leaders in the eastern states, there was a notable lack of representation from desert Country,

something he hopes to address at future gatherings.

A roundtable discussion was an opportunity for board members to provide updates on their activities over recent months, and to voice concerns and ideas. Jeremy Lebois informed the board about Oak Valley's new women's ranger coordinator and said the Oak Valley Rangers have been busy, with buffel grass the number one priority. He also spoke about attending the Dog Fence Board, and reiterated that dingoes play an important role in our landscape, and that improvements to the dog fence should be prioritised over trapping and shooting.

Wanda Miller reported on her representation on the Indigenous Desert Alliance and Yumbarra Parks Co-management Boards, and echoed the need to keep up the momentum on buffel, saying it is having impacts on the landscape in many ways and could take generations to overcome.

Julie O'Toole announced her resignation from the board after seven years of service, expressing that she has loved her time on the board and looks forward to seeing its important work continue. General Manager Kim Krebs thanked Julie on behalf of the board and staff, saying her contributions and insights have been invaluable. (see story p4)

Damon Ezis, AW's Manager, Strategy and Sustainable Landscapes, sought and received the board's endorsement of the proposed strategy for developing a new Regional Landscape Plan for 2026-2031. The new plan will guide AW's work over the next five years, so gaining an understanding of community priorities is vital.

A key component of the plan involves board members taking active roles in engagement meetings with stakeholders across the region. The board is committed to maintaining a strong focus on building and sustaining relationships with landholding authorities.



Meeting 20: April 2025

The Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board travelled to Scotdesco in April for board meeting 20. The day before the meeting, board members gathered in Ceduna, along with members of the Ceduna Aboriginal Corporation, for a workshop organised by the Department for Environment and Water to discuss the Aboriginal Water Interest framework that they are developing.

The board expressed disappointment in the workshop, feeling that it focused on the principles of engaging with Aboriginal communities, but did not appear to be structured to invite feedback or input.

The board were also dissatisfied that the framework is focused on water "interests" and not water "rights".

The board then drove to Scotdesco, where board member Wanda Miller hosted members and staff in her community.

AW Chair Brenz Saunders gave an update on his activities, which included the Landscape SA Chair's Forum, and an invitation to speak at the 2025 SA Industry Climate Change Conference (see story p5).

General Manager Kim Krebs informed the board that funding negotiations with the Australian Government had been finalised in March, almost two years after lodging the funding application. Kim also updated the board on the development of a business case for funding buffel grass management on a state-wide basis.

She noted that a letter had been sent to the Australian Rail Track Corporation, co-signed by AWLB, Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation, Maralinga Tjarutja/Oak Valley, and the chairs of the co-managed parks in the region, inviting them to meet and explain how they are managing buffel grass in the rail corridor.

Board discussions included concerns over mining tenements and exploration in national parks, water quality at the Iluka

mine site, an update from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and developing an Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property policy.

Representatives from Telstra and their contractor Fulton Hogan gave a presentation on Telstra's intercity fibre project, which is laying underground optical fibre through the AW region.

Discussions centred on vehicle hygiene to prevent buffel grass spread, use of tracks, improvements in phone and internet coverage, and potential future collaboration on protection of native fauna and cultural sites.

The board enjoyed being at Scotdesco, especially when the meeting ended and Wanda took everyone out for a wombat hunt.

While the hunt did not find a wombat, as an opportunity to spend time together on Country it was a great success.

# Farewell Julie O’Toole

Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board member Julie O’Toole announced her resignation at the board meeting in February, after seven years of service.

Julie represented the Antakirinja Matu-Yankunytjatjara area, on the eastern edge of the AW region near her Coober Pedy home. She was appointed to the then-NRM board in 2018, after serving on the Antakirinja Matu-Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal Corporation (AMYAC) board for 20 years, as well as serving on the Breakaways Conservation Park Co-management Board, which includes management of Tallaringa Conservation Park.

She was motivated to join the Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board after seeing the damage done to Country by mining. “I saw the difference between mining and caring for Country,” she says. “I chose Country.”

Julie’s dedication is lifelong, having been born on Country. “I’ve lived in my Country since birth. To be born on the munda (earth), means in Aboriginal culture, I am connected to the land. That’s why I feel for the Country. Spiritually the Country heals me,” Julie said.

During her time on the board, Julie’s passion for protecting Country has always been at the forefront, and she is especially keen to see traditional knowledge and connection to Country passed on to her grandchildren and the younger generation.

Julie was actively involved in the development of the AMYAC Healthy Country Plan in 2022, with representatives from the Umoona Community Council, Tallaringa Co-management Advisory Committee, Kanku-Breakaways Co-management Board, District Council Coober Pedy, Conservation Management and the Antakirinja Matu-Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal Corporation, supported by the AWLB with funds from Indigenous Desert Alliance’s Ten Deserts project.

One of the outcomes of the plan was a trip for young people to learn about language and culture on-Country, which resulted in a book for children featuring words in English and Yankunytjatjara.

Julie said her time with the board was a great learning experience and helped



Julie O’Toole (left) with fellow board member Debbie Hansen



Julie speaks to the Deputy Premier at a board meeting

her build the courage to speak her mind and do what’s right for her people and Country, and that it’s important for people of all backgrounds to work together.

Julie’s warmth, sense of humour, and determination to do her best for Country will be missed by board members and staff alike, and we wish her well in her future endeavours.



Julie at the AMYAC Healthy Country Plan workshop

## Board business



Damon, Brenz and Kim at SES HQ

### In the Zone

Brenz Saunders, Kim Krebs and Damon Ezis were invited to State Emergency Service headquarters in Adelaide in March to begin discussions about how AWLB could be involved in the Zone Emergency Management Committees in our region.

In addition to creating this opportunity for AWLB, we have also been able to bring the other regional landscape boards into the room.

This will be an important future element in how we keep caring for Country at the core of our work and aspirations.



GMs and landscape board staff

### GMs and Chairs gather

Kim Krebs joined the other landscape board general managers in March for their regular meeting with key staff in Adelaide, before coming together with board chairs at the Landscape Board Chairs’ Forum to set strategic directions and focus on future areas for natural resources management.



GMs and chairs



Brenz, Leah and Damon at the conference

### The climes they are a-changing

AW Chair Brenz Saunders joined Damon Ezis and Leah Kyriacou at the 2025 Industry Climate Change Conference at the Convention Centre in May. Brenz spoke on a panel focused on sustainable low emissions industry.

He stressed the importance of engaging with Aboriginal communities on projects that affect their Country, pointing out their deep-rooted knowledge and long history of responsible environmental stewardship.

He also spoke about the threat of buffel grass to communities and infrastructure, increasing the risk of fire in a warming world.



Brenz Saunders, Jason Downs (Reconciliation SA), Kim Krebs

### Reconciliation Breakfast

Brenz Saunders, Kim Krebs and Damon Ezis attended the National Reconciliation Week Breakfast in Adelaide in May, hosting guests from the Commonwealth Bank, LGT Wealth Management, Westpac Group, South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network, Elevate Management Consulting and ICHM.

This year’s theme, “Bridging Now to Next” recognises the 250,000 people who walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000, and looks ahead to how we make the next leap forward for reconciliation.



Jeremy Lebois speaks on the panel

### Forum for landscapes

Board members and leadership staff from the nine landscape boards met at Adelaide Oval in May for the 2025 Landscape Forum, hosted by Green Adelaide. AW Chair Brenz Saunders and board member Jeremy Lebois spoke on a panel of First Nations speakers sharing their experiences, connections and expectations of the landscape system, along with Bill Wilson, Tiahni Adamson and Allan Sumner.

AW GM Kim Krebs outlined the region’s priorities, and the team enjoyed the chance to network and compare notes with their counterparts from around South Australia.



Wanda Miller

### Wanda’s work awarded

Congratulations to AW board member Wanda Miller, who was named Female Elder of the Year at the 2025 NAIDOC SA Awards.

Wanda’s award recognises her long history of advocacy and involvement in community affairs, all aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of her people and her Country.

From serving on the Aboriginal Heritage Board in the 1980s, to helping develop Healthy Country Plans, to her current roles on the Yumbarra Co-management Board and the board of the Yadu Health Aboriginal Corporation and Indigenous Desert Alliance, Wanda’s dedication is an inspiration to all.

# AW staff roundup



## Talking with Tallaringa

The Tallaringa Advisory Committee had not met since 2020, and AW's Kim Krebs and Damon Ezis attended their February meeting online to provide an overview of the board's activities. It was an opportunity to talk about the planning for the new Regional Landscape Plan, and to seek advice on finding an appropriate representative on the board for the AMYAC region now that Julie O'Toole has resigned.

Kim and Damon also followed up on an action that was linked to that July 2020 meeting, providing information about mining tenements in the Tallaringa Conservation Park.

During the meeting, the committee also endorsed the board's proposal to install a new weather station in the park. AW followed up on this in June, when AW's Paul Gregory and Taylah Pitfield travelled to Tallaringa to scope out potential locations for the weather station, which will be the 12th in the AW region.



## Staff muster

AW staff from Ceduna and Adelaide gathered in February for the first staff muster of 2025, dedicating two productive days to planning and training for a busy year ahead.

With the team spread across two offices almost 800km apart, staff enjoy the opportunity to collaborate in person.



## Keeping it clean

Kim Krebs attended the inaugural First Nations Clean Energy Gathering in Adelaide in March.

The gathering was an opportunity to hear what people were saying about access to services during disasters, which is an important link to our Emergency Response Preparedness Plan, as well as our ability to contribute on the Zone Emergency Management Committees and Bushfire Management Committees for our region.



## Toolkit for resilience

Kim Krebs attended the National Indigenous Disaster Resilience Toolkit Workshop in Adelaide in March. Thirty delegates met at the Living Kurna Cultural Centre to develop community-led guidelines for disaster response. AW's focus is on building resilience for communities in advance of any disaster.



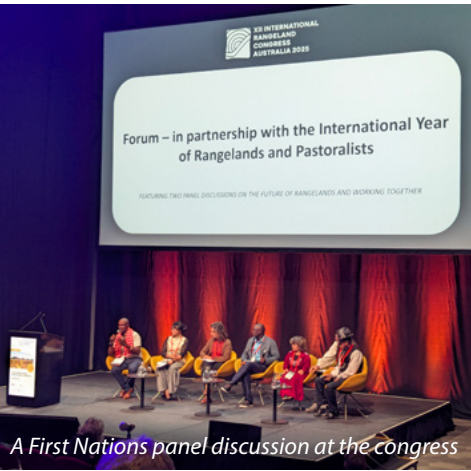
## Mintabie meetup

The former opal mining town of Mintabie in the APY Lands is due for a cleanup.

The town was closed in 2019 and has been uninhabited since.

The Department for Energy and Mining (DEM) and the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) are working on plans to rehabilitate the site, decommissioning tracks, removing abandoned buildings and equipment and managing weeds.

AW GM Kim Krebs visited the site in May with representatives from APY, DEM and NIAA to see the scale of the works required and discuss future plans.



## Rangelands Congress

AW's Project Officer, Sustainable Landscapes, Leah Kyriacou, attended the XII International Rangelands Congress in Adelaide in June.

The conference attracted delegates from around the world to attend presentations, tours and workshops focused on collaboration and innovation in rangeland management.

Sessions on co-design, partnerships and incorporating traditional knowledge were of particular interest.



## Connecting kids with Country

AW Project Officer Les Mundy joined the Far West Coast Rangers to spend a day with Clontarf Academy students from around the state. The Clontarf Foundation runs academies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys within mainstream schools, including Ceduna Area School.

This year, Year 10 and 11 boys from seven schools travelled west to take part in a football carnival at Koonibba, followed by a day of activities at Point Sinclair. Les joined the Far West Coast Rangers to talk to the students about the important work rangers do on Country, and the skills they learn in the job.

For many of the boys, it was a rare opportunity to spend time on Country and learn about the importance of caring for animals, plants and special places.

The large, hand-painted two-way map created by Far West Coast Rangers with support from a Grassroots Grant from the AW Landscape Board once again proved to be a fantastic tool for engaging with students.



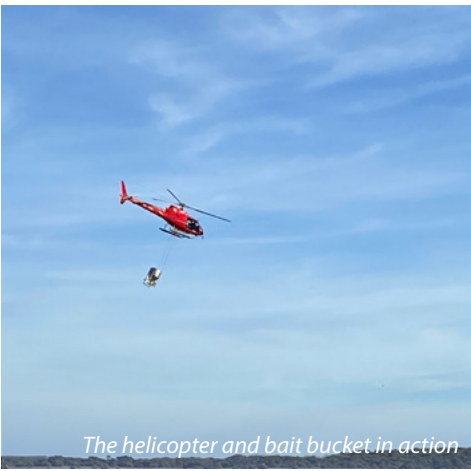
## Island haven

AW's Coordinator, Data & Information Management, Adam Wood, recently took a trip to Flinders Island, providing his expertise in mapping and data management to DEW's National Parks and Wildlife Service for their Flinders Island Safe Haven project.

The project aims to eradicate cats, rats and mice from the island, which is the fourth-largest in South Australia.

Helicopters are used to distribute rodent baits, and Adam was on hand to help with the calibration of the bait buckets that hang from the helicopters, ensuring even coverage of the whole island.

Once free of ferals, the island will be a safe haven for threatened mammal species, part of a network of havens, including more than 100 predator-free islands around Australia



## Firefighters fly out

AW Ecologist Brett Backhouse joined a group of SA firefighters heading to Canada to help battle blazes in remote areas of Alberta.

The team includes personnel from the NPWS brigade, including staff from DEW and landscape boards, and representatives from the CFS. The group of eight left Adelaide late in June, as part of a larger, 103-member Australian contingent. They're expected to be there for up to 40 days.

Canada's wildfire season started early due to a hot, dry spring, significantly increasing fire risk. At the time of the team's departure there were around 50 wildfires in Alberta, mostly in remote, hard-to-access forested areas.

Fighting these fires involves on-foot crews, heavy machinery for containment, and significant aircraft support for suppression and transport.

Brett sent some photos back from Canada and it looks like he's right at home among the tall timber – very different to his usual arid workplace.



# Digging deep

Collaboration on carbon and soil health

Leah Kyriacou



A soil sampling workshop in the APY Lands



Leah on the tools



Soil samples being tested



Andrew Schubert and Leah discussing vegetation cover



Examining a cow pat for dung beetles

There's something quietly magical about driving into the red dirt country of South Australia's far north-west, where the vast blue sky meets the contrasting colours of the russet soil and green vegetation.

That soil was the focus of our field trip in April, working with Traditional Owners, rangers and land managers to share knowledge and support sustainable land management through a series of workshops concentrating on soil health and sustainable agriculture practices.

The trip was part of a partnership between the Alinytjara Wilurara (AW) and SA Arid Lands (SAAL) Landscape Boards. Joining me on this journey were independent soil specialist Michael Eyres, and SAAL staff Jade Leyden (Sustainable Agriculture Facilitator and Carbon Outreach Officer), Sarah Voumard (Soil Extension Officer) and Tori Love (SAAL Community Landscape Officer).

Together we travelled to the APY Lands to work with APY Pastoral Manager Michael Clinch and Traditional Owner Donald Fraser. Our second destination was Mount Willoughby in the neighbouring SAAL region, where we met Mulga Park station owner and agister, Alethea Nicolle, and the Mount Willoughby Station Ranger Team.

The trip's focus was determining the health and composition of soils at two sites for a state-wide collaboration led by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, involving all eight regional boards. As part of the week-long field trip, we also delivered a carbon workshop and a vegetation ground cover monitoring workshop in the APY Lands.

At two paddocks in the APY Lands, known as McCaul's and Tja Tja, Michael Eyres delivered a soil workshop investigating soil structure, nutrient levels, acidity, and potential for carbon storage. The process

included hands-on testing in the field and discussion around what healthy soils mean for productivity, pasture condition, and long-term land resilience.

A small soil pit was dug to see the change in soil composition with depth. The acidity of the soil was tested at each depth, as was the clay content and the level of organic matter. Soil samples were collected for further testing. Roots of native grasses were compared with buffel grass. The conclusion of these initial investigations was that Tja Tja soil health is great. There is lots of phosphorous present in the soil, plenty of nutrients, good, uniform acidity, and enough clay to hold water. Michael Eyres said that these soils would be producing lovely tender meat, and joked that APY should start growing vegetables on the paddock, the soil was so good.

The vegetation monitoring session, led by botanist Andrew Schubert, demonstrated

the long-term approach to assessing land condition across 36 established monitoring sites across APY Pastoral paddocks. Participants learned how to identify good pasture plant species, and how to collect consistent data on species composition, grazing impacts, erosion, and fire history to inform better decision-making.

Jade and I ran a carbon farming workshop that involved overturning cow pats, to explore and share how dung beetles significantly improve soil health and soil organic carbon by burying and dispersing dung, which leads to increased nutrient cycling, improved soil structure, and enhanced water infiltration of the soil. Dung beetles also promote plant growth and can reduce reliance on synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. Conditions were quite dry, but there were a few dung beetles around, with lots of signs of their great work – holes on the cow pats and

buried bits of dung in the soil. We also discussed which soil types are able to hold more carbon, and ways of increasing carbon storage capacity of soils.

We spent the final day on Country with the Mount Willoughby Rangers, William, Wayne, Wayne, and Dallas, and Ranger Coordinator Janet Walton, for the second soil workshop. Michael Eyres talked about the soil type, structure, demonstrated soil testing, pH and collecting samples for laboratory analysis.

Mount Willoughby is half pastoral grazing enterprise and half Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). On the IPA side, we saw significant landscape rehydration works. Swales and filters, which were built by the Mount Willoughby Ranger Team in 2016 to slow runoff and encourage water infiltration, are making a visible difference, restoring plant cover in areas previously affected by erosion – a fantastic example of

practical, locally driven landcare in action.

Through all four workshops, the power of cross-regional collaboration, community partnerships and on-Country learning was clear. By bringing together soil experts, local knowledge holders, and committed land managers, this trip helped build capacity and strengthen relationships, all with the shared goal of supporting healthy Country, now and into the future.

*The soil extension officer project is funded by the South Australian Government's Landscape Priorities Fund.*

*The Carbon Farming Outreach Officer and Sustainable Pastoral Development in the APY Lands projects are supported by the Australian Government through funding from the Natural Heritage Trust under the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program.*

# Dunnarts by the dozen

Autumn was a busy time in the field for AW Ecologist Brett Backhouse, conducting fauna surveys that recorded six species of dunnarts across three sites in the AW region

### In the Pintji

While most of the state was in drought, rain fell in the APY Lands in late March as trapping for a warru translocation began in the Pintji, the fenced exclosure where warru breed, safe from cats and foxes. The population in the Pintji continues to grow, and the effects can be seen in the vegetation, which is noticeably thinner inside the fence. The team caught 47 warru during the week, and sent 33 to add to wild populations at Aeroplane Hill and New Well. While warru trapping was taking place, Brett conducted pitfall trapping in the Pintji. Numbers were down compared to previous years, possibly due to the weather. The most common species caught was the spinifex hopping mouse (*Notomys alexis*), followed by the sandy inland mouse (*Pseudomys*

*hermannsburgensis*). A single desert mouse (*Pseudomys desertor*) rounded out the rodent count. Three dunnart species were recorded – a couple of Ooldea dunnarts (*Sminthopsis ooldea*), a hairy-footed dunnart (*Sminthopsis hirtipes*) and a fat-tailed dunnart (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*). Reptiles were also scarce, the team recording smooth knob-tailed (*Nephurus levis*), burrow-plug and southern sandplain geckos (*Rhynchoedura ornata*), and a leonhardi's skink (*Ctenotus leonhardii*). **Yellabinna** Brett returned from the APY Lands and headed up Googs Track in early April, in search of sandhill dunnarts with rangers from the Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation.

Drought conditions have made an impact in Yellabinna, and this was reflected in the survey results. Mammals were in short supply, but the team did capture two sandhill dunnarts (*Sminthopsis psammophila*), along with little long-tailed dunnarts (*Sminthopsis dolichura*), a solitary Mitchell's hopping mouse (*Notomys mitchellii*) and a sandy inland mouse. Reptiles were out and about in the warm weather, with the pitfall traps capturing a variety of skinks, dragons, geckos and a single goanna. Thorny dragons were also quite commonly seen and at least a few caught by rangers and AW staff for photo opportunities. While in the area, the team also undertook some long walks and ticked off a few potential malleefowl mounds that had been identified by last year's aerial LiDAR survey. (continued next page)



It looks a bit like a snake but this delma is a legless lizard



Every animal captured is weighed and measured before release



Sleepy pygmy possum



Mitchell's hopping mouse



Les holding a sandhill dunnart



Sandhill dunnart



AW staff and Far West Coast Rangers set off to check the traps

Immarna

A third survey was conducted at Immarna, about 200km north of Yalata, in early May. Brett was joined by AW Project Officers Alex Mitchell and Les Mundy, and independent ecologist John Read. The team trapped for four nights, capturing 11 sandhill dunnarts, five little long-tailed dunnarts, an Ooldea dunnart and a lesser hairy-footed dunnart. Other mammals included Mitchell's hopping mice, a sandy inland mouse and several southern ningau (Ningau yvonneae), a tiny relative of the dunnarts.

Reptiles were few as the cooler weather set in, with a bright yellow dragon and a big legless lizard the highlights. A set of fresh tracks in the sand proved to be one of the most interested sightings of the week. A marsupial mole had emerged from the sand quite recently, and travelled a short way before diving back into the dune. These elusive animals are very rarely seen, as they spend most of their life 'swimming' through the sand, so simply seeing fresh tracks was a rare experience.



Bearded dragon

VIDEO:  
click or scan  
to watch



The sandhill dunnart project is funded by the Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust and delivered by the Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board, a member of the Commonwealth Regional Delivery Partners panel.



Rangers check a solar-powered bioacoustic recorder



Potential nganngi habitat

# Nganngi in good hands

In 2023, The Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board awarded its annual Grassroots Grant funding to a project in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands called Nganngi Kanyini – Pitjantjatjara for 'looking after frogs'. APY Project Officer Kieran Jairath reports on the latest news from the project.

Kieran Jairath

APY rangers have been working hard to monitor and protect the newly identified frog species, *nganngi lunki* (nganngi means frog in Pitjantjatjara). Named by the Kalka Pip Land Management Steering Committee, this species holds both ecological and cultural significance.

To identify the distribution of *nganngi lunki* and its close relative, *Pseudophryne robinsonii*, the rangers across the APY Lands have deployed acoustic monitoring devices called AudioMoths across the APY Lands. These compact, battery-powered devices are configured to record frog calls at specific intervals, making them ideal for capturing vocalisations in remote and challenging locations.

Deploying and retrieving the AudioMoths has been a significant logistical effort. Many devices were placed in isolated rockholes across the APY Lands, requiring rangers to traverse rugged terrain, often with limited access by vehicle. This work ensures even the most remote habitats are included in the monitoring efforts.

In addition to the AudioMoths, solar-powered BAR-LT (Bioacoustic Recorders –

Long Term) recorders have been installed at known locations of *nganngi lunki*. These devices are designed to continuously monitor frog activity, providing long-term data on behaviour, seasonal patterns, and environmental impacts. Their solar power capability ensures consistent operation in these remote settings, allowing for ongoing observation without the need for frequent maintenance.

Recently, the rangers presented their work on the frog at the Indigenous Desert Alliance conference in Yulara. Their presentation included a short film documenting a collaborative trip to New South Wales, where they worked with the Wiradjuri/Wolgalu rangers, sharing knowledge and building connections. The presentation was warmly received by conference attendees, with many ranger groups expressing admiration for the dedication and scope of the project.

All collected data will be delivered to frog researcher Dr. Kyle Armstrong at the University of Adelaide. Using advanced machine learning technology trained to identify frog calls, the system analyses recordings from multiple devices. This

automated process significantly reduces the need for labour-intensive manual analysis, enabling quicker and more accurate detection of frog populations.

The APY rangers' work demonstrates a strong commitment to understanding and conserving *nganngi lunki* and its habitat.



Rangers inspect a rockhole

# Traps set for ferals

High-tech traps protect beach-nesting birds on the Yalata coast



Paul Gregory and Les Mundy installing the communications mast

The Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board and Yalata Rangers are working together to protect threatened birds in the Yalata Indigenous Protected Area.

Feral predator traps are being set to capture cats and foxes, helping protect hooded plovers along the coast and nganamara (malleefowl) further inland. The traps are fitted with 4G-connected sensors that send the Yalata Rangers an alert when an animal is caught, saving many hours of driving to check traps each day.

AW and Yalata Rangers worked together this year to place the first traps and a Celium communications hub on the Yalata Coast.

## Site selection

Before traps could be set, it was important to know where hooded plovers could be found along the beach, and to understand feral predator movements in the area.

In January, AW staff Paul Gregory, Les Mundy and Taylah Pitfield travelled to the Yalata coast to conduct a shorebird survey and set up remote motion-sensing cameras in the dunes.

The survey was conducted over two days, focusing on beach nesting species such as hooded plovers, red-capped plovers, and pied and sooty oystercatchers. In contrast with the red-capped variety which were abundant along the coast, only two hooded plovers were seen, one adult and one fledgling. The fledgling was seen close to where a pair of hoodies were recorded in AW's previous survey in November 2024. Along the beach, the team noted tracks in the sand left by dogs and foxes, as well as some larger tracks left by a turtle that had made its way into the foredunes and back into the ocean, along with the remains of a whale and a wobbegong shark.

With the survey completed, the team spent the third day placing cameras at selected locations to test whether they would be appropriate spots to set traps.

No baits or lures are used with these cameras to ensure they show natural predator movements.

The team returned to the cameras in early April to see what had been

recorded. Several foxes were seen, confirming the locations.

## Setting up the network

Paul, Les and Taylah returned to Yalata in late April with AW Project Officer Alex Mitchell to install the communication hub and mast that are at the heart of the Celium network.

Each trap in the network connects to the hub using 4G wireless technology, and the tall mast ensures the signal from any trap being triggered reaches Yalata Rangers. With the mast securely set on a prominent dune, the AW team met up with Yalata Rangers.

The rangers gave the AW crew a demonstration of their drone surveillance techniques, conducting a sweep of the beach to check for unlicensed fishers, and taking a look at a cray boat that was working off the coast. The rangers then inspected the hub and mast installation, before setting out to confirm locations for four traps, each fitted with a communication node.

To start with the traps were baited, but wired securely open so that any animals



Yalata Rangers inspect a trap with Alex Mitchell



Setting up a trap site



Traps are monitored by motion-sensing cameras

entering them would not set them off. This step allows the target animals to become familiar with the traps, and not avoid them out of natural suspicion of new objects in their territory. Being able to enter them for food without being harmed reduces the risk of traps being set off on animals that are only partially in the trap, allowing them to wriggle free and avoid traps in the future. A motion-sensing camera was set up facing each trap to monitor activity.

Once traps had been set, signage was erected advising visitors that feral predator trapping is being undertaken in the area.

The next morning, the AW team did another check on the cameras that were installed back in January, before meeting

the Yalata Rangers again to carry out checks on the traps.

The AW staff then went through an informal training session, giving the ranger team a rundown on how the Celium network operated and showing them through the phone apps used to monitor the system.

On the final day of the trip, the team did a quick check on all traps, making sure they were baited and securely wired open, before packing up and returning to base in Ceduna.

The Yalata Feral Predator Project is funded by the South Australian Government's Landscape Priorities Fund (LPF).

## Camel control campaign



The Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board was part of a multi-agency operation in June to control feral camels.

Sharpshooters in a helicopter began the week-long trip on the Nullarbor, where recent sightings of camels had been reported, supported by data from tracking collars fitted to camels in 2023.

AW Senior Project Officer Paul Gregory was part of the ground support team that travelled along with the helicopter, allowing both the aircraft and the crew to rest and refuel.

Most of the Country was extremely dry after months of drought. Paul noted some locations on the Nullarbor that were so parched they seemed to have had no rain for years.

Only a few areas appeared to have had any rainfall in the past six months, and this was where many of the camels were found.

On the final day, the team enjoyed a close encounter with the AW region's apex predator. A curious dingo approached quite close to camp to watch everyone pack up.

This project is funded by the South Australian Government's Landscape Priorities Fund (LPF)



# Buffel battle unabated

*Buffel grass is the number one priority for the AWLB and the battle to manage this transformer weed has taken some new turns. With drought conditions limiting opportunities for control on the ground, the focus shifted to strategy and research.*



## **Mamu tjanpi – a crisis of national significance**

Buffel grass has been nominated for recognition by the Australian Government as a Weed of National Significance (WoNS).

The buffel grass nomination was submitted by the Indigenous Desert Alliance (IDA), in partnership with the Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board (AWLB) and the Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC). Comprised of evidence gleaned from research papers, documents, photographs and presentations from multiple organisations and individuals, the nomination included letters of support from 48 organisations, and an open letter signed by 83 organisations from every mainland state and the Northern Territory.

The WoNS list was established in 1999 and last updated in 2012. Plant species are assessed for inclusion based on their invasiveness, potential for spread, and

their environmental, social and cultural impacts.

Nominating buffel grass as a WoNS highlights the urgency of the issue and acknowledges that it has reached crisis level in many areas of Australia. It affects multiple sectors, including the environment, culture, tourism, the arts and health, leading to serious social and cultural consequences.

“Since its introduction into central Australia last century for dust control and livestock production, buffel grass has spread across parts of the landscape causing problems for biodiversity, natural and cultural heritage and infrastructure,” says the Hon Dr Susan Close, Deputy Premier and Minister for Climate, Environment and Water. “Buffel grass is highly flammable and has been implicated in accelerating wildfires in Australia and elsewhere, including Hawaii.

“South Australia took the lead in 2015 as the first jurisdiction in Australia to declare

buffel grass under its weed management legislation, and we are fortunate that many areas of South Australia remain free of buffel grass. Declaring buffel grass a Weed of National Significance would support national efforts to protect our environment.”

AW’s Buffel Grass State Coordinator Troy Bowman was one of the authors of the nomination and believes it is an opportunity to take meaningful action on one of the biggest environmental threats facing Australia’s rangelands.

“Buffel grass is a crisis that needs our immediate attention,” Troy says. “A national approach is critical to limit its spread, to mitigate the damage already done to Country, and to prevent a further increase in the risk of fire to Australian communities.”

The nomination will be assessed by a panel appointed by the Australian Government. A decision is expected later this year.



Researchers sampling for soil microbes and biocrusts near Lochiel. Photos courtesy Sofie Costin

## **Researchers work to beat buffel**

Managing buffel grass is a mammoth task, as it infests large areas, often in remote regions with small populations. To effectively limit its spread, we need a deep understanding of the weed. AW is supporting research that has the potential to significantly advance the fight against buffel grass.

### **In the mix**

Herbicide trials are planned for the Arid Lands Botanic Gardens later this year. AW is collaborating with the SA Arid Lands Landscape Board on a trial that aims to assess out of season treatment with granular flupropanate and alternative chemicals. The trials aim to reduce the reliance on flupropanate, devise a best-practice herbicide mix using different herbicides to use in rotation with existing mixes, avoiding the development of herbicide resistance, and refining the application rate of the granular flup product.

### **Down in the dirt**

At Flinders University, PhD student Sofie Costin is focusing on three key aspects of buffel grass: developing a model for predicting buffel distribution, a cost-benefit analysis to understand

the value of ecosystems to people, and investigating the soil microbes associated with buffel.

Soil sampling fieldwork is planned for later in the year, when the plants are actively growing.

Understanding how soil microbes help the weed flourish in the tough, arid rangeland environment could provide methods of manipulating the soil microbe communities to help control buffel.



## **Highway buffel spray**



After a long dry spell, a sprinkling of rain in the region has prompted some buffel growth, so AW Senior Project Officer Paul Gregory and Project Officer Taylah Pitfield went to Tallaringa for a week-long buffel grass surveillance and control trip in late May.

Paul and Taylah headed into Tallaringa from Coober Pedy along the Anne Beadell Highway, monitoring known buffel sites and treating any growth observed.

Roads are a major vector for buffel grass spread and the Anne Beadell Highway is a popular route for travellers. Managing any new growth promptly limits the ability of the weed to spread further into the region.

While on the road, Paul and Taylah investigated potential locations for a new remote weather station for Tallaringa, to add to the network of 11 stations currently in the AW region. They also checked out the location of planned track diversions around culturally significant sites in the area before returning along the Anne Beadell Highway to Coober Pedy.



# Oak Valley update

## Sam Doudle

Hello from Oak Valley Rangers. We are in the middle of the very busy field season at the moment so we have a very quick report this time. We hope everyone else is enjoying being back out on Country as much as we are after the long and hot summer.



What a wonderful season for Tjuratja (bush sugar) we are having. The birds and ants told us it was Tjuratja time. It's nice to be able to grab a feed off of a tree as we are out and about doing our other Ranger work. We took the Oak Valley School students out to teach them about Tjuratja. The Honey Eaters, the ants and the Nganamara are also very happy to have so much Tjuratja to eat.



# Far West Coast update

## Alex Fraser



The Far West Coast Ranger unit has had some exciting developments in the last six months. These developments have been headlined by a new, dedicated ranger base in Ceduna. Our new home base is a dedicated ranger space with meeting rooms, men's and women's ranger offices, along with an adjoining shed with plenty of room for all the tools, equipment and materials that we'll use to look after Country.



The other major development has been the commencement of our NIAA Indigenous Ranger Program grant. The success of our grant application has instantly transformed the size and capacity of the team and has allowed for extra ranger positions and the creation of a dedicated women's ranger team. NIAA's IRP grant was a large contributing factor towards the move to our new home base and we're excited to finalise our move and increase our time on Country.

Along with the major undertaking of upgrading premises, the FWC Rangers have continued to work across the Far West Coast region on a variety of projects. We have assisted the AW Landscape Board

with nganamara mound monitoring,  
remote camera grid maintenance and  
small vertebrate trapping in the Yellabinna  
/ Yumbarra parks.

We have worked with National Parks and Wildlife Service to assist with the maintenance of co-managed parks including closing old and unnecessary vehicle tracks, erecting signs and installing post and chain fencing. We have also been controlling buffel grass around Ceduna, assisting Yalata Rangers with patrolling the coastline, conducting presentations to the Ceduna Area School, Ceduna Youth Hub and Ceduna Clontarf, and surveying for desert greenhood orchids.



The second half of 2025 will be a busy and exciting time as we fill our remaining ranger positions and ramp up our time on Country. Keep an eye out for Facebook updates and if you're around Ceduna, feel free to drop in and say hi to the team!



Completed works at White Well

# Grassroots Grant for White Well compound

The 2024-25 Alinytjara Wilurara Grassroots Grant has been awarded to the Yalata community. The grant served as a top-up to a dedicated Yalata community fund for a project to protect critical infrastructure near the Head of Bight.

The White Well compound, around 80km west of Yalata, includes large shedding for machinery storage, and accommodation for contractors and researchers working on environment and land management projects, including whale and shorebird studies.

Over time, the compound’s perimeter fencing had severely deteriorated due to weather exposure, rust, and vandalism, leaving it vulnerable to unauthorised access, theft of valuable equipment, and damage by feral animals, which threaten water supplies and other resources.

The project replaced the existing fence with a more durable, secure structure, restoring security, deterring break-ins and safeguarding the compound’s infrastructure. Three local specialist fencing contractors completed the works, supported by four Yalata Rangers who cleared vegetation and dismantled the old fence over the course of a week.



Time and the elements took their toll on the old fence

The improved fence will also act as a barrier to protect the site from feral animals, particularly camels, ensuring the safety and functionality of the facilities.

By securing the compound, the project will ensure that researchers, contractors, and Anangu can continue using the White Well site for land management, biodiversity research and conservation efforts, contributing to the protection and sustainable management of Yalata Lands.



New fencing keeps the compound secure

# Farewell Aude Loisier

Leah Kyriacou



Aude Loisier

After 14 years of dedicated service to the Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board, we farewell our much-loved colleague Aude Loisier as she embarks on an exciting new chapter with the Department for Environment and Water.

Aude will be taking on the role of Senior Marine Scientific Officer with the Marine Science Team on a two-year contract, a perfect opportunity to return to her passion for marine science.

Aude joined AW in 2009 as the Coast and Marine Officer, based in Ceduna, where she played a pivotal role in designing and establishing the Coast and Marine Program along the Yalata coast. From the outset, her strong connection to Country and community, along with her passion for coastal management, was clear, laying a strong foundation for future coastal initiatives across the region.

After a short stint in beautiful New Caledonia, Aude returned to AW’s Adelaide office as our MERI Officer, where she has worked tirelessly to strengthen and implement the Board’s program management requirements.

Her achievements are too many to list in full, but highlights include leading the evaluation of numerous government-funded programs, coordinating the 10-year review of AW’s regional NRM Plan, developing the Climate Change Addendum, securing successful grant applications, and playing a central role in developing AW’s current Regional Landscape Plan.

Aude’s legacy at AW extends well beyond her professional accomplishments. Her commitment to excellence, care for her colleagues, and quiet determination have left a lasting impression. Always generous with her time and energy, she inspires those around her through both her work and her values.

We couldn’t be happier for Aude as she returns to her marine science roots, and while we hope to welcome her back in two years, we suspect the call of the coast may be hard to resist!

Thank you, Aude, for your passion, your integrity, and everything you’ve given to AW.



Aude on a beach debris survey

# Farewell Troy Bowman



Troy Bowman with AW’s Ashlee Lynch

Troy Bowman came to AW in 2023 from the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA), on a two-year contract to develop a strategic approach to buffel grass management, in SA and beyond.

With a background in biosecurity and research into buffel grass and other invasive plants, Troy was well placed to build collaboration and investment in buffel management with stakeholders including government departments, NGOs and landholding authorities.

During his time with AW, Troy began field trials for buffel treatment, conducted workshops and presented at conferences, working with other organisations to raise the profile of buffel grass and promote a more vigorous, coordinated approach to its management.

Troy was instrumental in delivering the ministerial roundtable on buffel grass (see Palya, Summer 2024), which brought together five state cabinet ministers, including the Deputy Premier, along with senior executives and stakeholders, to workshop ideas for a state-wide buffel grass strategy.

A proposal developed from the roundtable has been presented to the Deputy Premier.

He also collaborated with the Indigenous Desert Alliance and Arid Lands Environment Centre to nominate buffel grass as a Weed of National Significance (see story p16), an important step towards developing a national approach to buffel.

Troy has returned to PIRSA in a new role as Manager Industry Partnerships with Biosecurity SA. His expertise and dedication to tackling the buffel grass crisis will be missed by all at AW. Best of luck in the new role, Troy.



Troy giving a buffel hygiene demonstration



## Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board

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

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