

SHARK BAY WORLD HERITAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Communiqué

Meeting 10 20 September 2016

The tenth meeting for the Shark Bay World Heritage Advisory Committee was held in Carnarvon on the 20 September 2016. The Committee discussed the following matters.

Restoration of Seagrass Banks

Shark Bay's extensive seagrass banks have been under threat following widespread defoliation and dieback after the 2011 marine heatwave event. The Committee has received several presentations previously in regard to the extent of the damage to the seagrass and the consequences for the entire ecosystem and marine animals.

At meeting nine, the Committee heard from seagrass experts regarding options being trialled to restore seagrass banks and these were further explored at this meeting. Seagrass restoration is typically performed using adult plants, which has barriers to success and is expensive. Tests as to the viability of seed-based restoration of meadows in WA are underway but may take over a decade to produce any results. Research funding is required to further investigate seagrass and recovery strategies.

Seagrasses bury large quantities of carbon rich organic matter in sediments which does not break down easily once buried. This blue carbon is stored as soil carbon and is important on a global scale.

Fisheries Matters

The Committee was briefed on the 2016 fishing arrangements in the Denham Sound area of the Shark Bay Prawn Managed Fishery and the potential for access below the Snapper Trawl Line by license holders. In respect to the 2016 trawl season, the Department of Fisheries undertook the annual survey below the Line and advised that the criteria had not been met. Therefore, trawl fishing would not be permitted below the Line in 2016.

The Committee decided to seek an explanation from Department of Fisheries for the decline in combined prawn catch in 2016 requested to be included as a stakeholder for consultation in 2017 regarding a review of the current trawl arrangements.

Compressed Air Spearfishing – Shark Bay Marine Reserves

This item was referred for comment from the Minister for the Environment in response to a request to lift the ban on spearfishing (SCUBA and Hooka) in Shark Bay Marine Reserves. Members endorsed Parks and Wildlife's stance to continue the current ban. As the marine park management plan is overdue for review, this issue will likely be raised again in the future.

Twenty Five years of World Heritage Listing

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The Committee resolved to acknowledge the 25th anniversary on 13 December of Shark Bay's World Heritage Listing by conducting a photographic competition similar to the very successful event held in 2011.

Ecological Restoration – Dirk Hartog Island

Major outcomes achieved for the Dirk Hartog Island National Park Ecological Restoration project during the year were recognised by the Committee. These included: substantial progress in the eradication of feral cats, sheep and goats; weed management and vegetation restoration; fauna reconstruction and surveys.

Outstanding Universal Value Workshop

To determine whether the integrity of the World Heritage area's Outstanding Universal Value is being maintained, the Committee has been exploring options to quantify and measure the status of the values when World Heritage was listed in 1991. Members agreed that a sub-committee be formed to advance the process for reviewing the status of the attributes at Listing.

Joint Meeting with Ningaloo Coast World Heritage Advisory Committee

The Committee held a combined meeting for the first time with members of the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage Advisory Committee. Matters of mutual interest were discussed including the effects of climate change on both World Heritage areas and funding and support for the Committees. It was considered that the meeting was productive and beneficial and should occur on a regular basis, subject to available resources.

Further Information:

If you require further information on any of the above topics please contact Cheryl Cowell, Executive Officer, Shark Bay World Heritage Advisory Committee cheryl.cowell@dpaw.wa.gov.au or (08) 9948 2210

Alternatively please contact one of the Shark Bay World Heritage Advisory Committee members listed below:

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* Shark Bay World Heritage Advisory Committee – Membership as at August 2017