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The Right Whale Tracker Project Mamang

Eubalaena australis

South Coast WA
Albany to Hopetoun

Annual Report

2025

A collaboration between South Coast Cetaceans, South Coast Natural Resource Management, Oceans Blueprint and Edith Cowan University supported by funding from the Western Australian Government's State NRM Program and the Australian Government under the National Environmental Science Program.



SOUTHCOAST
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UNIVERSITY

**Marine
and Coastal**
National Environmental Science Program



natural resource
management program



Message from the CEO Western Australian Marine Science Institution



© Alastair Heslop



It is a great pleasure, as Chief Executive Officer of the Western Australian Marine Science Institute, to write the foreword to the latest Right Whale Tracker Annual Report. This report highlights the strength of collaborative science, brought together through the dedicated efforts of Indigenous ranger groups, citizen science volunteers, research collaborators and partners, and communities along our southern coastline.

Through the observations and care of these committed individuals, we continue to improve our understanding of southern right whales, which hold an important place in the cultural and natural heritage of Western Australia. These remarkable animals enrich our coastal environments and connect people with the unique marine life found in our region.

Right Whale Tracker provides new insights into individual whales, including their age and life histories, the habitats they rely on, and the patterns of their return to our coastal waters to calve and rest. This work is helping reveal aspects of their ecology that are essential for planning the long-term protection and management of the species in a changing environment.

I am genuinely impressed by the progress this project has made since its inception in 2024. It has quickly become an important initiative that is generating knowledge that would otherwise be extremely difficult to obtain.

At the heart of Right Whale Tracker are the Indigenous rangers and volunteers who spend countless hours observing these whales and collecting critical information. Their dedication and stewardship are central to the success of this work. Over the past year, 67 Indigenous rangers and volunteers between Albany and Hopetoun have contributed 226 surveys, building a robust dataset that will inform decision-making for many years to come.

I look forward to seeing Right Whale Tracker continue to grow and evolve, and to the valuable contribution it will make to understanding and supporting the recovery of endangered southern right whales in Western Australia

Dr Luke Twomey

CEO

Western Australian Marine Science Institution



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© Helen Bolton

The Team - Staff, Scientists and Volunteers



Laura Bird

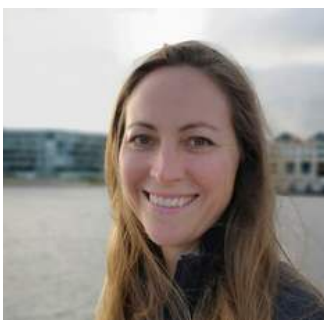
Project Coordinator at South Coast NRM

Laura began her position as Right Whale Project Coordinator in May 2024. Through this project, she is able to pursue her passion for connecting community and science, actively engaging the public as Right Whale Tracker citizen scientists.

Kirsty Alexander

South Coast Cetaceans Marine Scientist / Sea Country Coordinator Esperance Tjaltjraak

Kirsty is passionate about developing guidelines to make sure the marine environment is conserved. She developed South Coast Cetaceans in 2016 which has led to the formation of the Right Whale Tracker project ensuring the data collected during the project continues to inform conservation management decisions affecting southern right whales.



Chandra Salgado Kent

Professor of Wildlife and Ocean Conservation at ECU & Director of Oceans Blueprint

Chandra is a recognised expert in marine mammal ecology, applied statistics, and bioacoustics. Chandra regularly advises various government, industry and community on status, threats and management of marine wildlife, innovative research methods, and analytical approaches.



© Kathy Nikas

The Team - Staff, Scientists and Volunteers



Tim Button

Steering Committee Member -
Operations Officer Fauna, DBCA



Jen Bane

Steering Committee Member -
CEO Albany Historic Whaling Station



Vaughn Chapple

Steering Committee Member - Albany
Marine Park Coordinator DBCA



Eileen Wheeler

Steering Committee Member - South
Coast Cetacean Citizen Scientist



Bronte Van Helden

Steering Committee Member -
Program Lead - Threatened Species, South Coast NRM

Citizen Scientists & Indigenous Rangers who submitted surveys in 2025

Indigenous Rangers - Karina Woods, Barbara Nundle, Roxanne Woods, Desmond Eades, Kylie Hobbs, David Roberts, Jarrad Minter, Shantay Gray, and Tahlia Rodd.

Citizen Scientists - Alastair Heslop, Alisha Amir, Angela Recalde-Salas, Anke Stam, Brad Harkup, Chris Meuzelaar, Deanne Tyley, Di Rowling, Eileen Wheeler, Helen Bolton, Helen Morris, Javier Delgado Esteban, Jeff Morris, Joy Meador, Kali Caramia, Karrina Smallman, Kathy Nikas, Kaylah Tugwell, Kelsey Fremantle, Liz Tanner, Lynn MacLaren, Machi Yoshida, Michael Fox, Paul Guest, Ravindra Bastari, Renae Van Noort, Richard Clapp, Rhys Jones, Steve Pontin, Sue Roberts and Valerie Mather.

Purpose of the Project



To increase data on southern right whale aggregation areas and raise awareness throughout the community.

Southern Right Whales are listed as endangered by both state and national legislation. It is estimated prior to whaling, there were approximately 120,000 individuals in the Southern Hemisphere. This number dropped to approximately 300 in the 1920s due to whaling.¹

The Australian populations consist of two recognised sub-populations which in the 2022 annual aerial survey estimated these populations to be:



Individuals in the western sub-population¹

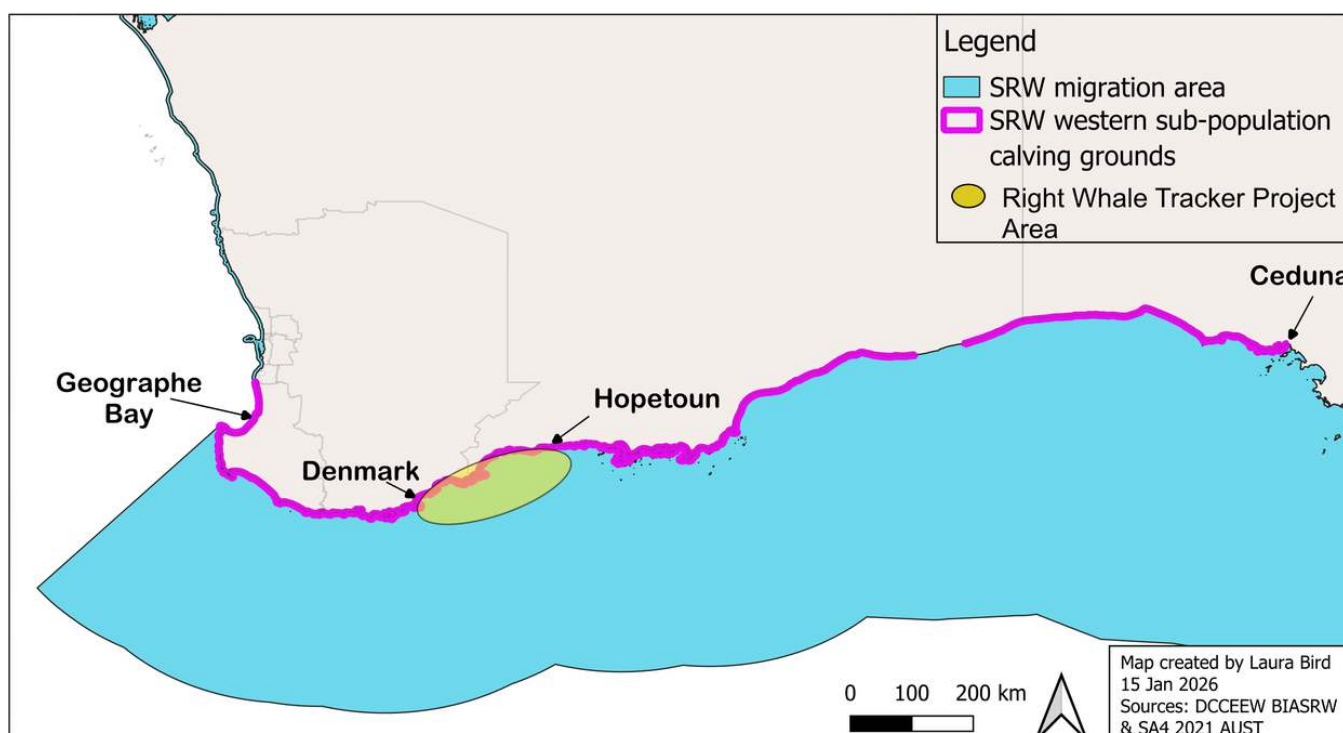


Individuals in the eastern sub-population¹

The Right Whale Tracker project in 2025 gathered data on the western sub-population between Denmark and Hopetoun.

¹ DCCEEW 2024, National Recovery Plan for the Southern Right Whale, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Canberra.

Right Whale Tracker Project Area



Project Outcomes Summary



Beginning in May 2024 the Right Whale Tracker has been working towards achieving the following target outcomes:

- Raising Awareness
- Filling Critical Knowledge Gaps
- Recruiting Participants
- Building Skills and Knowledge
- Fostering Engagement
- Sharing Findings



The project fills critical knowledge gaps to improve the species conservation, and empowers community to engage directly in conservation-based management actions.

Project Outcomes



In 2025 the Right Whale Project used the strong foundations built in 2024 to successfully deliver:

- 2 Regional Forums – Albany and Hopetoun with a total of 48 attendees.
- 3 Indigenous Consultation sessions with 35 attendees across 4 Ranger groups.
- 3 Right Whale Tracker face-to-face citizen science and online training sessions – Albany and Hopetoun resulting in 36 trained citizen scientists.
- 2 Right Whale Tracker Indigenous ranger training sessions – Cheynes Beach and Esperance resulting in 31 trained Indigenous rangers.
- 4 Steering committee meetings guiding the survey process, online training, regional forums and awareness raising activities.
- 2 Citizen scientist progress updates.
- 4 Indigenous Ranger survey feedback sessions.

Participate in the following community awareness events:

- Albany’s Historic Whaling Station’s holiday program in January.
- Great Southern Grammar’s Threatened Species activity day in March.
- Great Southern Museum’s WA Day event in June.
- City of Albany’s Marine and Maritime Festival in July.
- Aurora Magazine Spring edition in September.
- State Coastal and Marine Stewardship Forum in October.
- Albany Harbour’s Sustainability Symposium in October.
- Albany Show in November.



Developed the following promotional pieces:

- Annual report.
- Citizen scientists’ guide to southern right whales flyer.
- [Right Whale Tracker website](https://southcoastnrm.com.au/southern-right-whale/)

<https://southcoastnrm.com.au/southern-right-whale/>



Engaging Citizen Scientists & Indigenous Rangers

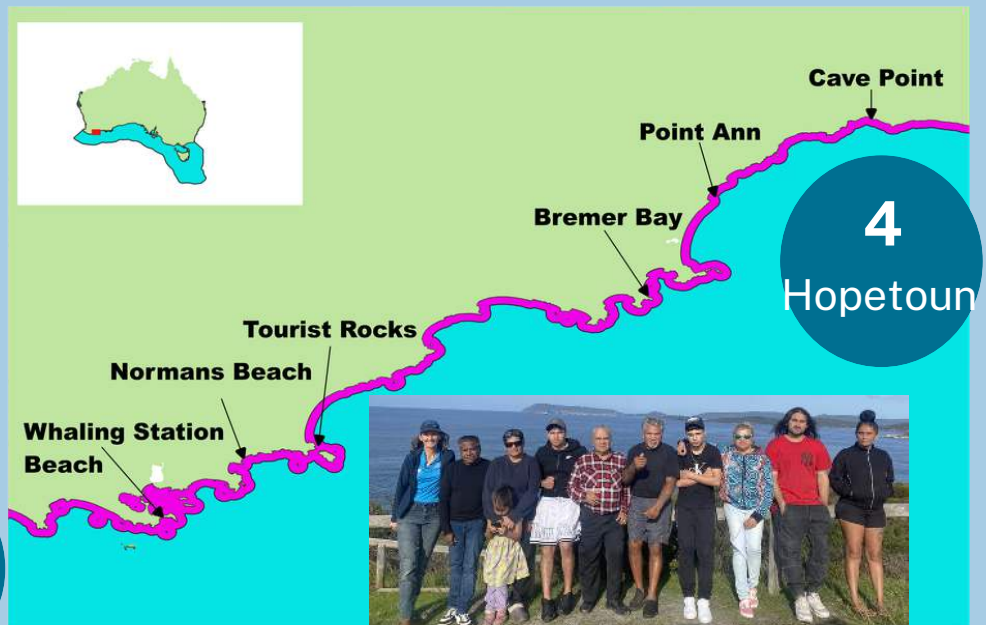
**3 Whale
Tour Boat
Operators**



31 Trained Indigenous Rangers



36 Trained Citizen Scientists



**32
Albany**



Project Statistics

Total Surveys



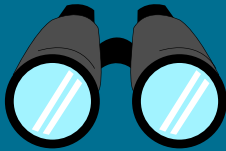
226

Photos Processed



218

Land Based Surveys



176

Citizen Scientists Photos

171

Vessel Based Surveys

50



Indigenous Ranger Photos

47

41 individual southern right whales identified along the South Coast

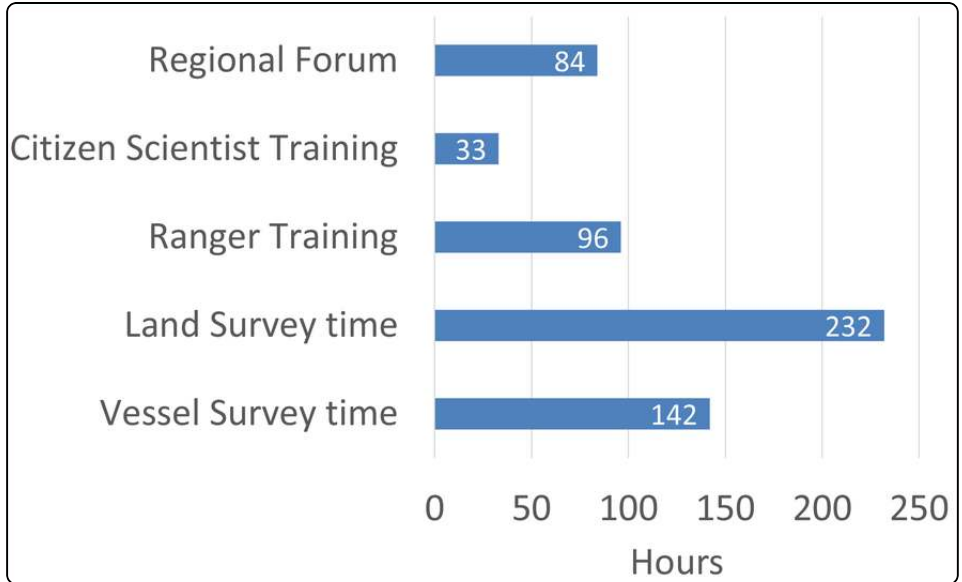


Sightings data and photo matching identified individuals using important Southern Right Whale aggregation areas along the South Coast between Denmark and Hopetoun in WA

Surveys Summary



Total Number of Citizen Scientist Hours

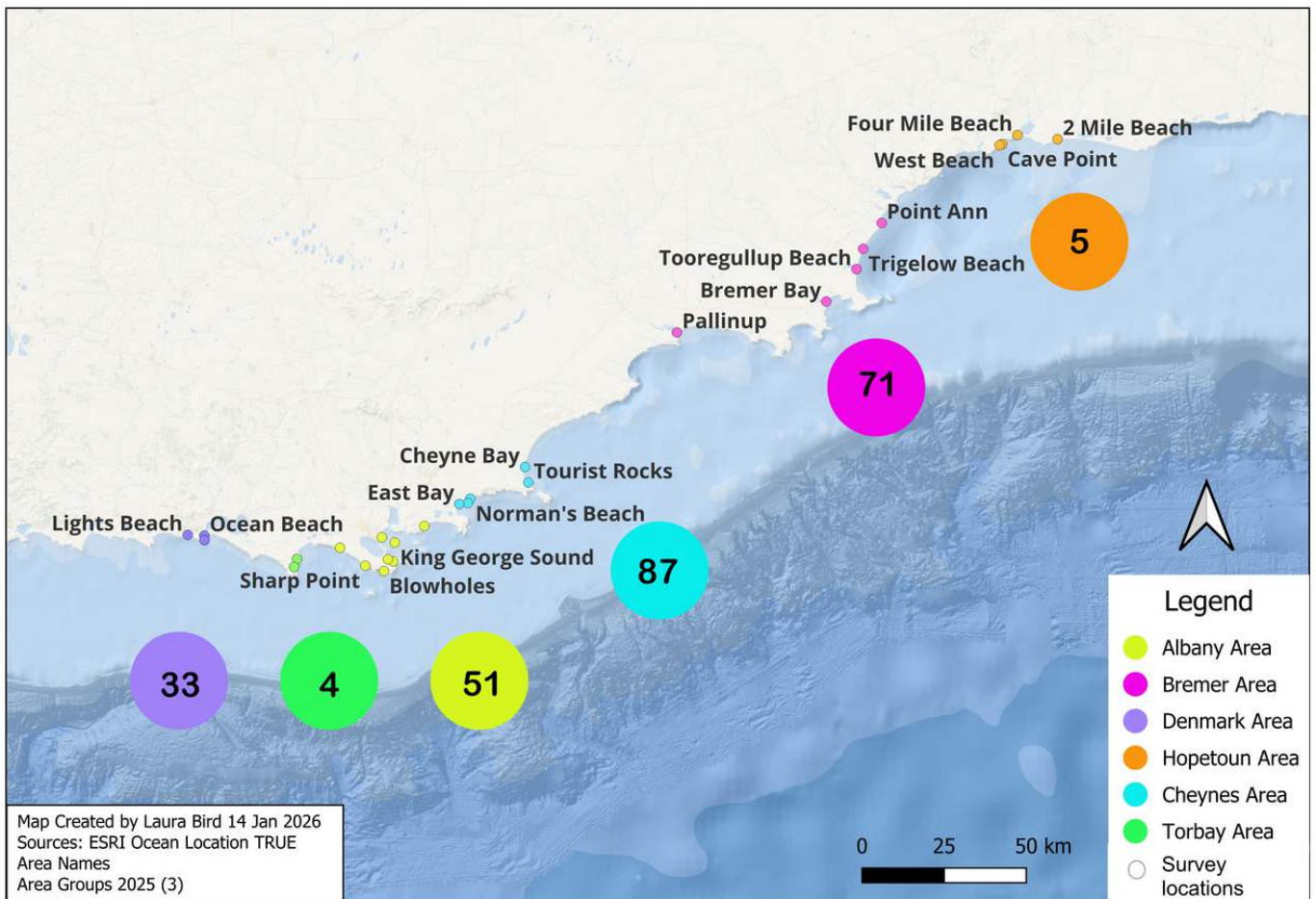


5 months

587 hours

254 sightings

Total Number of Southern Right Whale Sightings



Thank you all who participated in 2025, we look forward to continuing our partnerships with you during 2026 and identifying some return whale individuals.

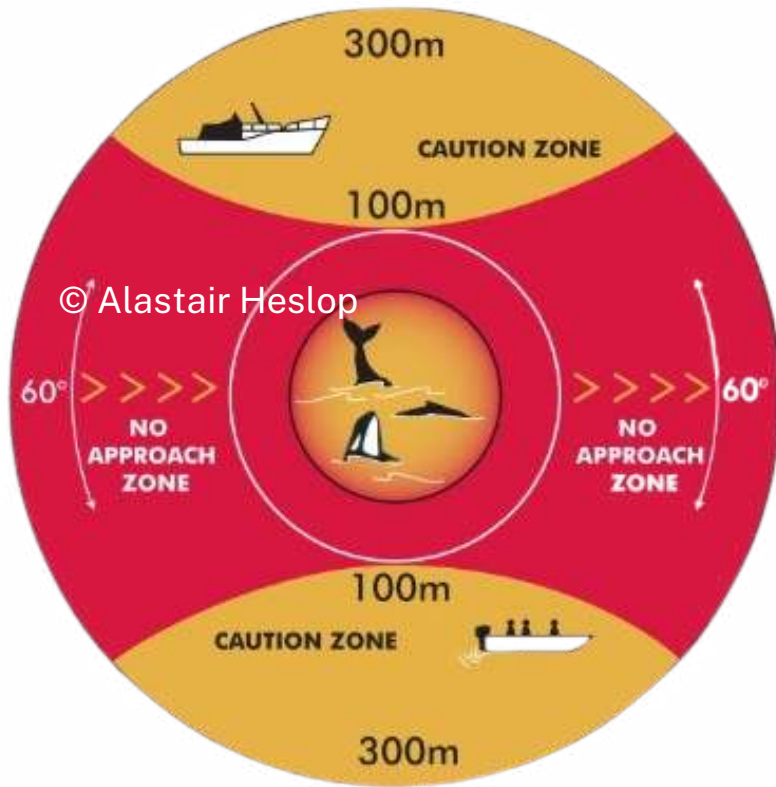
Actions to Sustain Whale Futures

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The areas along the south coast with the greatest number of mother and calf sightings were **quiet areas with minimal human contact**.

To encourage breeding areas it is important everyone keeps their distance, for your safety as well as the whales. <https://www.dbca.wa.gov.au/news/2019/have-whale-time-watching-southern-migration>



Please remember if approached by a whale:

- Keep 100m away in a boat
- Keep 100m away as a swimmer
- Never approach from the front or behind
- Slow down within 300m
- Take all fishing gear home



By doing this it will:

- Reduce noise exposure
- Reduce collisions
- Reduce entanglements



Citizen Scientist Profile-Alastair Heslop



Marine science was my favourite subject in high school, and as a child I spent most of my free time outdoors, immersed in nature. After leaving school, I watched the television series *Whale Wars* and became deeply invested in the plight of migrating whales in the Antarctic Whale Sanctuary, as well as the industrial whalers who pursued them.

In 2010, I had an unforgettable experience aboard *MY Steve Irwin*, the flagship vessel of Sea Shepherd. Meeting the organisation's founder, Paul Watson, further fueling my desire to be involved in whale conservation in some capacity. That same year, during a family holiday to Dunsborough, I experienced a truly life-changing moment. While stopping at the Sugar Loaf Rock lookout for a quick photo, I spotted my first Southern Right whale mother and calf. Seeing them so close to the rocks — carefree and playful, surrounded by dolphins — completely blew my mind. I scrambled down the rocks for a closer look and spent hours entranced by the scene before me, sunburnt and happy. That day changed my life forever. Since then, I always visit the coast with a camera in my car, just in case. I currently use an Olympus SLR with a large telephoto zoom lens.

I now spend many hours watching the coastal ocean in the hope of spotting whales. This practice has taught me patience and the ability to recognise the subtle signs that indicate a whale is nearby. With music and hot chocolate at the ready, I find these moments deeply therapeutic.

Becoming a citizen scientist has been an incredibly rewarding experience. As a naturally shy person, I would not usually reach out to a group, yet through this journey I have connected with many like-minded individuals. If you have a passion for marine conservation, I highly recommend joining the Right Whale Tracker project — you may well discover that you, too, can become an effective and enthusiastic citizen scientist.

With over 15 years of self-taught whale photography, I now contribute valuable data to whale identification and migration research as a citizen scientist. This work is both deeply fulfilling and vital for the protection of these endangered species. Instagram @alastairheslop

Next Steps

We will continue collecting data during the 2026 whale season to identify and provide evidence of southern right whale aggregation areas along the south coast. Aiming to identify additional individual whales as we learn who is visiting and revisiting our shores to birth their calves.

Right Whale Tracker citizen science training sessions will run in May 2026 for new and old volunteers that are interested in making a difference.

If this sounds like you, please contact Laura Bird the Project Coordinator for more details. Scan QR code
Email: laurab@southcoastnrm.com.au
Phone: 0428 294 234



© Nowanup Rangers

This is a collaboration between South Coast Cetaceans, South Coast Natural Resource Management, Oceans Blueprint and Edith Cowan University, and supported by Citizen Scientists, Albany Tour Boat Operators, Albany's Historic Whaling Station, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Department of Biodiversity and Cultural Attractions and the Australian Government under the National Environmental Science Program. The Project is supported by funding from the Western Australian Government's State NRM Program.



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