

Nullarbor Parks

Draft Management Plan 2017

- Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area
- Nullarbor National Park
- Nullarbor Regional Reserve

The vast, spectacular and unique Nullarbor (Mirning Country) has a strong and respected spirit. Mirning people are taking care of Country and providing opportunities for all.



Government of South Australia
Department of Environment,
Water and Natural Resources



National Parks
South Australia

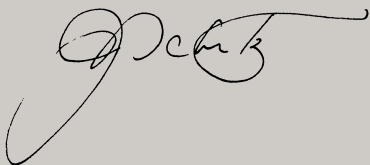
Your views are important

This draft plan has been developed to set directions for the management of the Nullarbor parks. It also aims to enable Mirning people to maintain their community health and wellbeing through supporting their connection to Country. Country is land, sea, sky, rivers, sites, seasons, plants and animals; and a place of heritage, belonging and spirituality.

The Nullarbor Parks Draft Management Plan 2017 is now released for public comment. Members of the community are encouraged to express their views regarding the management of these parks.

Each submission will be considered in the development of the final plan. Once developed, the final plan will be submitted to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation for adoption under section 38 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* and section 31 of the *Wilderness Protection Act 1992*.

I encourage you to make a submission on this draft plan. Guidance on making a submission can be found at on page 16.



John Schutz

Director of National Parks and Wildlife

Cultural Sensitivity Warning

Aboriginal people are warned that this publication may contain images of deceased persons.





Developing this plan

This draft plan has been developed with the Nullarbor Parks Advisory Committee - a partnership between Mirning people (the traditional owners of the Nullarbor) and representatives of the South Australian Government.

The committee provides advice on the management of the Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area, Nullarbor National Park and Nullarbor Regional Reserve. These parks are all part of Mirning Country and have been incorporated into a single management plan due to their ecological and cultural connectivity.

The *Far West Coast Healthy Country Plan* guides the management of Country and reflects the aspirations of Far West Coast Aboriginal people for their Country and communities. It was developed by the Nullarbor Parks Advisory Committee and the Yumbarra Conservation Park Co-management Board on behalf of the Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation, through a series of on-country workshops with Far West Coast Aboriginal people. The *Far West Coast Healthy Country Plan* underpins the management of the parks and has been used to develop this plan.

The Far West Language Centre provided guidance on the use of Mirning language used in this plan.

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Directions for management

The Nullarbor parks are an interconnected network of parks located in Mirning Country. They are managed in an integrated way with advice from the Nullarbor Parks Advisory Committee. Through this committee, Mirning people have a central role in setting directions for the management of the Nullarbor parks.

Several other groups within the Far West Coast Aboriginal people have associations and interests with these parks. Far West Coast Aboriginal people are members of the Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation and include Kokatha, Mirning, and Wirangu, Oak Valley and Yalata people as well as the descendants of Edward Roberts Senior. In setting directions for management, their interests are acknowledged and respected. The ongoing involvement of Mirning people and other Far West Coast Aboriginal people will ensure that their traditional knowledge is used as a foundation for future management.

“We are managing the Nullarbor Parks for all who visit them. We have responsibilities handed down from the old people to protect our sites and care for our traditional lands”

Clem Lawrie, Mirning representative

Across the Nullarbor parks significant sites according to Aboriginal tradition, and sites that are important to Aboriginal archaeology, anthropology and history, are protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988*, whether registered, unregistered or not yet recorded. The Nullarbor parks will remain subject to the native title rights and interests that exist in relation to the land. The plan will be implemented in accordance with the relevant provisions of the *Native Title Act 1993*.

The Nullarbor parks are a central feature within the land and seascape that extends south into the Great Australian Bight and north into Australia’s arid interior. Each of the Nullarbor parks has a different status under state legislation. As a result, management directions vary between each park.

The Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area is situated between the border with Western Australia and the Yalata Indigenous Protected Area, adjacent to the Great Australian Bight and on the iconic Nullarbor Plain (Figure 1). It makes up 31% of the area of the Nullarbor parks. It is proclaimed as a wilderness protection area through the provision of the *Wilderness Protection Act 1992*. Wilderness protection areas are highly protected landscapes, managed to retain their natural and undisturbed qualities. Mineral and energy resources exploration and extraction are not allowed in wilderness protection areas.



It will be managed to avoid development of any new infrastructure and any further alteration of the landscape. The wilderness protection area will continue to provide the distinctive remote and natural experience which has become synonymous with Australia's iconic Nullarbor Plain.

The Nullarbor National Park is situated between the Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area and the Nullarbor Regional Reserve (Figure 1). It makes up 1% of the Nullarbor parks and is a remnant of the original Nullarbor National Park which was reclassified as the Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area in 2013. This remnant section of the national park will be added to the regional reserve.

The Nullarbor Regional Reserve (Figure 1) is proclaimed under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*. Under this Act, regional reserves are proclaimed for the purpose of conserving wildlife, natural and historic features while also allowing for the sustainable utilisation of mineral and energy resources. The regional reserve comprises 68% of the Nullarbor parks.

This plan, together with the objectives of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* will provide direction for the management of the regional reserve at a high level. However, the use of mineral and energy resources is primarily guided by other management frameworks and legislation including the *Mining Act 1971* and the *Petroleum and Geothermal Energy Act 2000*.

This is the first management plan for the Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area, Nullarbor National Park and Nullarbor Regional Reserve. Once adopted, the Nullarbor Parks Management Plan will meet the requirement for the development of a management plan for the Nullarbor National Park and Nullarbor Regional Reserve, as specified under section 38 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*. It will also meet the requirement for the development of a management plan for Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area as required under section 31 of the *Wilderness Protection Act 1992*.

The Nullarbor Parks Advisory Committee will work with stakeholders and local communities to implement the priorities and strategies identified in this plan. Strategies will be monitored and regularly evaluated and adapted to ensure they are effective.



Significance and purpose

The Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area (894 245 ha), National Park (32 289 Ha) and Regional Reserve (1 919 527 ha) are situated approximately 300km west of Ceduna (Figure 1).

They are part of an iconic landscape, internationally renowned as the treeless plain (*null=no arbor=tree* in Latin). The saltbush (*Atriplex* spp.) and bluebush (*Maireana* spp.) scrublands-dominated plain is deceptively monotonous. Beneath the surface is part of the world's largest arid limestone karst system consisting of many hundreds of dolines, caves and blowholes. The Nullarbor parks are recognised as a largely intact and natural area and the area is recorded on the *National Wilderness Inventory* (Australian Heritage Commission 2003).

Koonalda Cave is significant in the history of Aboriginal occupation and has particular historical and cultural significance for the Mirning people. The cave contains markings made by Aboriginal people during the last ice age. In 1956 archaeologist Dr Alexander Gallus dated the archaeological remains and finger flutings to 22,000 years ago. Prior to this, Aboriginal occupation of Australia was generally thought to be 8,700 years ago (Department of Environment 2014). The significance of Koonalda Cave to Australian history was recognised when it was listed as a National Heritage Place in 2014, under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

For Mirning people, connecting to Country is essential for their health and wellbeing. The physical and spiritual landscapes of these parks are interconnected, and are inseparable from the physical and spiritual health of the people who have cultural connections to the area. The caves, dolines, blowholes and rock holes form a cultural landscape, connected by ancient tracks. Some of these tracks were used to trade the flint mined on Mirning Country with other groups as far away as Kati Thanda–Lake Eyre and north west Australia.

The Nullarbor parks adjoin the Yellabinna parks to the east, Eucla National Park in Western Australia, the Maralinga Tjarutja Lands to the north and the Far West Coast Marine Park and Great Australian Bight Marine Park to the south. They form a vast area that enables ecosystems to function and support a wide variety of flora and fauna with minimal disruption to natural processes.

The Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area was proclaimed in 2013 and is the largest wilderness protection area in South Australia. It protects a vast remote and natural area that is also an internationally recognised karst system.

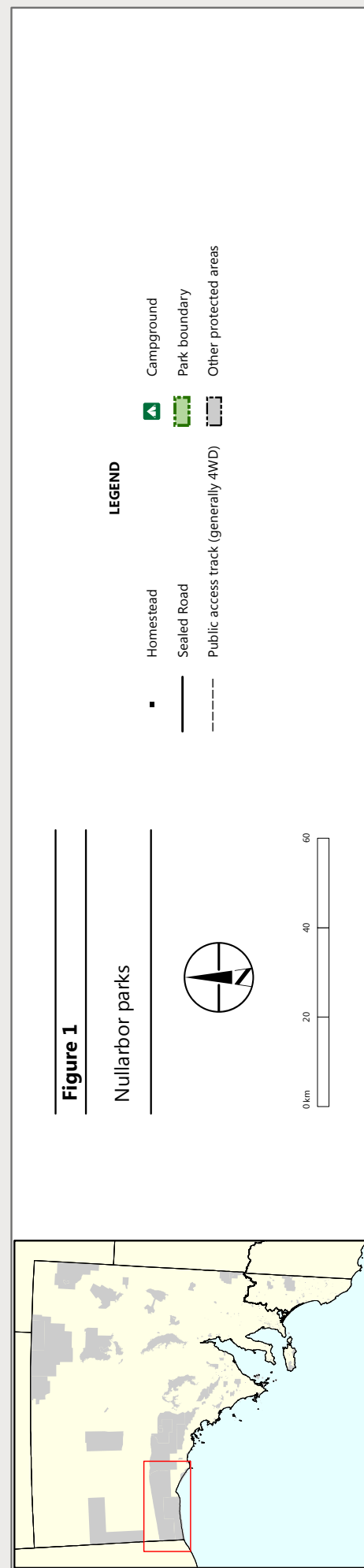
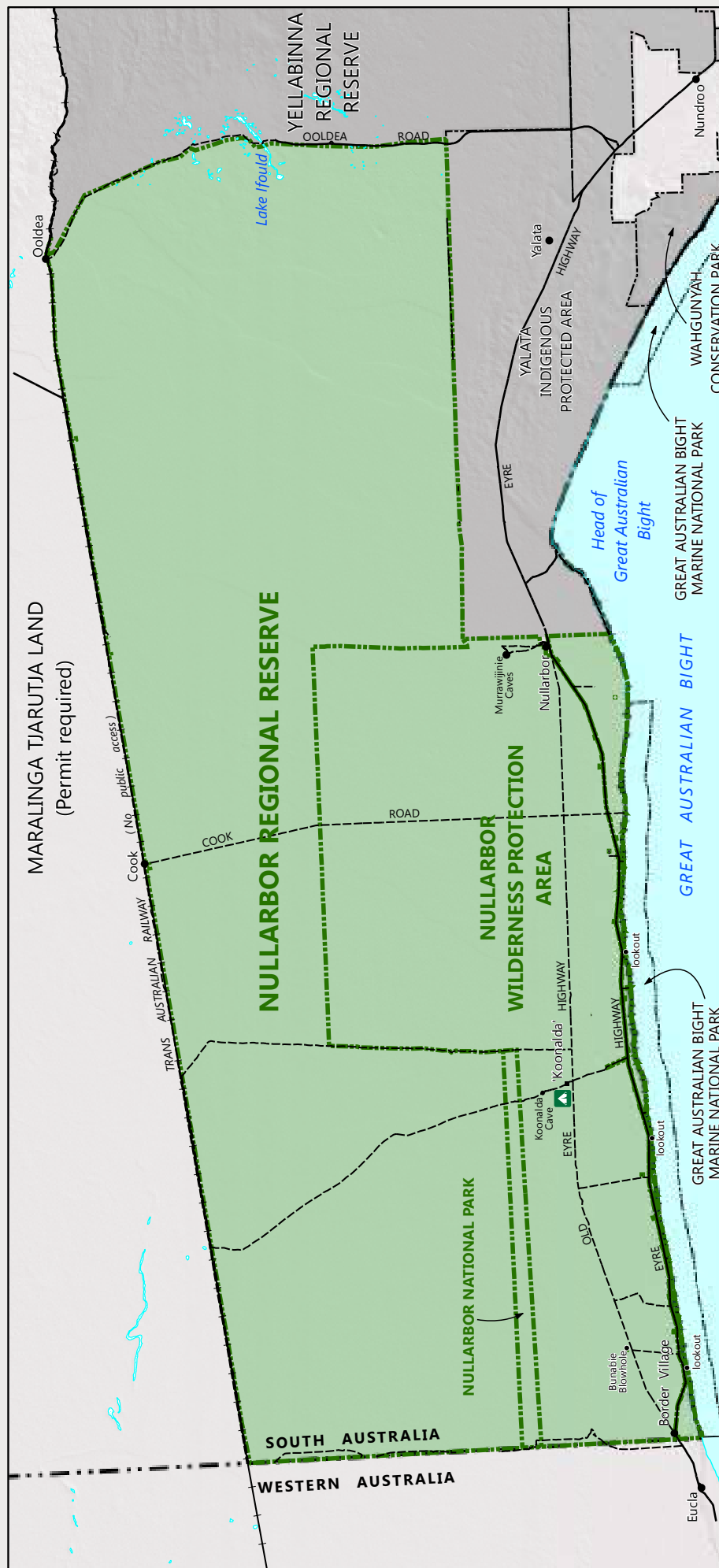
The network of caves beneath the plain is significant due to the high levels of endemism amongst the cave fauna. The Bunda Cliffs were formed over 50 million years ago when Antarctica split from Australia.

Koonalda Homestead is recognised as State Heritage Place under the *South Australian Heritage Places Act 1993*. It is made of railway sleepers making it a rare example of World War II outback construction. It was a sheep station and due to the arid nature of the plain the farmers had to pump water from Koonalda Cave for their stock. The Old Eyre Highway passes by the homestead and so the homestead also served as a fuel stop for travellers crossing the Nullarbor until the 1970s.

The Nullarbor Regional Reserve was proclaimed to facilitate the conservation of a unique cultural and natural landscape, while also enabling the sustainable use of mineral and energy resources. Mineral exploration has largely focused on paleochannels of ancient fluvial sand deposits and precious metal, diamond and iron potential in the basement rock.

Approximately 50,000 people travel across the Nullarbor Plain on the Eyre Highway every year. Of those roughly 2,000 stop and explore focusing on Koonalda Homestead, Koonalda Cave, Murrawijinie Caves and Bunda Cliff lookouts.

The yarda (wedge-tailed eagle) is significant to Mirning people. The wellbeing of such species, the landscape and the people is inextricably linked. The connection of particular groups of Mirning people to the yarda also identifies those groups' responsibilities for the species and the landscape it relies upon.



What are we looking after?

The Nullarbor parks protect:

Aboriginal culture

- A place for Far West Coast Aboriginal people to continue their culture through stories and traditions.
- Aboriginal cultural sites, including caves, blowholes, and a landscape that is of profound significance to Mirning people.
- Bush tucker such as boorah (quandong) (*Santalum acuminatum*), bush medicine such as nyoonyoon (*Eremophila* sp.) and seafood including mudi (fish).
- Culturally significant species of bush meat such as Australian bustard (*Ardeotis australis*), marlu (red kangaroo) (*Macropus rufus*), wardu (southern hairy-nosed wombat) (*Lasiorchinus latifrons*), galda (sleepy lizard) (*Tiliqua rugosa*) and goanna (*Varanus* sp.).
- Totemic species such as yarda (wedge-tailed eagle) (*Aquila audax*) and dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*).
- Culturally and ecologically important water sites, such as rock holes and those occurring in caves.

Land systems

- The Nullarbor Plain - an iconic Australian landscape known as an expansive flat treeless plain.
- The South Australian section of the world's largest semi-arid karst system (limestone caves and features).
- The longest south-facing line of cliffs in the southern hemisphere (the Bunda Cliffs).

Flora and fauna

- Twenty-four fauna species that are rare or threatened according to state listing and four species that are nationally listed. These include the nationally critically endangered plains wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*) and the state and nationally vulnerable Australian sea lion (*Neophoca cinerea*).
- The largest population of wardu (southern hairy-nosed wombat) (*Lasiorchinus latifrons*) in Australia.
- Fourteen flora species of state conservation significance and two species of national conservation significance. These include the nationally vulnerable needle wattle (*Acacia carneorum*), the nationally vulnerable *Microlepidium alatum*, and the endemic Nullarbor daisy (*Brachyscome tatei*).

Heritage

- Subfossil deposits in caves that indicate the past fauna composition of the area.
- Koonalda Cave, State and National Heritage site, which is also of cultural significance to Mirning people.
- Other caves which have Aboriginal artefacts that extended the scientific knowledge of the occupation of the Nullarbor by Aboriginal people back 39,000 years.
- European heritage sites such as graves of early explorers, Gilgerabbie Hut and the State Heritage Site, Koonalda Homestead.

Tourism opportunities

- An iconic tourism destination valued for providing a remote and natural visitor experience including the Nullarbor Plain, spectacular vistas of the Southern Ocean from the towering Bunda Cliffs, Murrawijinie Caves, the collapsed doline opening of Koonalda Cave, Koonalda Homestead and outstanding land based marine mammal viewing opportunities.



The significance of finger flutings in Koonalda Cave

The human made markings in the soft limestone at Koonalda Cave are often termed 'art' although the reason for their creation is not fully understood. Made by drawing the fingers over the limestone surface, these markings are often called finger flutings. At the time of its discovery by archaeologists the only comparable type of marking were found in Europe in the Garonne River in France.

The enigmatic 'art' of Koonalda Cave involves two styles of rock markings; the finger markings and similar marks made using a sharp tool in the harder rock. They cover two large sections of Koonalda Cave deep beneath the earth.

These distinctive human made markings are moving reminders of the ice age people who had the skill and knowledge to survive in this harsh environment. The markings at Koonalda Cave are considered some of the most complex and best preserved of their kind in Australia.

Other archaeological deposits found at Koonalda Cave provide evidence of silica mining activity that can be reliably dated to the same period. The location of the archaeological remnants of silica mining hundreds of metres below ground provides further confirmation of its human occupation to a discreet period over 20 000 years ago and informs our understanding of the human life and activity during this time.

Koonalda Cave is unique as one of the few arid sites used almost exclusively by Aboriginal people during the Pleistocene epoch and represents their long and rich cultural connection with the landscape. It is a tangible link to the past and a place that continues to hold special significance for the Mirning people today.

Department of Environment (2014)



Mirning people and DEWNR staff at the Healthy Country Planning Workshop

What are the challenges and opportunities?

Key challenges and opportunities in the protection and management of the Nullarbor parks are:

- Increasing understanding of, and respect for, the cultures of Mirning people and other Far West Coast Aboriginal people and their role in managing the Nullarbor parks.
- Incorporating traditional knowledge into the management of the parks and assisting Mirning people with the use and transfer of traditional knowledge through the maintenance of cultural sites.
- Ensuring that the hunting of bush meat, fishing, and gathering bush tucker, bush medicine and coastal food is enabled in a sustainable way.
- Minimising the impacts of pest animals including cats, foxes and wild dogs on native fauna and camels on water sources, native vegetation and cultural sites.
- Minimising the impacts of pest plants, particularly buffel grass, on flora, fauna and cultural sites across the vast plain.
- Providing visitors with a unique Nullarbor parks experience while protecting cultural sites and the fragile environment.
- Providing opportunities for visitors to learn about the special landscape, caves, animals, plants and Mirning people's history and culture so they gain a greater appreciation of and respect for the Nullarbor parks.
- Providing for the increasing interest in scientific and recreational exploration of caves while protecting sensitive cultural, geological and biological values.
- Managing fire to protect life, cultural sites, heritage sites such as Koonalda Homestead, and property such as the telecommunications infrastructure, while allowing natural processes to occur.
- Allowing for the maintenance of important communications infrastructure.
- Providing for mineral and energy resources exploration and extraction rights while minimising the impact on a sensitive and fragile environment and cultural sites.
- Providing scope for commercial tourism businesses to develop new tourism experiences while protecting the parks' natural and cultural values.
- Facilitating opportunities for Mirning people to work on-country.



Management themes and priorities

This section of the management plan addresses the most important management issues for the park, focusing on four key themes.

Theme 1: Maintaining Healthy Country

Mirning people lived harmoniously on-country for thousands of years. When Europeans arrived the lack of permanent surface water limited the use of the plain for grazing. Freshwater was drawn from underground sources at Koonalda and Nullarbor Stations for sheep. Although grazing by sheep and rabbits has had an impact on the type and structure of vegetation, the parks have protected the area for several decades allowing natural processes to occur. The healthy condition of the parks is due to their remote location and the ongoing care by Mirning people, Far West Coast Aboriginal people and government. To maintain the health of the parks, Mirning people and other Far West Coast Aboriginal people need to be able to care for Country and natural ecological processes need to continue.

The Nullarbor karst system consists of hundreds of caves and rock holes which is considered to be of international significance. The Nullarbor's network of caves were formed during a period when the climate was much wetter. These caves range from small caves, close to the surface, to enormous cathedral-like chambers and lake-filled chambers that are much deeper. These spectacular geological formations are important to protect and are inhabited by unusual and endemic cave fauna which are specially adapted to life in caves.

Water is a vital part of the system. Mirning people have cultural methods to use the fresh water and ensure it does not become contaminated. There are tracks across the Nullarbor Plain, connecting the water sources that enabled Aboriginal people to traverse the plain. These water sources, such as rock holes and in caves, are also important for the survival of wildlife. Feral animals, such as camels, can use all of the limited water so it is unavailable for native animals. The maintenance of these water sources is crucial to maintaining healthy Country.

The Nullarbor Plain is home to the largest population of wardu (southern hairy-nosed wombat) in Australia. They are listed as near-threatened on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Woinarski and Burbidge 2016) due to the decline in numbers and extent. The Nullarbor parks provide important habitat for wardu (southern hairy-nosed wombat) as available habitat declines in other areas of its range.

A number of rare or threatened fauna species are found in the parks. The nationally-rated critically endangered and state-rated endangered plains wanderer has been recorded in the Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area and will be managed according to the recovery plan developed for it (Commonwealth of Australia

2016). The colonies of the nationally and state listed vulnerable Australian sea lion at the base of the Bunda Cliffs are significant as one of the few mainland breeding sites for the species. Most of the threats to Australian sea lions are at sea or due to rising sea levels which are managed through the implementation of the recovery plan developed for the species (Commonwealth of Australia 2016). Other native wildlife will be managed through the management of threats such as protection of habitat and targeted feral predator management.

Some rare or threatened flora are present in the parks including the state-rated rare Nullarbor daisy, nationally and state rated vulnerable needle wattle and the nationally and state rated vulnerable *Microlepidium alatum*. These will be managed through threat abatement, including weed management.

Pest species need to be managed to minimise the pressure they place on native flora and fauna. Camels graze on native vegetation, whilst cats and foxes prey on native small mammals, reptiles and birds. These pest species need to be controlled to limit their impacts. Targeted management programmes, particularly around rock holes, are necessary. Weeds can also outcompete native flora, removing habitat and food sources for native fauna. Buffel grass is of particular concern due to its invasive nature, and is actively monitored and removed in the region according to the *South Australian Buffel Grass Strategic Plan 2012-2017* (Biosecurity 2012) and *Alinytjara Wilurara Buffel Grass Operational Strategy* (Tschirner et al. 2012).

The Nullarbor parks are relatively flat and largely covered by grasses or low shrubs. The nature of this environment means that it is easy to deviate from official tracks and create new ones. These new tracks can last for many years, destroying native vegetation and leaving the thin topsoil prone to erosion. Damage to vegetation as a result of illegal off-track vehicle use will continue to be managed by defining tracks and educating visitors.

The telecommunication repeater stations located along the Eyre Highway are provided with access through the parks for maintenance purposes. There is also cabling along the Old Eyre Highway which requires periodic maintenance. The maintenance of this infrastructure can be continued using existing tracks to prevent damage to native vegetation.

Fire is a natural part of the ecology of the Nullarbor parks. Some vegetation associations require fire to regenerate and the fresh green pick after a fire can bring native animals, such as marlu (red kangaroo) to the plain. On occasion, large bushfires threaten cultural sites, historic buildings, infrastructure, and people. In these cases, the fires are managed to prevent loss of life, cultural sites and property.

Water extraction for mineral sands mining occurs within the Nullarbor Regional Reserve. Mineral and energy resource activities are permitted in the Nullarbor Regional Reserve and National Park under strict conditions to protect the cultural and environmental values of the parks. All mineral and energy resource activities are managed in accordance with the *Mining Act 1971*, and the *Petroleum and Geothermal Energy Act 2000*. Companies are also required to comply with other legislation.

Objective and strategies

Protect and conserve the Nullarbor parks' natural values and rich cultural Aboriginal heritage as well as non-Aboriginal heritage.

- Continue to encourage and recognise the contribution of partners including the Victorian Speleological Society and the Cave Exploration Group of South Australia.
- As guided by the *South Australian Buffel Grass Strategic Plan* (Biosecurity 2012) and *Alinytjara Wilurara Buffel Grass Operational Strategy* (Tschirner et al. 2012), monitor and remove buffel grass outbreaks.
- Develop and implement feral predator management programmes at rock holes to allow native fauna populations to recover.
- Monitor and manage camels around sensitive sites through collaboration with regional stakeholders.
- As appropriate, authorise resource exploration and extraction activities and work with mining and energy resource companies to ensure that any future resource development activities have a minimal impact on the parks cultural, environmental and tourism values.
- Continue to implement the *Alinytjara Wilurara (AW) Fire Management Strategy* (Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources 2014) for the protection of people, cultural sites and property.
- Encourage research that will support the management of the parks in collaboration with Mirning and other Far West Coast Aboriginal people.



Theme 2: Keeping culture strong

Mirning people are the traditional custodians of the Nullarbor parks and have always held ceremonies, hunted, traded, created artworks and taken care of Country to ensure that it would continue to sustain future generations as it has for thousands of years. Mirning people and other Far West Coast Aboriginal people continue to use and care for the Nullarbor parks in both contemporary and traditional ways.

Co-management of the Nullarbor parks, through the Nullarbor Parks Advisory Committee, aims to build the capacity of both partners to cooperatively manage the parks. It also aims to enable greater involvement of Far West Coast Aboriginal people in the management of the parks.

Co-management of the parks means that both traditional knowledge and western scientific knowledge is used to manage the parks. This sharing of knowledge is important for the co-management of the parks to progress. It is also important to protect Aboriginal people's intellectual property rights.

Far West Coast Aboriginal people still use the Nullarbor parks for traditional purposes. Bush meat such as Australian bustard, marlu (red kangaroo), wardu (southern hairy-nosed wombat) and galda (sleepy lizard) are hunted. Aboriginal people pass on their stories and responsibilities for totemic species such as dingo, white-bellied sea eagle and yarda (wedge-tailed eagle). Bush tucker such as boorah (quandong) and bush medicine such as nyoonyoon (*Eremophila* sp.) are collected and used.

"I grew up on the Nullarbor, helping my father catch dingos and collecting boorah to eat and nyoonyoon to make medicines. Now I am an Elder passing on this knowledge to the next generation."

Dorcas Miller, Mirning Elder

The use of modern techniques and equipment for hunting, fishing and gathering can affect the sustainability of the species collected. For traditional hunting purposes, the use of four wheel drives and firearms makes it much easier to catch Australian bustards. Far West Coast Aboriginal people are encouraged to minimise their impact on the parks by keeping to designated vehicle tracks and by managing their take through traditional means, whenever possible.

European use of the Nullarbor expanded during the 1860s and 1870s. By 1890 Mirning people were displaced from the Nullarbor. Tens of thousands of kangaroos were killed for their pelts and rabbit plagues had a severe environmental and economic impact on the area. Droughts affected everyone and all of these combined meant that many Aboriginal people, including Mirning people, stayed at Fowlers Bay where the ration depot provided food. Despite this displacement, Mirning people have maintained their connection to Country.

The health of Country and the health of people are inseparable. The land must be actively taken care of to be healthy. Mirning people and other Far West Coast Aboriginal people need to be able to maintain their cultural sites and pass on their knowledge of how to do this.



Mickey Free

Mirning man, William Michael Lawrie, who was better known as Mickey Free Lawrie, was born at Eucla on 5th November 1868. His Mirning mother, Tjabiltja came from the Eucla district. Mickey Free grew up on the Nullarbor and spent some of his young adult life around Fowlers Bay. He was well known as a

hardworking man; patrolling the dog fence, cutting wood, fencing, kangaroo hunting and rabbiting. His second son, Albert James "Bulla" Lawrie, would often work with him.

Mickey Free used a horse and buggy to travel around the Nullarbor with his young family. He assisted European explorers document the existence of some of the well-known Nullarbor caves. In the 1890s he worked in the Denial Bay district for the pioneer settlers, usually as the foreman of an Aboriginal scrub clearing gang. In 1896 he leased a block of land just south of what became the Koonibba Mission

and went kangaroo hunting to supplement his income. It is thought that he was hunting on his land when the Lutherans came looking for a suitable location for their mission. He showed them the country around Koonibba rockhole. His hunting took him all over the Nullarbor region. In 1903 he was hunting with people from Ooldea, who then went on to attend ceremonies at Denial Bay.

In 1912 Mickey Free wrote to the Chief "Protector of the Aboriginals" asking for land to be granted to the hardworking Aboriginal people because of their contribution to the country. He also asked for an English school for their children.

Mickey Free was a leader and Elder in the Aboriginal community. He was married twice and when he passed away aged about 79, he had 10 daughters, 2 sons, 51 grand-children and 13 great-grandchildren - the basis of the well-known Lawrie clan of the Mirning tribe and well-known family on the Far West Coast of South Australia.

Story provided by April Lawrie with assistance from Mirning Elders.

Objective and strategies

Protect and care for cultural sites and enhance Far West Coast Aboriginal people's connection to Country.

- Enable maintainance of connection to Country through cultural activities in the Nullarbor parks.
- Continue to progress the partnership of co-management to enable Mirning people to have greater role in managing the parks.
- In partnership with Far West Coast Aboriginal people, develop a traditional hunting and gathering protocol and establish a process for monitoring species taken to ensure sustainability.
- Incorporate traditional knowledge and skills into research, monitoring and management activities whilst ensuring intellectual property rights are respected.
- Support Mirning people in their management of important cultural sites for cultural and ecological values.
- Facilitate opportunities for involvement of Far West Coast Aboriginal people to work on Country including employment and enterprise.



Theme 3: Respecting and enjoying Country

The Nullarbor is internationally famous for being a vast, flat and treeless plain. The Nullarbor parks provide a quintessential Nullarbor experience for those that want to camp under the stars with no one else for miles around.

The Nullarbor parks also have some recent historical sites where visitors can learn about the Koonalda sheep station and spend a night or two at Koonalda Homestead (Figure 1). Koonalda Homestead is used by independent travellers and commercial tour operators as a campsite and base to explore the surrounding area, including viewing the opening of Koonalda Cave. This site has become more popular with people creating new spots in the nearby vegetation. To maintain the value of the homestead campsites have been defined and toilets have been installed. The surrounding areas will be protected from further damage so visitors can continue to enjoy the isolation and natural beauty.

The Nullarbor caves hold cultural significance for Mirning people and most can only be entered by certain people. The Murrawijinie Caves are the only caves in the Nullarbor parks that are open for the public to explore. Improved access into and through these caves would protect the caves and provide a better visitor experience.

There is currently limited interpretive information at key sites such as Koonalda Cave and Murrawijinnie Caves. Improved visitor information, particularly about cultural associations, would enable visitors to gain a greater appreciation of the Nullarbor parks and the culture of the Mirning people.

Scientific research by speleological associations, museums and universities has provided valuable information about the karst system as well as the human and ecological history of the area. The research is carefully conducted to prevent damage to geological features and Aboriginal heritage. There is some interest from recreational cavers to explore more of the caves. Caving activities will need to be carefully managed to protect cultural sites and the geological and ecological features of the caves.

Many visitors stop at one or more of the three lookouts along the Bunda Cliffs to admire the spectacular views and the chance to observe marine mammals such as Australian sea lions and southern right whales. There are three official lookouts that provide the best viewing opportunities along the cliffs. New directional and interpretive signage will assist visitors in finding official lookouts which provide the best views and opportunities to observe wildlife. Information on the plants, animals, geology and cultural associations can provide visitors with greater appreciation of the special nature of the area.

A number of commercial tour operators offer tourism experiences within the Nullarbor parks, predominantly focussed on the Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area. The Murrawijinie Caves, Koonalda Cave entrance, Koonalda Homestead and the spectacular Bunda Cliffs are the most popular sites for these tours. Commercial tour operators are required to have permits to provide tours in the parks. Sustainable, nature-based and wilderness experience tours are encouraged, particularly those that provide an authentic cultural experience with traditional owners.

Koonalda Station

In the 1930s the Gurney brothers, Roy and Cyril made an application to graze sheep on the western portion of the South Australian part of the Nullarbor. Their application was rejected due to the lack of water. Local Aboriginal people knew there was freshwater in Koonalda Cave and showed the brothers. The Gurney brothers got the lease once they proved that they could pump the water out for the stock. Cyril Gurney started building Koonalda Homestead in 1938 using railway sleepers and whatever material he could easily transport there. Cyril and Audrey Gurney brought up their children at Koonalda. They grazed sheep and cattle on the station and sold fuel to passing travellers. They continued to manage the station until the 1970s when it became a national park.



Now Koonalda Homestead is a popular camping area and is co-managed as part of the Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area.

Objectives and strategies

Assist visitors develop a greater appreciation and respect for the Nullarbor parks and the deep cultural connection Mirning people have with their Country.

Provide more opportunities for nature-based and cultural tourism, whilst ensuring that the Nullarbor parks continue to provide a unique remote and natural experience.

- Develop a visitor experience strategy for the Nullarbor parks that:
 - Identifies the location of signage that welcomes visitors to the Country of the Mirning people.
 - Identifies sites that require improved information or interpretation for visitors.
 - Identifies opportunities for investment in tourism enterprises.
 - Sets out strategies for the improvement of vehicle access to sites that have been degraded over time.
- Continue to consolidate and maintain visitor access, camping areas and facilities in consultation with the broader community and Far West Coast Aboriginal people.
- Encourage sustainable tourism enterprises that provide tourists with superior visitor experiences, which involve Mirning people.
- Allow for camping at Koonalda Homestead and other areas identified in the visitor experience strategy.



Theme 4: Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area Visitor Management Strategy

Visitation to the majority of the Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area is very low with the iconic sites such as Koonalda Cave receiving most of the visitors. This is compatible with the objective of maintaining wilderness quality. The Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area will be managed according to the *South Australian*

Code of Management for Wilderness Protection Areas and Zones (DEH 2004) which guides the management of wilderness protection areas and requires a visitor management strategy to be included in any management plan.

Objectives and strategies

Maintain the remote and natural qualities of the Nullarbor Wilderness Protection Area.

- Close tracks where there is a safety concern and allowing others to revegetate naturally through lack of use.
- Install signs at the Nullarbor and Border Village Roadhouses and replacing some existing signs with interpretive material about the cultural and natural values and visitor facilities information.
- Allow public access to the Murrawijinie Caves and improve access into and through the caves.
- Allow camping at Koonalda Homestead and other sites identified in the visitor experience strategy via the online booking system.
- Make information available to visitors and the local community to encourage awareness of wilderness values, adoption of minimal impact practices and awareness of appropriate activities
- Approve commercial tourism proposals that are consistent with the *Wilderness Protection Regulations* (2006), the principles contained in the *South Australian Code of Management for Wilderness Protection Areas and Zones* (DEH 2004) and the requirements of the *Minimum Impact Code for wilderness use in South Australia* (DEH 2006).
- Periodically assess the impact of visitor activities on wilderness values within the Wilderness Protection Area with a particular focus on Koonalda Cave, the Bunda Cliffs and Murrawijinie Caves.
- Implement strategies that are consistent with the *South Australian Code of Management for Wilderness Protection Areas and Zones* (DEH 2004) to address any emerging impacts arising from visitor activities.

Invitation to contribute

This draft management plan is released for public consultation over a three month period to facilitate community input into the development of the Nullarbor Parks Management Plan. You are invited to contribute by making a submission.

To ensure that your submission is effective:

- Make your submission concise and clear.
- Reference any specific comments to a page or section within the draft plan.
- Identify aspects of the draft plan that you support, or do not support. Explain your reasons for disagreeing with the content of the draft plan and suggest alternatives.
- Highlight any information that may be inaccurate and provide a reference to assist with further editing.

Each submission will be carefully reviewed. A final Nullarbor Parks Management Plan will then be prepared and forwarded to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation for consideration together with a detailed analysis of submissions received.

The Minister may adopt the plan with or without alteration. Once adopted, a notice will be published in the Government Gazette.

The plan and an analysis of the public submissions will be available at **www.environment.sa.gov.au/park-management**.

Please note that your submission will become part of the public record and will be available to anyone who requests a copy unless you specifically request otherwise.

Submissions close 27 January 2018

Written submissions:

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Online submissions:

www.yoursay.sa.gov.au/decisions





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