

Wilbinga National Park

– the Kings Park of the north!

A proposal for the creation of a National Park on the northern limits of Perth City



Western Australia's National Parks are vital for conservation, tourism, indigenous heritage and scientific discovery, making them invaluable for current and future generations.

1 Overview

It is proposed that Wilbinga National Park be formed by encompassing the area between the northern limits of Perth's urban development at Two Rocks, the south bank of the Moore River estuary and bounded to the west by the Indian Ocean and to the east by Indian Ocean Drive.

The proposed park forms part of the traditional lands of the Yued people.

This proposal summarises some of the potential outcomes that would arise following consolidation of the existing reserves, Unallocated Crown Land and 3 small parcels of currently undeveloped private land, into a single National Park.

The land in question is unique in its proximity to the limits of metropolitan Perth to the south and to the Moore River estuary to the north.

The land contains a number of threatened ecological sub-communities (TECs) of the Swan Coastal Plain and includes portions of the Gnangara, Gingin and Yanchep Groundwater Management areas. As urban areas have expanded on the Swan Coastal Plain, a great deal of biodiversity has been lost (Hill et al. 1996).

The unification of this area into a single park would have multiple benefits for protecting the remaining biodiversity as well as enhancing opportunities for nature-based cultural and recreational tourism. It could also create employment opportunities through the Indigenous Ranger Program. The proposed park will complement Yanchep National Park, Neerabup Regional Park, Neerabup Nature Reserve and the regionally significant remnant bushland identified under the Bush Forever program (Government of Western Australia 2000).

Perth Urban Environs need a Green Space to the North

Perth, Australia, is often described and known as the "longest city in the world" due to its extensive urban sprawl, stretching approximately 150 kilometres from Two Rocks in the north to Mandurah in the south.

This length is primarily due to its unique geographic constraints and historical development patterns, which have led to a long, narrow urban form rather than a more compact city.

Factors contributing to Perth's unusual length include -

Geography

Perth is bounded by the Darling Ranges to the east and the Indian Ocean to the west, limiting its expansion in those directions.

Social Preferences

Historical preferences for detached housing and single-family dwellings have contributed to the city's sprawling nature.

Infrastructure Development

The construction of highways like the Kwinana and Mitchell Freeways, as well as the Narrows Bridge interchange, facilitated and encouraged suburban development along these corridors, further extending the city's length.

However, Curtin University's Sustainability Policy Institute estimated that every new dwelling built on the urban fringe requires about \$90,000 in taxpayer subsidies compared to a similar infill dwelling in Perth.

So we are not only creating a burden for generations to come but also a city that is less liveable, sustainable, and vibrant now.

It is the decisions we make today that will define the Perth of tomorrow and on issues of density and sprawl, we're dropping the ball. There are better decisions to be made.



We are destroying Perth's coastal bushland for housing as seen in this new suburb.

Why a National Park at Wilbinga ?

One of the definitions for an Australian National Park is as follows –

A National Park is an area of public land designated to protect native species, ecosystems, and landscapes of national significance, while also providing opportunities for cultural and recreational activities.

As the name implies – it is a park that has all the above qualities and therefore meets the “National” standard to gain this status; a park of the Nation.

Under these criteria, Wilbinga warrants National Park status.

Advantages include –

Environmental and Conservation Benefits

- Biodiversity Protection - WA's national parks safeguard unique ecosystems, including rare and endangered species and threatened ecological communities e.g. tuarts, banksias, Yanchep Peacock Spider and Carnaby's cockatoos
- Habitat preservation – protect ancient landscapes, coastal dunes and geological formations.
- Climate resilience – natural areas act as 'carbon sinks', helping mitigate climate change
- Water protection – Moore River Estuary marks the northern limit of Wilbinga NP - it's health, wildlife and watershed need protection
- Providing a 'Wildlife Corridor' to nearby Yanchep NP
- A 'dark skies' area to further the science at Gingin Observatory

Economic Benefits

- Tourism Revenue – convenient too much of Perth's population, this park will attract visitors, supporting local businesses and jobs
- Employment Opportunities – parks generate jobs in tourism, conservation, research and Indigenous land management
- Sustainable development – eco-tourism minimises environmental damage while boosting regional economies

Cultural and Heritage Benefits

- Indigenous Connection – the Yued people of the Noongar nation have deep cultural ties to Moore River Estuary and manage a large piece of Wilbinga land included in the South West Native Title Settlement
- There is an important opportunity to involve traditional owners in management, thereby preserving Indigenous knowledge of this area

Social and Recreational Benefits

- Outdoor activities e.g. responsible 4WDing, fishing, hiking, camping and wildlife watching all improve people's wellbeing
- Education and Research – parks serve as living laboratories for scientists and schools
- Mental health benefits – access to nature reduces stress and promotes physical activity
- The park would be ideal area to undertake the construction of new walking and bike riding trails

The Southwest Australia Biodiversity Hotspot

The Southwest Australia Ecoregion, located in the southwest corner of the country, is **characterized by an exceptional concentration of biodiversity**. More than 4,000 species of endemic plants and 100 endemic vertebrates have been recorded here, with many other plant species believed to be yet discovered.

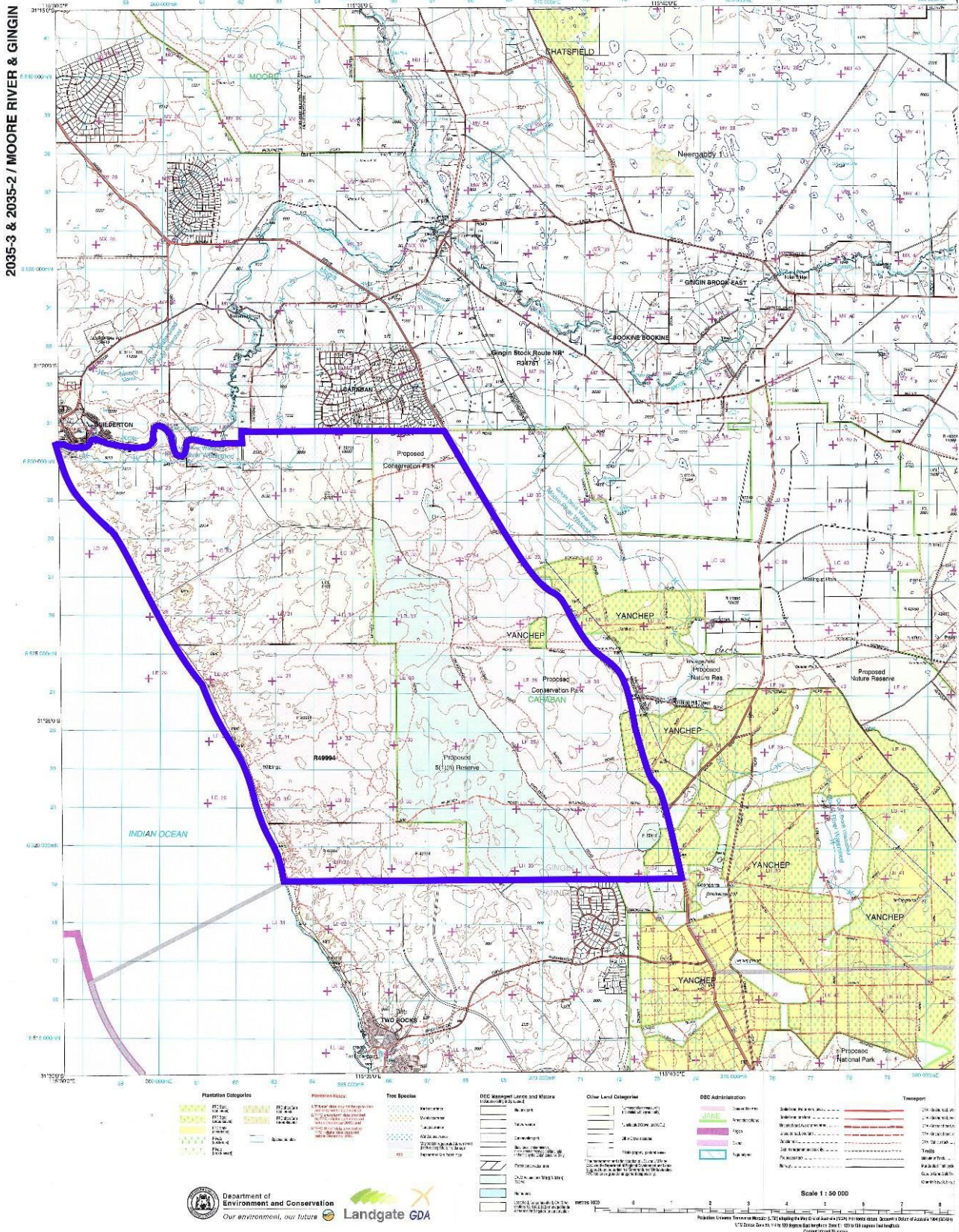
- Much of the land within this Region is already within the development zone of Perth City and likely to be cleared within the foreseeable future.
- Planning documents from WAPC describe Perth's northern limit at 'a line in the sand' just north of Two Rocks so creating a National Park at the city's edge would ensure that all urban development remains south of the Gingin Shire.

2 Area and Tenure of Proposed Park

The area, outlined in blue in the maps in Maps 1 and 2, predominantly consists of shire reserves, reserves currently under management of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), Unallocated Crown Land or state forest in addition to 2103ha in the north-west corner owned by privately by Parkmar Pty Ltd for Mr Peter Medich, and two other small privately-owned blocks, totalling 200ha, bordering the south bank of the Moore River.

The northern boundary of the park would be defined by the extension of Barragoon Road to the upper eastern boundary of Lot 2149 with the remainder of the northern limit being defined by the south bank of the Moore River.

The southern boundary of the park would be defined by the boundary between the Shire of Gingin and the City of Wanneroo. The coast forms the western boundary and Indian Ocean Drive defines the eastern border of the proposed park.



Key: Pink shaded = Conservation Park, Green shaded = CALM Act sections 5 (1) (g) & 5 (1) (h), Pale Yellow shaded = Unallocated Crown Land, White = Private property, Bright Yellow with tree symbol = FPC State Coniferous

Map 1 Proposed Park Area showing tenure and management of land.

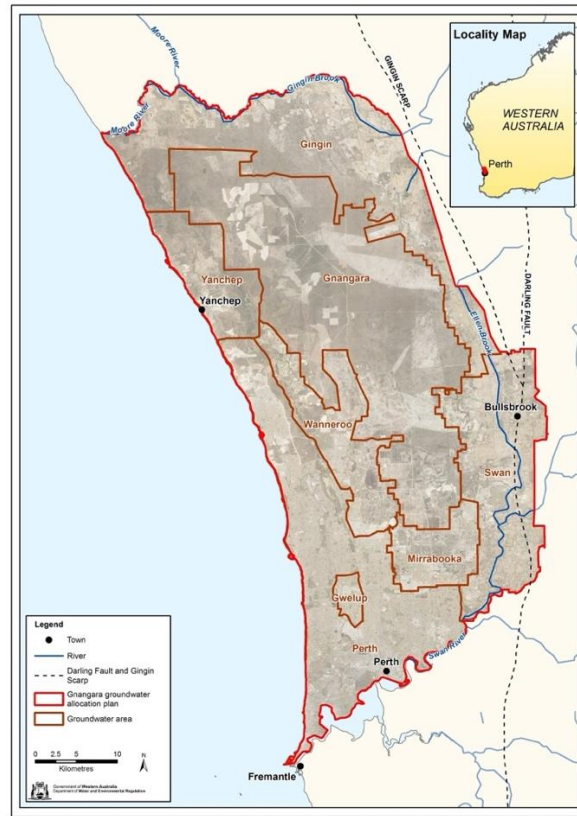
Excerpt from Landgate Map Moore River and Gingin Map 2035-3 and 2035-2

3 Opportunities

Groundwater Reserves

Supporting the DWER Gngangara groundwater allocation plan as it evolves, is essential to ensuring the groundwater reserves are protected.

In the northwest corner of the Gngangara mound, Wilbinga National Park can protect the groundwater system and the environment there that is groundwater dependant.



Action 16 from the Gngangara ground water allocation plan 2024 Progress Report

Review and replace the Gingin Groundwater Allocation Plan and Gingin Surface Water Allocation Plan with a new Gingin Water Allocation Plan.

In June 2024, an evaluation of the 2015 Gingin Groundwater Allocation Plan and 2011 Gingin Surface Water Allocation Plan was published (Figure 18). The evaluation statement includes updated management arrangements to manage the impacts of climate change and abstraction in the southern part of the Gingin region.

The changes strengthen the protection of Gingin's water resources and support local water users and the environment by restricting new water licensing, and the trade of water in areas most impacted by climate change and water use.

The 2022 Gngangara Groundwater Allocation Plan indicated the Department's intent to reduce groundwater abstraction in the Gingin area, and to replace both the groundwater and surface water plans with a new, combined Gingin Water Allocation Plan. A new draft Gingin Water Allocation Plan is expected to be released in 2028 for public consultation.

This is a change from the estimated 2025 timeframe given in the 2022 Gnangara plan. The change will allow for development of a new numerical groundwater model using the latest climate projections.

The new combined surface and groundwater plan is intended to capture the complex groundwater/surface water interactions throughout the Gingin area and to outline a consistent approach to managing groundwater resources to the north and south of Gingin Brook and Moore River estuary.

Following the release of the evaluation statement in June 2024, a meeting was held with the Yued Aboriginal Corporation and another meeting with members of the Chittering Landcare Group and Gingin Brook Catchment Group (formerly Gingin Water Group) which discussed the evaluation statement, the new Gingin allocation plan and opportunities for collaboration and engagement during plan development.

Biodiversity

The proposed park will consolidate the north-south nature corridor along the coast between Two Rocks and the southern bank of the Moore River Estuary.

It represents a coastal limestone ecosystem that has been, or is planned to be, heavily cleared and developed to the limit of Perth city.

This proposal will therefore maintain large-scale ecosystem processes with benefits to many native plants and animals including endangered and threatened species of the Swan Coastal Plain. By creating a large and continuous wildlife corridor, the park will help protect against coastal erosion as sea levels rise and enable species to move south as temperatures rise and rainfall reduces even more in future.

In time the park could be considered a coastal version of Kings Park offering refugia for species affected by nearby development.

Stygofauna and Troglafauna (subterranean invertebrate fauna)

The proposed park area contains aquifers within tamala limestone which form part of the Gnangara Groundwater System and are an integral part of Perth's drinking and non-potable water supply. These aquifers are also home to stygofauna and troglafauna which occur in dissolution cavities.

These invertebrates are known to have very high diversity and endemism, with new species commonly being described every time an investigation is made prior to development.

Unique species associated with Tuart root mats were discovered at Yanchep and it is very likely that an investigation of the proposed park area would encounter unique species as their range is often very limited (Department of Environment and Conservation 2012).

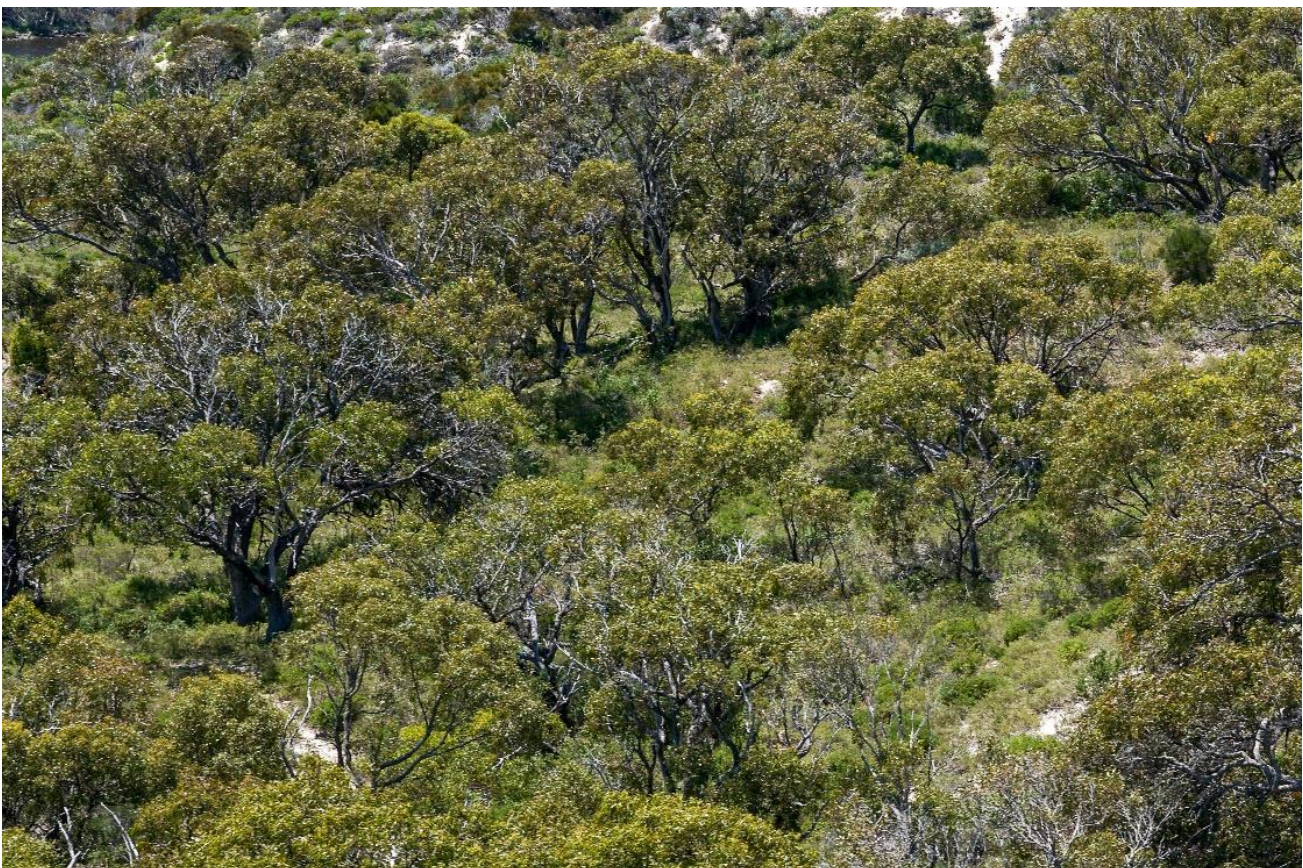
Aquatic Invertebrates

DWER's environmental monitoring program and other research in the Gnangara Mound area has identified a number of species of aquatic invertebrates new to science, including some that are listed under the Australian Government's *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* and the WA Government's *Wildlife Conservation Act* (Department of Environment and Conservation 2012). The proposed park area (including the area south of the Moore River estuary) is likely to include groundwater-dependent ecosystems (GDEs) containing locally endemic and therefore vulnerable aquatic invertebrate fauna. GDEs provide links with other wet areas in Australia and to Asian flyways and are therefore important links for wildfowl. The proposed park provides opportunity for further research and the development of management strategies to maintain this important part of the Swan Coastal Plain's biodiversity.

Tuart Woodlands

The proposed park area contains multiple isolated patches of undisturbed Tuart trees in addition to the significant stands of Tuart vegetation with connectivity along the Moore River at the northern boundary of the proposed park, as documented in the Tuart Atlas (Government of Western Australia 2003). This can be seen in aerial photographs supplied.

The decline of Tuart stands caused by clearing, disease and the drying climate on the Swan Coastal Plain is cause for concern, not least because of their role in supporting TECs including aquatic root mat communities and an endangered community, the *Melaleuca huegelii* – *Melaleuca acersoa* shrub-lands (Department of Environment and Conservation 2012).





Banksia Woodlands Ecological Community

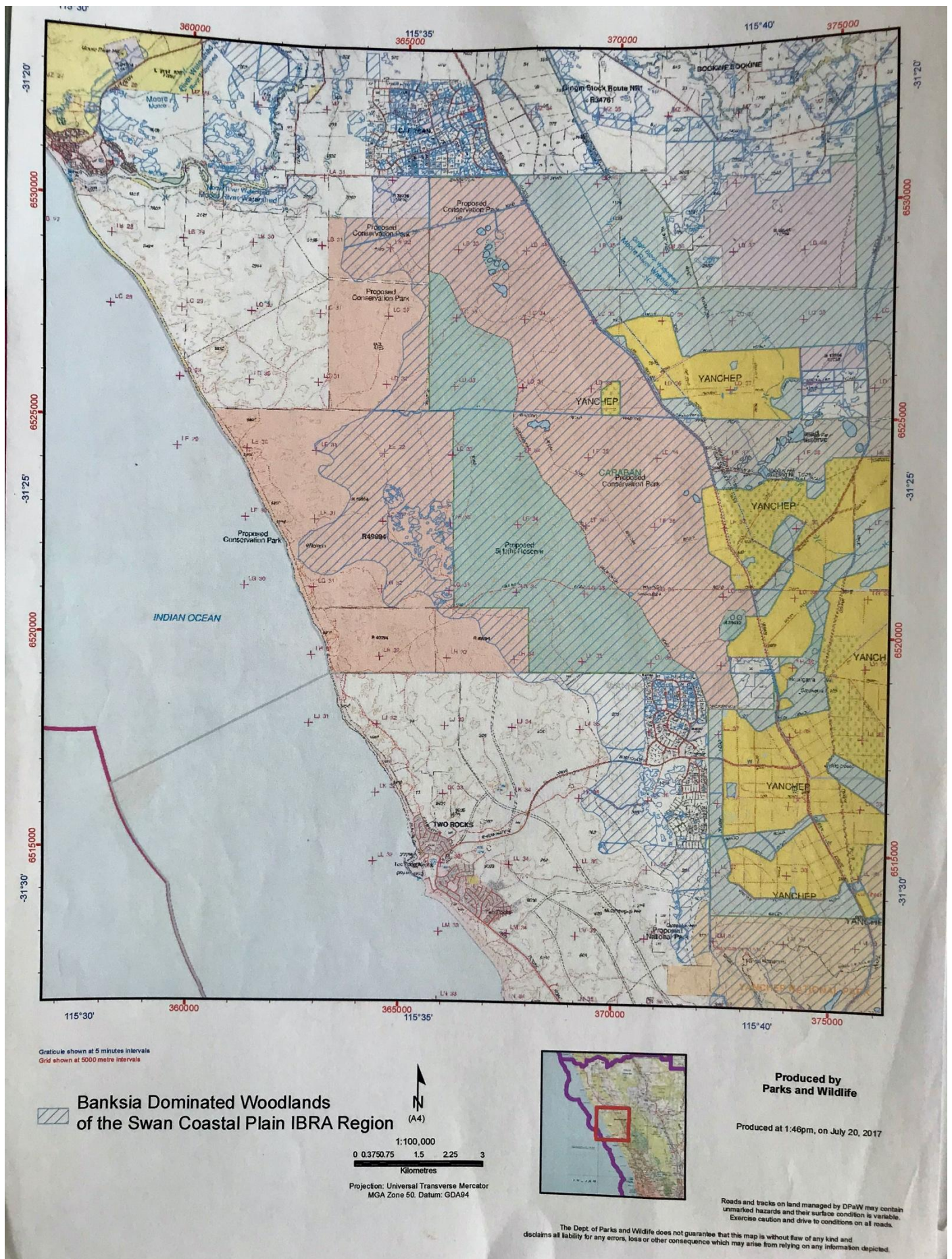
Eighteen complexes that contain a significant Banksia woodland component have been identified south of the Moore River. An indicative distribution map (Department of the Environment and Energy 2016) suggests that some of the most densely connected patches of this endangered ecological community occur in the proposed park area. This information is also substantiated by a map produced by the Department of Parks and Wildlife (2017), which focuses on the sub areas of the proposed park and shows Banksia-dominated woodlands covering the majority of the proposed park area (Map 3).

As is well documented, this ecological community provides habitat for over 20 threatened species as well as ... “helping to cool temperatures in the surrounding region; store carbon; filter and maintain aquifers, including those supplying drinking water for Perth; mitigate local flooding, soil loss, and pollution; and, provide amenity and recreation such as scenic areas for bushwalking. The ecological community also can support soil health, crop pollination and pest management” (Department of the Environment and Energy 2016, p.3).

Aerial photographic records indicate the likely presence of Banksia Woodlands TECs in the private lots at the northern limits of the proposed park (Appendix 5). Systematic current surveys are required to determine the significance and condition of the Banksia Woodlands on this land.



Aerial photographs of proposed park land bordering south bank of Moore River Estuary showing banksia and tuart woodlands (FOMRE archives)



Map 3 Showing Banksia dominated woodlands on proposed park area.
Excerpt from Department of Parks and Wildlife (2017)

Carnaby's Cockatoo

Banksia woodlands of the Swan Coastal Plain have always formed part of the foraging area for endangered Carnaby's Cockatoo (Valentine and Stock 2002).

Carnaby's Cockatoos have more recently shifted their breeding to the Swan Coastal Plain with most nests being in Tuarts. The paucity of nest sites, exacerbated by clearing and by introduced hollow nesting fauna, such as European Honey Bees (Johnstone and Kirkby), has been highlighted as one of the many critical pressures on this species. The proposed park includes important foraging areas and potential breeding sites for this species.



Preservation of Wetland Riparian Zone around the Moore River and Estuary

The inclusion of the land on the south bank of the Moore River near its estuary provides a long-term opportunity for managing increasing threats to the riparian-zone vegetation with consequent positive outcomes for water quality of the river and preservation of TECs.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management's Biodiversity Audit of Western Australia (McKenzie, May and McKenna 2003) lists the Moore/River Gingen Brook wetland as a Wetland of Subregional Significance.

Yued Cultural Heritage and Employment

The proposed park is part of the Yued traditional land and is included in the Yued Indigenous Land Use Agreement as a part of the South West Native Title Settlement and the future management of the acquired land is now vested with the Yued Regional Corporation.

The Yued people are supportive of the creation of a National Park at Wilbinga. Current managers of Wilbinga are committed to working with traditional owners and providing employment opportunities through the Indigenous Ranger Program. The proposed park would facilitate opportunities for the traditional custodians of the area to care for country and provide culturally appropriate information and interpretation to park visitors.

Recreation and Tourism

Rapidly spreading urban and industrial development on the Swan Coastal Plain means that bushland in close proximity to Perth is now highly valued for recreation and as a visual and spatial buffer from urban development. Rapid urbanisation to the south of Two Rocks has led to increasing fragmentation of habitat and other associated threats such as increased feral animals (especially cats, foxes and rabbits), increased fire risk and increased environmental weeds.

The proposed park area has recently come under growing pressure from 4-wheel-drive vehicle users and recreational fishers seeking access to the ocean.

The volunteer Wilbinga Shacks 4x4 Crew work with the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) to encourage responsible 4 Wheel Driving, rationalise tracks and do an annual clean-up of the Wilbinga Conservation Area through a Motorised Recreation Adoption Agreement (Department of Parks and Wildlife, 2014).

The proposed park would recognize the current value of the land for a range of recreational users and facilitate appropriate management, thus complementing the popular Yanchep National Park, in addition to providing further opportunities for community engagement and education.

The 2025 Coastal Recreation Track Management Master Plan, endorsed by the Shire of Gingin, will also enable the careful use of the coastal areas for recreation.

Beekeeping

Honey collection may be one of the current uses of the land proposed for the park. Given concerns about honey bees becoming feral under some conditions, the proposed park would facilitate management through liaison with apiarists, to enable the goal of more efficient and sustainable use of apiary sites.

Gingin Gravity Discovery Centre and Observatory

This very special place of science - on Military Road, 12 kms directly east of the coast – which relies on ‘dark skies’ and will highly value the nocturnal darkness that Wilbinga National Park will maintain.

4 Constraints

Managing Conflicting Land User Values

Restrictions on beach access might need to apply seasonally or in particular locations or at given times, such as when birds are nesting.

The planning area is within a zone which may be vulnerable to the establishment and persistence of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* or jarrah dieback. Recreational use such as off-road vehicles and bushwalking are known to increase the spread of jarrah dieback and will need to be carefully managed to reduce the threat to susceptible flora (Commonwealth of Australia 2016).

Tuart trees are susceptible to both *Phytophthora multivora* and to root and collar rot caused by the soil-borne fungus *Armillaria luteobubalina*, both of which can be spread by soil.

Acquiring Private Land

A list of the lots comprising this area are as follows (from most north-west corner) –

- Lots 1, 2424, 2593, 2802, 2914, 3099 and 3156 Barragoon Road, Carraban privately owned, having changed owner in July 2024 for \$20 million.
- Lot 2481 privately owned, having changed owners in June 2025 for \$1.5 million
- Lot 2149 privately owned, by the current owners since about 1992
- Lot 10692 R 39736 Nature Reserve
- Swan Lot 8185 Unallocated Crown Land, now in South West Land Agreement
- Lot 10651 Reserve 39411
- Lot 5611 F 65 Proposed 5 (1) (h) reserve and proposed Conservation Park
- Lot 10652 R39412
- Lots 9755, 9756, 9757: R49994 Conservation Park

The Parkmar Pty Ltd owned land (in most NW corner) constitutes the immediate freehold land in need of purchase. Development of a sub-division with 1,940 lots was approved for this land. The development process has been prolonged (over 30 years) and controversial, and all approvals are due to expire in 2028.

Development proposals were initially rejected by Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC), a decision which was upheld by the State Administrative Tribunal. It proceeded as a result of intervention by John Day, the Planning Minister in the Coalition government at the time in 2009, and the threat of a lawsuit.

It is a development which contravenes many current state planning guidelines and policies (State Planning Policy No. 3 Urban Growth and Settlement and State Planning Policy No. 2.6 State Coastal Planning).

It has had strong community opposition throughout. The development would result in considerable environmental damage. In 2018, the WAPC imposed onerous conditions which makes the area very costly to develop.

With no nearby power, water, sewerage or roads established and the acknowledged fire dangers in this isolated cul-de-sac between ocean, river and bushland, any idea of a suburb is simply bad planning.

Conclusion

Western Australia's National Parks are vital for conservation, tourism, indigenous heritage and scientific discovery, making them invaluable for current and future generations.

The proposed Wilbinga National Park presents an opportunity to safeguard the remaining unique terrestrial, aquatic and subterranean biodiversity of the Swan Coastal Plain in a north-of-the-city coastal version of Kings Park, however approximately 5 times as large.

The proximity to Perth of this visionary park would ensure valuable economic benefits through local and nature-based tourism and social and cultural benefits through the Yued sharing their connection to land. The potential for far-reaching benefits through carbon storage, aquifer maintenance, coastal management and mitigating the effects of the urban heat island of the adjacent metropolitan area have been discussed in this proposal.

Unifying management of this area (e.g. fire management and regeneration of native species) and including the southern banks of the popular Moore River Estuary ensures that this park will become an important nature sanctuary for future generations of Western Australians.

Finally, points of note –

Of the entire area of the new Wilbinga National Park – 80% of this proposed National Park is already zoned as 'Conservation' and/or 'Recreation.' Most of the area is under the management of DBCA and Forestry.

- When it comes to re-zoning areas for a National Park, it is a very rare opportunity for the following –
 - for an area such as Wilbinga to be available so close to established urban areas. Other municipalities which also have this unique situation include - Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park to the north of Sydney and Royal National Park to the south of Sydney
 - that a proposed National Park has so few land owner issues to manage

- there are 3 private landowners within the proposed Wilbinga National Park. The north westerly 2000ha was rezoned from General Rural to Urban by Gingin Shire in the early 1990s. It has a development approval over it and sold last year (2024) for \$20 million. It has been grazed in parts for 60 years and much of it is in excellent condition. Creating a suburb here would certainly be a mistake by all modern standards especially regarding bushfire vulnerability.
- The neighbouring 2 blocks are relatively small i.e. a 120ha block (sold this year for \$1.5 million) and the other - most north easterly block of 80ha - has been owned by the current owner since 1992.
- Compulsory acquisition of these 3 blocks via State Offset Funds, would allow the Wilbinga National Park to extend to a natural northern limit along the southern boundary of the Moore River.



Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

This proposal has been the collaboration of a large number of concerned WA residents and organizations, who for a long time have held a vision of keeping this particular area of land in natural perpetuity, via a Wilbinga National Park.

Current contact person -

Linda Johnson

Chair of the Friends of Moore River Estuary (FOMRE)

0414 631 273 or email lindabob@gmail.com

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