

A Recovery Plan for Boranup Forest & the Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park

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The Calgardup Fire of December 2021 which burned virtually the entire Boranup Forest within the Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park in SW Western Australia was devastating. While the Forest will gradually recover, the impact of the fire will have a profound ongoing effect.

Our community derives its culture and strong sense of place from the natural environment of this land. For more than 60,000 years the Leeuwin Ridge has lain at the heart of a sense of the spirit of the place. As modern custodians of country, we must show profound respect and care for this place, Wadandi Boodja.

The Boranup Forest is a symbolic feature for our local community and so many Western Australians. It stands above a unique karst system and has impressive landscapes. There is immense history here with tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal culture and an important timber industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These are stories not yet well told but we have an opportunity to provide a fascinating and enlightening insight into this land.

The fire has left an uncounted loss of animals and birds of the forest, as well as creating an ongoing effect on the vegetative mix, the age profile, and the proliferation of weeds. There will be human costs in the loss of amenity and livelihood for those who have built businesses that help visitors enjoy the park and appreciate its features, above ground and below it.

Our community is in awe of the efforts of the dedicated men and women who battled the blaze. We are grateful for their skills and application, which prevented a much greater potential tragedy.

We are conscious that Boranup Forest and the entire Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park have been under pressure from the weight of intense and growing public use and see the necessity of managing visitor impact. The meagre public resources that have been applied to the protection and conservation of the National Park have been insufficient for the task. The State's most-visited National Park was exhausted even before this latest fire.

The undersigned representatives of key community organisations of the Margaret River Region have joined here to propose a course of action to Government that will be imperative to sustain Boranup Forest and the Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park in robust good health. Our Six-Point Plan is as follows. We pledge our respective organisations to do all we can within our resources to support the implementation of this urgent plan.

1. Joint Aboriginal management of the Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park in perpetuity

- *to ensure the park benefits from ongoing full involvement of traditional Wadandi skills and knowledge, and builds Aboriginal employment*

ACTION:

- 1.1. Establish the Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park as the first SW Park in WA to enter joint management with local Aboriginal custodians.
- 1.2. Meantime encourage full engagement of the Wadandi people in decisions which affect the future of the Park.

2. Resources to restore and sustain the Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park

- *to ensure that the entire park has sufficient resources to be fully restored to good health and then maintained in that condition, with weeds and feral animals controlled to support biodiversity and cultural values*
- *to ensure scientific research and monitoring of flora and fauna recovery*

ACTION:

- 2.1. Increase the number of DBCA Parks & Wildlife Rangers from the historic level of 4 to 8, to provide a level of park management that better reflects the high level of visitation (4 million visitors per year) into the National Park that runs 130km north to south with 55 uncontrolled free entry points.
- 2.2. Provide additional resources to control invasive and feral species, and to support native and endangered species. The fire has created a rare opportunity to access the forest and coastal heath to control invasive weeds, especially Arum Lily, and feral animals. This intervention post-fire is urgent as native fauna will be subject to increased predation and most invasive weeds will regenerate more rapidly than natives.
- 2.3. Provide resources to purchase and deploy nesting boxes for cockatoos in place of destroyed nesting hollows, and biodegradable habitat pods to provide shelter for vulnerable native fauna such as quendas.
- 2.4. Fund the necessary monitoring and research into the recovery of flora and fauna to inform the management of future post-fire habitat recovery.

3. Reinstatement of the Nindup Plain, including privately held Blue Gum plantations

- *to recognise the pivotal ecological role of the Nindup Plain, the need to sustain subterranean water flows, the fact that the part of the Nindup Plain within the park boundary has been destroyed*
- *to protect flora and fauna (incl Stygofauna and Geocrinia)*
- *to embrace the imperative for an east-west corridor now that native logging is to cease*

ACTION:

- 3.1. Extend the Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park east of Boranup to encompass available privately owned and farmed properties. This would facilitate the removal of the plantation blue gums that are the main factor in depleting surface and subterranean water flows vital for the adjacent wetlands and the karst system habitats to the west.

- 3.2. Re-establish flora and fauna native to the Nindup Plain to help build a habitat connection from the National Park to the State forests to the east.

4. **Visitor facilities, education & management**

- *to re-imagine tourism and visitation in the park*
- *to provide for curated, informed, primarily non-motorised future enjoyment and appreciation of the park, its significant natural values and beauty as well as its significant Aboriginal and European heritage values, and to adequately manage the significant pressures of being the State's most-visited park*

ACTION:

- 4.1. Upgrade the necessary facilities such as carparking, toilets, guidance and signage at key access points along the National Park coast where visitation is overwhelming the existing access facilities and causing significant environmental harm.
- 4.2. Fund the upgrade and ongoing maintenance of the Cape to Cape Track which is located primarily within the National Park. The track is already well known but under-resourced and poorly maintained. It has the potential to become one of the world's best coastal walks attracting interstate and international visitors.
- 4.3. Establish world class, museum quality interpretation facilities that provide an understanding and appreciation of Wadandi Aboriginal history, European history and the timber industry, as well as the flora & fauna of the Boranup Forest itself. This facility should include Wadandi engagement and employment. A forest interpretation facility at Boranup has the potential to be one of WA's premier nature-based tourism attractions.
- 4.4. Manage visitor impact and raise the quality of experience in the Boranup Forest by providing safe, enjoyable, non-motorised access into the forest via a series of boardwalks and designated trails.

5. **Future fire management**

- *to maintain a sufficient program of fire management in the National Park to minimise the risks of large scale, high temperature fires*
- *to introduce and trial traditional Wadandi burning to areas in which the fuel load has been eliminated*

ACTION:

- 5.1. Ensure that the necessary program of prescribed burning, based on contemporary scientific evidence, is maintained across the National Park to create more manageable fuel loads and safeguard adjoining private properties.
- 5.2. Liaise with Aboriginal traditional custodians to investigate the use of traditional burning techniques within selected and appropriate terrains and habitats, while taking account of required standards for the protection of lives and assets.

6. **Financial sustenance for businesses whose income will be significantly affected by the fire (incl MRBTA).**

- *to provide support to tourism-related businesses/individuals who are reliant on the forest for income*

- *to provide support to agriculture/horticulture businesses, including vineyards, that incurred loss due the fire.*

ACTION:

- 6.1. Make available short-term financial aid to offset the loss of income for tourism businesses directly impacted by lack of access to Boranup Forest, or loss of infrastructure within the fireground.
- 6.2. Investigate the establishment of a government supported insurance scheme for businesses operating in high-risk locations or undertaking higher risk activities.

Respectfully, these actions are critical to the ongoing custodianship of this special place. The Margaret River Region needs support.



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