



MEDIA RELEASE
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Western Port Biosphere holds second annual Biodiversity Forum

Over 80 people attended the 2nd annual Biodiversity Forum at Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne on Friday 6th May 2016, which this year had a general theme of pest control.

The Forum is an opportunity for the Biosphere to present the work being undertaken as part of the Australian Government-funded ***Growing Connections Project***, and the projects of our partner councils, Landcare and community groups.

Biosphere updates included:

- Launch of an online version of the innovative Biodiversity Plan (<http://arcg.is/1VUnrrY>)
- News on the establishment of the Western Port Pest Animal Group. The Group will define best practice and continued improvement in pest control and coordinate on-ground works with community groups and individuals.
- Commencement of a year-long fox control program in the Tooradin area, with 50 baits laid on participating private properties and adjoining public land. The program will help control fox numbers and predation to protect national and state threatened species
- Fourteen landholders have signed up as water stewards under the Biosphere's Water Stewardship Program. Further expressions of interest are encouraged as the project expands into catchments beyond Watson Creek.

Federal Minister for the Environment Greg Hunt attended the event and during his speech announced that following a further scientific review the Southern Brown Bandicoot will remain on the endangered species list.

Minister Hunt also referred to a program (first mooted at the Threatened Species Summit in 2015) under which five islands around Australia will be declared cat free. Minister Hunt announced that there is a commitment from the Australian Government to work with and support the French Island community towards the goal of becoming cat-free by 2020. French Island is within the Western Port Biosphere Reserve.

The keynote presentation by Professor John Woinarski, Deputy Director of the Threatened Species Recovery Hub in the National Environmental Science Programme at Charles Darwin University, highlighted Australia's poor record of species extinction, with new species recently added to the list of threatened species.

Professor Woinarski said Australia has lost far more mammal species than any other country, with 30 species classified as extinct. A further 56 terrestrial mammals qualify as threatened, and another 52 as near threatened.

Professor Woinarski also spoke about the importance of connecting with and understanding nature.

“We have lost the ability to connect with the environment; with expanding development changing the landscape, the face of the environment as we knew it has changed, and the streetscape of urban development is seen as the norm,” he said.

“This inability to engage first-hand with the natural environment is impacting on our understanding of the relationship between the different native species and their habitat. We must identify mechanisms to foster community stewardship of the natural environment.”

Frankston City Council, Cardinia Shire Council, Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network, Bass Coast Landcare Network, French Island Landcare Group, Birdlife Australia and Frankston Environmental Friends Network also delivered presentations on their pest control and biodiversity activities.

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