



GOVERNMENT OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# Government Response to Taskforce Recommendations in the Exmouth Gulf Taskforce Interim Report and Final Report

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The Cook Government welcomes the delivery of the Final Report of the Exmouth Gulf Taskforce. The report represents the advice and contributions of Traditional Owners, community members, local governments, industry, recreational fishers and scientific experts collected over two years and provides important guidance for the long-term sustainable management of Exmouth Gulf and its surrounds.

The Cook Government recognises the importance of Exmouth Gulf as home to globally significant marine species and a critical part of the food web that sustains nearby Ningaloo Reef. It is a refuge to a stable population of dugongs and a nursery for humpback whales. It also hosts Indo-Pacific and bottlenose dolphins and is a foraging and nesting habitat for hawksbill, green, flatback and loggerhead turtles. It is a hotspot for threatened sawfish and wedgefish, and at least 15 species of sea snakes. The Exmouth Peninsula is also an internationally significant area for several migratory shorebird species and home to unique subterranean fauna found nowhere else in the world.

Exmouth Gulf has immense social, lifestyle and cultural value to all Western Australians. Indigenous cultural heritage of the area dates back at least 32,000 years and includes important ceremonial sites. The Gulf is also highly valued by local and visiting fishers and supports a valuable commercial prawn fishery.

A key recommendation of the Taskforce is establishing a whole-of-Gulf marine park, to be jointly managed with the Nganhurra Thanardi Garrbu Aboriginal Corporation (NTGAC). The Cook Government endorses this recommendation and will commence working with the Exmouth community to see it implemented.

In planning and consultation for the marine park, the Government will ensure existing managed commercial fishing activities within the Gulf are not impacted and provide for, where possible, ongoing sustainable recreational and tourism use, including recreational fishing across the Gulf.

The Cook Government welcomes the research and analysis produced by the Taskforce, which will provide important guidance for the future sustainable management of the Gulf, and thanks all members of the Taskforce for their efforts and commitment to protecting this special place.

Government responses to the recommendations in the Taskforce's Interim and Final Reports are below.

## Response to recommendations

No.	Recommendation and advice	Government Response
<b>Interim Report</b>		
<b>1</b>	<p>A marine park jointly managed with NTGAC should be created under the <i>Conservation and Land Management Act 1984</i> (CALM Act) over the remainder of the Exmouth Gulf, in addition to the eastern and southern portions of the Gulf currently considered for protection as a marine park.</p> <p>The zoning scheme must take a balanced management approach recognising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the government's existing commitments to very high levels of protection over the eastern and southern portions</li> <li>• the requirement to ensure existing managed commercial fishing activities within the Gulf are not impacted</li> <li>• provide for ongoing sustainable recreational and tourism use, including recreational fishing across the Gulf.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Supported</i></p> <p>The government is committed to protecting the whole of the Gulf. A significant proportion of the lands and waters in and around the Exmouth Gulf are already, or are proposed to be, conservation reserves jointly vested between the Conservation and Parks Commission and NTGAC and jointly managed by NTGAC and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA). This includes the Ningaloo Marine Park, Ningaloo Coastal Reserves, Cape Range National Park, Giralalia National Park, Shothole Canyon Conservation Park, island conservation reserves and the proposed Exmouth Gulf Marine Park.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p>Given the unique nature of the Exmouth Gulf, an appropriate marine park planning process should be developed through codesign between DBCA and NTGAC, in consultation with DPIRD, and approved by corresponding Ministers.</p>	<p><i>Supported in principle</i></p> <p>The Government supports the intent of this recommendation. It is committed to achieving the right balance of conservation and social and economic outcomes consistent with community expectations. It recognises the importance of the Gulf for tourism, commercial and recreational fishing, cultural heritage, conservation, economic development and the broader area's role in national defence.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p>The NTGAC to be resourced to fully engage as genuine partners and with partnership opportunities and to support their aspirations for Country, including independent Prescribed Body Corporate activities and programs to support self-determination (e.g. On-Country managers, rangers).</p>	<p><i>Supported in principle</i></p> <p>The government supports appropriate resourcing for NTGAC to respond to the needs of all levels of government, industry and stakeholders and enable NTGAC to engage in the protection of the Gulf.</p>

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<b>Final Report</b>		
1	<p>Support local, State and Commonwealth complementary protection mechanisms in conjunction with Traditional Owners to enhance respect for Country and connectivity, balance and harmony for the Gulf, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engaging with the Australian Government on a nomination for a new National Heritage listing for Exmouth Gulf and surrounds</li> <li>• additional values and ecological linkages nominations under the World Heritage process, and</li> <li>• improving protection and management measures to align with significant cultural and environmental values, particularly the north-eastern Gulf.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Supported in principle</i></p> <p>The Government supports relevant State agencies working collaboratively with local and Commonwealth governments on complementary protection mechanisms to improve the integrated protection of the Gulf.</p>
2	<p>Enhance the protection of the Cape Range Subterranean Waterways (CRSW) by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engaging with the Australian Government on expanding the National Heritage listing from existing boundaries to the Western Gulf foreshore</li> <li>• investing in targeted research and monitoring to improve knowledge that will underpin the long-term protection</li> <li>• exploring appropriate planning, environmental and water policy mechanisms to incorporate enhanced protections, and</li> <li>• partnering with Nganhurra Thanardi Garrbu Aboriginal Corporation for knowledge gaps, cultural significance and heritage recognition, surveying programs, management and protection activities.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Supported</i></p> <p>The Government supports research and monitoring to improve knowledge that will underpin the protection of the Cape Range Subterranean Waterways and working with NTGAC to address knowledge gaps.</p>
3	<p>Establish an ongoing State of Exmouth Gulf reporting framework.</p> <p>A structured reporting framework would assist in continuing to address knowledge gap priorities and inform decision-makers on</p>	<p><i>Further consideration is required</i></p> <p>In light of the Government supporting a marine park across the broader Gulf and the monitoring and reporting requirements for marine parks and other terrestrial reserves surrounding the Gulf,</p>

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	outcomes to ensure long-term sustainability and resilience of the Gulf and surrounds.	there may overlap with the roles and functions of the Conservation and Parks Commission and DBCA under the CALM Act. Therefore, the recommended reporting framework requires further consideration.
4	<p>Establish a sustainably funded independent coordinating body, which is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advise the Government on the long-term health and resilience of the Exmouth Gulf and surrounds</li> <li>• act as a knowledge hub sharing cultural and scientific knowledge, using two-way learning for improved protection of the Exmouth Gulf and surrounds</li> <li>• ensure outcomes and learnings are shared through the knowledge hub, and</li> <li>• undergo review every five years to evaluate its continued value to the Government and the community.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Further consideration is required</i></p> <p>Further consideration of this recommendation is required to ensure the independent coordinating body does not duplicate existing regulatory and planning frameworks and address inconsistencies in approaches and responses.</p>
5	Ensure the Nganhurra Thanardi Garrbu Aboriginal Corporation are sustainably funded to be empowered and have capacity for their aspirations for self-determination, stewardship of Country and a pathway for co-leadership in a future coordinating body for Exmouth Gulf and surrounds.	<p><i>Supported in principle</i></p> <p>The Government supports appropriate resourcing for NTGAC to respond to the needs of all levels of government, industry and stakeholders, as this underpins empowerment.</p> <p>The Government specifically supports capacity building of NTGAC attributed to engagement in the integrated protection of the Gulf.</p>