

NULLARBOR KARST PROJECT

PROJECT OUTLINE

1. PROJECT TITLE: Under the Nullarbor; assessing and protecting the biodiversity assets of the Nullarbor karst.

2. OBJECTIVE/GOAL:

Identify and work towards the protection of the biodiversity assets of the Nullarbor Karst through a desktop survey of assets, a field trip to fill knowledge gaps and the production of interim management guidelines.

3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION OUTCOME:

The Nullarbor houses the world's largest arid karst (limestone) system, which includes hundreds of caves. This unique area is of national and international acclaim but currently virtually unmanaged. The karst system includes assets such as; fragile ecosystems of often unique cave adapted flora and fauna, habitat for native flora and fauna such as bats and birds, significant megafauna fossil deposits and important Aboriginal heritage sites. The karst features exist under a range of land tenures including pastoral leases, Unallocated Crown Land and State formal reserve system. The caves are currently under threat from a lack of understanding and management, uncontrolled and uninformed human visitation and altered hydrology.

This proposal aims to improve the understanding and management of the Nullarbor Karst. This will be achieved through a desktop and field biological inventory survey to fill the large gaps in knowledge of the biota of many of these caves. This information is needed before effective management for their protection can be put in place. This will ultimately lead to the writing of interim management guidelines for the management of the Nullarbor Karst across tenures, updating the Resource Management of the Nullarbor Region written in 1978. This action will require the establishment of a steering group as all stakeholders, including those across the South Australian border need to be involved in making decisions relating to karst management. Education of the wider public is also needed for the karst system to be protected in the long term. This project will link with projects occurring in other important and threatened Rangeland karst systems such as the Cape Range karst system, as well as other cave systems across the state.

4. OTHER OUTCOMES

Some of these karst features and the biodiversity assets within them are currently within CALM reserves and many other significant karst features are to be included in proposed future CALM managed conservation reserves (as part of the 2015 Pastoral Review negotiations and ongoing implementation of the South Coast Regional Management Plan tenure recommendations). The knowledge that this project will uncover and the management actions outlined will assist with the appropriate management of these features. It will also contribute to the global karst management knowledge.

This project has the potential to raise the profile of DEC within the community in a positive manner. This project will work closely with the Western Australian and national speleological groups who have offered to assist with the sourcing of information and on the field trip. Local pastoralists and traditional owners will also be consulted when the field trip occurs and the management guidelines are produced. The Western Australian Museum has also offered in-kind support.

5. PROJECT DURATION / DURATION OF FUNDING REQUIRED

The project will be completed over two years, from 2006/07 – 2007/08.

7. REGION(S)/LOCATIONS OF WORKS

Nullarbor, WA: South Coast and Goldfields regions

8. CRITICAL PROJECT MILESTONES

Desktop Survey of known biological and geographical information
Field survey to fill critical knowledge gaps
Taxonomic work to identify collected specimens
Writing of Interim Management Guidelines

PARTNERSHIPS

This project is a partnership between the Rangelands NRM Coordination Group and DEC.

Western Australian and national speleological groups have offered to assist with the sourcing of information and on the field trip. The Western Australian Museum (through Bill Humphreys) has offered in-kind support in terms of equipment and laboratory space for collecting and identifying specimens. There will also be the opportunity to liaise with pastoralists on the Nullarbor and Indigenous groups with an interest in the region.

Goldfields Land Sea Council and the Department of Indigenous Affairs will be consulted in relation to traditional owner involvement and to ensure cultural issues surrounding the caves are handled appropriately.