



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Environment and Conservation**

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Dr M D Nahan MLA
Chair
Economics and Industry Standing Committee
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000



Dear Dr Nahan

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY – 2011 KIMBERLEY ULTRAMARATHON

I refer to your letter of 9 March 2012 inviting the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) to make a submission to the above inquiry being conducted by the Economics and Industry Standing Committee.

I am pleased to provide the attached submission.

Please contact DEC's Ms Bel Catcheside on phone 9442 0353 or email Bel.Catcheside@dec.wa.gov.au, or myself, should you require any further information or assistance.

Yours sincerely

Keiran McNamara
DIRECTOR GENERAL

4 April 2012

Att

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION SUBMISSION TO
THE ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY STANDING COMMITTEE PARLIAMENTARY
INQUIRY INTO THE 2011 KIMBERLEY ULTRAMARATHON**

Background

The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) has legislative responsibility for fire preparedness on DEC-managed lands (generally parks and reserves) and unallocated Crown land (outside metropolitan and townsite areas) in Western Australia. Fire preparedness activities include the preparation and implementation of an annual prescribed burning program by DEC on these lands. This includes a prescribed burning program in the Kimberley Region. DEC's Kimberley Region prescribed burning program is generally implemented between February and June each year to take advantage of mild conditions, to reduce fire intensity and protect biodiversity values.

In 2011, all DEC prescribed burning in the Kimberley Region was completed by June. The closest DEC ignitions to the incident site were 10 kilometres to the east of the site of the incident in Ngamoowalem Conservation Park on 20 May. The Kimberley Ultramarathon event was run during September 2011.

DEC would like to respond specifically to two of the inquiry terms of reference, namely:

- (e) *the role and actions of Western Australian government departments and agencies, including WA Tourism, DEC, FESA, Police and Health departments and local governments in respect of the event and the protection and rescue of competitors, employees, contractors, volunteers and spectators; and*
- (f) *whether there are measures that should be taken by government to ensure the risks including bush fires in remote areas in the context of extreme sporting events are adequately identified and addressed.*

Response to (e)

- On 31 August 2011, Luke Bentley, DEC's Acting Joint Management Coordinator at our Kununurra office, received a phone call from a RacingThePlanet staff member who identified herself as 'Sam' (subsequently identified as Ms Samantha Fanshawe). Ms Fanshawe requested specific advice from Mr Bentley regarding the risk of estuarine crocodiles in rivers around Kununurra.
- Mr Bentley requested that a map be provided, and subsequently an A4 black and white map was hand-delivered to the DEC office in Kununurra on 31 August.
- The map indicated main roads, a number of watercourses, the Kununurra townsite and the proposed route of the race. The marked course route ran west and south of the Victoria Highway, crossing the Dunham River before entering Kununurra. The route did not enter upon DEC-managed land at any point.
- Mr Bentley contacted Ms Fanshawe later on 31 August and advised that where the proposed route crossed the Dunham River, there was a risk of estuarine crocodiles being present. He recommended that participants be ferried across the river in a vehicle. Ms Fanshawe verbally agreed to comply with this recommendation.

- Ms Fanshawe then asked about fire in the area and whether there were any fires burning at that time. Mr Bentley advised that as the route did not enter upon DEC-managed land, he was unable to provide formal advice. He recommended that she contact the local Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) office in Kununurra. Mr Bentley provided Ms Fanshawe with the contact number (9169 1370) for FESA in Kununurra. Ms Fanshawe indicated to Mr Bentley that she intended to contact FESA.
- At the time this advice was provided, Mr Bentley was not aware of any fire within the vicinity of Doon Doon Station or El Questro Station as there is no DEC-managed land within the immediate area.
- Subsequent investigation by DEC staff using the Northern Australian Fire Information webpage (www.firenorth.org.au) after the event indicated that the fire may have started on Doon Doon Station on or about 29 August in the vicinity of the Wuggubun Aboriginal community. The fire burned west from its point of origin into El Questro Station.
- DEC did not have any operational or other role in the Doon Doon/El Questro fire that caused injuries to participants in the Kimberley Ultramarathon.

Response to (f)

A comprehensive risk assessment by the event organisers would have identified the various government agencies (including local government) responsible for providing advice on potential risks during the event. DEC was not formally advised that the event was taking place apart from the single phone call from Ms Fanshawe on 31 August. DEC provided advice regarding the risk of estuarine crocodiles and referred the race organisers to FESA for fire-related matters.

DEC favours a formal referral and endorsement process, coordinated by a peak industry body such as Tourism WA (in the case of tourism events such as this), to minimise the potential of further incidents.
