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WWF-Australia

Tel: +61 2 9281 5515  
Fax: +61 2 9281 1060

Level 13  
235 Jones St  
Ultimo NSW 2007

enquiries@wwf.org.au  
www.wwf.org.au

## Media release

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### **Australia's largest terrestrial conservation plan developed for WA**

The next phase in the development of the largest terrestrial conservation plan in Australia's history will be decided this week at Western Australian stakeholder workshops led by internationally renowned conservation planner Professor Bob Pressey.

The conservation plan takes in an area of Western Australia known as the South West Australia Ecoregion, which is larger than the state of Victoria.

This ecoregion is Australia's only internationally listed biodiversity hotspot and contains the highest concentration of rare and endangered species in the country.

"Few Western Australians realise their capital city is in the middle of one of the great natural wonders of the world but also one of the most threatened," Professor Pressey said.

"The landscapes in the southern half of Western Australia have remained relatively unchanged geologically over 250 million years. This has created micro-environments and inter-species relationships which have given rise to an extraordinary number of rare flora and fauna."

"New plant species are still being discovered every year in this ecoregion. Preserving this remarkable region is more than just an environmental imperative, it could be the key to our own future as well."

The ecoregion is home to 6,759 species of plants, and has the highest concentration of rare and endangered species in Australia, including seven mammal species, 13 birds, 34 reptiles and 28 frogs, many of which are not found anywhere else in the world.

Unfortunately the impact of development on this region has been profound, pushing numerous species to the brink of extinction.

"The expansion of our ecological footprint in Western Australia over the past 100 years in particular has been so rapid that it is very likely some species have become extinct before we even knew they existed," said WWF-Australia's Danielle Witham, who coordinates the planning project. "This conservation plan is vital to preserve those species and ecosystems that still remain and to enable others that have yet to be discovered to survive."

The conservation plan has been funded as part of the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative.

Caring for our Country is the Australian Government's natural resource initiative. It seeks to achieve an environment that is healthy, better protected, well-managed, resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

#### More information

Alvin Stone, Communications Officer WWF-Australia. Phone: (02) 8202 1259 or mobile 0410 221 068.

This press release and associated material can be found on [www.wwf.org.au](http://www.wwf.org.au)

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## Notes

- To qualify as a Conservation International hotspot, a region must contain at least 1,500 species of vascular (higher order) plants as endemics (found nowhere else) and must have lost at least 70 per cent of its original habitat. [View webpage here](#)
- In recognition of its conservation significance, the wetland systems of the region have been selected as one of WWF's Global 200 priority freshwater ecoregions, and forest and scrub ecoregions.
- In one part of the region, on the Swan Coastal Plain (including Perth and surrounds), it has been estimated that because of man-made degradation, 70-80% of those wetlands have been destroyed or heavily degraded since European settlement.
- Granite outcrops, known as inselbergs, in the region have created microhabitats that support an extraordinary variety of life. A relic of Jarrah survives at Jilakin Rock, 150 kms inland from the main forest population that exists in a higher rainfall zone. Some species of plants in the ecoregion can only be found at one granite outcrop and nowhere else in the world.
- Some of the remarkable creatures that call the region home, include the noisy scrub-bird that was long presumed extinct until it was rediscovered in Two Peoples Bay near Albany; the western swamp tortoise, which is the smallest and rarest of Australia's tortoises; and the sunset frog which was discovered in 1994 and represents an entirely new genus of frog that molecular estimates indicate could be 30 million years old.
- The Southwest Australia Ecoregion Initiative includes the Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation (co-Chair), the Australian Government, the Department of Planning, Greening Australia (WA), WA Local Government Association, and WWF-Australia. A wider range of community, conservation and industry sector stakeholders is also involved.