

## POLICY STATEMENT No. 80

# PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF CAVES AND KARST

### 1. OBJECTIVE(S)

The objectives of this policy are:

- to protect and manage a comprehensive, adequate, representative and resilient range of caves and karst occurrence on *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* land (CALM Act land); and
- where possible, to encourage sound planning and management of caves and karst in other lands through liaison and advice to relevant parties and through advocacy for the protection of caves and karst generally.

### 2. SCOPE

This policy addresses the protection of caves and karst landforms and features. The policy does not specifically deal with the protection of the flora and fauna that are associated with these landforms, although it is expected that some beneficial outcomes for biodiversity values will occur through protection and management of caves and karst.

Whilst the focus of this policy is toward typical carbonate rock karst, the principles and management strategies required may also be applicable to other karst-like landforms and to pseudokarst.

### 3. CONTEXT

There are extensive areas of karst landforms and processes throughout Western Australia, some of which are of national and international significance. While many caves and karst features are protected within department-managed lands there are also extensive areas of caves and karst features in other lands.

Karst terrain can have outstanding visual, geological, biological and cultural significance. A number of threatened fauna and flora species and threatened ecological communities are associated with karst including relictual Gondwanan species with related taxa located in places such as Madagascar and South America. The cultural values of caves include Aboriginal significance in terms of location and landform, as well as importance for rock art sites and other archaeological materials.

Many caves have been developed and managed for tourism and visitation purposes, including some caves that are recognised as outstanding visitor attractions. Speleological groups at the state and national level assist in the planning and advocacy for karst protection and management.

Caves vary immensely with regard to their size, ease of access, their remoteness, their special attributes such as unique habitat or heritage value and the practicalities of on-site management and protection. Considering the special attributes of karst features, associated habitats and their high susceptibility to irreversible damage, it is important to encourage and promote the protection and management of these areas.

## Associated policies and guidelines

- Department of Parks and Wildlife (Parks and Wildlife) *Corporate Guideline No. 16 – Guidelines for the protection and management of caves and karst*.
- Parks and Wildlife *Policy Statement No. 18 – Recreation, Tourism and Visitor Services*.
- *Guidance Statement No 33, Environmental Guidance for Planning and Development Chapter B9 Karst, subterranean wetlands and fauna* (Environmental Protection Authority 2008).<sup>2</sup>
- *Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection* (World Conservation Union, 1997).<sup>3</sup>

## 4. LEGISLATION

The CALM Act is the primary instrument for the protection and management of CALM Act land, including provisions for the preparation of statutory management plans. The *Environmental Protection Act 1986* provides the mechanism through which land use, pollution and drainage impacts on karst values can be addressed through the assessment of proposals that may impact on karst values. The *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950* provides state-wide protection to flora and fauna on all lands, including protection of stygofauna, troglafauna and 'dead fauna' which, in the context of karst, includes mummified fauna and bone material but not fully fossilized fauna.

## 5. POLICY

- 5.1 The department will ensure that the reservation of representative karst is a consideration in establishing protected areas, and will address the protection and management of karst values in the preparation of management plans.
- 5.2 The department will manage and protect karst on CALM Act land with special attention to the management of threatening processes, including those arising from water catchment processes.
- 5.3 The department will classify caves and manage public access to caves for recreation, tourism and other purposes in accordance with *Corporate Guideline No. 16 – Guidelines for the protection and management of caves and karst*, and will take a precautionary approach where any risk to speleothems, other karst values, Aboriginal heritage sites or human life may occur.
- 5.4 Where possible and appropriate, the department will encourage and support the protection and management of karst outside CALM Act land through liaison, advice and promotion of best management practices and improved knowledge about the environmental significance of karst and its management.
- 5.5 The department will promote community awareness of, and appreciation for, caves and karst, including awareness of their special protection and management needs.
- 5.6 The department will arrange training and awareness programs on karst management for department staff, volunteers and others involved in the planning and management of karst.
- 5.7 The department will review legislation and associated regulations on an ongoing basis in order to maintain or improve the protection and management of caves and karst on CALM Act land and other lands.
- 5.8 The department will support research and monitoring of karst systems as required.

## 6. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- 6.1 This policy will be implemented in accordance with *Corporate Guideline No. 16 – Guidelines for the protection and management of caves and karst.*
- 6.2 The Director Parks and Visitor Services will convene a Caves and Karst Advisory Group in accordance with *Corporate Guideline No. 16 – Guidelines for the protection and management of caves and karst.*

## 7. CUSTODIAN

Director Parks and Visitor Services.

Support from Science and Conservation and Regional and Fire Management Services will also be required for implementation of this policy.

## 8. KEY WORDS

Caves; karst; subterranean features

## 9. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed no later than February 2019.

## 10. DIRECTOR GENERAL APPROVAL

Approved by



Jim Sharp  
ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL

Effective date

14/3/14



*Lake Cave doline, Margaret River, Western Australia in 2009*  
Photo: Steve Bourne