

Region's future in focus

Forum addresses major trends

A sell-out audience heard about prospects for agriculture, tourism, aquaculture and wave energy at the Great Southern Future Forum on Friday 27 March.

The forum, officially opened by Great Southern Development Commission Deputy Chairman Ross Thornton, attracted a capacity audience of more than 140 people to the Kalyenup Studio at the Albany Entertainment Centre for a day of informed thinking about the Great Southern's future.

Mr Thornton outlined the *Great Southern Regional Blueprint* and said it provided a clear framework for strategic investment decisions, both public and private.

Colin Holt MLC, the Minister for Housing, Racing and Gaming, addressed the forum on behalf of Regional Development Minister Terry Redman.

Speakers who followed described current activities and future trends in tourism, agribusiness, wine export, creative industries, small business, aquaculture, sustainable energy and the digital economy.

The GSDC partnered with the Albany Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) to present the forum, which was also supported by the City of Albany, RDA Great Southern, the Small Business Centre Great Southern and Tourism WA.

Fairfax Media marketing strategist Andrew McEvoy, formerly chief executive officer of Tourism Australia, described trends in the tourism industry, including massive growth in tourism by the emerging middle class in Asian countries, making tourism a "super sector" in Australia.

"The future looks bright for this sector and inbound visitors will come to places like this," Mr McEvoy said.

"Europe is still a great market for visitors to this region. The drive from Margaret River to Esperance is better than the Great Ocean Road: Albany and this region can be a big part of that."



Among the speakers at the Future Forum were, from left, Fairfax Media's Andrew McEvoy, GSDC Deputy Chairman Ross Thornton, Carnegie Wave Energy's Jessica Kolbusz and ANZ Bank's Paul Neesham.

Mr McEvoy said the Great Southern needed to find strategically placed advocates to tell the story of the region to potential customers in the market for experiences.

Carnegie Wave Energy environmental engineer Jessica Kolbusz said Albany was a valuable commercial site for the company's innovative CETO technology, the first generation of which is now operating off Garden Island near Perth with three 240kW units.

Ms Kolbusz said Carnegie was the world's first wave energy power production company to connect to the grid.

A deepwater unit rated at 1mW will be in development until 2017, and a commercial rollout would take place from 2018, which could take in the Albany site.

Self-described digerati Jim Wyatt, of Optimi Digital, dazzled the audience with descriptions of high-technology homes and offices. Mr Wyatt said that, in future, everyone's daily life would involve ever-more pervasive software and devices.

Landcorp CEO Frank Marra outlined the organisation's planning processes in relation to the *Great Southern Regional Blueprint*, and reflected on options for the development of the Middleton Beach hotel site.

ACCI Chief Executive Russ Clark described

the Future Forum as a great success and said it should become an annual or biennial event.

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Major projects to grow the south

Five initiatives funded

Five projects in the Great Southern will benefit from \$11.55 million in Royalties for Regions funding announced by Regional Development Minister Terry Redman on Wednesday 11 February.

The grants are part of the \$600 million Growing Our South initiative, a five-year program for major infrastructure and community projects in the Peel, Wheatbelt, South West and Great Southern regions.

Katanning will gain a purpose-built Early Childhood Hub with funding of \$5.7 million (see below), as well as further implementation of its Mainstreet project with \$350,000 towards the revitalisation of Clive Street between Richardson Street and the railway line.

The Shire of Jerramungup will receive \$3.1 million to improve waste management facilities servicing the shires of Gnowangerup, Jerramungup, Katanning, Kent and Ravensthorpe.

Better visitor facilities will be provided at The Gap in Albany, through a \$1.2 million grant to the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

Student accommodation will be built in Albany with the support of a \$1.17 million grant to the Great Southern Community Housing Association for five four-bed residential units at Norman House.

"These new infrastructure projects have been identified as immediate priorities

and will enhance the region's economic development and quality of life for residents," Mr Redman said.

GSDC Chairman Peter Rundle said the projects would provide significant improvements in the region.

"The GSDC has worked with the Department of Regional Development to bring about these benefits for the people of the Great Southern," Mr Rundle said. "It is pleasing to see support for initiatives that will support early childhood development, tourism, tertiary education and better waste management in the region," Mr Rundle said.

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Early childhood boost in Katanning

Dedicated pair drive project

Early childhood services in Katanning are about to take a big step forward with the announcement of \$5.725 million in Royalties for Regions funding for the town's Early Childhood Hub.

The Early Childhood Hub project was initiated in 2011 by local mothers Davina Davies and Tania Edwards, who started feasibility and business planning for the initiative with support from the GSDC and Lotterywest.

Mrs Davies said the aim of the Early Childhood Hub project was to construct a multipurpose building to house the range of early childhood services in Katanning.

"From the many case studies nationally and internationally, we identified that early childhood hubs were the best model for delivery of services," Mrs Davies said.

"They provide a one-stop shop for families, support easy referral between services, and facilitate integration of services.

"Some families who have been in Katanning long-term may be able to seek out the services available in town



Tania Edwards (left) and Davina Davies initiated Katanning's Early Childhood Hub project in 2011 and continue to work on the project although their own children are now in school.

or know who to ask. However, other new families, perhaps from a humanitarian refugee background or a disadvantaged background, could face significant challenges in finding out what is available and how to access it."

Mrs Davies said the hub would provide an

easily identifiable venue for all families to access services.

Mrs Edwards said the hub could help families in many different ways.

"Imagine a mum with her toddler comes in to see the child health nurse," Mrs Edwards said. "While in the waiting area, the receptionist chats with her about some of the other services available.

"She introduces the mum to the Smart Start coordinator who is walking past.

"The coordinator invites the mum to a messy play session where the mum can meet other mums and the local occupational therapist who provides suggestions for improving the toddler's motor skills development."

Now that the funding for the hub has been allocated, Mrs Davies and Mrs Edwards will continue their input through a Project Advisory Group being set up by the Shire of Katanning with the GSDC.

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Community Chest grants announced

Approval for 26 applications

New GSDC funding programs are set to enhance the lives of Great Southern residents.

In October 2014, applications opened for two funding opportunities totalling almost \$1.5 million.

The fourth round of the Great Southern Regional Grants Scheme (RGS) was allocated \$1.1 million for contestable grants from \$20,001 to \$300,000, and associated administration.

A new Community Chest Fund (CCF) offered \$370,000 for grants up to \$20,000.

Both programs were oversubscribed by their respective closing dates.

Approvals were announced in February for the CCF, which will support 26 projects in the Great Southern.

CCF funding will support initiatives across the region, including improvements to community and sporting facilities in Katanning, Wellstead, Mount Barker and Albany.

Projects include the Great Southern Sustainable Living Festival, restoration of the Twertup Field Studies Centre, a

Noongar Community Centre project in Katanning and a youth arts project in Albany. The full list is on the GSDC website at www.gsdc.wa.gov.au.

A possible second allocation of CCF grants was mooted when applications opened last year, but the response was such that the funds were fully allocated and no further CCF applications will be considered in the 2014-2015 financial year.

Approvals for the RGS funds are still pending at the time of publication.

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Noongar heritage has a home

Gnowangerup centre refurbished

A unique Aboriginal heritage centre in Gnowangerup is ready to receive visitors.

A long-term refurbishment project supported by the GSDC has helped to set up the Gnowangerup Heritage Centre in a historic building that was Australia's first non-government rural support centre for Aboriginal people.

Gnowangerup Aboriginal Corporation Chairperson Robbie Miniter said the centre was a tribute to the strength of Noongar people.

"We've come through so much and to still be strong the way we are, it's a credit to the community," Mr Miniter said.

"This heritage centre has been a major step forward for communication and understanding between groups."

The centre is in a 102-year-old home that became the Gnowangerup Noongar Centre in 1972.



Gnowangerup Aboriginal Corporation Chairperson Robbie Miniter (left) with community representative Derek Woods, who worked on the refurbishment of the centre.

The centre was refurbished under the capable leadership of project manager Lawrence Cuthbert and the interior was fitted out in a style that recalls the housing of Noongar people in the 20th century, with a dark interior, exposed wood, corrugated iron and a bush pole.

"They wanted to give it the effect of when you walked into a house on the reserve – this would take you straight back to what

was there," Mr Miniter said. "We've had elders come in here and a couple have just burst into tears.

"The dark colour inside could depress people – you don't want to depress people but you want to take them into a state where they remember."

Displays on the walls inside the centre recall pre-settlement history and the era of Aboriginal reserves, and celebrate the achievements of local Noongar people.

Mr Miniter said the corporation would seek funding for a coordinator at the centre and work to promote tourism.

"There may be a bit of a barrier where the non-Indigenous community might think we can't go there, but once we break that cultural barrier down, then people will start coming a bit more easily," he said.

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Paper performance sparks talk

Successful festival program

An intimate performance staged at Oranje Tractor winery was a popular talking point of the 2015 Great Southern Festival program of Perth Festival events.

Tickets to The Paper Architect sold out early, and the lucky few viewed a romance between two paper figures in an intricate paper set.

The performance by John Cording was part of the program for the thirteenth Great Southern Festival, held from 16 February to 7 March and supported since its inception by the GSDC.

Great Southern program manager Rod Vervest said the 2015 festival registered almost 5000 ticket sales and drew audience numbers similar to previous years.

"Visitor numbers to free events such as visual arts, Playmakers, writers' events and artist talks raised the overall community engagement figure to approximately 10,000 people," Mr Vervest said.



Brooklyn-based band Lake Street Dive perform at the Vancouver Arts Centre. Lead singer Rachael Price revealed she had family connections in Mount Barker.

The 2015 festival included the world premiere of Ross Edwards' *Gallipoli*, an evocative piece that was performed by the Australian String Quartet and received rapturous appreciation from the audience.

A Great Southern audience at the Albany Entertainment Centre enjoyed a festival exclusive in the one-man theatre piece *Beowulf*, which was both a retelling of the ancient English epic and a poignant look

at contemporary father-son relationships.

Retro four-piece band Lake Street Dive played a sell-out performance for more than 500 people in the grounds of the Vancouver Arts Centre.

The Playmakers program focused on Celtic music and featured three international performances, eleven workshops and a finale that brought together many of the visiting artists. The 2015 Great Southern Festival also included a Noongar welcome to country, a writers' program, heritage site tours, art exhibitions and twelve films.

Perth Festival artistic director Jonathan Holloway completed his term of appointment with the 2015 program and the festival's new artistic director, Wendy Martin, visited the Great Southern in February to begin planning for the 2016 program.

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Prescription for healthier research

Workshop sets priorities

After a check-up from a group of specialists, the Great Southern has a prescription for a healthier future in research projects.

At the Healthy Futures Forum Regional Research Priorities Workshop on Thursday 19 February, 58 participants heard from experts in a range of fields including environmental health, ageing populations, Indigenous health, disability issues and early childhood.

With support from the GSDC and Regional Development Australia - Great Southern, the forum was organised by a committee of the Great Southern Science Council and South West WA Medicare Local.

Organiser Dr Craig Sinclair said the aims of

the workshop were to discuss key regional issues in health sciences, identify priority areas of need for health research, and build links between established researchers based in universities, government departments and the private sector.

Dr Sinclair said the response from the invited speakers, participating organisations and the local community was fantastic.

"It is inspiring to see such engagement from the community and health sector, to set priorities for our ongoing work in the region," Dr Sinclair said.

"It's comforting to know that our research topics are overseen by such significant community input."

Dr Sinclair said the collaborative approach underpinning the workshop had the potential to lead to stronger projects that were more likely to receive continuing funding.

A final report summarising the workshop discussions will be drafted in partnership with workshop attendees.

The report will aid postgraduate students in developing projects and avoiding research duplication. It will also support funding applications and assist scientists in the region to direct their research towards community identified priority areas.

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Great Southern digests Taste success

Great Southern celebrates fine produce

After feasting for forty days and forty nights (almost), the Great Southern is ready to sit back and digest the success of the 2015 IGA Taste Great Southern celebration of regional food and wine.

Taste 2015 opened on Thursday 19 February and featured a rich program of events that concluded on Sunday 29 March with a sustainable seafood fiesta at Due South on the Albany Waterfront.

Along the way, diners experienced culinary tours, light lunches, degustation dinners, classic long tables and tutored tastings.

Taste Great Southern is managed by Great Southern Tourism Events and supported by the GSDC, among a range of sponsors. The GSDC provided \$35,000 of support, including \$20,000 from the Community Chest Fund.

Great Southern Tourism Events Chief Executive Officer Justine Nagorski said attendance numbers for the 2015 program were higher than in the previous year.

"Almost all the 60-plus events reported sell-out numbers," Ms Nagorski said.

"Introducing feature events that highlighted the subregions within the Great Southern was a successful innovation, encouraging larger crowds to visit the subregions."

More than 800 people attended the



Mark Olive and Verity James presented some culinary creations at the Rockcliffe Night Markets as part of IGA Taste Great Southern.

Plantagenet Fair, 2000 went to the Porongurup Wine Festival, more than 1000 to the Rockcliffe Night Market, and the Albany Seafood Fiesta attracted around 1500 people.

Taste 2015 also introduced a Farmgate Trail, as an acknowledgement of the critical role played by Great Southern farmers.

Ms Nagorski said the trail had potential to grow and become an important part of the Taste experience.

Another plus for Taste 2015 was the involvement of the Great Southern Wine Producers, who staged a tasting that looked at the latest style trends in the region's wines. This tasting was attended by interstate and international media.

Among the special guests were Mark Olive and Adam Liaw, both of whom captivated audiences with their warmth, charm and knowledge.

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Mobile phone coverage boost

New towers for Great Southern

Five new mobile phone towers will be provided in the Great Southern in the first part of a \$45 million Regional Telecommunications Project (RTP), funded by Royalties for Regions.

Albany West, Cranbrook West, Nyabing, Ongerup North and Peaceful Bay are part of an initial list of 22 priority regional sites announced in February by Regional Development Minister Terry Redman and Commerce Minister Michael Mischin.

More sites will be added to the RTP later in the year, including further sites for the Great Southern. When completed, the four-year RTP will have added 85 new mobile phone sites in regional Western Australia.

The GSDC liaised with the Department of Commerce to help develop the priorities for improved services in the region.

The RTP builds on a previous program, the \$40 million Regional Mobile

Communications Project, which delivered six new mobile phone sites in the Great Southern and 113 across the state, with a focus on communication along major highways.

The RTP will fill gaps in mobile coverage for smaller communities and offers significant benefits for emergency services and the safety of regional residents.

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Malleefowls more secure

New enclosure excludes foxes, cats

Yongergnow's malleefowls are safer than they used to be, following the opening of a new vermin-proof five-hectare enclosure.

Foxes, cats and stray dogs will be excluded from the surrounds of the aviaries and chick-raising pens at the Ongerup site.

Chairman Ken Pech said the new enclosure, called the Yongergnow Sanctuary, would give the Yongergnow Australian Malleefowl Centre the opportunity to research the flora and fauna at the site and to reintroduce native animals.

"We are planning to involve the community in projects at the sanctuary to increase awareness of our mallee environment and to attract more visitors to Ongerup," Mr Pech said.



Celebrating Lotterywest support of the Yongergnow Sanctuary (left to right): Yongergnow board member Susanne Dennings, Yongergnow Chairman Ken Pech AM, biologist and project manager Vicky Bilney, Yongergnow-Ongerup Community Resource Centre Chairwoman Janet Savage OAM JP and Wagin MLA Terry Waldron.

Wagin MLA Terry Waldron officially opened the Yongergnow Sanctuary on Saturday 14 March.

The opening event was part of the Green

Skills Great Southern Festival of Sustainable Living, a project supported by \$13,000 of Royalties for Regions funding through the GSDC's Community Chest Fund (see page 3).

The Commission has also been a long-term supporter of the Yongergnow Malleefowl Centre.

Yongergnow Sanctuary project manager Vicky Bilney said the new facility had attracted a lot of interest in the centre's operations.

The Yongergnow Sanctuary project was supported by Lotterywest, North Stirling Pallinup Natural Resources, and the Shire of Gnowangerup.

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Research reveals possum range

Animals help plant pollination

Research by honours and postgraduate students at the University of Western Australia in Albany is contributing to understanding the ecology of the south coast.

An Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery grant has enabled the first of a series of studies on the honey possum and the western pygmy possum.

The studies aim to shed light on how flowering plants in the global biodiversity hotspot are pollinated by vertebrates.

Chief investigator and ARC Discovery Outstanding Researcher Professor Stephen Hopper said the project would explore whether Australian birds and mammals were responsible for wider dispersal of pollen and more outbreeding in plants than convention predicted.

Professor Stephen Hopper is Winthrop Professor of Biodiversity at UWA's Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management, a position established with support from the GSDC.

"Our studies may shed light on an intriguing aspect of Southwest Australian biodiversity, which has the highest proportion (15 per cent) of flowering plants in the world that are pollinated by vertebrates," Professor Hopper said.

"We live in an exceptional global biodiversity hotspot, and this research is exploring and testing ideas why this is so. Ultimately, research of this kind may reveal how we can live sustainably with biodiversity, rather than in ways that cause the continuing loss of other species."

Honours student Jessica Masson is

exploring whether honey possums are most common in Torndirrup National Park, where flowers with abundant nectar and pollen are concentrated.

Ms Masson's research revealed the presence of western pygmy possums in Torndirrup National Park, where the marsupials had not previously been recorded.

Professor Hopper said the discovery would enable other research students to pursue comparative biological studies of possum species at Torndirrup.

The work is an essential first step in planning future work on mammals and birds in the ARC study. Another student, David Tunbridge, has begun a part-time PhD program to explore the topic in greater depth.

Medal finalist studies wetland projects

Developments affect bird migration

Migration patterns of birds that spend a season in the Great Southern took GSDC Medal finalist Basil Schur across the globe to China, South Korea and Thailand.

In November and December 2014, Mr Schur undertook a five-week study tour of wetland conservation projects, taking in a six-day Living Lakes conference in Nanchang, China.

His travel was supported by the \$2000 grant he received as a finalist in the 2014 GSDC Medal, which celebrates innovation and leadership in the management of natural resources.

Mr Schur said the study tour confirmed his commitment to wetland conservation work in the Great Southern.

"I found it both informative and disturbing to gain some confirmation of the scale of the challenges afflicting China's environment," Mr Schur said.

"These challenges cover loss of biodiversity, pollution of water, air and soil



GSDC Medal finalist Basil Schur studied wetland conservation projects in Asia.

resources, and the state of the country's wetlands and waterways.

"I came away with a greater sense of urgency of how China's resource demands

will increasingly impact on both its own and broader global environments."

Migration patterns of birds that use wetlands in the Great Southern can be affected by the loss of wetlands habitat in countries in the northern hemisphere.

In South Korea, Mr Schur visited coastal sites linked to migratory shorebirds that visit Australia each year.

In Thailand, Mr Schur took part in a five-day mangrove and wetland conservation tour in the provinces of Trang and Krabi.

The GSDC Medal is a biennial award and will next be presented in 2016. Nominations will open in October 2015.

In addition, the GSDC Medal luncheon will be held on 14 September 2015 to showcase the work of 2014 medallist Gary Muir.

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Fitzgerald River centre refurbished

Restoration a seven-year project

Seven years after it was damaged by fire, the Twertup Field Studies Centre in the Fitzgerald River National Park is almost ready to resume hosting visitors, researchers and environmental organisations.

In the 1960s, the building was home to the manager of a spongolite mine at the site. From 1980 until the fire in 2008, it was used as a study centre by a wide range of groups with an interest in the biologically diverse Fitzgerald River National Park.

Refurbishment of the study centre has been a labour of love for the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park (FFRNP).

After the fire damage, the group prepared a Twertup master plan, which gained



Restoration work at the Twertup Field Studies Centre is almost finished.

approval from the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

With the help of seed funding from the GSDC, the group attracted donations and grants from State and Commonwealth

Governments to begin rebuilding the centre.

A grant of \$20,000 in Royalties for Regions funding through the Community Chest Fund (see page 3) will enable the FFRNP to complete the refurbishment of the centre.

The grant will provide materials to finish the restoration of the walls, ceilings and windows in the centre.

On completion, the Twertup Field Studies Centre will reopen to the public as a venue for the promotion of environmental education, outdoor recreation and research.

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Festival promotes sustainability

Living for the future

Western Australia's first regionally-based sustainability festival finished at the end of March after two weeks of a Great Southern program promoting ecologically sound and socially responsible ways of living for a sustainable future.

Green Skills project manager Dawn Atkin said there were city-based sustainability festivals that extended into the regions, but the Great Southern event was the first in the state – possibly in Australia – to be regionally-based.

Programmed events took place from Denmark to Katanning to Ongerup.

The festival was supported by \$13,000 of Royalties for Regions funding through the GSDC's Community Chest Fund.

Early in the program, on Saturday 14 March, Cyclone Olwyn threatened to put a damper on the Sustainable Living Expo in Albany but Ms Atkin said the turn-out was fine even if the weather was not, and Olwyn caused little disruption until the very end of the day.



The RAC's all-electric car was an eye-catching display at the Sustainable Living Expo in Albany in March.

"The expo was fantastic and the turn-out was great," Ms Atkin said. "It was a good move to hold it at the Albany Town Square and the Town Hall.

"The stalls included a mixture of businesses and community organisations and people involved found it very beneficial."

Other events on the festival program included a popular session on Noongar bush food and medicine, workshops on home produce and organics, and the South Coast Festival of Birds.

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