



Australian Government

**Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water**



Christmas Island National Park

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ABN: 13 051 694 963

Frank Mills

Chief Executive Officer

Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands

PO Box 1094

Cocos (Keeling) Island

Indian Ocean WA 6799

6th February January 2024

Dear Frank;

We would like to take this opportunity to provide the Council for the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands with an update on the successful translocation and establishment of Critically Endangered blue-tailed skinks (*Cryptoblepharus egeriae*) from Christmas Island to Pulu Blan and Pulu Blan Madar. Additionally, Parks Australia is seeking support for a proposal to establish a third population on a larger island in the Cocos (Keeling) southern atoll for reasons outlined below.

Since releasing 300 blue-tailed skinks on Pulu Blan and Pulu Blan Madar in 2019 and 2020, respectively, Parks Australia estimates the populations have grown to more than 4000 on Pulu Blan and over 1400 on Pulu Blan Madar. This outstanding result has been made possible by the support of Council, community organisations and many individuals in the Cocos community. The invasive wolf snake, the primary cause of the skink extinction on Christmas Island, continues to persist and so maintaining skink populations at Cocos is crucial for their survival.

A new ten-year Christmas Island Reptile Conservation Plan (2024 – 2034) is close to finalisation., This has been developed collaboratively by Parks Australia and Taronga Conservation Society with extensive input from the Christmas Island Reptile Advisory Panel (CIRAP) and Christmas Island and Cocos Island community representatives. This plan identifies a heightened risk for the skink populations on Pulu Blan and Pulu Blan Madar due to climate change. The small size and low-lying nature of these islands, their proximity to one another, and exposure to ocean currents means they are increasingly vulnerable to extreme storm events. To address this vulnerability, Parks Australia proposes establishing another population of blue-tailed skinks on a larger island in the southern atoll (that is likely to be less susceptible to extreme weather events, serving as an additional safeguard to protect the species). The success of this project over the next 5-10 years may provide the time necessary for the development of



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techniques to suppress or eradicate the Asian wolf snake from Christmas Island, potentially paving the way for the blue-tailed skink to be reintroduced to the wild on Christmas Island.

If this proposal is supported by Council, then Parks Australia would first undertake a feasibility assessment of potentially suitable islands for a third assisted colonisation. This would include engagement with the Cocos community on the cultural and recreational values of the shortlisted islands. Once the feasibility assessment has been completed and an island has been chosen as the preferred location, Parks Australia would seek Council's support and permission to progress further.

Should you require any further information to assist you in coming to a view about this proposal, please don't hesitate to contact me at (08) 9164 8700 or via email at derek.ball@dceew.gov.au. We look forward to continuing our work alongside Council and the Cocos community in conserving this unique species.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Derek Ball', written over a horizontal line.

Derek Ball
Park Manager
Christmas Island and Pulu Keeling National Parks