



## MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Indigenous Rangers Drive Marine Safety Campaign in Remote Communities

The Bardi Jawi Rangers, supported by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) Marine Rescue, have created a marine safety campaign to encourage the local boating communities of Ardyaloon, Djarindjin and Lombadina in the Kimberley's North West to stay safe on the water.

The Bardi Jawi Rangers provide marine rescue response support around their sea country on the Buccaneer Archipelago and are a part of a network of 39 DFES Marine Rescue groups situated along Western Australia's 13,000 km coastline.

Indigenous ranger groups are often the first point of contact for rescues, which are often initiated by community messages and smoke signals. The rangers work closely alongside DFES Marine Rescue groups and the Western Australian Police Service (WAPOL) to perform search and rescue missions at sea.

Phillip McCarthy, Ranger Coordinator and Commander of Bardi Jawi Marine Rescue Service said rangers play a vital role in marine rescue because of their local and traditional knowledge of the waters, places, people and local vessels.

"Keeping both local community members and visitors to Bardi Jawi country safe is a priority for the rangers. Bardi Jawi sea country can be an incredibly treacherous area of water, with high reef platforms that become exposed and dry daily with up to 11m springs tides, rip tides, back-currents and standing waves," Mr McCarthy said.

"This marine safety campaign has already started to have a positive impact because they are Traditional Owner-led, designed by local people, with input from the local rangers who have local and traditional knowledge of the waters, places, people and local vessels."

Bardi Jawi Ranger Azton Howard, who also recently won a national award for marine science, initiated and lead the marine safety campaign.

Azton supported the installation of key safety equipment across the main boat access points for community in Ardyaloon, Djarindjin and Lombadina and facilitated a workshop with students of Ardyaloon school to design the signs.

"The local artworks designed by the students at Ardyaloon school helps the community to feel they have ownership over these messages, and it's great to get young people thinking about marine safety at school."

"I started this project started when I was completing my Cert IV in Conservation Land Management, as part of my ranger training development, and recognized there was a need to increase community awareness of marine safety," Azton said.

"Designing visually engaging signs placed at all the major boat ramps will help make sure our people go out with the right equipment so they can return safely, and prevent an emergency situation where they will need to be rescued."

KLC Land and Sea Unit Manager Daniel Oades said the work rangers are doing with community safety is a reflection of the varied role a ranger plays whilst working on country.

"The Bardi Jawi Rangers taking responsibility for marine safety alongside DFES is a great example of traditional

owners exercising their cultural responsibility to look after their own people and visitors to their sea country,” Mr. Oades said.

“Bardi Jawi sea country is beautiful and unique but also inherently dangerous because of the large tides, currents, reefs and islands. These waters are their customary fishing/hunting areas with the marine resources providing livelihoods for Bardi Jawi people, so support for people to getting out on sea country safely is in everyone’s interest.”

“Marine rescue will become a bigger part of the ranger’s role, as visitation numbers to the Dampier Peninsula are expected to spike following the completion of the Cape Leveque Road.”

DFES Pilbara/Kimberley Marine District Officer Bec Benson said DFES is proud to continue to assist the community, visitors to country and Marine Rescue Bardi Jawi with this marine safety campaign.

“The inclusion of local students and traditional owners in the design of the signs was imperative to ensure the Bardi Jawi rangers safety messages, marine rescue response services and rescue operations are recognised as being driven by the locals,” Ms Benson said.

“It’s their country, their water and there is no one on earth who knows its hazards, complexities, and beauty better. In addition to the sign project, DFES will also be upgrading Marine Rescue Bardi Jawi’s search and rescue equipment and increasing marine rescue exercises specific to the Bardi Jawi sea country.”

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