

MEDIA RELEASE

25 March 2022 - For Immediate Release



Save Rockingham's Little Penguins

City councillors vote to save our little penguins

The City of Rockingham's unanimous rejection of the WA government's proposed Penguin Discovery Centre on Penguin Island has been welcomed by the **Save Rockingham's Little Penguins** campaign.

While the councillors don't have the power to stop the Discovery Centre from being built on Penguin Island, the vote means the council will join voices from the community, science and tourism in opposing the plans

A council report on the development also found the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) has so far failed to provide an adequate evaluation of the full impact on the declining little penguin colony of the centre's construction and the visitation it would encourage to the island.

The report by City of Rockingham planning officers also highlighted an assessment the council commissioned from little penguin scientists which found the centre was likely to negatively impact the island's little penguins, which have declined by 80% between 2007 and 2019.

The councillors' rejection means the council will ask the WA government to delay construction of the new facility on Penguin Island to consult properly with scientists, to investigate an alternative location at Mersey Point and conduct a thorough public consultation process.

Convenor of the Save Rockingham's Little Penguins campaign Dawn Jecks thanked councillors for backing the little penguin colony.

"The state government wants to barrel ahead with this poorly planned construction on Penguin Island in just six months without even understanding the impacts it will have on the remaining population of little penguins, which the experts think currently numbers fewer than 300 individuals," she said.

"Considering how fragile and vulnerable the colony is at present, their plan seems illogical, at odds with their conservation and the long-term viability of the island as a tourism attraction. If there are no wild penguins left, that's a major reason not to bother visiting.

"The best outcome for the future of this colony is to build a penguin discovery centre on the mainland, and help the remaining colony recover with a suite of conservation measures that can include more island closures. This colony is just too precious to lose!"

The City of Rockingham asked little penguin scientists to evaluate the impact of the island centre just after it was announced by WA environment minister Reece Whitby in February. Their conclusions were damning.

They found the development footprint conflicts with the location of known natural nests and nesting boxes, the jetty expansion will alter the accessibility of penguin arrival points and the timing of the development conflicts with the presence of chicks in nests and the ability of penguins to moult.

The scientists' assessment confirms that, as the current population is small and declining, even a minor impact on a few individual penguins could have major population level effects.

“On this evidence, the risk an island-based Discovery Centre presents to the colony is just too high. I’m flabbergasted DBCA and the WA environment minister can’t seem to grasp this,” added Ms Jecks.

“This is a truly precious population, important to the community, the balance of ecosystems in and around Penguin Island, and a true tourism drawcard for the area. If the penguins are all gone, how can we call it Penguin Island anymore?”

The **Save Rockingham’s Little Penguins** campaign has organised a petition calling for the new Penguin Discovery Centre to be built on the mainland. Sign it [here](#).

To read more about the Council's decision, visit <https://bit.ly/37W3VdY>.

ENDS

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