

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Little penguin population may be consigned to oblivion with pro tourism announcement

The **Save Rockingham's Little Penguins campaign** has blasted the WA government for failing to listen to scientists or the community and ploughing on with a tourism development that will have grave consequences for a population of little penguins.

It was announced in the Sound Telegraph yesterday that a new \$3.3m Penguin Discovery Centre will be built on Penguin Island in Rockingham replacing old facilities despite concerns raised by scientists that the demolition of the old centre, and construction and placement of the new centre will contribute to the decimation of the remaining little penguin population.

There may be fewer than 300 penguins left using the island to breed following a series of climate change and human driven impacts across the last 11 years. In 2007, there were estimated to be 1700 penguins.

**Dawn Jecks, convenor of the Save Rockingham's Little Penguin campaign** said she was sickened the WA government had ignored pleas from scientists and the community to at the very least delay the construction for full consultation, and ideally relocate it to the mainland.

"The decision would seem to indicate the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, which manages the island and advises WA Environment Minister Reece Whitby, are more interested in tourism dollars than saving this population," she said.

"This decision kicks the population when they're already down. We fear the construction of a new penguin discovery centre will effectively be a nail in the coffin for this already decimated population.

"Neither scientists who study the colony nor the community have been consulted on this development. These are scientists who have been studying this population for decades and yet they were merely provided with briefing just days ago. We are especially concerned about building works planned for a known penguin entry point to the island. Penguins are highly faithful to access points and are sensitive to disturbances. They choose not to nest in busy areas, so we question whether a building that will attract even more visitors is actually going to help with their conservation as is claimed by the Minister.

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

“There are options on the table, there are conservation measures that have been put forward to the minister and to DBCA. But it’s like talking to a brick wall - there is no transparency on how decisions are being arrived at.

“DBCA have thrown in the towel and have their heads in the sand, admitting that they think the population is doomed. Unfettered tourist numbers and unwillingness to listen to scientists have gotten us where we are. If the Penguin Discovery Centre goes ahead on the island, we fear this population is pretty much doomed.

“Sadly the climate crisis is here now and we need to get so much better at dealing with it than we are currently. The WA state government needs to actually listen to what scientists are telling them and what the community wants rather than come out with a flash looking announcement which makes their new environment minister look ill-informed.”

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**ENDS**

-  **Contact:** Dawn Jecks (Campaign Convenor)
-  **Email:** [dawnjecks@gmail.com](mailto:dawnjecks@gmail.com)
-  **Mobile:**
-  **Web:** @SaveRockinghamLittlePenguins