



MEDIA RELEASE

The Hon Peter Garrett MP

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

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BUSH BLITZ LAUNCH OF AUSTRALIAN NATURE DISCOVERY MISSION

Environment Minister Peter Garrett today launched Bush Blitz - a pioneering three-year multimillion dollar partnership to document the plants and animals in properties across Australia's National Reserve System.

Led by the Australian Government with an investment of \$6 million, Bush Blitz brings together global resources company BHP Billiton with a \$4 million investment, not-for-profit conservation research organisation Earthwatch who will manage field safety and coordinate volunteer 'citizen scientists', and rangelands survey group the National Scientific Reference Site Network.

Mr Garrett joined Bush Blitz partners at the NSW property of Darkwood today, as a dozen researchers set traps to search for rare frogs, moths, and small marsupials.

"Bush Blitz is nature discovery on a huge scale – teams of scientists will scour hundreds of reserves and expect to find hundreds of species that are completely new to science," Mr Garrett said.

"In this International Year of Biodiversity, Bush Blitz scientists will provide the baseline data that will help us protect our biodiversity . This is an investment in science-based decision making that will pay off for generations to come.

"Australia is home to more than 560,000 native species, many found nowhere else on earth – yet only one-quarter of this biodiversity has been scientifically documented.

"In the face of ongoing threats from climate change, it's time to rev up our scientific understanding of our plants and animals and that's what Bush Blitz is all about."

Bush Blitz will be supported by CSIRO, museums, herbaria and governments across the country with dozens of Australia's top scientists and corporate volunteers.

Ian Wood, BHP Billiton Vice President Environment & Community Relations, described the Bush Blitz partnership as a new and significant investment in biodiversity conservation.

"Many of BHP Billiton's operations and people are located in regional and remote Australia and as a natural resources company we believe that we have a part to play in supporting the conservation of Australia's biodiversity.

"This unique species discovery project is a natural fit with our commitment to sustainable development and science-based decision-making."

Earthwatch Australia's Executive Director Richard Gilmore said Earthwatch would manage the health and safety of Bush Blitz surveys and coordinate corporate volunteers to assist the scientific teams.

"Earthwatch supports critical conservation research and our scientific standards and field management systems are world-class. We see Bush Blitz as a terrific opportunity to engage Australians as 'citizen scientists' in practical environmental research," Mr Gilmore said.

"We believe that working in partnership with volunteers, governments, business and local communities is the best way to deliver practical, evidence-based outcomes that enhance our environment, improve our livelihoods and inspire people."

Bush Blitz partner the National Scientific Reference Site Network is a \$3 million facility of the Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network, coordinated by the University of Adelaide. Director of the National Scientific Reference Site Network, Professor Andrew Lowe, said Bush Blitz also would help establish scientific reference sites for long-term systematic monitoring.

"We'll be working with Australian governments to survey flora and vegetation condition, establishing benchmarks for the protection of biodiversity in the long-term," Professor Lowe said.

Bush Blitz was launched with a scientific expedition at Darkwood - a 1,035 hectare property recently added to New England National Park and managed by the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service. It is part of a package of six properties which the Australian Government helped the NSW Government to add to the reserve system in 2009, through \$14.75 million from Caring for our Country.

Nestled beneath the soaring cliffs of the Dorrigo Plateau and next to the World Heritage Gondwana Rainforests, Darkwood protects the headwaters of the Bellinger River and helps create an important wildlife corridor protecting the habitat of several nationally threatened species. It has never been scientifically surveyed and its species have never been documented.

A Bush Blitz report released today, *Focusing on the Landscape: Biodiversity in Australia's National Reserve System*, assesses the state of knowledge of biodiversity in the National Reserve System, based on records of 20,146 terrestrial fauna and flora species (54 per cent of Australia's known terrestrial species). The report found that over 88 per cent of the plants and animals are adequately or well-represented in the reserve system, but there are still important knowledge gaps to fill, with inadequate information on one-third of the species.

*For information about Bush Blitz and the report released today visit www.bushblitz.org.au
For information about Australia's National Reserve System and Darkwood visit www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs.*