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## Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust Launched



On November 25, the Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust (the Trust) was launched. 360 Environmental worked with AngloGold Ashanti Australia Ltd to develop the Trust initiative with the assistance of the State and Federal regulators, stakeholders and the Peer Review Panel (made up of expert scientists, indigenous and community representatives) established through the Environmental Impact Assessment process for the project. The Trust is a new environmental initiative which will focus on observing and increasing knowledge of biodiversity in the Great Victoria Desert.

The Trust was established by the Tropicana Joint Venture (AGAA 70% and manager, Independence Group NL 30%) as part of its offset strategy for the Tropicana Gold Mine in Western Australia. The Trust represents a new structure of offset delivery and operates as a unique partnership model between industry and government. The Tropicana Gold Project is located on the western edge of the Great Victoria Desert (GVD). The joint venture partners recognised the need for basing management decisions on robust science and hence, the concept of the Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust (the Trust) was conceived.

The Trust has the broad aims of:

- Consolidating knowledge of the Great Victoria Desert through the creation of a Bioregional Plan
- Funding priority research and on-ground conservation management of threatened species and communities in the region
- Funding priority research and on-ground conservation management at a landscape level to benefit biodiversity across the region
- Facilitating Indigenous involvement in land management and conservation activities.

The majority of the GVD is (vacant) unallocated crown land with some conservation reserves and Indigenous lands, and there is no freehold land located within the GVD. Pastoral development in the bioregion is confined to a few peripheral areas in the south and east where water and feed are available in particular years, depending largely on climatic conditions.

The Great Victoria Desert is characterised by longitudinal sand dunes and a diverse range of fauna and has an exceptionally high diversity of reptiles, including the vulnerable Great Desert Skink (*Liopholis kintorei*) which had been considered extinct in South Australia until its rediscovery by Aboriginal landholders in 1998. More than 100 species of reptile have been recorded. Several threatened mammals, such as the endangered Sandhill Dunnart (*Sminthopsis psammophila*), the endangered Marsupial Mole (Notoryctes typhlops), and the vulnerable Mulgara (*Dasyercus cristicauda*) still occur or are believed to occur within the region.

Through the Trust structure, a wide range of government and non-government groups can contribute to research and implementation of conservation activities, when opportunities arise in either the short or longer-term. The Trust will improve scientific knowledge within the GVD 1 and 2 areas, support on-ground action and subsequently ensure the long-term conservation of the regions natural and cultural values are managed for present and future generations.

Dr Garry Middle is the Independent Chair for the Trust. Garry indicated on the night he is excited about its potential as a streamline model for achieving significant on-ground action and consolidating knowledge about biodiversity in this remote and largely unstudied region.

Kathryn Sinclair is the GVD Biodiversity Trust Coordinator.

360 Environmental were pleased to be part of this great project initiated by AGAA.

360 Environmental's Michelle Rhodes and Felicity Jones attended the launch – and it was a most enjoyable evening to celebrate this milestone with colleagues.



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