

The Kimberley

Australia



Australia

An ancient continent, a recent disruption



Landscapes – flora and fauna shaped by:

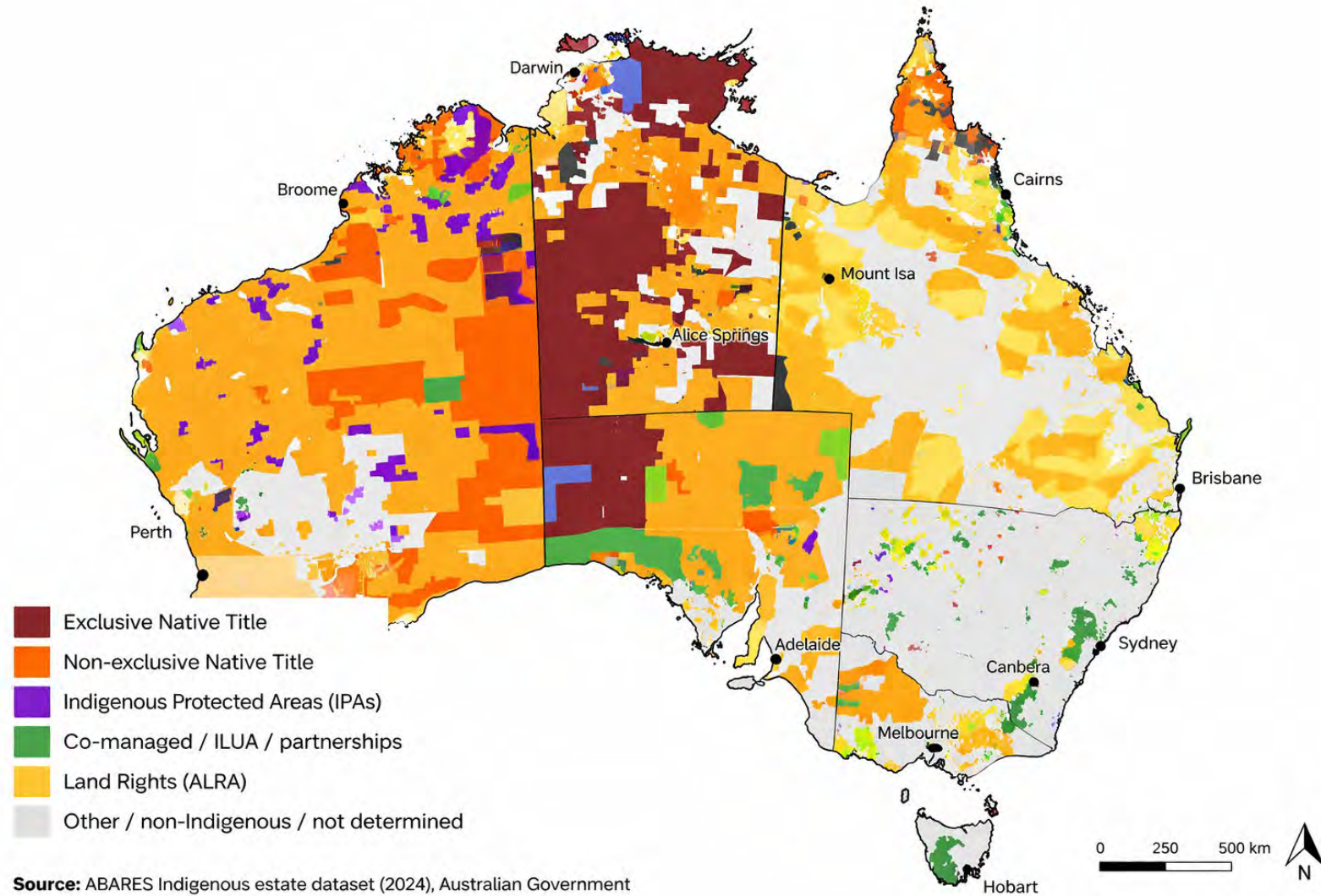
- Isolation
- First Nations Aboriginal people
 - >60,000 years
 - Care for Country
 - Oldest living culture in the world
- Recent European colonization
 - <250 years
 - Profound ecological disruption
 - Dispossession
 - Disruption of cultural land management
 - Introduced species

To understand conservation in Australia today – we must begin here!



First Nations Countries

Continuing connection of Traditional Owners through Native Title

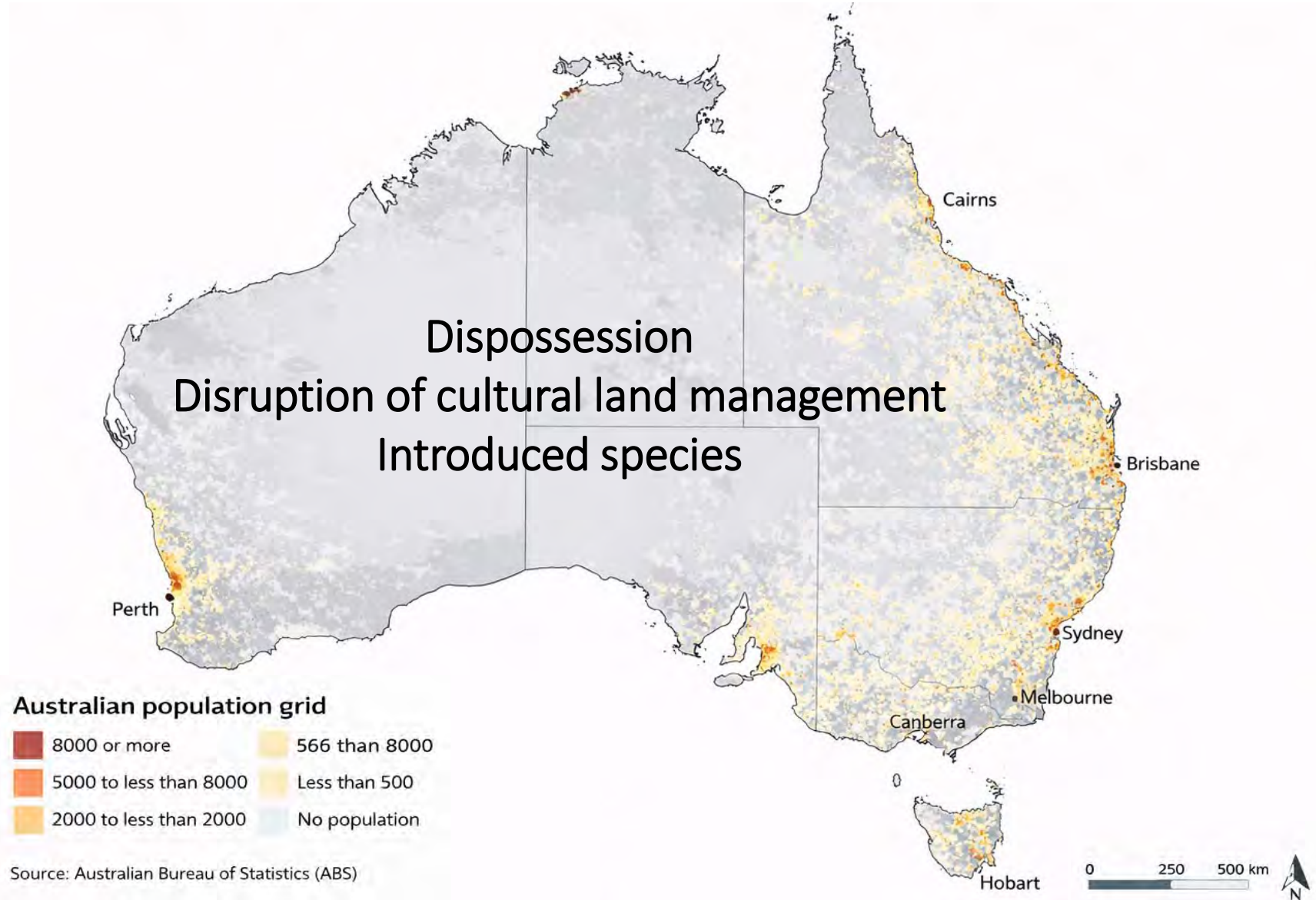


Source: ABARES Indigenous estate dataset (2024), Australian Government



Modern Australia

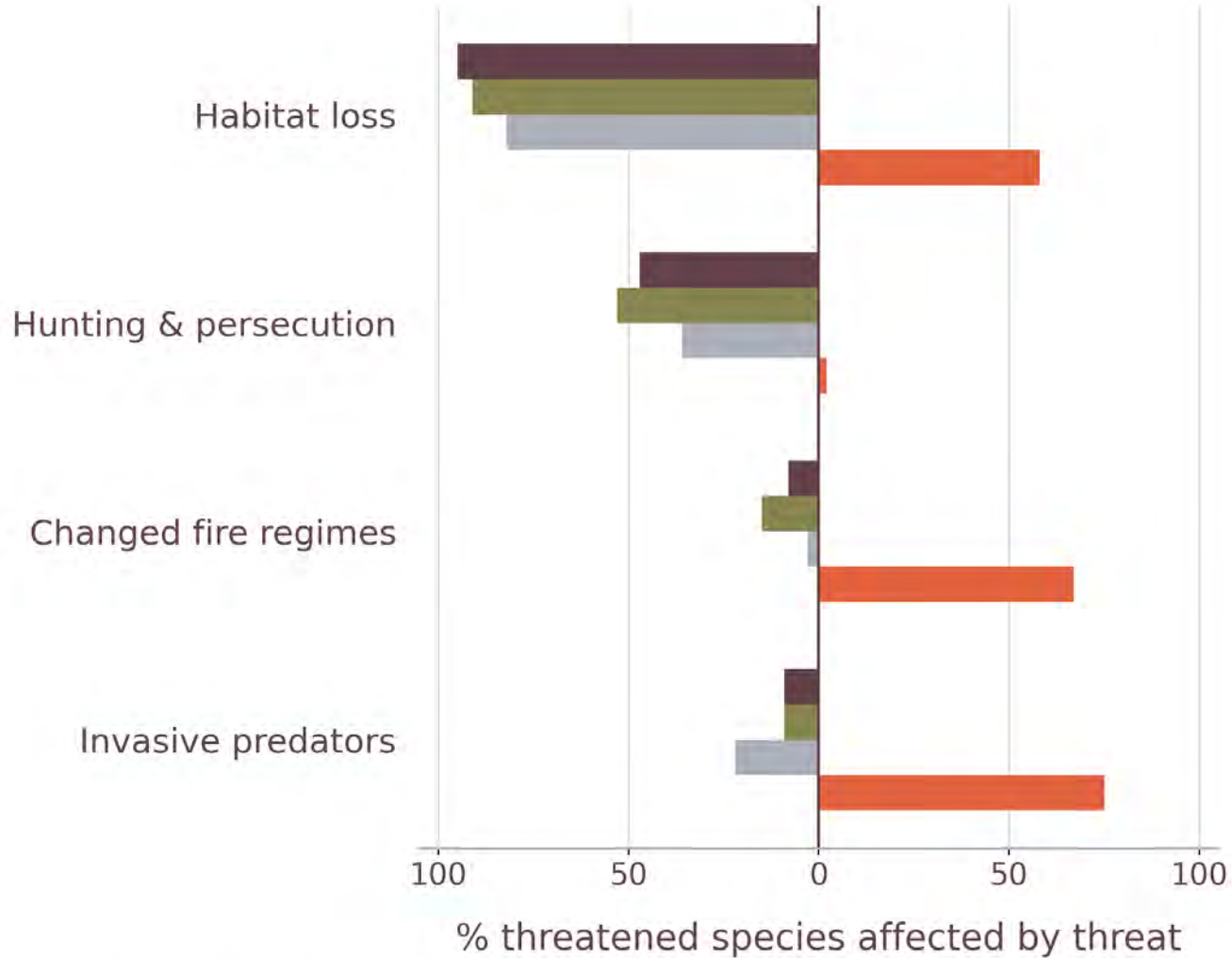
Sparsely populate but not untouched





A different conservation challenge

Global threats VS Australia threats

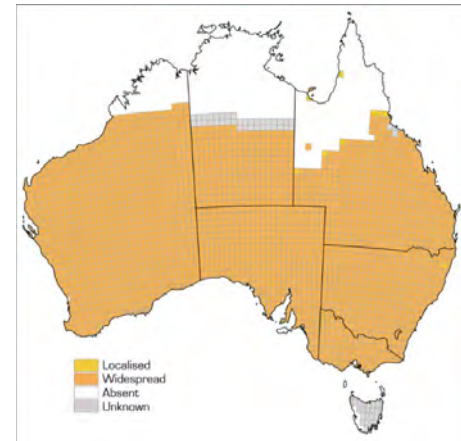


Source: Woinarski et al. 2014/2015; values digitised from the original figure for presentation-style replication.

Cat
Felis catus



Red fox
Vulpes vulpes

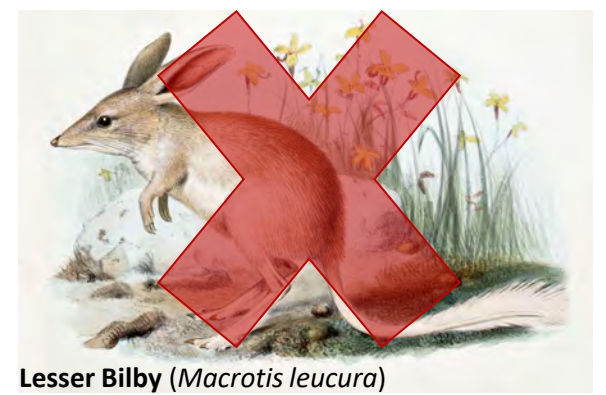
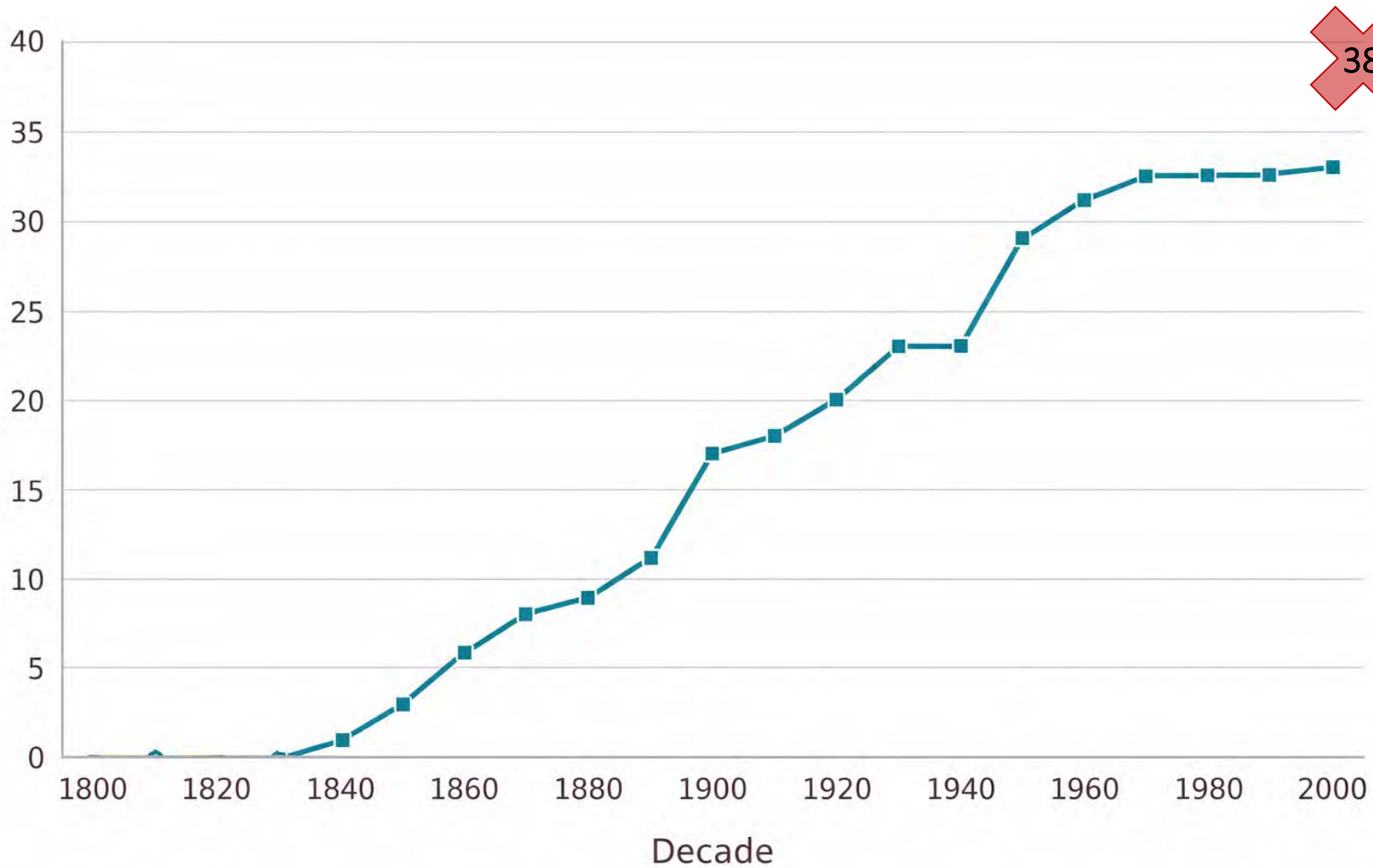




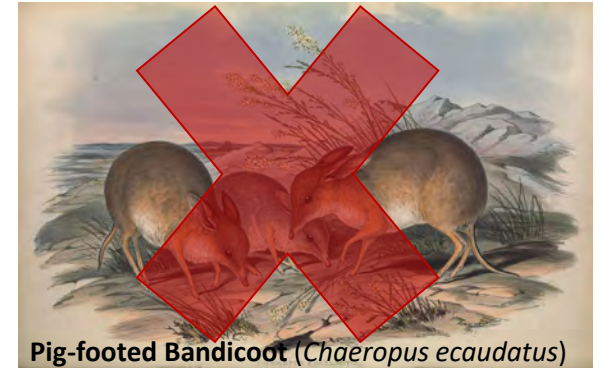


A National Biodiversity Crisis

Mammal extinctions – devastating global record



Lesser Bilby (*Macrotis leucura*)



Pig-footed Bandicoot (*Chaeropus ecaudatus*)



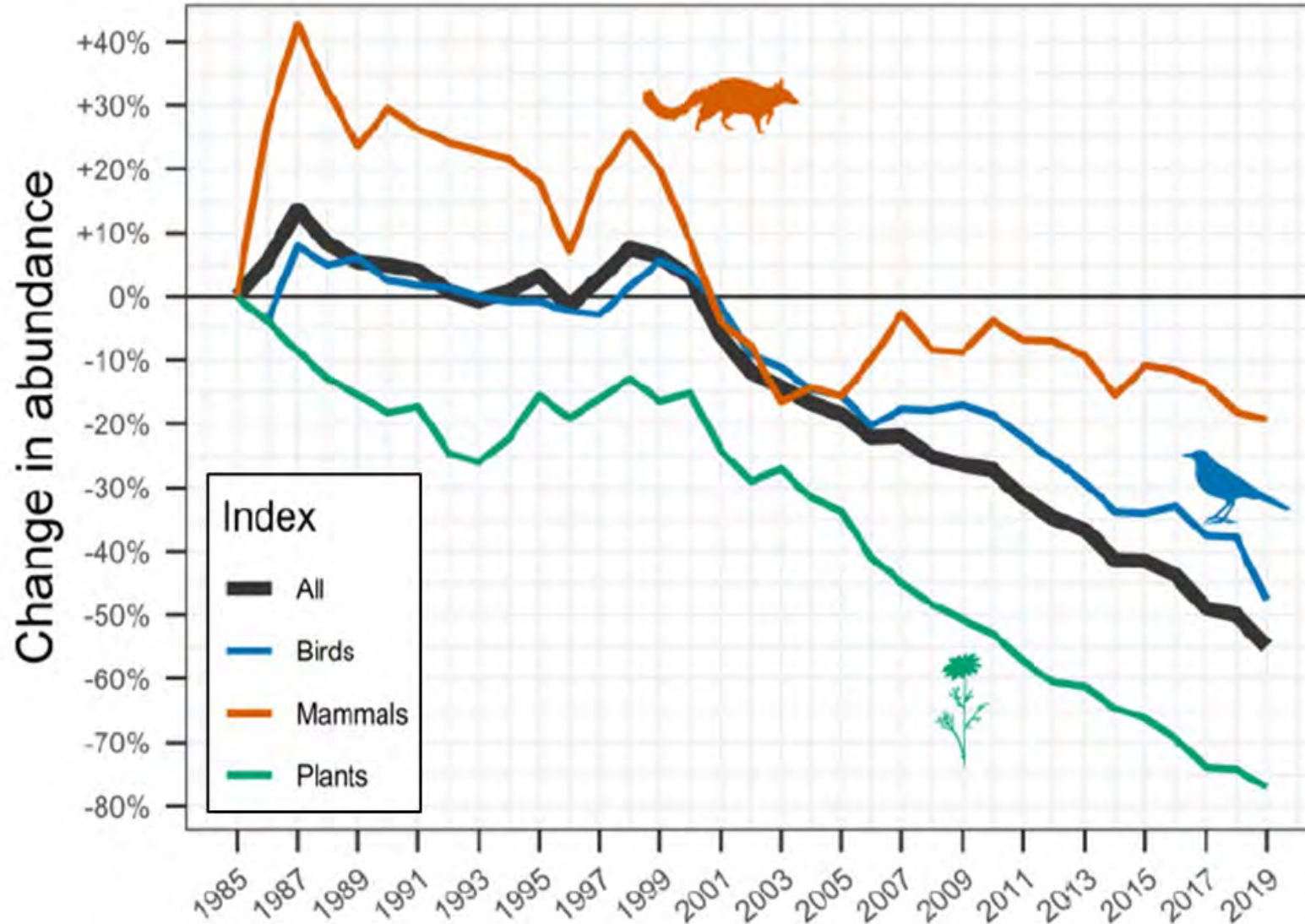
Desert Rat-kangaroo (*Caloprymnus campestris*)

Source: Woinarski et al. 2015 (both species and subspecies)



A National Biodiversity Crisis

Ongoing biodiversity decline



In one part of Australia, much of what has been lost elsewhere remains.



The Kimberley

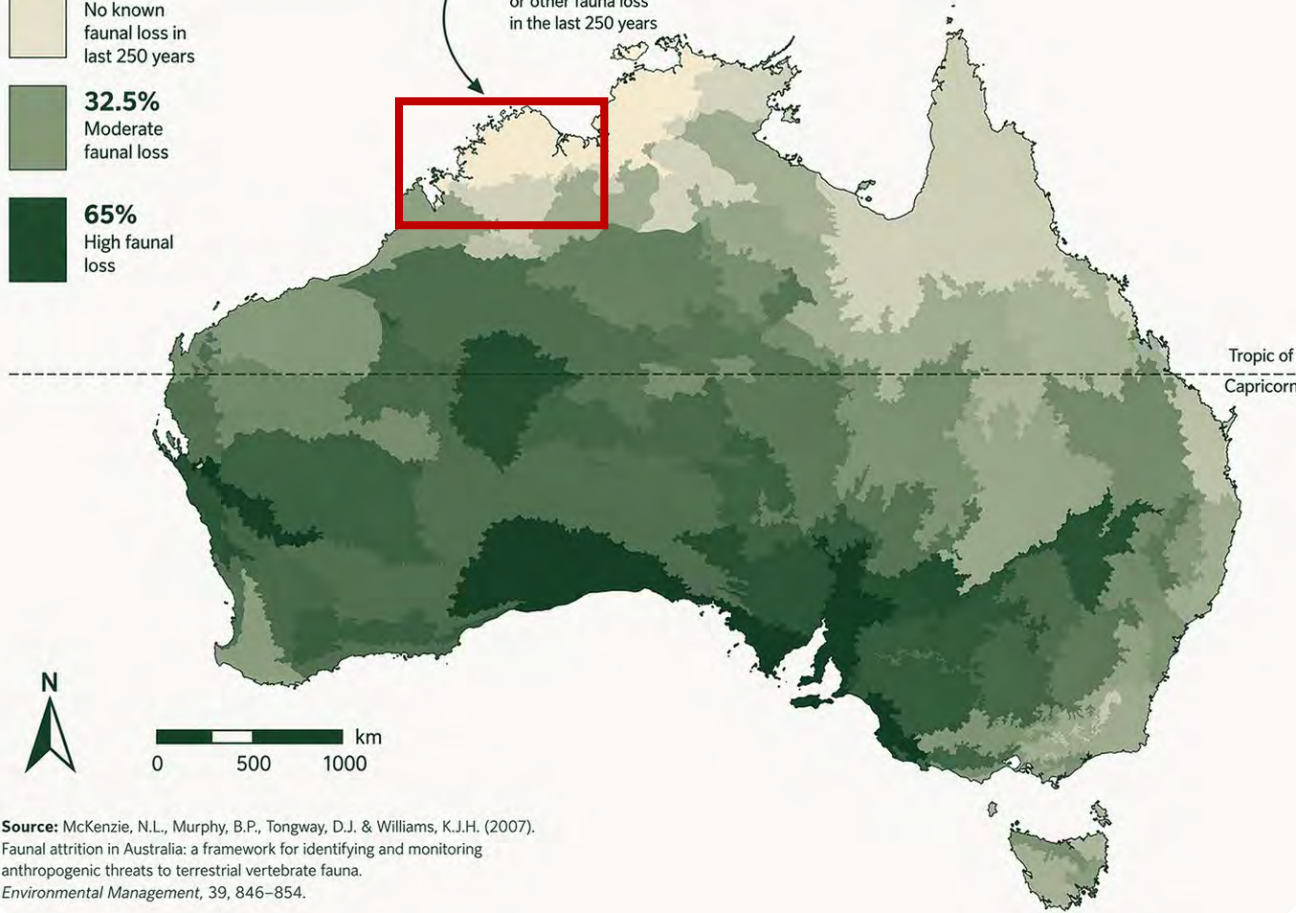
Key stronghold for threatened and endemic species

FAUNAL ATTRITION INDEX

- 0%**
No known faunal loss in last 250 years
- 32.5%**
Moderate faunal loss
- 65%**
High faunal loss

KIMBERLEY

No known mammal or other fauna loss in the last 250 years



Source: McKenzie, N.L., Murphy, B.P., Tongway, D.J. & Williams, K.J.H. (2007). Faunal attrition in Australia: a framework for identifying and monitoring anthropogenic threats to terrestrial vertebrate fauna. *Environmental Management*, 39, 846–854.



Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC)

Mission

*The effective conservation of
all Australian animals and
their habitats*





Opportunity for conservation at scale through collaboration

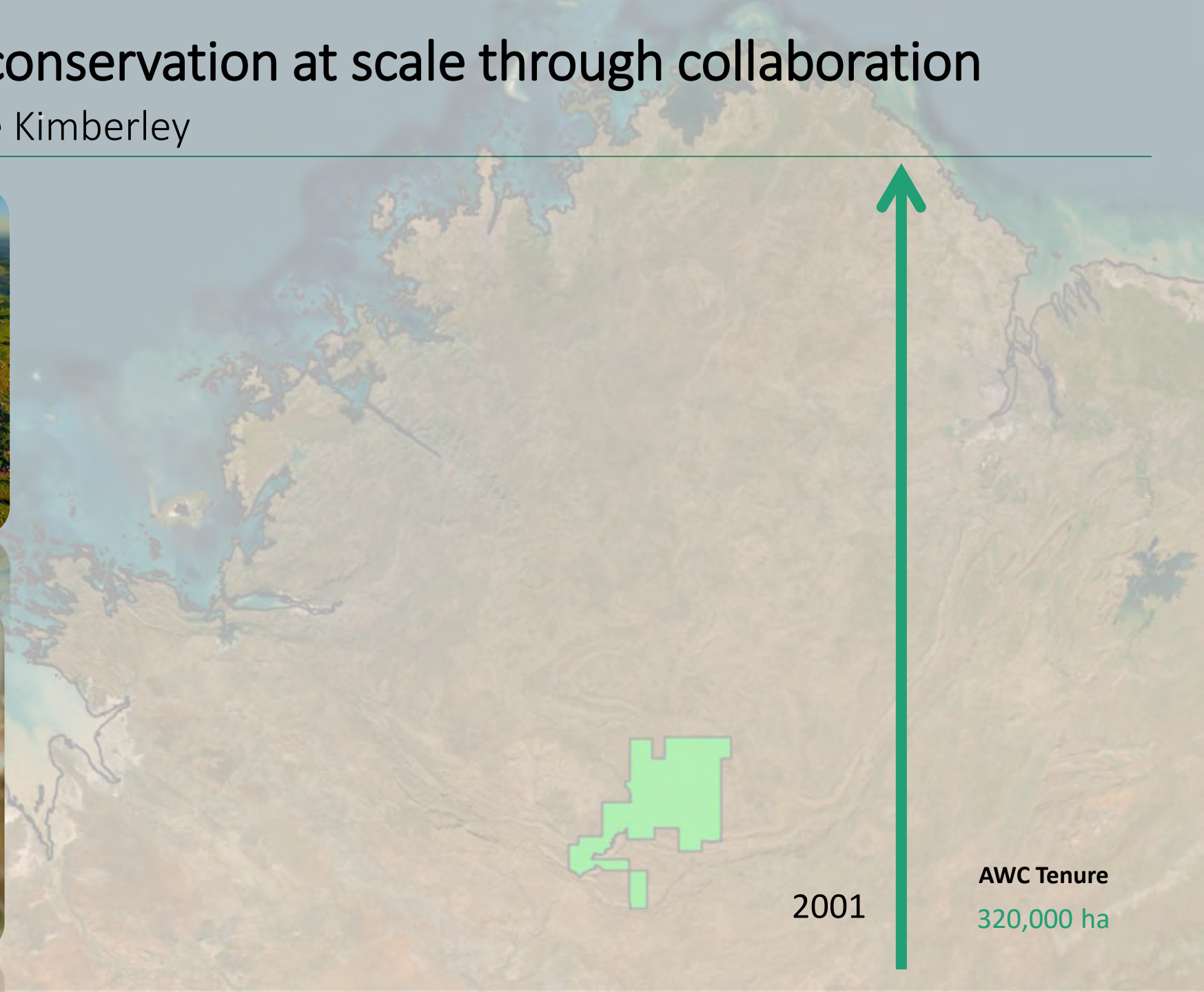
25 years of AWC in the Kimberley



Bunuba and Kija Country – Wayne Lawler/ AWC



Purple-crowned Fairywren – Nikki Teunissen/ AWC





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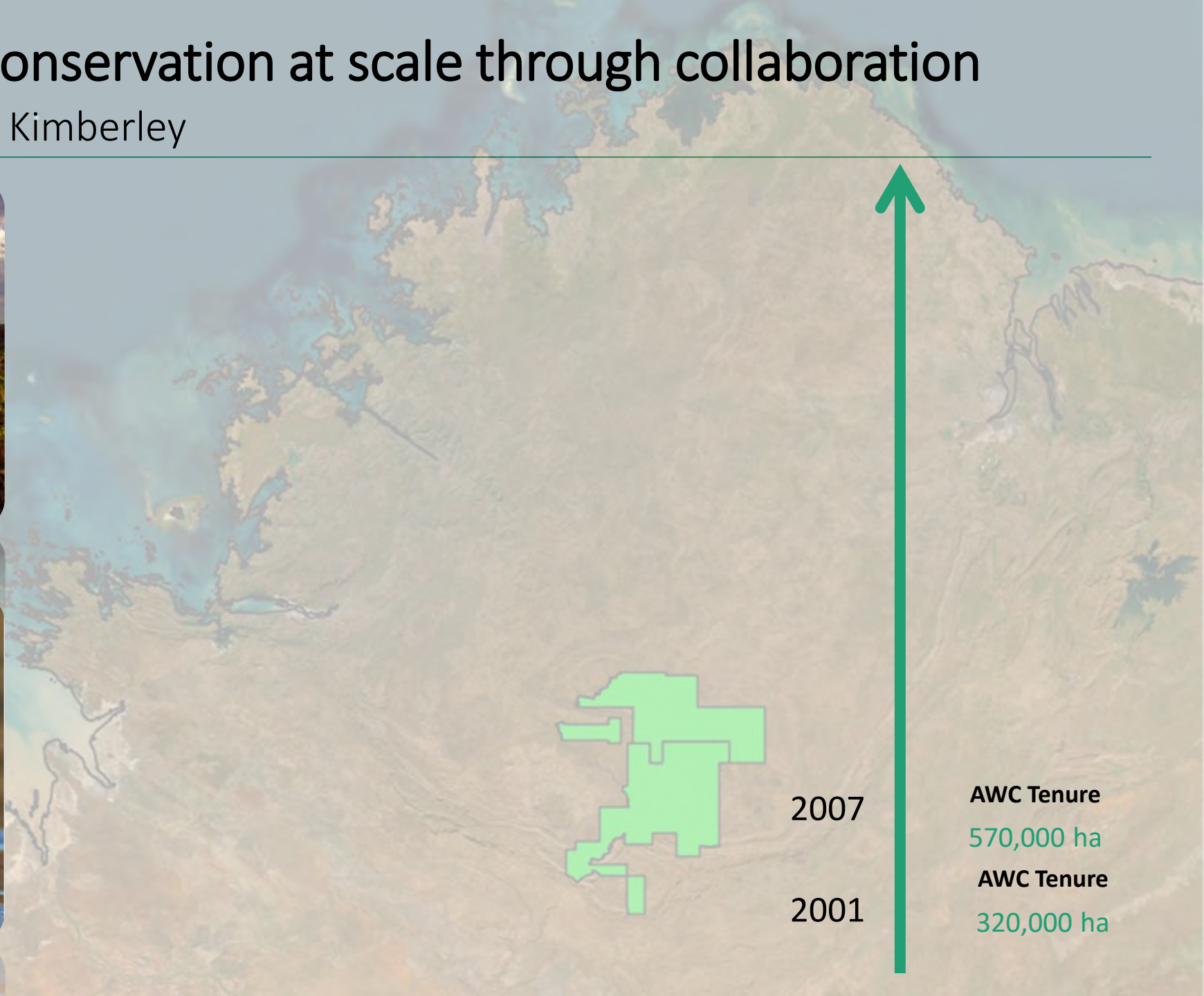
25 years of AWC in the Kimberley



Wilinggin Country – Wayne Lawler/ AWC



Gouldian Finch – Martin Willis/ AWC





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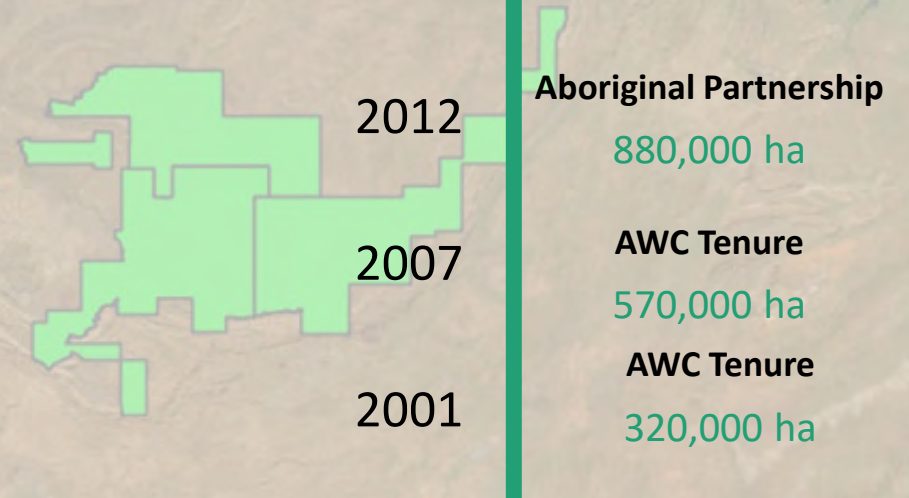
25 years of AWC in the Kimberley



Kija Country – Wayne Lawler/ AWC



Agile Wallaby – Wayne Lawler/ AWC





Opportunity for conservation at scale through collaboration

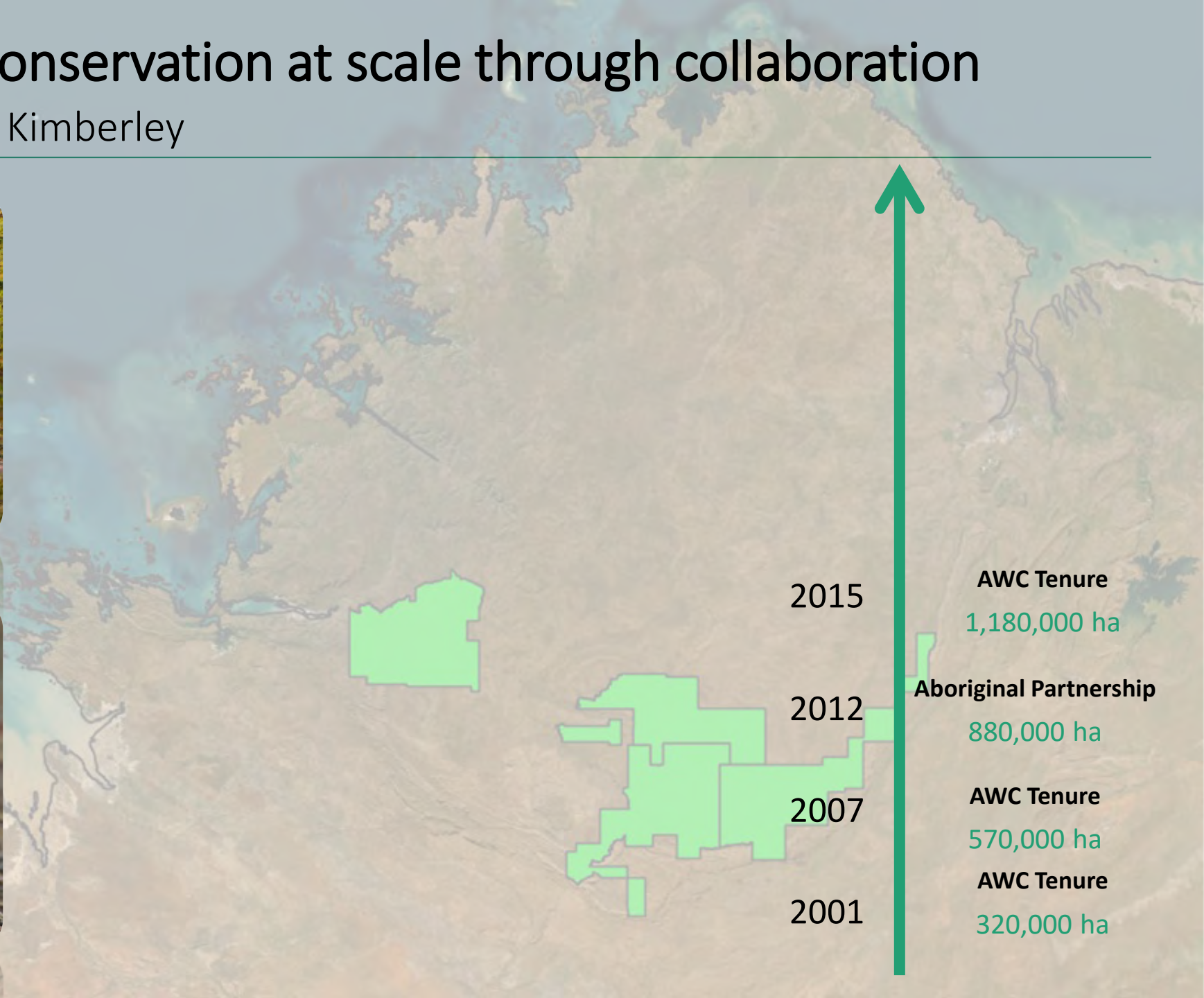
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Wilinggin Country – Wayne Lawler/ AWC



Golden Bandicoot – Tom Sayers/ AWC





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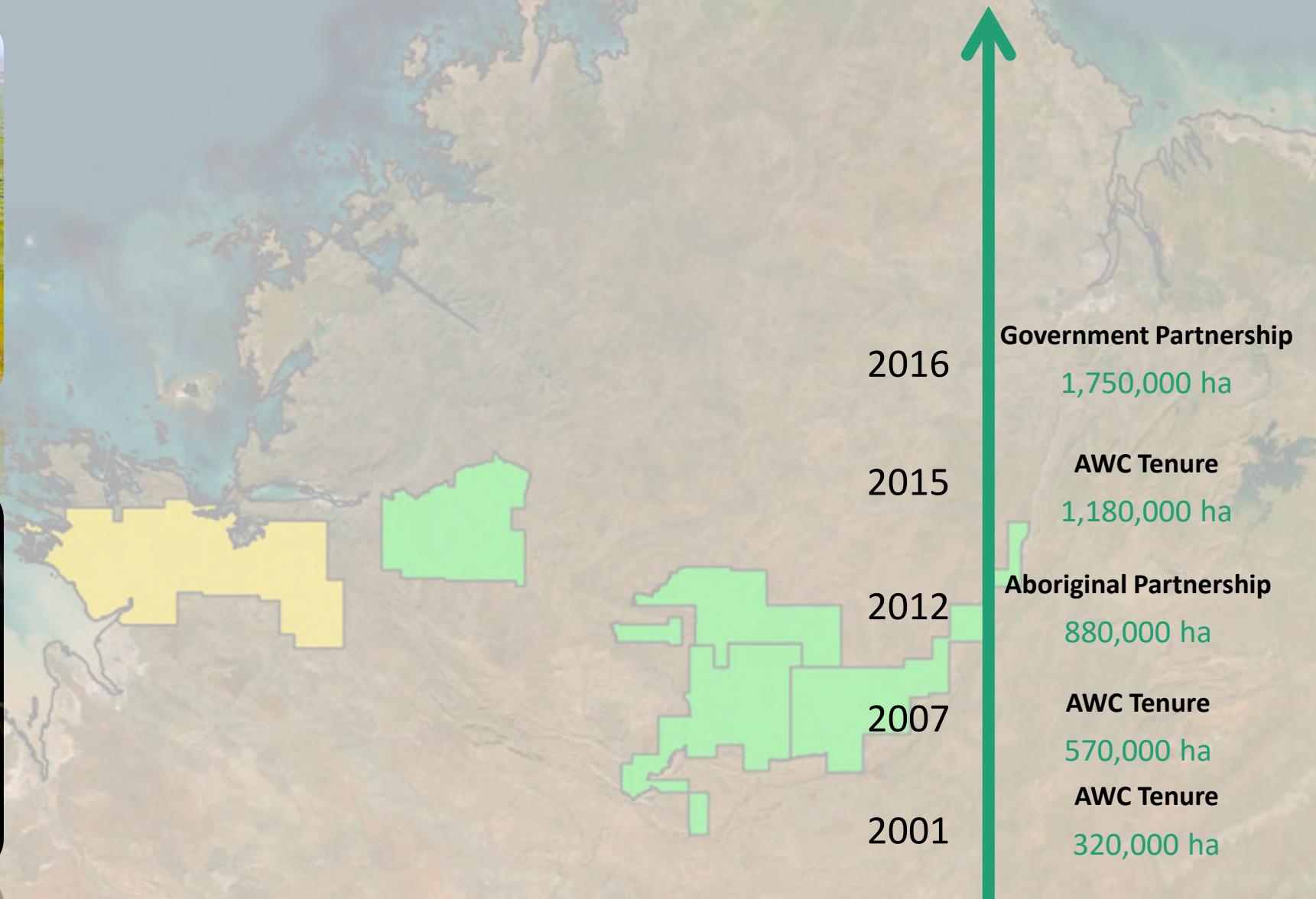
25 years of AWC in the Kimberley



Dambimangari Country – Wayne Lawler/ AWC



Kimberley Brushtail Phascogale – Ian Bool/ AWC



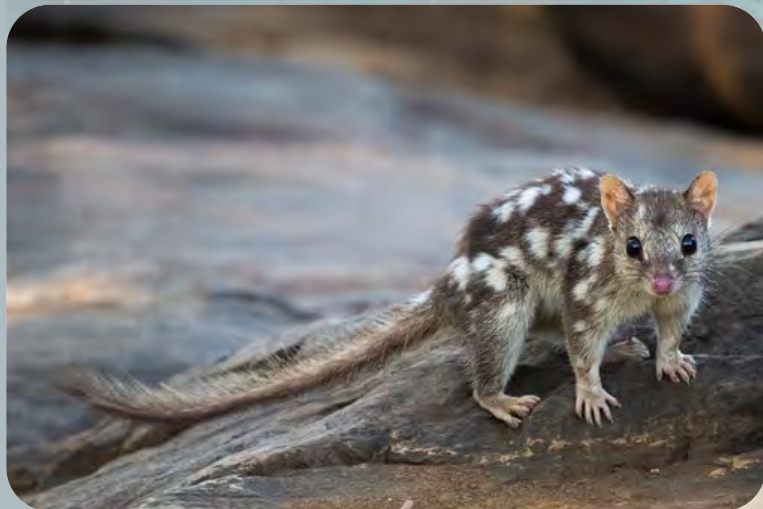


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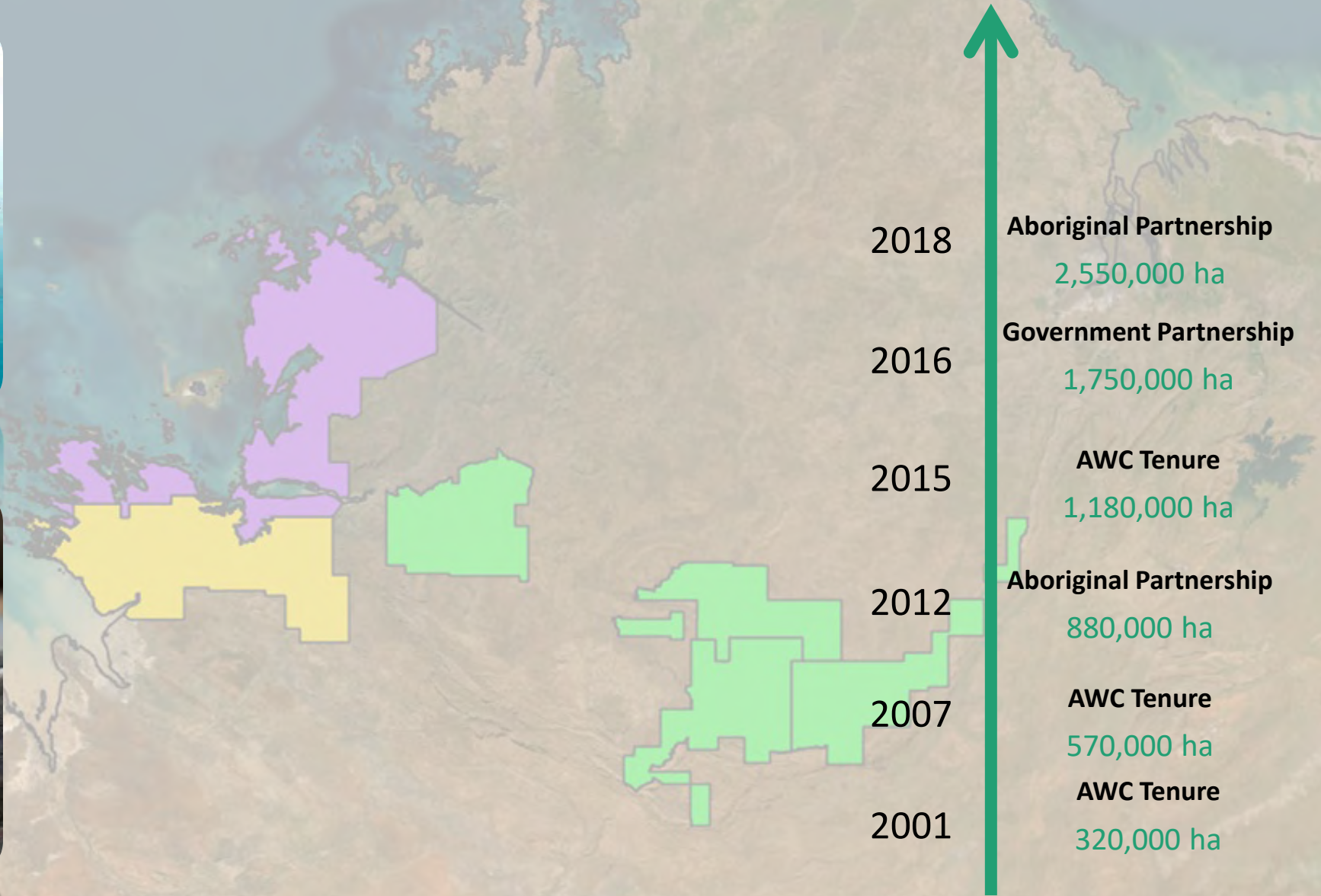
25 years of AWC in the Kimberley



Dambimangari Country - Brad Leue / AWC



Northern Quoll - Brad Leue / AWC





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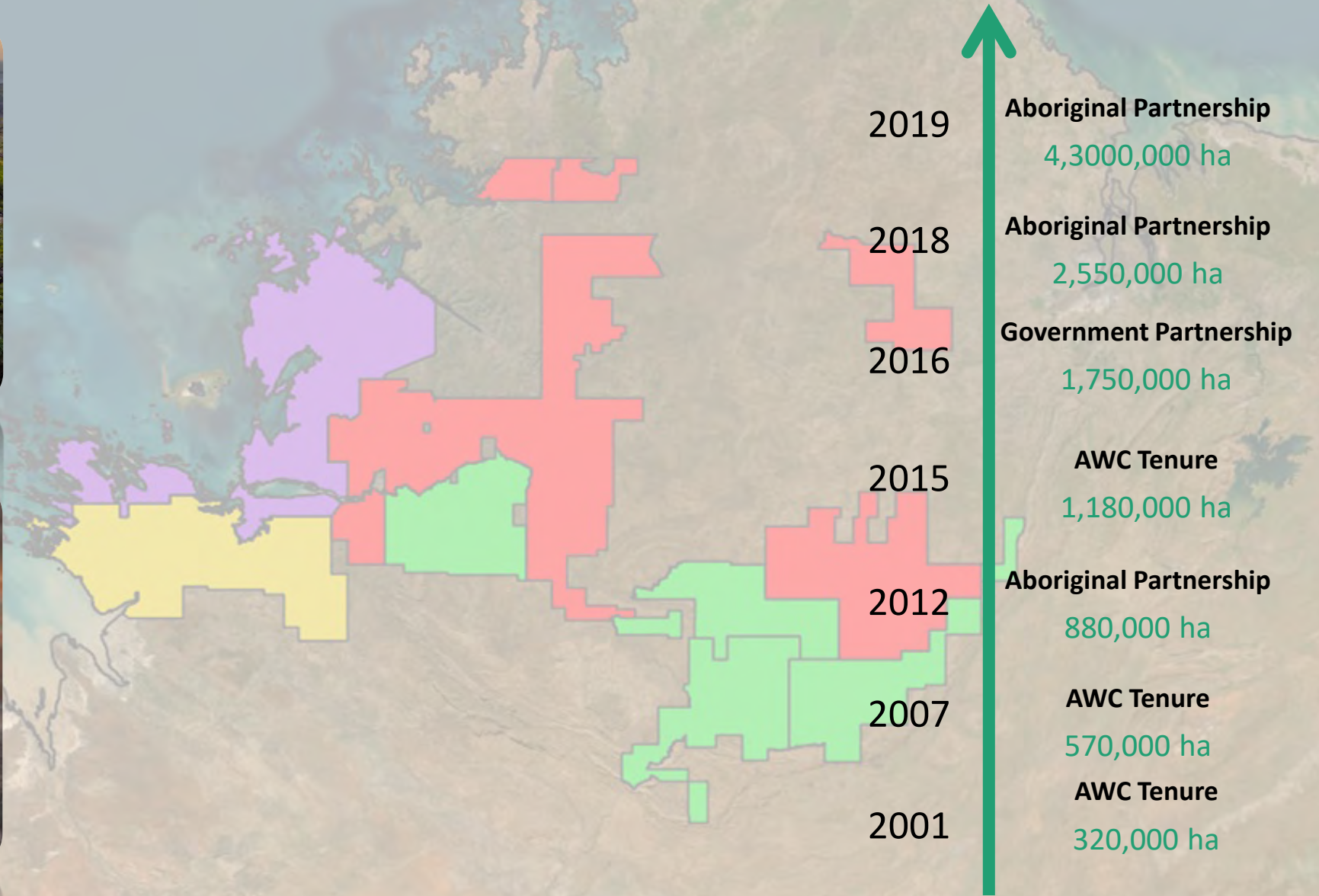
25 years of AWC in the Kimberley



Wilinggin Country - Brad Leue / AWC



Monjon - Brad Leue / AWC



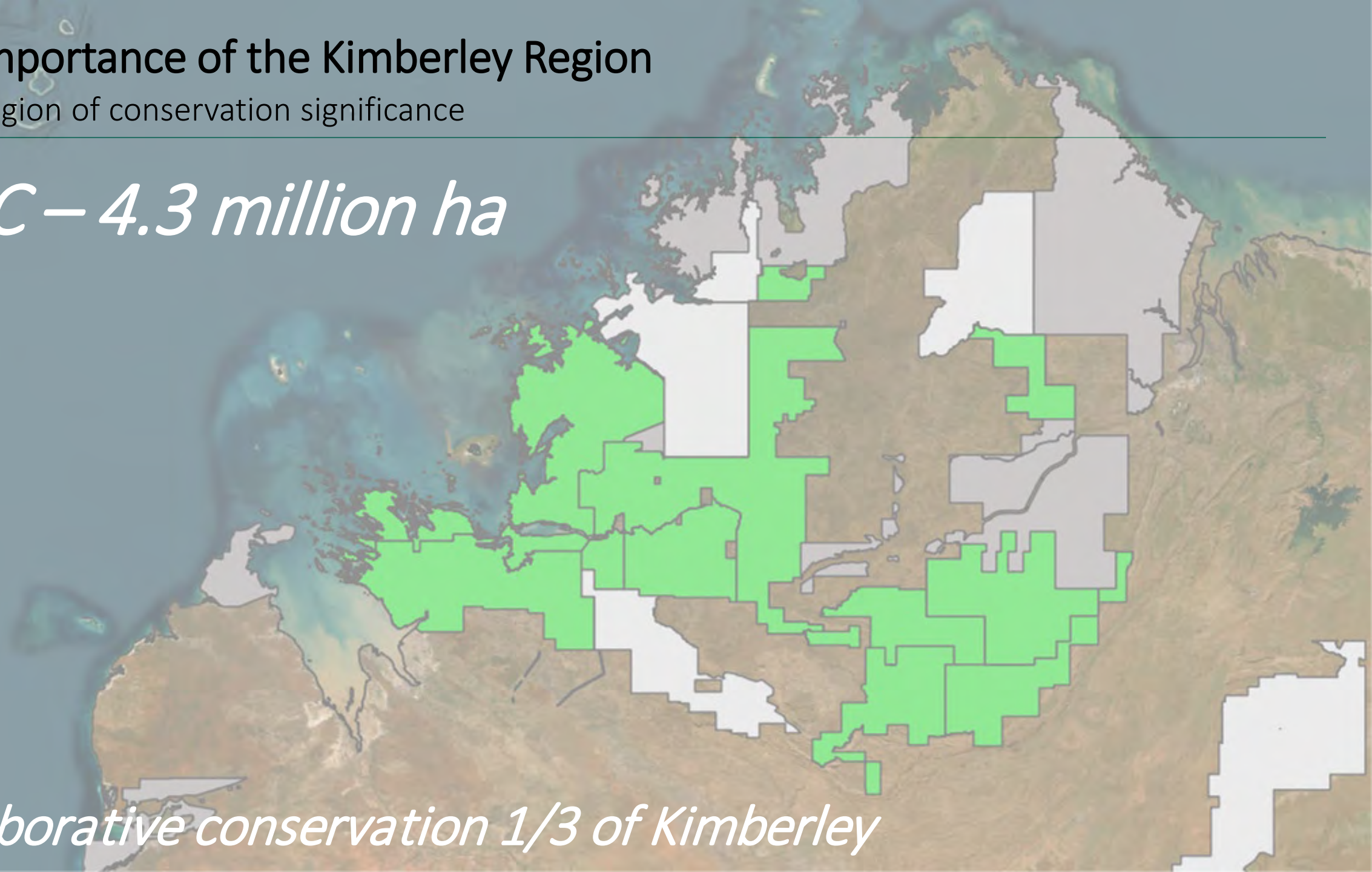



Importance of the Kimberley Region

Region of conservation significance

AWC – 4.3 million ha

Collaborative conservation 1/3 of Kimberley



A large baobab tree stands in a savanna landscape under a starry night sky. The tree is the central focus, with its thick trunk and sparse branches. The background is a vast field of golden grasses and a line of trees on the horizon. The sky is dark blue and black, filled with numerous stars and the Milky Way galaxy.

*Healthy Country and support
long-term ecological
resilience of this tropical
savanna ecosystem for
generations to come through
First Nations stewardship.*



Key threats in the Kimberley

Wildfire – Feral Ungulates – Invasive Predators





Science informed conservation land management

How AWC works in the Kimberley





People on Country

Boots on the ground





Science guiding action

Research, monitoring and adaptive management





Applied land management at scale

Restoring savanna fire management





Applied land management at scale

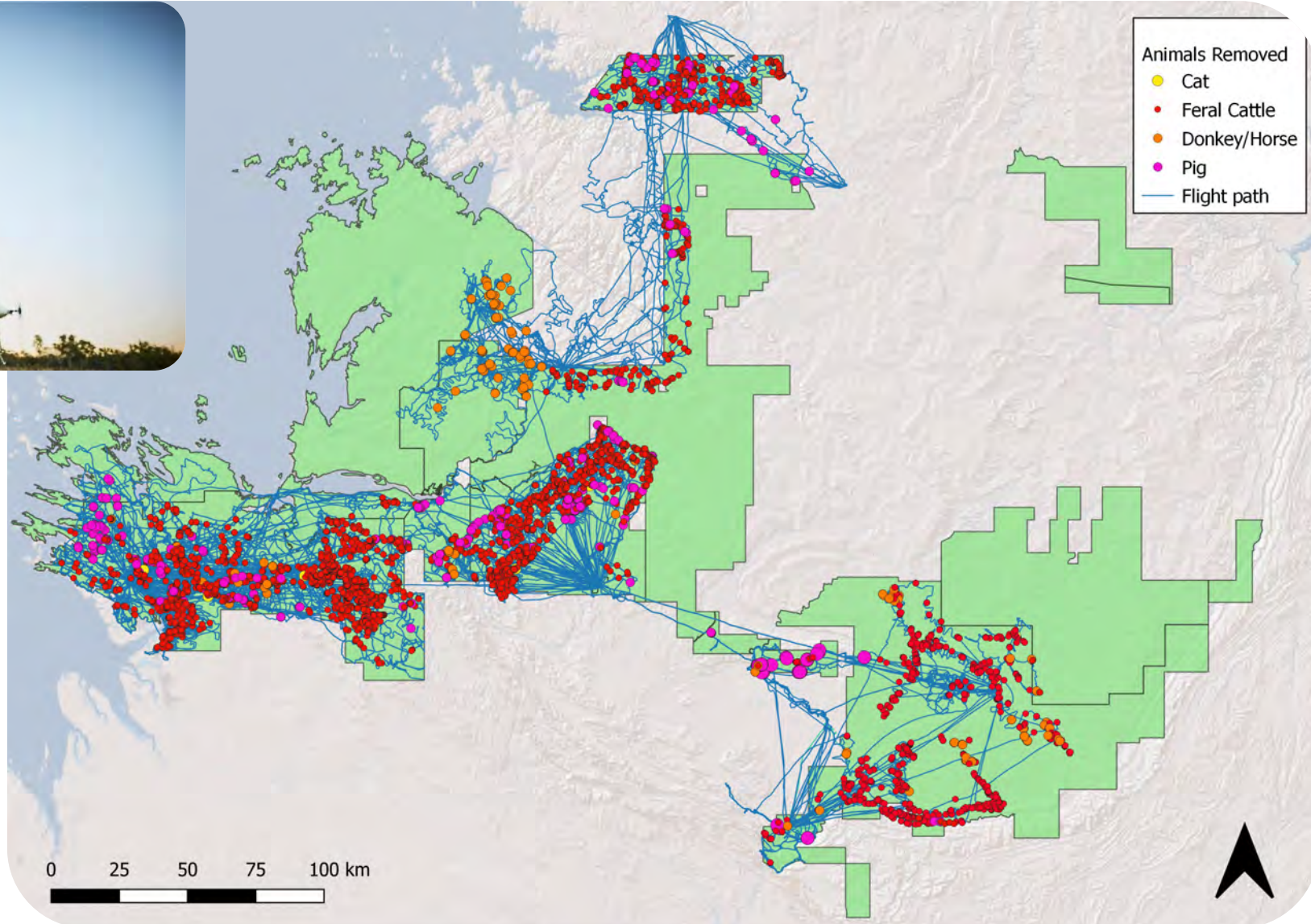
Removal of feral ungulates





Applied land management at scale

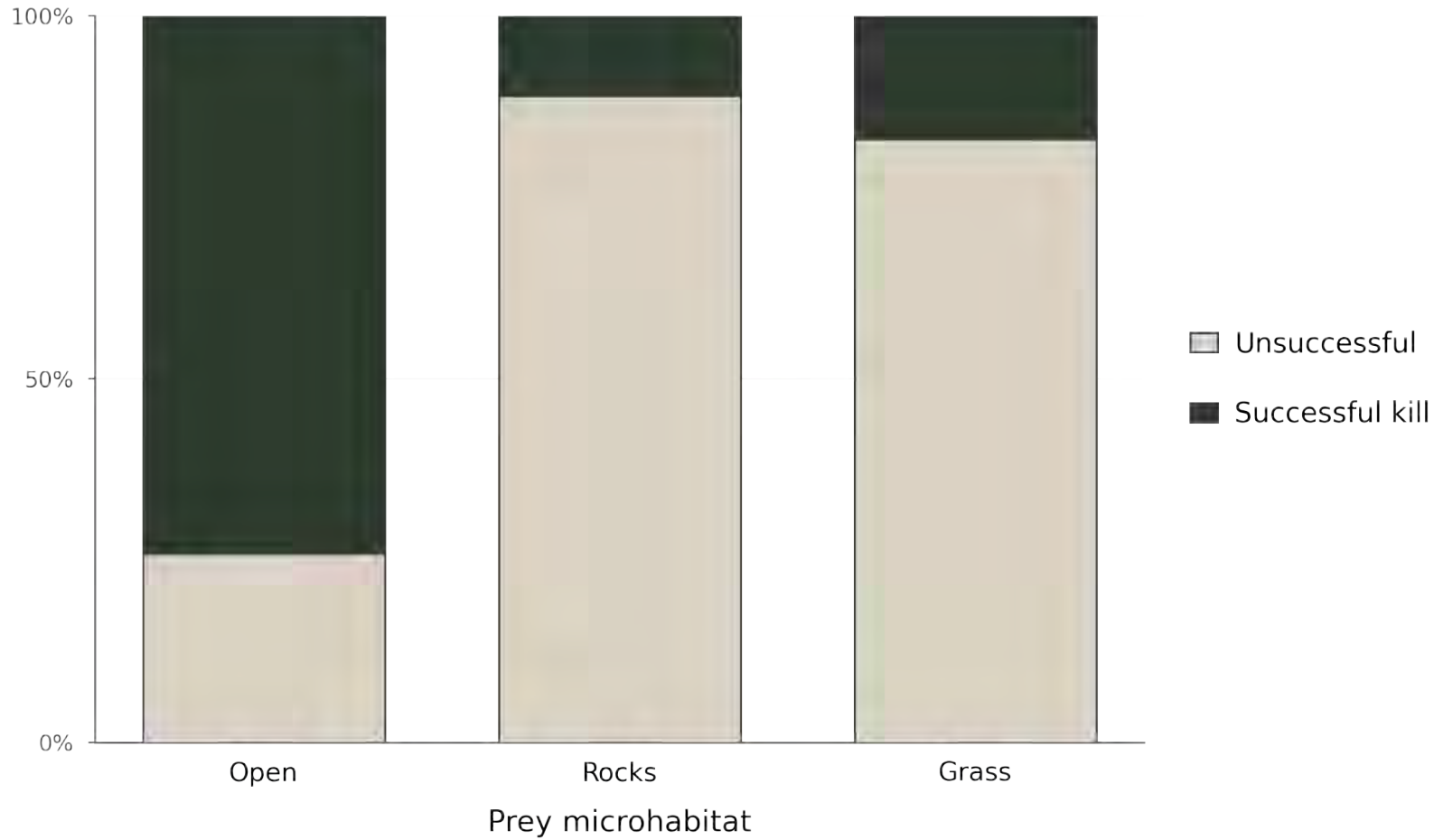
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Applied land management at scale

Invasive predator pressure reduction





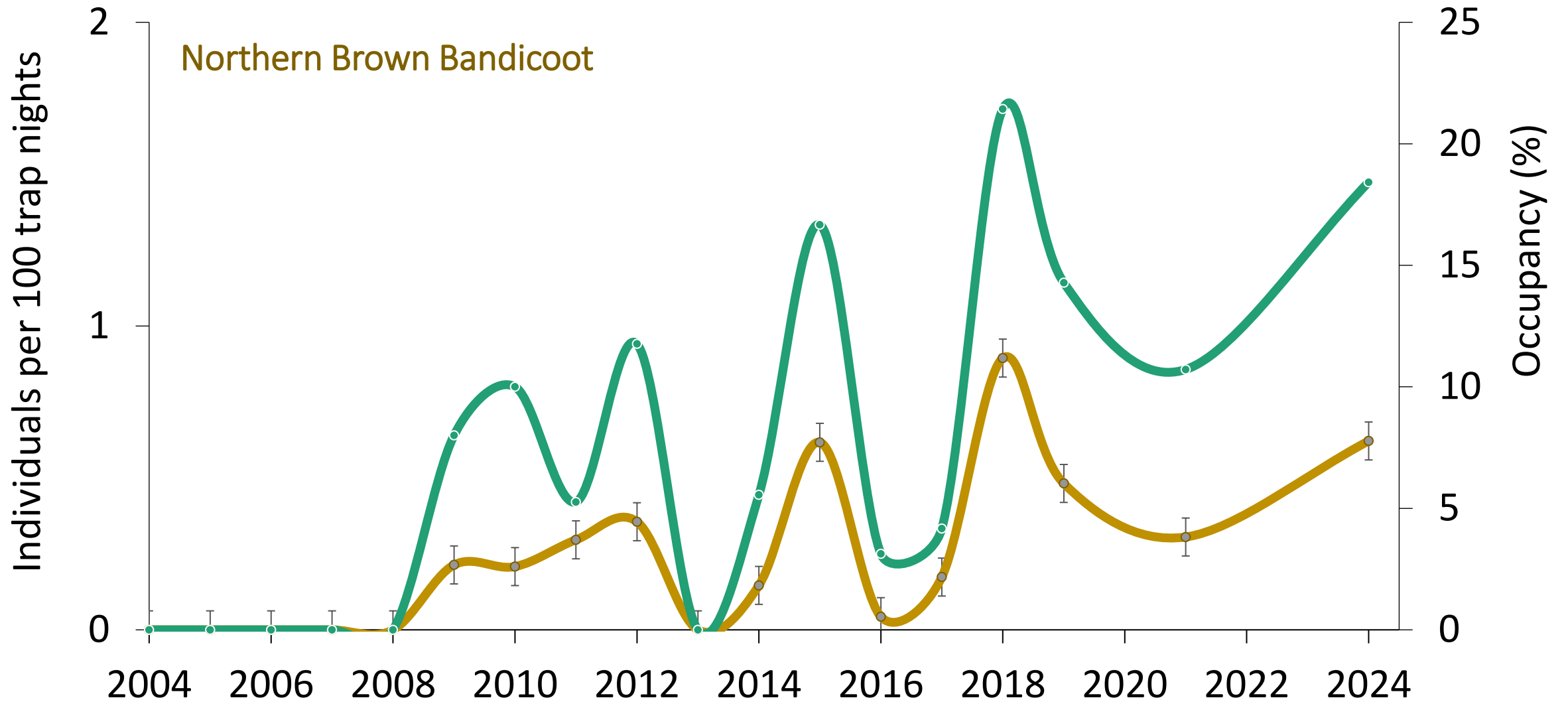
Partnerships and influence across landscapes





Measure outcomes and scaling impact

Native wildlife recovery





Measure outcomes and scaling impact

Landscape restoration





Restoring Fire to the Kimberley Savannas

Kimberley Fire Program

AWC's role

- Early research and on-ground trials
 - Fire delivery
 - Fauna and landscape response
 - Reduce impact of feral cats
- Demonstrating contemporary fire management at scale >6 million ha – outside AWC owned tenure
- Building partnerships and key relationships across the region



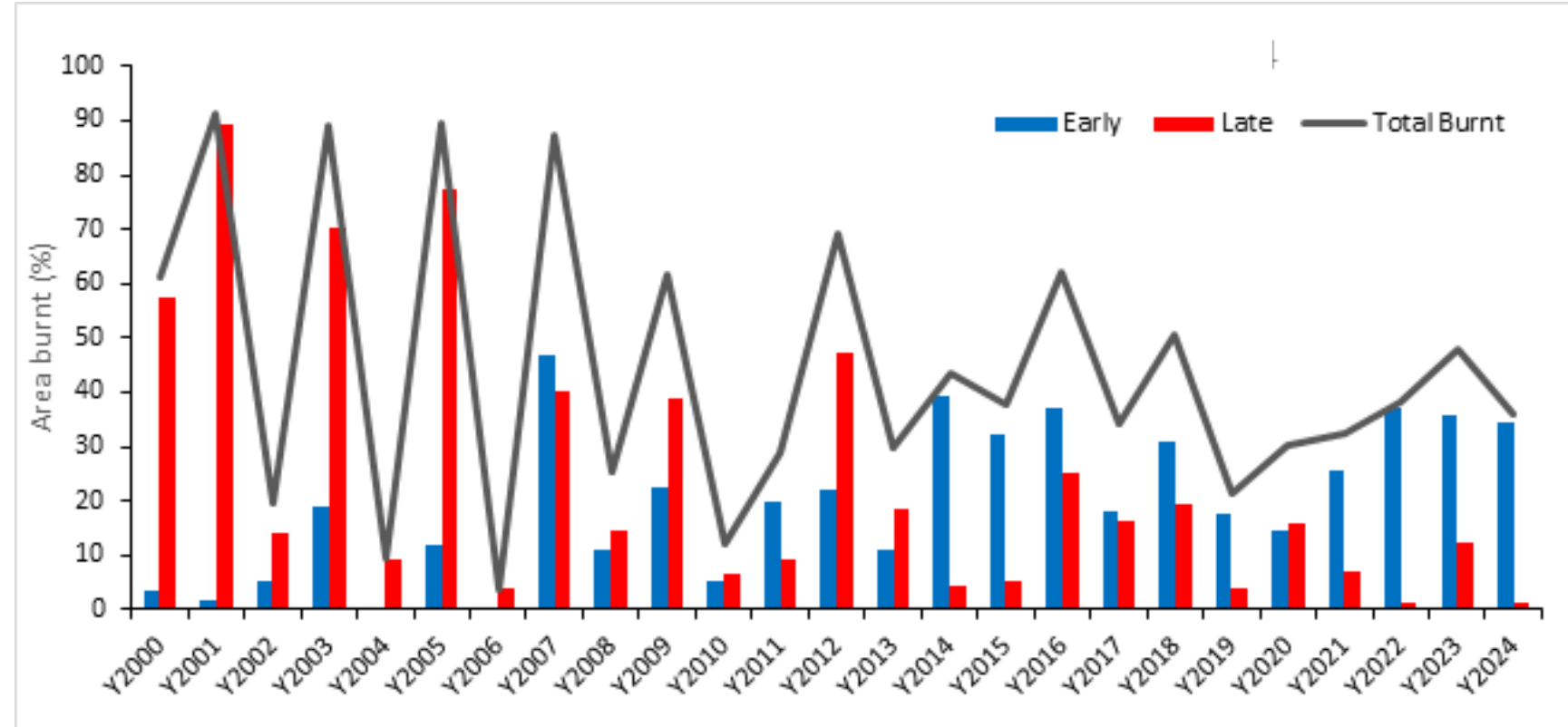


Transformation in fire regime

Restoring Fire to the Kimberley Savannas

Measured change in fire regime

- Shift from late season to early season fire
- >50% reduction in large destructive wildfires
- Reduction in total area burnt



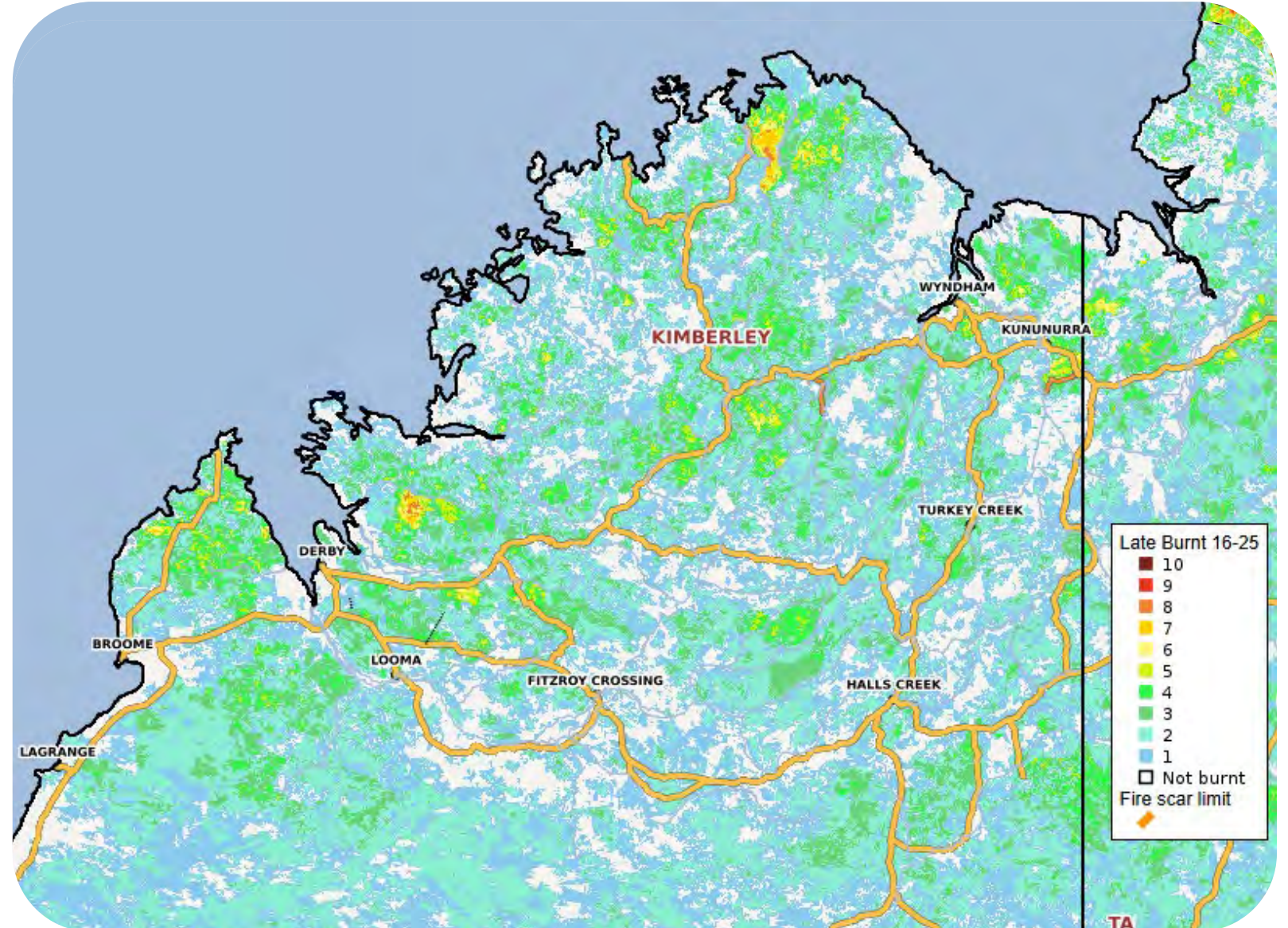


Transformation in fire regime

Restoring Fire to the Kimberley Savannas

From trials to regional transformation

- Fire management expanded across **millions hectares**
- ~95% now under coordinated fire management
- Shift in fire regime at landscape scale





Fauna recovery

Restoring Fire to the Kimberley Savannas

Endangered Gouldian Finch - Example

- Seed eating species – savanna grasses
- < 2000
- Improved habitat structure and food resources
- Return of endangered species to landscape of Northern Australia





Beyond conservation – First Nations stewardship

Restoring Fire to the Kimberley Savannas

Return to Country and Cultural Burning

- “Right-Way” fire
- Fire walks
- Identity through cultural responsibility in Caring for Country



Tim Woods / AWC

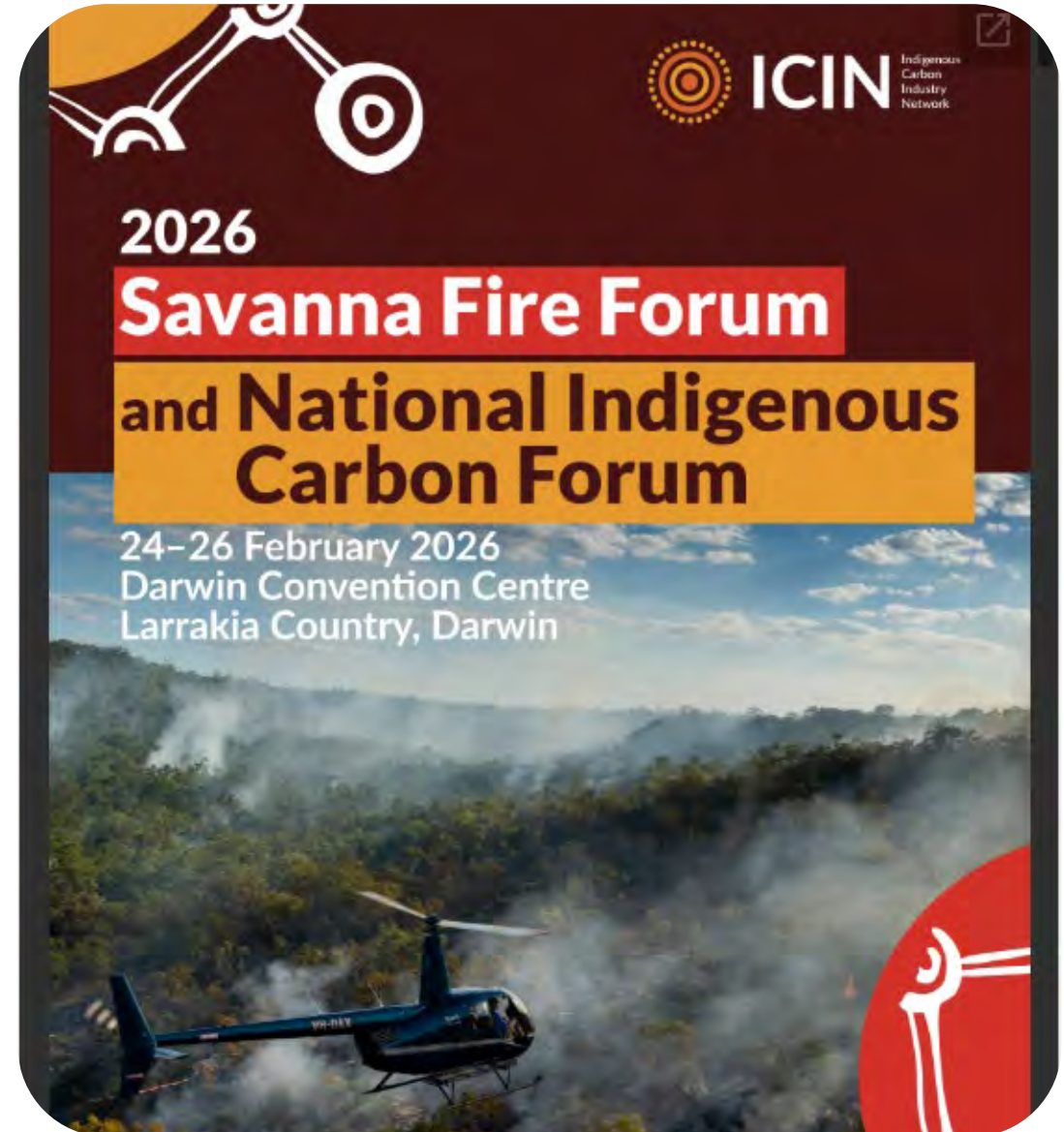


Beyond conservation – Carbon income

Restoring Fire to the Kimberley Savannas

Northern Savanna Fire Carbon Program - 2010

- Fire management now occurs across northern Australia
- Carbon projects generating income for communities
 - ~Annually > USD \$57 million
 - 75% Indigenous carbon programs





Northern Australia Savanna Fire Management

Positive biodiversity outcomes and circular economy

April 01, 2025



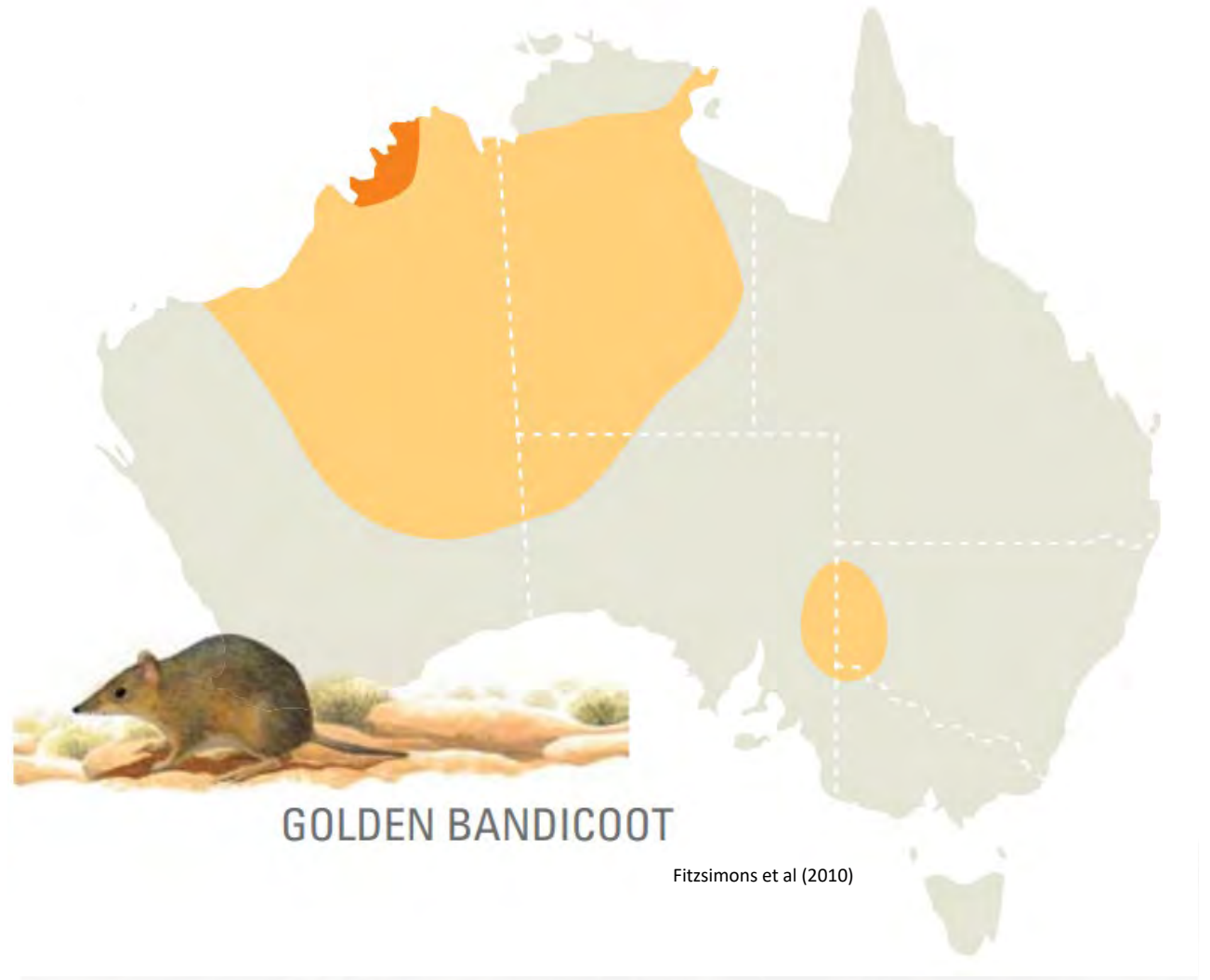


Healing Country through reintroductions

The Golden Bandicoot

A species in decline

- Lost from ~95% of its historical range
- Predation by feral cats a major driver of decline
- Fire and feral ungulates altering habitat



GOLDEN BANDICOOT

Fitzsimons et al (2010)

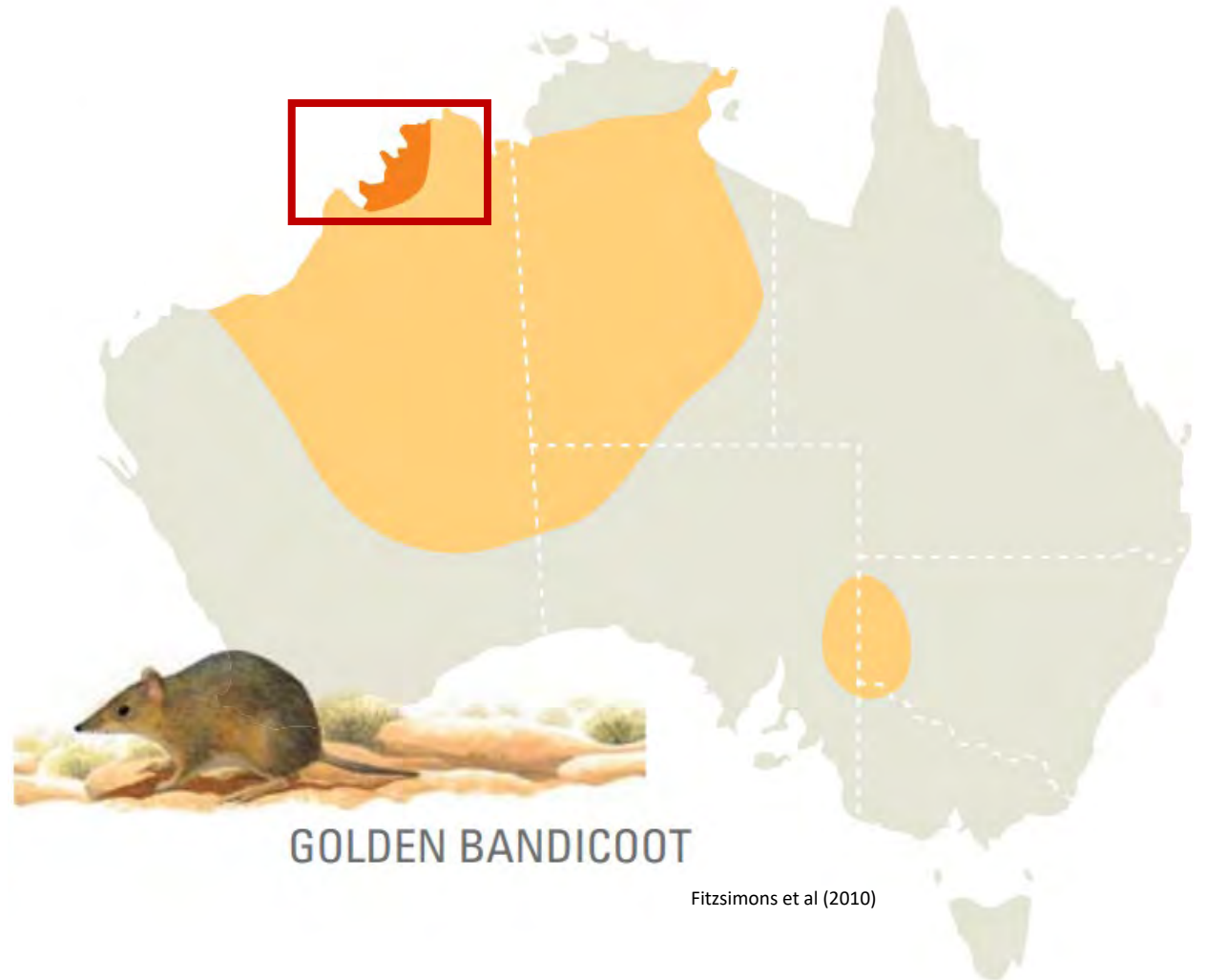


Healing Country through reintroductions

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The Kimberley stronghold

- Last mainland populations persist here
- Healthy populations across managed landscapes
- Maintaining >70% of the species' genetic diversity



Fitzsimons et al (2010)

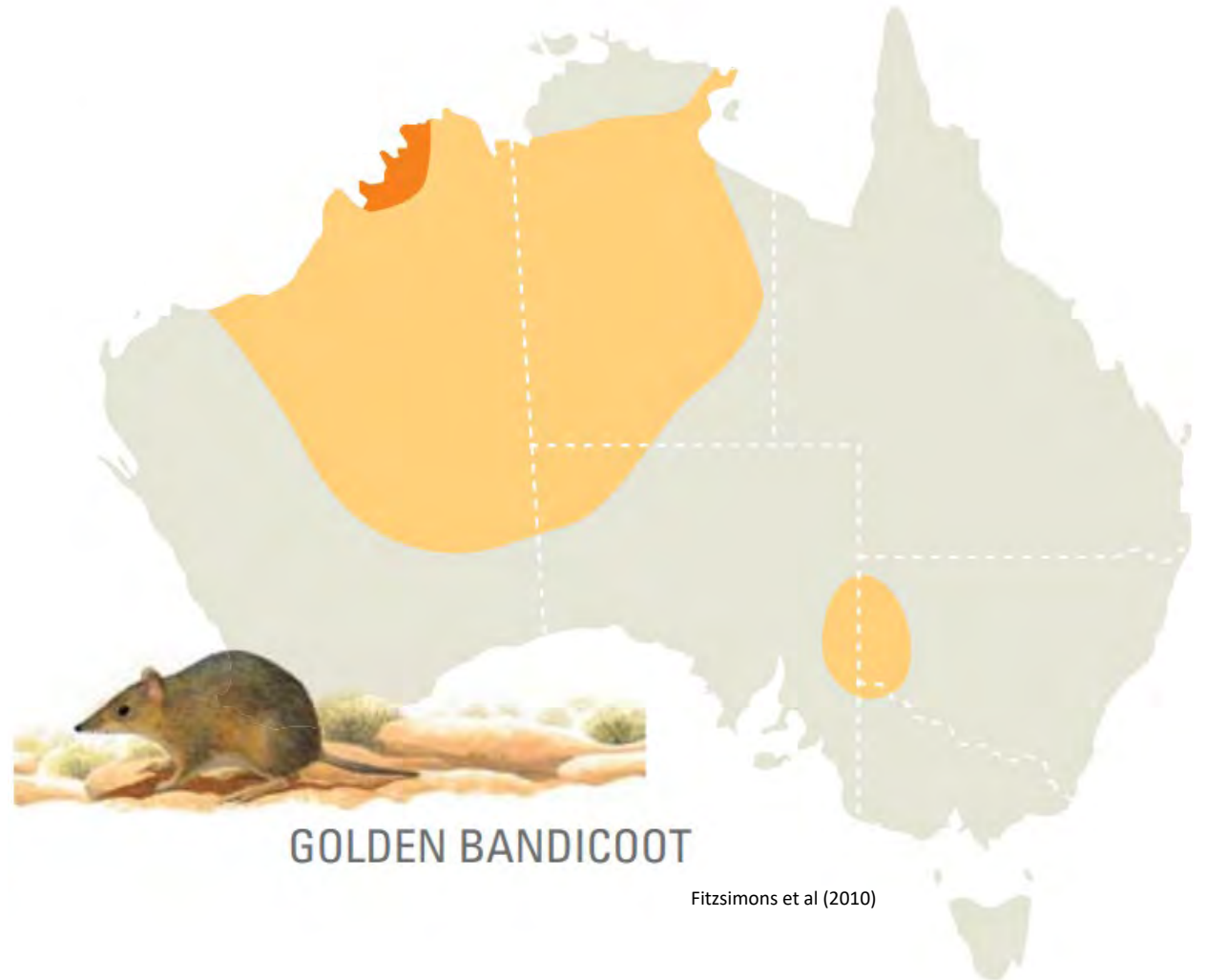


Healing Country through reintroductions

The Golden Bandicoot

Why this matters

- One of Australia's most threatened mammals
- A culturally important species for many First Nations peoples



GOLDEN BANDICOOT

Fitzsimons et al (2010)



Healing Country through reintroductions

The Golden Bandicoot



Wilinggin Country



Warlpiri Country



GOLDEN BANDICOOT

Fitzsimons et al (2010)



Healing Country through reintroductions

The Golden Bandicoot



Species returned to Country

- 2 years later – thriving population
- 6th generation



Tim Henderson / ABC



Healing Country through reintroductions

The Golden Bandicoot



Cultural reconnection and knowledge sharing

- Ngarinyin people gifting strength of their Country
- Warlpiri Country healing
- Supporting people, culture and Country
- Narelle's journey





Challenges of Landscape-scale Conservation

Scale and complexity

- Managing millions of hectares across multiple tenures and jurisdictions





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Balancing land uses and priorities

- Conservation alongside pastoralism, culture, tourism, community and other land uses
- Increasing pressure for resource-extractive land uses



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Climate variability and change

- Floods, extreme fire seasons and shifting ecological conditions increase uncertainty and cost



Opportunities for the future

A rare opportunity at landscape scale

- Lower pressure from human encroachment and poaching than many global landscapes
- Large, intact ecosystems still functioning across vast areas





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- Investing in local people and long-term leadership of Traditional Owners on Country



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A landscape where conservation can still succeed

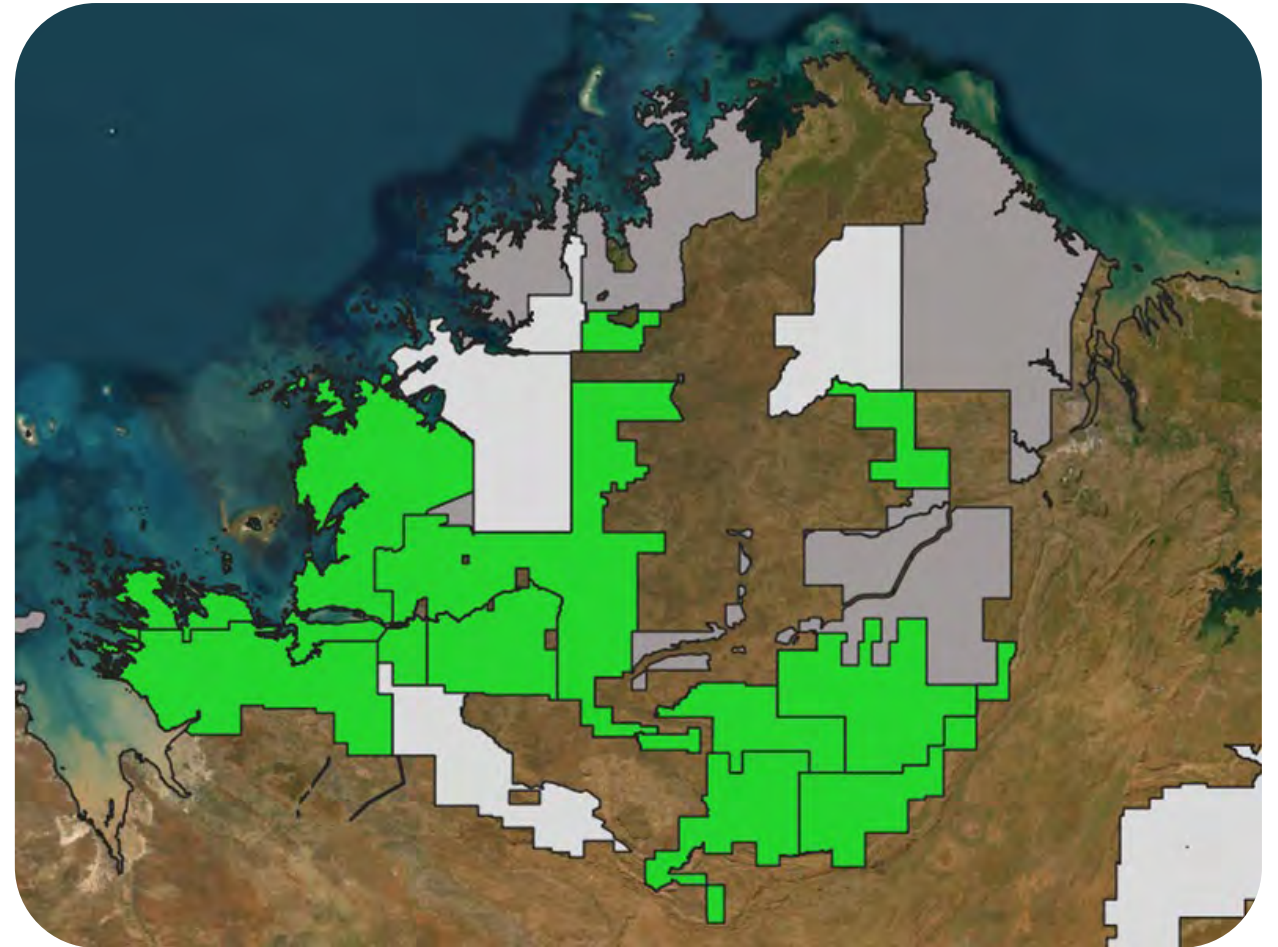
- An opportunity to protect nature before it is lost



Work at the scale of nature

Lessons from the Kimberley

- Nature does not operate in neat boundaries
- Think beyond organisations and tenure
- Collaboration and common ground





Integrate science and knowledge with action

Lessons from the Kimberley

- Effective landscape scale conservation
Traditional knowledge + Research and monitoring + On ground management + Evaluation + Adaptation
- Not easy or neat – takes time, capability, resources and triage
- Knowledge sharing – no longer working in isolation





Integrity – owning mistakes

Lessons from the Kimberley

- Conservation organisations have not always worked in right way with First Nations people
 - Own mistakes and acknowledge past decisions
 - Understand why mistrust exists
 - Community have intergenerational memories
- Build trust – conduct, consistency, integrity within a shared common goal
- Values are lived in community and organisationally
- Organisation continues to evolve



Wayne Lawler/ AWC



Partner with Traditional Owners

Lessons from the Kimberley

- Strongest alongside Traditional Owner knowledge, stewardship and responsibility to care for Country
 - Culture and conservation are inseparable
 - Native title rights matter BUT so does
 - Identity
 - Obligation / Cultural responsibility
 - Belonging
- Be ready to hop off the “boat” when asked





Country needs people – people need Country

Lessons from the Kimberley

- Right people right Country
- Boots on the Ground
- Sense of purpose and belonging matters





Influence and collaboration

Lessons from the Kimberley

- Demonstrate what works
- Influence spreads beyond one organisation
- Good ideas move – proven models get adapted
- Continuity of programs increases scale and conservation outcomes!





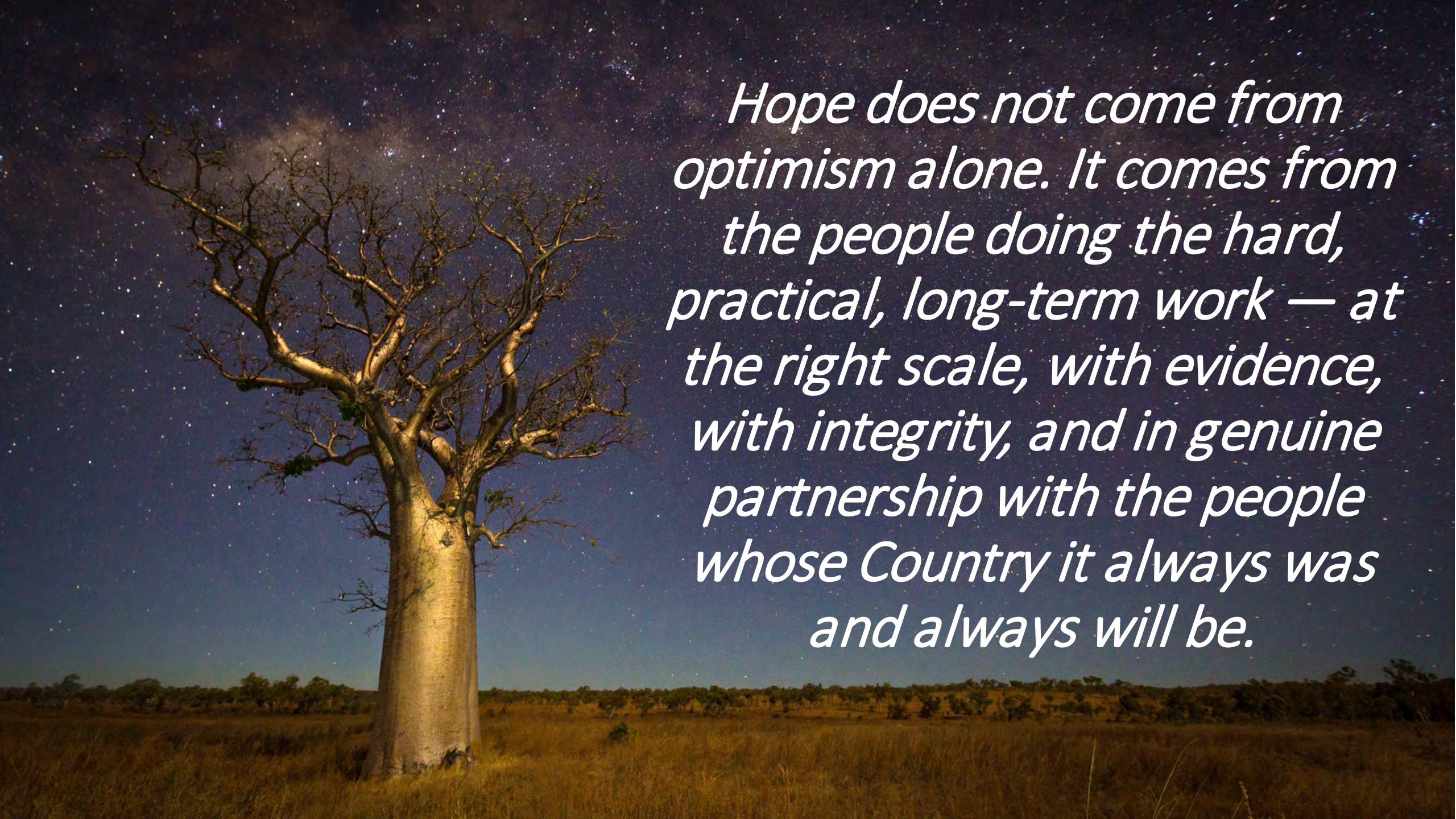
Commit for the long-term

Lessons from the Kimberley

- Recovery takes time
- Caring for Country / Conservation does not stop
 - People must remain on Country
 - Integrated traditional and contemporary management must continue
- Climate change increases the need for active stewardship + adaptive management
- It is more effective to invest in holding on to what we have then restoring what we have lost



Brad Leue/ AWC

A large baobab tree stands in a savanna landscape under a starry night sky. The tree is the central focus on the left side of the image, with its thick trunk and sparse branches silhouetted against the dark sky. The ground is covered in dry grass, and a line of trees is visible in the distance. The sky is filled with stars, and the Milky Way is visible in the upper left quadrant.

*Hope does not come from
optimism alone. It comes from
the people doing the hard,
practical, long-term work — at
the right scale, with evidence,
with integrity, and in genuine
partnership with the people
whose Country it always was
and always will be.*



Australian Wildlife Conservancy

Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) is a global leader in conservation, providing hope to Australia's wildlife with a science-informed, land management partnership model that delivers high impact results.