

McNamara, Keiran (obituaries from ABC and SES websites)

Former DEC chief dies in hospital

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Photo: Keiran McNamara had worked for CALM and then DEC since 1985. He has died in hospital. (Brooke Bannister: ABC)

The former director general of Western Australia's Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), Keiran McNamara, has died in hospital, aged 58. Earlier this month, Mr McNamara announced he would be stepping down after 12 years in the role, due to a terminal illness. DEC's Acting Director General, Jim Sharp, has offered his sincere condolences to Mr McNamara's family, friends and colleagues. The long-serving environment chief joined the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) in July 1985 and went on to become CEO, before that agency was combined with the environment department. He is survived by his wife and three children.

The head of Western Australia's Department of Environment and Conservation, Keiran McNamara has lost his battle with cancer after a short illness. Mr McNamara died peacefully last night in Hollywood Private Hospital. He was 58 years old. He is survived by his wife Anne, daughter Sarah, sons Peter and Ian, and extended family in Western Australia and New South Wales.

DEC Acting Director-General Jim Sharp said Mr McNamara was touched by the support he received. "On behalf of the department, I offer my sincere condolences to his family, friends and colleagues," Mr Sharp said. "Keiran was deeply touched and comforted by the expressions of appreciation, care and support he received following his announcement on March 12 that he would not continue in his role as Director-General due to a terminal illness."

Mr McNamara announced he was stepping down on March 12 due to ill-health. He said it had been "a privilege and an honour" to lead the department's staff, volunteer contingent and partners through various conservation and environmental protection initiatives for the state. At the time of Mr McNamara's resignation, Mr Sharp said the DEC boss had worked tirelessly to conserve and protect the State's environment.

Premier and Cabinet department director-general Peter Conran said Mr McNamara had been a remarkable public servant. "His dedication and contribution to the environment and to the development of Western Australia has been exceptional," he said. "If a word could describe Keiran it is 'courage'."

Mr McNamara graduated with a degree in natural resources from the University of New England in 1976. He spent seven years with the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service in Canberra before joining WA's Conservation and Land Management (CALM) Department in July 1985. Mr McNamara went on to become CALM's director of nature conservation in December 1991 and its chief executive in July 2001.

When the state government amalgamated CALM and the Environment Department to form the DEC in July 2006, Mr McNamara was appointed its director general. At the time his illness was made public Premier Colin Barnett paid tribute to Mr McNamara, saying the DEC boss had struck an appropriate balance between environmental conservation and economic development.

"He has fulfilled this role with vision, commitment and integrity," Mr Barnett said. Environment Minister Bill Marmion said Mr McNamara had been an outstanding leader who had left an enduring legacy in environmental protection. "The environmental and conservation achievements of the Western Australian governments over the last 10 years could not have been possible without Keiran's contribution," he said.

World Wildlife Fund spokesman Paul Gamblin said his group had worked closely with Mr McNamara for many years and was "shocked and saddened" by news of his illness. Mr McNamara played a major role in recent conservation advances in WA from expanding marine protection at Ningaloo Reef and steering its World Heritage nomination, to conservation parks in the Kimberley, Mr Gamblin said.