

Tasmania's Devil Island fundraising program winds up after iconic species rebounds

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-14/tasmanian-devil-island-fundraising-program-winds-up/9147124>

By Stephen Pigram 14 Nov 2017



The leader of a team credited with helping to save Tasmanian devils from extinction says with many members aged in their 70s and the devils' future looking good, it is time for a well-earned rest.

Photo: [The relocated devils are breeding, which is a great sign for the future.](#) (Supplied: Devil Island Project)

A contagious cancer-like facial tumour disease has killed more than 80 per cent of the wild population of Tasmanian devils in the past 20 years.

The project raised more than \$2.4 million to build large-scale quarantine facilities or "islands" to house and breed disease-free devils, and was the brainchild of the owner of a Bicheno wildlife park, Bruce Englefield.

He said with government and research institution funding, the project co-ordinators now believed the devils' fate is secure.

"We built six of the devil islands, and we also built four kilometres of transportable fencing that can be used to house the devils in sites around the state before they are released," he said.

Some of the 130 relocated devils in four sites across Tasmania have survived translocation, settling into release sites, putting on weight and breeding.

"We've had 10 years now and we have raised a lot of money and built some very good enclosures and there is nothing left for us to do that the (government-funded) Save the Devil program want us to do," Mr Englefield said.



"We've all aged 10 years and some of us are in our middle 70s, so the time has come to say 'well, we've accomplished more than we've ever set out to do'.

Photo: [The Devil Island Project is winding up.](#) (Supplied: Devil Island Project)

INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN PROJECT MODEL



Mr Englefield said the project had now become the model for similar projects around the world.

Photo: [Bruce Englefield, completing the 2013 Paris Marathon to raise awareness for Devil Island Project.](#) (Facebook: Devil Island Project)

"Particularly in South Africa, they're housing their threatened species in huge enclosures before they release them to the wild," he said.

Mr Englefield said the program had also led those involved to come to the conclusion the best place to keep devils is on an area offshore, like Maria Island, off the State's east coast.

He said the project finally lead to a strong population of devils to develop on Maria Island which is now the source for healthy devil populations around the state.

"We set out originally to show that it was welfare-friendly to keep devils in large enclosures, rather than putting them in small enclosures in the insurance population," he said.

"My idea was that these are free-roaming animals and they should be given as much room to roam in as possible.

"I had the idea of the large enclosures and I happened to have land available at Bicheno at my wildlife park."

Mr Englefield said he gathered a group of "like-minded people together" who were very keen to see that devils were looked after properly.

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Photo: [The latest research indicates devils are developing immune genes within eight years.](#) (Supplied: Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries and Water)