

Targeted Kakadu bureaucrats step aside



Environment Minister Sussan Ley meets traditional land owner Michael Bungalang at Ubirr in the Kakadu National Park in August last year.

- AMOS AIKMAN
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All three federal bureaucrats whose heads traditional owners demanded in a dispute over the management of Kakadu National Park have left their roles.

A Parks Australia spokeswoman confirmed on Friday that director of National Parks James Findlay and assistant secretary Brant Smith would no longer serve on the World Heritage-listed park's board of management.

Parks Australia will instead be represented by assistant secretary Judy West, who is currently responsible for botanical gardens.

The spokeswoman confirmed that Kakadu National Park manager Russell Gueho had also stepped away and would be replaced by acting manager Scott Suridge.

Mr Suridge, who has managed Kakadu before, is retired but continues to work with Parks Australia occasionally. He last served in Kakadu in 2018.

Locals told The Australian he was well respected and that many long-term residents were "pleased to see his face".

“Parks Australia is committed to the joint management of Kakadu, and these interim arrangements are an act of goodwill to support the ongoing discussions towards a resolution of the matters,” the spokeswoman said.



A waterfall in Kakadu National Park. Picture: Paul Arnold Bush Photos

The reorganisation comes after the Kakadu board, which includes traditional owners, representatives of the science community and the NT government, declared no confidence in Mr Findlay, Mr Smith and Mr Geuho.

Leaked correspondence detailed a range of complaints related to fire management, alleged sacred site damage, poor consultation and a dangerous helicopter crash.

Environment Minister Sussan Ley said she remained “committed to addressing the issues raised by traditional owners and securing a strong relationship”.