South West Environment Centre Inc. Submission

Climate Change in Western Australia – Issues Paper
Department of Water and Environmental Regulation Consultation, 2019.
Climate Change Consultation
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1. Introduction

Thank you for the giving the South West Environment Centre Inc. (SWEC) the opportunity to comment on the DWER Climate Change in Western Australia – Issues Paper.

WA needs legislation to:

1. Stop burning fossil fuels
2. Protect and restore native forests
3. Make climate justice a normative factor in all decision making
4. Support and help to fund communities to mitigate and adapt to climate change at a local government level

Native forests store and draw down huge volumes of carbon from the atmosphere and currently deforestation and forest degradation are major drivers of climate change.

Forest protection is essential if we are to keep the average global temperature increase below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

2. The role forests play in mitigating and adapting to climate change

The latest IPCC report found that, "Reducing deforestation and forest degradation rates represents one of the most effective and robust options for climate change mitigation, with large mitigation benefits globally". (Seymour and Gibbs, 2019; IPCC, 2019)

Western Australia can play a significant direct leadership role in reducing global warming by protecting and restoring our carbon dense and biodiverse forests. This is an effective way for us to act locally for substantial local and global benefits.

In order to do this, we need significant policy change, as currently our forests are being logged, cleared and burnt with massive impacts on climate, water, wildlife and communities, releasing huge volumes of carbon into the atmosphere.

Forests are a part of the climate system: they draw down carbon from the atmosphere, store it in their trees and roots and move it down into the soil. They make and attract rainclouds, and this should be considered due to the drought over east.

Net emissions from land use change and forestry account for about one third of accumulated atmospheric CO_2 and are currently around 13% of total annual emissions (Global Carbon Project 2018).

Native forests, especially ancient forests, store carbon, longer and more securely compared to logged and plantation forests (Keith et al. 2015), and Australian eucalyptus forests are among the most carbon dense in the world (Keith et al. 2009).

Australia's forests are an especially important ally in the climate and ecological crises we face. Intensive, industrial logging such as the current clear-felling and burning of forests is not compatible with a 'forests for climate' approach.

3. Local resilience and adaptation

Forest protection and restoration offer critical improvements in our local resilience and adaptation to global warming. It has been established that up to 62% of the rainfall decline in the South West can be attributed to land-clearing (Andrich and Imberger, 2013). Forests make and bring rain, create shade and reduce temperatures, protect soils and riparian zones.
Regrowth forests (following clearing and intensive logging) use up to twice as much water than old-growth and other mature forests (Macfarlane and Silberstein, 2010). Protecting mature forests and allowing regrowth forests to mature reduces pressure on groundwater and riparian systems and reduces the drought sensitivity and flammability of the forests.

4. Taking action

<u>We must:</u>

1. Protect native forests as biodiverse carbon stores
2. Restore cleared and degraded areas to native forest ecosystems

3. Transition the timber industry to sustainably managed plantations and farm forestry
4. Develop a strategic approach to prescribed burning by abandoning the annual burning target; burning small, strategic areas close to assets, including townsites to keep fuel levels low
5. Say no native forest bioenergy

Forests are critical in our efforts to adapt to and mitigate dangerous climate change. Forests also suffer from the effects of a changing climate. Increased temperatures and reduced rainfall are increasingly putting forests under stress. The increasing severity of fires, including prescribed burns are having major impacts on forests. We need to look after the forests in Western Australia and give them the best chance of adapting to climate change for their own sake, and to prevent ecosystem collapse.

References:

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