

Response ID ANON-4EM2-EKBW-1

Submitted to **Native vegetation issues paper**

Submitted on **2020-02-10 16:22:27**

Your details

1 What is your name?

Name:

[REDACTED]

2 Can we publish your response?

Yes, you may publish my response anonymously

3 What is your email address? (optional)

Email:

[REDACTED]

4 What is your postcode? (optional)

Postcode:

[REDACTED]

5 Do your views officially represent those of an organisation?

No, these are my personal views

If yes, please specify the name of your organisation.:

6 Which of the following best describes the group or person you represent?

Private citizen

If other, please specify.:

7 Which of the following best describes the sector you represent?

Not applicable (private citizen)

If other, please specify.:

8 Are there specific parts of your submission that you want to keep confidential?

If yes, please outline which specific parts of your submission must be kept confidential and explain why. :

A State native vegetation policy

9 Referring to the proposed policy objective statements below, how well do you support each one in guiding our development of a policy?

Objective 1 matrix - Objective 1:

Supported

Please explain in the text box below.:

Agree management should be consistent, transparent and strategic. Balance must be weighted in favour of environment to redress the imbalance of the past eg WAWheatbelt, Swan Coastal Plain.

Objective 2 matrix - Objective 2:

Strongly supported

Please explain in the text box below.:

Native vegetation is the State's most valuable asset and must be protected. With Climate change challenging the survival of our most critical natural assets, the value of native vegetation for carbon sequestration is invaluable.

Objective 3 matrix - Objective 3:

Strongly supported

Please explain in the text box below.:

See attachment.

10 What opportunities are presented by the development of a State Native Vegetation Policy focused on how government manages vegetation?

Please provide your answer in the text box below.:

See attachment

Better information

11 How do you use native vegetation data within your sector? (Choose as many options as you require)

If you have chosen 'other', please specify:

N/A

12 Which of the following elements of better information provision would be most relevant to your sector? (Choose as many options as you require)

If you have chosen 'other', please specify:

N/A

13 What other opportunities are presented by improved information and improved access to information?

Please provide your answer in the text box below.:

See attachment

Better regulation

14 Which of the following elements of better regulation would be most important to your sector? (Please rank your top three)

Rank better reg elements - Improved protection for native vegetation:

1

Rank better reg elements - Ensuring development is sustainable:

Rank better reg elements - Streamlined regulation for cost saving:

Rank better reg elements - Clearer requirements for business certainty:

Rank better reg elements - Improved assessment timeframes:

Rank better reg elements - Transparent, evidence-based decisions:

3

Rank better reg elements - Improved compliance and enforcement of unauthorised clearing:

2

Rank better reg elements - Equitable treatment of all proponents:

Rank better reg elements - Confidence in the regulatory system for all stakeholders:

Rank better reg elements - Other:

If you selected Other, please provide further information.:

15 What other opportunities are presented by better regulation?

Please provide your answer in the text box below.:

See attachment

A bioregional approach

16 Which of the following elements are the most important to you/your sector? (Please rank your top three)

Rank bioregional elements - 1. Transparent outcomes and objectives:

Rank bioregional elements - 2. Leveraging local knowledge:

Rank bioregional elements - 3. Strategic and innovative approach to conflicting interests:

Rank bioregional elements - 4. Clear targets and thresholds:

3

Rank bioregional elements - 5. Planned approach to dealing with cumulative impacts:

1

Rank bioregional elements - 6. Effective monitoring and evaluation framework:

2

Rank bioregional elements - 7. Supporting public-private partnerships for conservation:

Please explain in the text box below.:

See attachment

17 What other opportunities are presented by a bioregional approach?

Please explain in the text box below.:

See attachment

18 What concerns are presented by a bioregional approach, for your sector?

Please explain in the text box below.:

See attachment

Other initiatives

19 What initiatives do you think would work best to improve native vegetation outcomes in your region?

Please explain in the text box below.:

See attachment

20 What else could be done to improve the management of native vegetation to arrest the decline of native vegetation extent and condition?

Please provide your answer in the text box below.:

See attachment

Upload a document

21 If you would like to upload a document to support your submission, please upload it here.

Upload document 1 here.:

DWER response.docx was uploaded

Please describe which question(s) document 1 relates to. :

Items 1-20 of native vegetation issues paper

Upload document 2 here.:

No file was uploaded

Please describe which question(s) document 2 relates to. :

Native Vegetation in Western Australia

Issues paper for public consultation – November 2019

The Government is to be congratulated on taking these long overdue initiatives in an attempt to better conserve and manage our native vegetation.

As outlined in the Introduction Western Australia is renowned for its native vegetation and biodiversity and for its landscapes that have given the State and its people a unique identity.

Although not stated in the Introduction our valuable native vegetation also has the important benefit of supporting and enhancing the health and well being of people. This includes fundamental life preserving benefits such as mitigating the impact of climate change through carbon sequestration, soil stabilization and the production of oxygen.

The Challenge clearly outlines just how much human activity, in particular clearing, fragmentation and degradation, has led to the dramatic decline in the State's native vegetation cover. As stated the toll is highly evident in the State's southwest and gaining momentum in the northwest.

The challenge must be met by not only employing long overdue rectifying initiatives, such as new policy, laws and regulation, but by the imperative of Government providing sufficient funding to its departments and agencies to facilitate much needed action and research to halt, mitigate and reverse the loss and decline of our native vegetation.

Box 1 and Box 2 reveal how the rapid loss and decline of our ecosystem services, including salinity, has cost the State dearly e.g. loss of productivity, the ongoing cost of maintaining infrastructure and ecosystem reparation.

Again as stated above steps must be taken to stop the decline and degradation of our native vegetation through policy, tough laws and regulation. For example, a clearing ban on native vegetation in high impact areas, e.g. the wheatbelt where catastrophic clearing has led to the loss of 97% of some woodland areas. Policy, regulation and laws are needed to stop this happening again, particularly in the northwest.

Box 3 outlines the 4 initiatives and introduces a staged and ultimately longer term solutions to improve outcomes. With some qualifications outlined below this is supported.

Box 5 is strongly supported.

1 A State native vegetation policy

Box 6

- (a) Striking a balance with competing interests usually ends, as history has shown (pp. 2,3,4), in the negative for native vegetation. The "management" of native vegetation has failed. The system is out of balance and native vegetation needs to enjoy a higher status and priority. Once it is cleared it can never be replaced. In general Offsets have failed. Native vegetation protection laws need to be strengthened and the overriding Mining Act needs to be addressed to reflect the importance of protecting our dwindling native vegetation and

cultural assets. New overarching legislation is needed e.g. the Conservation and Biodiversity Act, the Environmental Protection Act.

(b) Supported.

(c) Supported with the proviso that not all systems are thoroughly understood as to the extent and distribution of their rare species and communities. Small sites need more focus.

Box 7 contains the listed legislation that may affect native vegetation outcomes but does not include the Public Works Act. Clearing of native vegetation occurs under this act and it must be included.

2 Better Information

Supported with the proviso that it include ground truthing of flora, vegetation, fauna, as well as vegetation composition, extent and condition. Should not be used to “fast track” or “streamline” assessment process.

Public access to this database is important to facilitate volunteer work, conservation, restoration, monitoring, report and submission writing etc.

3 Better regulation

Regulation is inadequate and needs improvement to ensure native vegetation and its inherent biodiversity is protected, better managed and not subject to unsustainable decision making.

Native vegetation communities in some regions are unable to withstand more clearing and require immediate protection. There are 41 exemptions under which clearing can take place without a permit and some regions of the State should not be subject to them, for example the wheatbelt and the south west biodiversity hot spots. The wheatbelt and the south west biodiversity hot spots should be declared ESAs and incorporated into the Environmental Protection Act. Offsets in these sensitive areas are not acceptable as these last remnants of native vegetation cannot be replaced. Illegal clearing penalties need to be increased to reflect the high value the community and Government places on native vegetation.

An Environment Court should be established in line with some other States e.g. NSW Land and Environment Court to prosecute illegal damage to native vegetation.

Offsets are not supported in areas that are ESAs or TECs. Native vegetation supporting TECs should receive maximum protection as described under the Clearing Principles of the Environmental Protection Act. Indeed the Clearing Principles set out in the Act should be strictly applied to all applications for a clearing permit and enforced under the Clearing Regulations.

Box 10 Regulatory reform should not be used to facilitate greater flexibility and fast tracking of clearing permits if the result is loss of good condition native vegetation or loss of native vegetation on a landscape scale.

Box 11 Although a bioregional approach is supported, enforcing and improving the regulations and laws we have in place now would go a long way to conserving our threatened species and communities.

Under the EPBC Act wheatbelt woodlands, Tuart and Banksia woodlands are listed as threatened communities. These communities are still enduring clearing and their future can only be described as “death by a 1000 cuts”. These communities are well known to the approving authorities to be in a terminal state and yet there are no protective measures and clearing permits and exemptions can still apply. Will a bioregional approach really “prevent” this fatal haemorrhage?

Box 13 See comments under Better Regulation above. Reiterate need to prosecute unlawful clearing. Legal and illegal roadside clearing in such regions as the overcleared wheatbelt still occurs.

The “avoid” principle should be enforced through government agencies so that alternative locations can be sought for development and infrastructure.

4 A Bioregional Approach

This initiative is supported with the proviso that it works to improve policy, regulation and laws that enforce protection of native vegetation and not promote “streamlining” or “fast tracking” decision making to the detriment of our native vegetation, biodiversity and TECs. The paramount consideration for all bioregions must be the protection of native vegetation and biodiversity. All key Government agencies need to respect constraints on encroachment into sensitive, depleted, over cleared, threatened or richly biodiverse native vegetation. See Box 10 and 11 above for further comments here.

Box 15 As outlined, Offsets seldom have a satisfactory outcome. For example, removal of a plant community and the offset replacement is another entirely different type of plant community. Offsets are often not implemented at all. Payment to Government to offset mining development in the Pilbara does little to manage the cumulative impacts on the North West’s biodiversity.

Other initiatives

Box 16 Aboriginal land management initiatives are supported.

Box 17 The value of nature-based tourism for regional economies is long established and is based on the wealth of our natural assets. This provides a sound foundation for the argument to protect those natural assets and halt certain types of clearing such as roadside clearing in the wheatbelt and curtail damaging recreational activities in sensitive or vulnerable native vegetation.

Box 20 The Government is supported in its commitment to increase the conservation reserve system.

However, the Plan for Our Parks (DCBA 2019b) is stated to deliver on several existing strategic priorities and commitments as well as create new, visionary opportunities for parks and reserves.

One element of DCBA’s Plan highlights a problem found in several instances with the Issues Paper and that is a lack of clarity/detail regarding intent. The Plan for our Parks currently intends to put mountain bike trails in the State’s premium hotspots of the Southwest e.g. The Stirling Range National Park, the Porongurups and many more (Great Southern Regional Trails Master Plan). Management of these hotspots focus on preserving ancient and fragile biodiversity and mitigating adverse impacts. The management of *Phytophthora* dieback disease as well as weed invasion is paramount in these outstanding environments. With mountain bikes as vectors for both disease and weed spread I would suggest they have no place in native vegetation areas of international and national botanical importance. Indeed, they have no place in native vegetation communities that support reasonably healthy vegetation and/or complex vegetation communities or TECs.