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Submitted to **Native vegetation issues paper**

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Your details

1 What is your name?

Name:

Martine Scheltema

2 Can we publish your response?

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3 What is your email address? (optional)

Email:

[REDACTED]

4 What is your postcode? (optional)

Postcode:

5 Do your views officially represent those of an organisation?

Yes, I am authorised to submit feedback on behalf of an organisation

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

Main Roads Western Australia

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

Government body

If other, please specify.:

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

Government

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

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Upload document 1 here::

MRWA submission on NV issues paper - final.pdf was uploaded

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

All

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mainroads
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Our Ref: 07/1082 (D19#1105130)

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Dear Mr Newman

NATIVE VEGETATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA – ISSUES PAPER FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Thank you for your invitation to provide feedback on the Issues Paper – Native Vegetation in Western Australia. Thank you also for your recent briefing on the policy review, which helped our understanding of the purpose and how Main Roads Western Australia (Main Roads) might usefully contribute.

Main Roads manages transport infrastructure that is central to the economy of the state and the quality of life of Western Australians. The task of delivering road improvements, including the pressing road safety issues in rural regions, is of critical importance. The regulatory regime around native vegetation is an important factor affecting the management of road projects, and Main Roads is perhaps the stakeholder most strongly affected by regulatory changes that may ultimately result from changes to native vegetation policy. We recognise that the review of native vegetation policy may offer opportunities to both improve the focus of regulatory processes and to achieve biodiversity gains at the same time.

To assist your Department in understanding the context for the Main Roads' road construction programs, we firstly outline the key drivers for Main Roads' road upgrade and renewal programs. We then comment on issues raised in the native vegetation Issues Paper, focusing on the areas where Main Roads sees opportunities to achieve improved, sustainable outcomes.

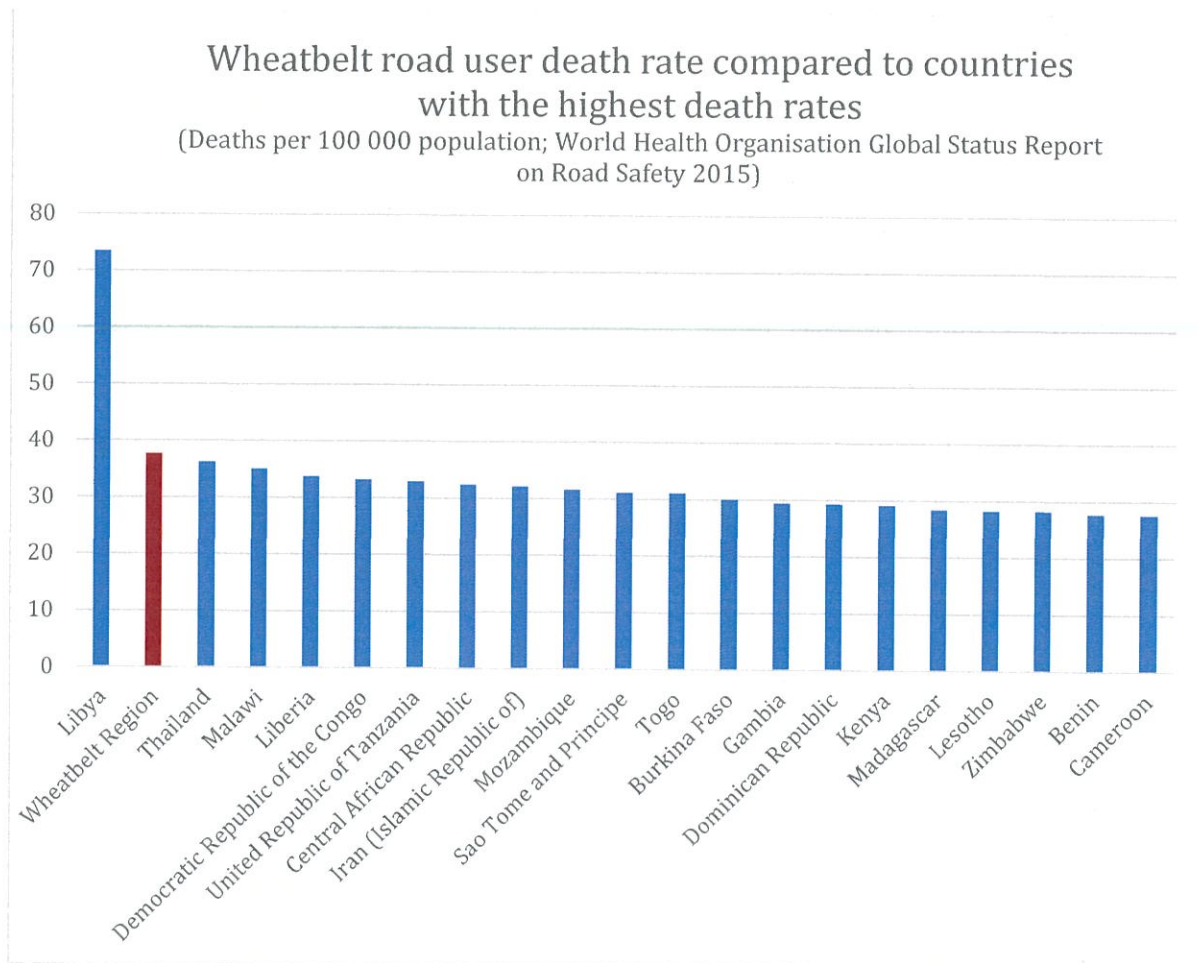
Road safety

In accordance with National and State Government road safety policies, Main Roads is committed to substantially reducing road trauma on the road network. It has been established that more than two thirds of all serious crashes are due to non-deliberate human error and sub-optimal road infrastructure.

Single vehicle lane departure (run-off road, head-on) crashes on the high-speed state roads are the largest contributor to death and serious injuries on the rural areas of the Western Australian state road network (69%). The financial cost alone of this trauma is estimated to be around \$900 million annually.

Currently the rate of fatalities in Western Australia (6.9 per 100,000 population) is significantly higher than all other Australian states. Of most concern is the rate of fatalities in the Wheatbelt region (37.7 per 100,000 population), which is five times higher than the state average.

To put this number in perspective, of 180 countries measured, Libya is the only country in the world that has a higher road traffic death rate than the Wheatbelt, with numerous undeveloped countries considered to be safer for road users, see graph below.



It is well established that improving sub-optimal road formations substantially reduces the likelihood and severity of road crashes. Between 2012/13 and 2014/15 over 900 kilometres of rural Western Australian roads were treated under the rural Run-off Road Crash Program. Treated sites subsequently had a 25 per cent reduction in Killed and Seriously Injured (KSI) numbers.

Increasing the sealed shoulder width is particularly effective in improving safety performance. Increasing the sealed shoulder from 0.5 m to 2 m has been shown to reduce KSI numbers by more than 50 per cent. However, where the existing road formation needs to be widened to support a wider sealed shoulder, this is likely to result in a need to clear some vegetation immediately adjacent to the road.

Economic drivers and the freight task

Main Roads has responsibility for managing the network of 18,500 km of major roads across Western Australia. The Main Roads network has an asset value of over \$48 billion, representing the largest state government asset. It is estimated that the added economic value (GDP) due to roads in Western Australia is around \$31 billion a year. One dollar out of every \$25 generated in the economy is derived from the road transport industry. Nationally, 1.3 million jobs are supported by the transport sector, with the overwhelming majority of these being road based.

The Western Australian economy, being commodity-based, is particularly dependent on the regional road freight network. Western Australia's regional road freight task is undergoing sustained expansion. Road freight is expected to double from 20 billion tonne kilometres per annum of freight in 2010 to 40 billion tonne kilometres per annum of freight moving into, within and out of the State's regions by 2030. Agricultural activity continues to grow, with larger harvests and diversification creating a greater freight task for both road and rail. There is a continual need to provide an efficient supply chain infrastructure in order to remain globally competitive. Western Australia's agricultural sector alone represents about 10% of the State's economy, having an export value of \$7.7 billion in 2015-16.

There is a pressing need for road upgrade and regeneration programs for a substantial part of the existing road infrastructure, driven by both safety and freight transport imperatives. There are significant sections of the state road network more than 50 years old with substandard geometry, particularly in the agricultural regions. The proportion of the road network requiring improvements in the Wheatbelt, for example, is in the order of 25%.

Project expenditure timeframes

Changes to policy and regulations around the clearing of native vegetation could potentially have major implications for Main Roads' ability to deliver Government objectives in relation to road improvement initiatives in rural areas. Meeting government and community expectations regarding road safety and transport needs, while still managing environmental impacts and funding/timing constraints is a challenge, especially for small-scale projects in the agricultural regions.

Main Roads receives external funding for road safety initiatives annually through a number of programs, each of which have varying criteria and conditions associated with expenditure. However, a common feature of road safety funding programs is that the funds need to be expended within 12 months of receipt of the monies. This means that Main Roads is required to design the project, obtain environmental approvals and construct the project within a very short timeframe.

Minimising impacts on roadside vegetation

Main Roads recognises that Western Australia's environment is significant from a global perspective. Main Roads' road network often adjoins natural areas and, in some locations, the reserve itself hosts remnant vegetation with high environmental values.

Main Roads operates on a hierarchy of avoiding, minimising, reducing and then, if necessary, offsetting its environmental impacts. Main Roads' environmental impact assessment process for all road projects requires that opportunities to reduce impact on native vegetation are specifically investigated, with a view to minimising clearing on native vegetation.

This often requires changes in project scope and design. Main Roads regularly reduces its clearing footprint by restricting earthworks limits for projects, steepening batters, installing barriers, establishing borrow pits (material pits) in cleared paddocks and avoiding temporary clearing for storage, stockpiles and turn around bays. Incorporating these initiatives to minimise the clearing footprint can, and does, add significant costs to projects. It is a cost deemed appropriate to achieve a balanced outcome.

Potential opportunities

Main Roads supports the view expressed in the Issues Paper that better outcomes may be possible by 'dealing strategically with difficult trade-offs which pit public safety against biodiversity outcomes, such as roadside clearing in extensively cleared landscapes' (Page 24, Box 14). One such opportunity is in the area of environmental offsets, where a whole-of-government approach offers opportunities for improved outcomes.

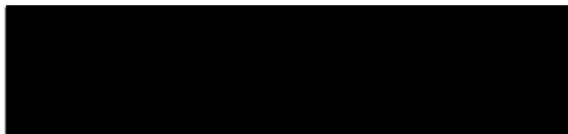
Main Roads Main Roads is currently exploring options for a strategic offsets program involving the widening and revegetation of road reserves in extensively-cleared landscapes. This initiative has the potential to both redress cumulative loss of vegetation from roadsides and to add value to regional biodiversity outcomes by providing ecological linkages. Main Roads notes that draft recommendations of the review of the state environmental offsets framework support strategic approaches to offsets design and the integration of offsets with regional environmental objectives. Main Roads has previously written to your Department seeking feedback on this approach, and would welcome the opportunity to collaborate in further developing this initiative. Co-operation in areas such as identifying priority locations for revegetation corridors, and technical and research aspects of revegetation, are areas where Main Roads sees value in a whole-of-government approach. It is also an area where Main Roads could contribute to the State Government's wider response to climate change. The strategic restoration of native vegetation in agricultural regions was identified as an area of opportunity in the Climate Change Issues Paper released in September last year.

A further area where there may be opportunity for improvement to flow from a review of the native vegetation policy is in relation to how the clearing of native vegetation is regulated in different regions of the state. Main Roads supports the concept of a bioregional approach as proposed in the Issues Paper if it assists to concentrate regulatory effort where it is most needed while providing improved approvals efficiency in lower risk environments. A bioregional approach could deliver benefits by streamlining vegetation clearing processes in regions outside of the extensively cleared regions of the state.

To briefly summarise, Main Roads would like to see two primary issues addressed in the review of native vegetation policy. The first issue is the timeliness of project assessments and the second is a strategic revegetation program for mitigation and offsets. Main Roads would be happy to provide more detail on any of the above, and would welcome further discussion and collaboration.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the Issues Paper - Native Vegetation in Western Australia. We look forward to working with your Department during the course of the policy review, and beyond, to achieve these outcomes.

Yours sincerely



Martine Scheltema
MANAGER ENVIRONMENT