

City of Busselton comments on the Native Vegetation in WA- Issues Paper

State Native Vegetation Policy

- A State Native Vegetation Policy is supported and essential to guide the protection of Threatened Vegetation Communities, flora and fauna as well as retention of key vegetation linkages across broad landscape area in a bioregional approach. This needs to be resourced and include updating vegetation/habitat mapping and monitoring. Weed management also needs to be considered including the management and education on environmental and invasive weeds.
- Local government is responsible for planning, regulating and undertaking many activities which have the potential to impact on biodiversity values and threatened species. Local government also have the responsibility of management large areas of reserves/public land within high conservation values.
- Local government manages 88% of the road network within narrow corridors within areas of high conservation value.
- Local governments are well placed to deliver an overall benefit by balancing clearing for community needs and weed management for an overall gain.
- There is limited coordination between government agencies on the cumulative impacts to native vegetation.
- There is potential for community groups to work together with Government Agencies in vegetation protection, monitoring projects and use of local knowledge.
- Protection of native vegetation biodiversity values from fire with consideration of, for example, fire frequency, mosaic burning and protection of vegetation community diversity and fauna habitat values. The need for site specific Ecological Fire Management Plans (including cultural knowledge and fire practices) for all managed Reserves and funding assistance to complete these whether through DFES Mitigation Funding or another funding source.
- The increase in Mitigation Funding available through DFES and the effects of the increase in prescribed burning on native vegetation and biodiversity.
- A review of existing exemptions available to facilitate managed clearing needs to be retained within the Policy.

Better Information

- Better communication and a central mapping system / data system for all stakeholders and Departments.
- Use of updated and current vegetation mapping (or requirement for the proponent to supply flora and fauna assessment reports) for DWER officers to adequately assess clearing application.
- Update of DWER website to educate and promote the values including biodiversity functions of native vegetation to the community.
- Create and provide information resources for local government ease access to information to assist them in understanding their obligations and function under various Acts relating to biodiversity and threatened species. Promotion of best practice management with regard to vegetation protection and minimising impacts.
- Support to assist local government in the mapping of environmental values (flora, vegetation, condition, DRF, TECs etc.) of roadside vegetation and promoting the provision of

a template of an Operational Roadside Vegetation Management Plan to improve practices and train staff.

- Support for the WALGA budget submission to the State Government for a Roadside Environmental Management Program to develop guidance material and training, develop a rapid roadside assessment tool, assistance with vegetation surveys and mapping of roadside vegetation and grants to local government to implement management measures.
- Simple, user friendly, integrated with clear and concise guidelines are required. Timely and consistent information needs to be given by DWER staff and in writing.
- A review of the exemptions is required to ensure that they are appropriate, relevant and provide an overall benefit.
- Update of the ESA information.
- Update of DBCA's database information on environmental matters- for local government GIS staff to have updated information.

Better Regulation

- Local government require upfront information with advice from DWER for road construction projects on what environmental assessments are required. This could be achieved through an initial scoping meeting.
- Need more resourcing for DWER/DBCA staff in the regions for advice, site meetings and compliance matters.
- Penalties that apply are in the right order of magnitude, however it is well known that the responsible authority is under resourced to be able to conduct thorough investigations and compliance work. The compliance aspects of the department need to be better funded and more effective.
- As well as the regulatory approach there should be more emphasis on programs that encourage the protection and management of bushland. Getting land under covenant is a good way of protecting vegetation for the longer term. There needs to be integration of regulation and incentive functions to provide a more holistic approach to protection and management of vegetation.
- The applications process should be streamlined. Small applications that may be for things that were previously exempt from clearing could be fast tracked. While some of them may be supported it is likely that many could be supported with minor modifications such as realignment of tracks, relocation of buildings etc. Organisations with large applications should have a pre application process by which they can get succinct advice on what information will be required to assess the application. There have been too many instances where the clock has been stopped on applications because the department decides it wants more information before a decision is reached. This will improve the certainty and timing of the application process.
- The exemptions for clearing need to be clarified and tightened up. For example;
 - Clearing to construct a building (Item 1) - positioning of buildings has implications for location of access and fencing and therefore could have a threefold impact. Assessment of Building locations via clearing permit could result in less clearing.
 - Clearing to obtain fencing or farming materials (Item 6) – This exemption is potentially obsolete. The areas that are left on farms are becoming smaller and smaller and alternative sources are more convenient and support other industry.
 - Clearing for fence lines (Item 10) – This exemption should only be for boundary lines. Incentives should be offered to fence off bushland on private land therefore alleviating the need to fence through it.

- Clearing for vehicular tracks (Item 12) – The exemption should be removed. Justification for the alignment of vehicular tracks should be provided within a clearing permit application
- The allowable limit for clearing under exemption (5ha) is significant. 5ha of vegetation each financial year is a high. This should be reduced to a nominal area of 1ha to 2ha. Cumulative impacts on individual properties should be monitored and an overall limit set for total clearing to retain pockets of native vegetation.
- Clearing for the construction of a crossover (Item 21A) – This exemption needs to be amended to include clearing for associated sight lines on existing crossovers.
- The need for State and Federal requirements to be consistent.

Bioregional approach

- Together with better resourcing the responsible authority should have staff within the regions who can assist local communities to understand and fulfil their obligations under the act. Being regionally based, staff can gain better understanding of proposals by visiting the properties, rather than relying on aerial photographs which only tell part of the story. Property visits allow the ability to work with a proponent to deliver a better outcome.
- Need better coordination for offset planning with consideration given to a bioregional approach including protection and enhancing of key ecological corridors with recognition of the corridors primary role.
- The protection of native vegetation, particularly in highly cleared landscape in the Wheatbelt and the Swan Coastal Plain needs a coordinated, strategic approach to address landscape scale impacts and address the significant residual environmental impact of the present rate of clearing at a regional scale.
- Taking a bioregional approach needs to consider climate change impacts including the functions and resilience of native vegetation remnants in the long term.
- Opportunities for partnerships with industry groups, NGOs such as Greening Australia to undertake strategic revegetation on a large scale. Possibility to partner with local government with strategic offset planning and revegetation.