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**From:** Michael Tichbon [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, 7 February 2020 3:48 PM  
**To:** Native Vegetation Strategy  
**Subject:** Survey Response - 2020 02 07 - Letter to DWER responding to WA's native vegetation  
**Attachments:** 2020 02 07 - Letter to DWER responding to native vegetation.docx  
**Categories:** SUBMISSIONS

To: The Officer in Charge,

Please find attached my letter detailing my response to the WA Native Vegetation Survey.

Whilst I have made a submission via the online survey, I have set out further details including my lifetime of experience. I can say that I am concerned that there is a push to make it easier to get a clearing permit whereas the submission should be for an assessment, not for approval. There has already been too much clearing of native vegetation in certain areas in Western Australia.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my comments and views.

A signed hard copy of my letter will follow by post.

Kind regards

Michael Tichbon OAM

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7 February 2020

The Officer in Charge  
Native Vegetation Strategy  
Department of Water and Environmental Regulation  
Locked Bag 10  
Joondalup DC, WA, 6919

Dear Officer in Charge,

**Re: Western Australia's Native Vegetation – have your say**

Further to your email of Wednesday, 20 November 2019, I am appreciative of the State Government and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) providing the opportunity for the public to “have our say” on Western Australia’s Native Vegetation.

In response to DWER’s four initiatives, I am pleased to provide a detailed response on my views on how these issues are currently being managed and areas where improvements need to be made:

**1. A State Native Vegetation Policy – to promote consistency and transparency in the objectives that apply to consideration of native vegetation across all Government processes.**

Ever since the first European settlers arrived in Western Australia, this State’s unique vegetation has, in most cases, been seen as a hindrance to development, a source of income, a fire hazard and harbour for vermin, as well as an area to go bush bashing, gather firewood or dump rubbish.

As a hindrance to development, landowners or exploiters are now required to lodge some form of clearing application before clearing vegetation, which is seen as a green tape hinderance.

In former years, new land farmers were encouraged to take up huge swathes of virgin country for farming, which they were legally required to clear.

Over-clearing in the early days of Western Australia soon resulted in an increase in salinity on many better soil types due to the rise in the saline water table.

In the era after World War I, inexperienced immigrants were encouraged to take up heavily forested land in areas of high rainfall.

Most of these potential farms failed, resulting in great hardship to the settlers and great loss of karri forest, while other areas were wet and low lying with virtually no usable transport system available.

In addition, many sawmillers recognised the economic potential in the State's jarrah and karri forests, but too many mills were allowed to operate in the State's very small area of forests, resulting in the bulk of the State's hardwoods being cut over before 2000.

Though much of these forests will regrow they will never be the same as in their virgin condition.

In the 1800s sheep and wool were seen as the way to make a fortune. Vast tracts of land were leased out in the Murchison, Gascoyne, Pilbara and Kimberley as areas for sheep grazing and in most cases were greatly over stocked. This caused degradation of vegetation and erosion, resulting in most of the rivers and deep pools becoming full of sand.

Since early days, wild dogs have become a problem and most sheep and goats have made way for cattle on the stations that have not been de-stocked.

After World War II, vast tracts of lighter and in many cases more marginal land were released for agriculture.

There was a boast by the Government at the time that their policy was to release 1,000,000 acres of the land per year for new land settlement.

The criteria for being allocated a block at that time were not having great capital resources, not having much farming equipment, being a Returned Serviceman and being married. Such schemes as War Service Land settlement were started at Jerramungup, Eneabba and Rocky Gully etc. These schemes had basic asbestos clad houses and were partially cleared, but had little else.

A visit to new land farms in other areas in the early days after World War II, would reveal a shed with some accommodation at one end, vast areas of vegetation that had been chained and burnt black and some areas of struggling crop.

A return visit to the same areas a few years later showed in many cases the property being abandoned.

Some landowners did survive and successfully acquired additional farms over the years, but many did not.

We will never know how many rare species of plants and animals were lost during this time.

In recent years many large areas of vegetation and forest have been cleared and excavated by open cut mining operations.

Depending where the mines are situated many rare plants and timbered areas are not being rehabilitated to a satisfactory revegetation level.

Many forested areas in the Great Western Woodlands fall into this category having open pit mines which can include gold, nickel, lithium and low grade iron ore to name a few.

Open pit gold mines are particularly destructive and we humans are happy to destroy large areas of dry land and jarrah forests for a few tonnes of gold.

In areas other than the Pilbara, open cut iron ore mines destroy the vegetated landscape and some greedy operators are very reluctant to give up any areas that contain Declared Rare Flora (DRF).

Back in the 1960s the State Government drew up legislation which gave the first bauxite miner the right to mine the State's prime jarrah forest.

Although there has been an attempt to rehabilitate these mined areas, the resulting vegetation will never be the same as the original jarrah forest.

Since then another bauxite miner has commenced mining operations at Boddington.

Increased population in the Perth area and larger towns has led to an expanding requirement for housing land, and as a result much of the coastal banksia vegetation has been cleared to such an extent that it has now been declared a Threatened Ecological Community (TEC).

Perth has a relatively small population compared to the area cleared for housing in comparison to other cities in the world where there are much higher populations occupying a smaller area of land.

Below is the official email re the TEC protecting Banksia Woodlands, extract also below.



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[REDACTED], Dept of Env

*The Minister for the Environment and Energy, the Hon. Josh Frydenberg, has approved the inclusion of the **Banksia Woodlands of the Swan Coastal Plain** on the list of threatened ecological communities under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, in the endangered category. This listing became effective on 16 September 2016.*

*Thanks to those that provide submissions and other input during the assessment and consultation period.*

*The approved conservation advice and indicative distribution map are on the Department's website at [http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-](http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=131&status=Endangered)*

*[bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=131&status=Endangered](http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=131&status=Endangered)*

Many of Western Australia's disastrous policies have developed as a result of short sighted governments seeking more growth, but do not have the long term view that a growth policy cannot continue forever as we live in a finite world.

When all the vegetation and minerals are gone, what is the next step?

We cannot continue along this pathway.

Therefore, it is quite clear a policy to protect as much of Western Australia's unique vegetation as possible is urgently required, as the present policy can only lead to a total destruction of vegetation, native animals and eventually humans.

## **2. Better information, including mapping and monitoring – to improve our state-wide monitoring of the extent and condition of native vegetation.**

With modern satellite technology it is very easy to map the present areas of vegetation and the depletion rate. What is causing the rate of depletion?

Some of the main causes of vegetation depletion are:

- the clearing of native vegetation for agriculture, housing and commercial sub-division;
- mining and extractive industries in higher rainfall and dryland forested areas;
- road widening by Main Roads and Shires;
- power, gas and water lines through prime areas of vegetation;
- the extent of timber harvesting and illegal tree felling;
- determining the extent of damage caused by major fires;
- animal grazing – sheep, cattle, wild pigs, kangaroos, rabbits and camels etc.

While satellite vision is available it needs to be kept up to date as it is little use looking at five year old images to assess the current situation.

Most of the State's bushland areas are also threatened by weed invasion and the spread of phytophthora, including National Parks and Kings Park.

While the extent of phytophthora can probably be accurately assessed, it is not known to what extent weed infiltration of bushland can be determined by satellite imagery.

However, with the rapid improvement in drone technology, it should be possible to determine in some detail:

- the extent of weed infestation;
- how much grazing is occurring by feral animals and kangaroos;
- if private land is being well managed and not being over-grazed;
- if illegal timber and firewood harvesting is occurring; and
- if illegal bush bashing and rubbish dumping is occurring, particularly along beach frontage sand dunes.

Though it is possible to monitor the extent of all these issues, there is little point in doing this if no action is to be taken to combat all these threats.

Therefore, I am suggesting that:

- an up to date monitoring and mapping program be introduced;
- additional rangers be appointed to apprehend offenders and deal with feral animals where possible;
- a weed management program be introduced to limit the spread of weeds and eradicate where possible. Drone technology now allows weeds to be treated in previously inaccessible areas; and
- a kangaroo management program be introduced to prevent kangaroos over-grazing in bushland areas and rare plants.

These problems can be overcome if the Government and the public have the desire to do so.

It will take money (considerable funding allocation) and a genuine desire to succeed, otherwise the best monitoring system available will not save our unique native vegetation.

### **3. Better regulation – to improve efficiency and effectiveness of regulatory processes, as well as supporting compliance and enforcement activities.**

It is not known what direction the regulatory process will follow if “improved”. Is it intended to make it easier to obtain a clearing permit, or is it intended to make it harder to obtain a permit with increased penalties for illegal clearing.

One thing is certain, clearing of bushland cannot continue at the present rate, and any offsets and reserves that are retained should also be required to be managed in a way that results in the bushland not being degraded.

Mining companies and some Governments seem to think that minerals will continue to grow out of the ground, but once mined, they are gone forever.

The present attitude seems to be mine what we can as quick as we can and then move on until it all ultimately runs out.

Unfortunately, our unique vegetation gets caught up in the mining process and some mining companies do not willingly give any ground when a rich mineral deposit is at stake, even if rare flora is wiped out in the process.

Any new policy should insist that any area to be cleared be offset by a land purchase of at least four times the area of similar vegetation, or a revegetation program of double the area to be cleared.

DBCA has very rigid rules about the taking of native plants. But rare plants need more protection other than a couple of yellow markers.

DBCA is too much of a closed shop when it comes to accepting photos for Florabase and spends too much time on academic name changes of plants rather than protection work in the field.

Without scientific modern methods such as DNA technology, much of this work would not have been available and the vegetation would not be any worse off if the names were never changed. In the mean-time many areas of rare vegetation continue to decline as the name changing has no effect on the extinction or protection of rare plants.

#### **4. A bioregional approach – to explore approaches to setting regionally tailored objectives for native vegetation management.**

Certain areas of the State have already been over cleared and should be rigidly protected from any further clearing. In particular, the wooded areas of the Wheatbelt have been over cleared with much of the retained vegetation being on road verges. Due to the larger trucks, farm equipment and general road upgrades, it has been a practise to widen many of these roads where there are the remaining mature aged trees. If mature trees are removed, it will take decades to replace them with young trees and bring them to maturity. As a result, the Commonwealth Government has introduced a TEC for many of these Woodland areas. See below.

Eucalypt Woodlands of the Western Australian Wheatbelt

<http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=128&status=Critically+Endangered>

Much of the increased volume of large vehicles on Wheatbelt roads has been caused by the policy of the former State Governments to not maintain many of the Tier 3 railway tracks to transport grain. Furthermore, the management responsibility of the railway reserves has been handed over to private operators that are not keen to spend large sums on reserve management, resulting in weeds, feral animals and fire hazards

Another area that is increasingly over cleared is the Swan Coastal Plain. Much of this area is Banksia Woodland which is now protected by the Commonwealth TEC, as mentioned earlier. Much of the Coastal Plain is threatened due to human activity, ie residential and hobby farm sub-divisions, sand and limestone extraction from a diminishing resource and highway building to allow for increased population growth.

Many small Banksia Woodland reserves exist, but most are poorly managed and are infested with weeds and grasses such as watsonia, freesias, veldt and lovegrass and have become an annual fire hazard. Furthermore, an over abundant kangaroo population does no favours to the native vegetation, eg Tuart Forest.

The world's only Tuart Forest is also in the Coastal Plain and the Ludlow National Park areas have been largely neglected by DBCA and allowed to become overgrown by arum lilies and over grazed by an out of balance population of kangaroos. Apart from rehabilitation work done by Tronox Holdings plc and volunteer groups, the Tuart Forest has been left to deteriorate despite being declared a TEC by the Commonwealth Government.

Much of the area known as the Great Western Woodlands is also under threat due to human activity. Unfortunately, much of this area is very rich in minerals and as such pose a threat to this area which is the world's biggest dryland forest. In earlier years gold and mining for other minerals was done by sinking shafts, and although this caused damage in limited mining areas, it was not on the scale of modern open pit mines which cause total devastation with very little rehabilitation.

Many of the Southern Coastal areas have a tendency to become badly wind eroded and saline affected if over cleared, so these areas should also be subject to rigid clearing controls.

The Kimberly area has many districts that have not been over exploited to date and they should remain in this condition to protect the pristine vegetation, rare wildlife and rugged landscape. Mining should be excluded from much of the Kimberley, eg bauxite mining in the Mitchell Plateau. The balance of Western Australia consists of areas of low seasonal rainfall, deserts and the unique Pilbara region. Certain rare vegetation communities and rare plants in these areas still require protection, depending on their scarcity and to allow mining operations to destroy them to get at common minerals such as iron ore, would be a tragedy.

Realistically, there could be a case to have a graduated scale of vegetation protection from no clearing permitted to a more relaxed version in lower rainfall and unforested areas. However, rare and threatened species still need protection.

There has been some suggestion of a balanced approach to vegetation clearing and management. With many areas already over cleared to a critically low level, it is too late for a balanced approach in most areas, eg Swan Coastal Plain, Tuart Forest, Wheatbelt trees, Wetlands and salinity and erosion prone areas.

## **Conclusion**

The State and Commonwealth need a Native Vegetation Policy provided the intent is to protect remaining native vegetation and not make it easier to clear for miners and others. It is fine to have a policy, but a policy will not protect any vegetation unless it is enforced in the field and in the Courts.

The State plans to enlarge many additional areas of National Parks, but as many National Parks, Reserves and Forests are poorly managed, there needs to be more field staff, particularly rangers, who work on weekends and on public holidays.

Weed infestation is a major problem in some National Parks and Reserves as well as many private retained areas of vegetation, particularly on the Swan Coastal Plain.

Many Shires have a poor record of managing roadside vegetation and reserves, while many road verges have become heavily weed infested, or bush bashed out of existence. There needs to be technical and practical classes in native vegetation management available for Shire staff etc.



Any clearing in sensitive areas needs to be offset by the purchase of at least four times the area of similar private vegetated land if available, or successfully replanting double the area cleared.

Many of the State's DRF species are not being managed adequately and there should be greater encouragement to qualified nurseries to propagate these plants for public use, otherwise we will lose them. Discouragement and restriction which is the present situation should be changed.

Many neglected railway reserves in the South West have become a weed infested fire hazard – even though some contain TECs and DRF plants, eg Boyanup to Capel and Wonerup to Tutunup. More effort is required to manage these sensitive areas.

Shires and City Councils should be encouraged to grow native trees and shrubs local to their area, not roses, pansies or plane trees.

Activities such as horse riding, four wheel driving and mountain biking should be restricted to degraded areas of bushland or pine forests, otherwise pristine areas will be degraded by the spread of phytophthora, weeds and erosion.

Feral animals should be eradicated from national parks and reserves, while kangaroos are causing serious overgrazing problems where their numbers are out of control.

There should be increased amounts of protective burning in many areas, as a diminishing amount of protective burning has greatly increased the risk of major fires in recent times.

No residential subdivisions should be permitted in bushland where there is a high risk of wildfires, as well as loss of habitat.

The Writer's experience:

The writer has lived on the same property for over 83 years and has had a lifetime experience of how the bushland and flora was in earlier times and how much of it has either disappeared or deteriorated over that time.

Commencing with riding a bike 6 km to the Boyanup Primary School in the 1940s and collecting bunches of orchids on the way home, to walking long distances through adjoining bush tracks as I got older. Then in the 1950s touring through local districts and in 1957 went on a trip to Gillingarra, south of Moora.

From then on there were annual trips throughout the southern two thirds of Western Australia where many areas had not yet been cleared for farms. For example, east of Hyden to Newdegate.

I made my first trip from Lake King to Norseman in 1962, and in 1970 drove through the Fitzgerald National Park before it was a National Park.

Concerned by the rapid spread of agriculture, I contacted the Late Hon. H. D. Evans, Minister for Lands, requesting an increase in the size of the Frank Hann National Park. This was subsequently agreed to, as was a request to increase the width of Road Reserves in new land farming areas.

In 1992 I was elected inaugural Chair of the Capel Land Conservation District Committee, and I am still a member.

The Shire of Capel awarded me the Citizen of the Year in 1999 and 2006 for conservation work, and was awarded the State Individual Environment Award in 2006 for rehabilitation work on the Capel to Boyanup Railway Reserve.

I have been a significant financial supporter of Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) for many years and am recognised as a major supporter of the Mt Gibson Sanctuary project, including funding for the Neville Tichbon Field Research Station, which was officially opened in September 2015. I have had the rare plant *Hemigenia tichbonii* from Mt Gibson Sanctuary named in my honour.

I have also been a long term supporter of Bush Heritage and given substantial financial support for the project at Monjebup, including funds for the Michael Tichbon Field Station, which was officially opened in December 2018.

I am also a financial supporter of the Friends of Kings Park, specifically giving funds for the propagation of rare and endangered plants.

In 2015 the Shire of Capel named a Park in Gelorup “the Michael Tichbon Park”, which had been revegetated with water-wise native plants under my guidance since 2001.

In 2017 I received a 25 year service award for 25 years membership of the Capel LCDC.

In 2019 I was awarded an OAM for conservation work.

Yours sincerely

*(Submitted electronically and via mail)*

Michael J. Tichbon OAM