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PPG is a non-profit organisation devoted to the conservation of the natural environment in the Peel Region of Western Australia

Peel Preservation Group Inc.

Native Vegetation Strategy

Department of Water and Environmental Regulation

Email: nvs@dwer.wa.gov.au

7 February 2020

RE: NATIVE VEGETATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

I am writing on behalf of the Peel Preservation Group (Inc.), an environmental group based in Mandurah with a prime focus on protecting and maintaining the wetlands and bushland in the Peel region.

The State Government of Western Australia and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation are to be commended for the very important issues that have been articulated in the paper "Native Vegetation in Western Australia".

In regard to the initiative of a "State Native Vegetation Policy", setting an "enabling framework for consideration of native vegetation across all government processes" seems very important to ensure that there is a coordinated and integrated response to conservation across all government, non-government and community agencies, rather than an outdated partitive and disconnected approach which undoubtedly wastes time and money, but may fail in addressing important local environmental issues.

The policy initiative of "Better Information" is a very sensible move to collecting and collating data across all agencies and making it more accessible by having a single source of collated information that any agency, government or non-government can tap in to. Regarding collecting information about native vegetation, our group would like to highlight the very important role that community environmental groups and volunteers must play. This is vital data collection that comes at minimal or no cost to the State Government, such as the many volunteers who are currently involved in mapping the discrete habitat of some of our rare native orchids and other flora, some on the "endangered" list, that grow in WA and nowhere else. Consulting with local communities and local environmental groups is crucial in a comprehensive data collection policy, as well as the implementation of workable programs and initiatives.

It is pleasing to see in the issues paper that due consultation with our highly knowledgeable indigenous peoples is part of the plan.

The Policy initiative of a "Bioregional Approach" has a lot of merit, given that one size doesn't fit all. It does make sense to give "higher priority and strategic protection for unique and at-risk vegetation", which might be different from one region to another. Also, partnerships with private companies, and developing new initiatives for carbon offsets, may likely have a regional flavour and impetus.

The various “regions” in WA were illustrated in a map without being further articulated, but understandably this is still a work in progress (given that historically we have had different descriptions of what is a “region”). But over and above the different regions that may be considered in a “Bioregional” approach, there is another important dimension that was not flagged, and that is the cross regional domain of urban bushland which may pertain to Perth, Mandurah, Bunbury, Albany and other burgeoning population centres. Urban bushland may be a special case with special needs and, hence, needs special status which needs to be reflected in any comprehensive policy.

A very good example is the Mandurah region which has had unprecedented development in recent decades with an enormous loss of bushland, coastal scrublands and wetlands to make way for urban development. Hence, special consideration needs to be given to the remaining native vegetation. Short of a moratorium on any future clearing of bushland or felling of roadside trees, we need a policy that ensures that any offsets mandatorily require a replanting with indigenous species only. This is very important to protect our urban fauna: our indigenous mammals, birds, reptiles and the oft forgotten insects. (For example, I live less than half a kilometre from one of Western Australia’s largest shopping centres, but my own highly vegetated backyard has been home to native bandicoots, possums, a variety of parrots and frogs, as well as bees by the thousands visiting my stately red-flowering gum).

The issues paper also highlights the huge benefits of eco-tourism, both to the local and state economy and to conservation. This can never be overstated because it provides a win-win in terms of employment as well as environmental sustainability. Eco-tourism is still in its early developmental days but has huge potential. In this regard, the Indigenous Ranger Program outlined in the paper is to be highly commended.

There is an enormous downside for eco-tourism if we don’t protect our local vegetation. Who wants to see where the karri forest used to grow? Who wants to visit the destroyed habitat of recently extinct fauna?

Conservation and eco-tourism require a huge educational and promotional component which was only mentioned in passing in the issues paper. The broad populace who, understandably, are focused on family issues and family finances, need to be reminded why it is so crucially important to protect our natural environment.

We have a long way to go to tap into the goldmine of eco-tourism. For example, in the recent past I had a display of my native orchid photos at a Mandurah festival. A group of affluent Chinese tourists were absolutely amazed by the stunning beauty of the floral photographs but had never heard about our native orchids and other flora. They could not believe that we had a flower called the Blue China Orchid and were keen to tell all their friends in Beijing. Perhaps a picture in our airport terminals would be a good promotion.

Overall, the issues paper is a well thought through document, highlighting some significant changes to provide a more coordinated and comprehensive way to protect our unique and precious native vegetation. We trust that our own locally based information and perspective will be taken into consideration.

Yours sincerely

Melvyn J. Tuckey
Committee Member
Peel Preservation Group (Inc.)