

Monday, 25 October 2021

Native Vegetation Strategy Branch
Locked Bag 10
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Re: Draft Native Vegetation Policy, Consultation Draft – South West Group Response

This submission is provided in my capacity as the Director South West Group, and not as a position of the South West Group Board.

It is a high-level submission intended to:

- support the individual submissions made by South West Group member Councils and to commend these to the state government, and
- support the comprehensive submission made by the Western Australia Local Government Association (WALGA), and to commend this to the state government.

Background

The South West Group, formed in November 1983, is a Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils. It comprises the Cities of Cockburn, Fremantle, Kwinana, Melville, and Rockingham, and the Town of East Fremantle. The South West Group is managed by a Board consisting of the Mayors and CEOs of its member local governments.

The South West Group seeks to work with these six local governments and through cooperation with industry, community and the other spheres of government to capture a wide range of opportunities to enhance economic growth as well as supporting a diversity of quality lifestyles whilst servicing and sustaining cohesive, productive communities in an enviable environmental setting.

The South West Group therefore recognises the critical need for well-planned and adequately resourced management of the state's assets and importantly, also recognises the crucial role that cooperative and productive partnerships between state and local governments, business and the community play in maximising beneficial environmental, social and economic outcomes.

Native Vegetation management is an important issue. The South West Group of Local Governments, both manage native vegetation in reserves and on our open spaces, and clear native vegetation for roads and other important infrastructure. The South West Group therefore have significant interests in the management and protection of native vegetation and the effective, efficient and equitable operation of the regulatory system for the clearing of native vegetation.

South West Group Response to the Draft Native Vegetation Policy

1. Has the policy's context adequately covered native vegetation values, opportunities and challenges?

The South West Group supports the setting of targets, thresholds and outcomes-based objectives for Native Vegetation. We note that the actions that address this are outlined in Strategy 1 of the Roadmap.

Maintaining urban native vegetation (extent, condition, ecosystem services) under increasing pressures (development/multiple uses/ illegal activity/ threats – climate, heat, declining rainfall etc.) is a pressing challenge and we suggest that urban native vegetation should be a priority for:

- 1.3 implementing regionally tailored objectives and priorities; and that
- 1.4 monitoring and evaluation to be developed and implemented in the same time frame (i.e. as Stage 1 actions).

2. How suitable are the guiding principles in providing a contemporary foundation for managing native vegetation?

The South West Group support the guiding principles, values and practice, opportunities and challenges that guide the Policy. We concur with opportunities and challenges p 15:

In the intensive land use zone, in particular the Swan Coastal Plain and the Wheatbelt (as defined in Figure 1 and Glossary), historic clearing has been extensive. A net improvement in the condition and extent of native vegetation can be achieved through strategic coordination and stewardship across sectors, and will restore landscape and ecosystem functions.

As a voluntary regional organisation of Councils, we work together as much as possible to ensure the consistent and coordinated management (e.g. fire, ferals, weeds) across local governments/ across tenure and jurisdictions in the South West Group region ensuring the best outcomes for native vegetation and the biodiversity that is supported by our urban bushland.

Measuring management effectiveness in relation to the major challenges of changing climate and increasing pressures, and the ability to report on outcomes of management is important. This will ensure that all involved know how to best invest in management and the relationship between investment and outcomes. It is important to continue to work together to achieve a net improvement in vegetation condition and extent in our region and identify support and assistance for this important work.

3. How well do you support the strategies and outcomes?

The South West Group support the comments in the WALGA submission that while it is difficult to find fault with the strategies and outcomes- they seem sensible, it seems that there is an over emphasis on hierarchy of terms (guiding principles, strategies, outcomes, actions) that could well be simplified in the final draft.

We particularly agree with the four outcomes:

- Native vegetation is conserved and restored at landscape-scale
- Certainty, transparency and data sharing improve
- Improved policy, practice and evaluation
- Native vegetation objectives are achieved, together with other state priorities

Consistent monitoring and reporting on native vegetation extent and condition will provide us with reliable data that can enable improved management (targeted interventions) and citable evidence of good management. This information can be used to leverage support for protection and enhancement of native vegetation and make real time decisions into adaptive management approaches.

On the Swan Coastal Plain in particular, there is opportunity for increased/increasing interest and involvement of community in native vegetation management, including enhanced private land management, street verges, bushland and parklands which can contribute to Native Vegetation values. In Strategy 4: All sectors are enabled, we identify local government as the conduit not only for adaptive management of our bushland areas but as a point of public engagement, education and volunteer management in native vegetation.

4. How suitable are the goals and approaches in guiding implementation of the policy?

The SWG support the goals associated with Strategy 1: Planning, collaboration, and coordination and associated goals, specifically clear, regionally tailored objectives and priorities promote strategic coordination across State Government functions.

It is particularly important in urban areas to manage vegetation to maintain ecosystem services and their co-benefits (1.a.vii), and we seek to do this in a coordinated way across tenure and including State Government as land managers.

Furthermore, we will view development/ infrastructure as opportunities to increase native vegetation extent and condition i.e., develop opportunity for local offsets.

The SWG supports the WALGA submission regarding the need for clarity and emphasis of 'purpose' as a way of sharpening the focus of this policy. There are many layers of action that support the achievement of this purpose including much of the process activity described as Strategy and Goals.

The State Government recognises the need to:

- *prevent the extinction of threatened species;*
- *protect areas of high conservation value; and*
- *achieve a net gain in native vegetation extent.*

5. Which roadmap actions are most important?

Adopting a regional approach (Roadmap 1.3) via implementing regionally tailored objectives and priorities will likely contribute to a more strategic approach to Native Vegetation and avoidance of cumulative impacts (as is possible with case-by case considerations). Additionally, there is potential to ensure that offsets and any other arrangements to mitigate clearing will provide measurable alternate local benefits (shade, heat reduction, habitat etc...).

Applying a value to native vegetation 4.1 will potentially make development proponents work harder to resolve the problem and create a climate ripe for stewardship and partnership-based approaches. We are currently exploring ways to quantify how much is spent on native vegetation management in the region and will seek to develop this as an indicator of the value of our urban bushland.

To retain native vegetation values in urban, increasingly constrained settings these systems need to be managed, including threat mitigation and active adaptive management. Action 4.7 *build on existing strategies to protect and enhance urban forests* is a critical action, as we seek to engage strongly with State Government (DLPH) and ensure our efforts are both acknowledged and supported.

