

20 OCT 2021

RECORDS

16<sup>th</sup> October 2021

## **SUBMISSION TO NATIVE VEGETATION POLICY**

I thank you for the opportunity to have a say on the future of our unique West Australian Native Vegetation.

I was involved in the original workshops, which were held regionally and attended the one here in Esperance.

I have since given my feedback on the issues, written a submission on the Native Vegetation Issues Paper, arising from those workshops, which I am enclosing again.

The roots of native vegetation are holding our soil together, it's leaves are absorbing carbon from the air, it is food source for insects, birds and small animals, it's home to our incredibly unique wildlife and the time has come to preserve what's left and restore what's lost.

### **Global Reports**

Since the global IPCC report, followed by the ICUN report, humanity has been given a wake up call. It is clear we need to live within the natural systems, not continue to regard them as resources for us, to dominate and every living thing that relies on that system deserves to have a place on this earth as much as we do.

We have been told with both of those reports that nature is under huge pressure, both from human impacts, but also from the rapidly changing climatic conditions.

This is the time to stop what we've been doing and decide to do things differently. We have an opportunity to show that it can be done and given the many regions within the vastness of our state, we can ensure they will survive and even thrive into the future.

At least 30% of global natural systems need to be thriving by 2030, to enable us to retain the essential biodiversity required for the survival of our species in the long term.

We should all be grateful to live in this wonderful state and be able to access all it's natural beauty. We should also look forward and be proud of the changes we CAN achieve using this outline of a plan, to show that rapid and essential changes CAN take place if given the right strategies and resources.

### **Issues paper**

I am somewhat disappointed with the final draft of the Native Vegetation Policy as it doesn't take into account all the issues raised and even though there are numerous acknowledgments throughout the document of how precious our WA Native Vegetation is, even on a global scale, there is not the urgency I would have expected to make the changes needed to preserve what's left.

### **1. Presentation**

I have to say also that the draft could have been presented better. Many people, unless they're very concerned like myself or have a vested interest in clearing vegetation, will look at this document and not bother. If the WA government is truthfully looking for feedback from the community, everything should be worded more simply. EG; This is what we know, This is what we need to know, This is what we would like to do, This is how we think we can do it and This is what we need to achieve. What do you think?

However, I welcome a document where the photos have been limited, thank you!



## **2. Land clearing**

Of course I'm in an industrial farming area, where very little retention of the natural vegetation has taken place. During the 1960's vast areas of vegetation were cleared and since then, I see little evidence that there has been much attempt at reinstating those areas lost. Given the size of machinery now used, even 1 tree in a paddock is not allowed, although it would be unlikely to survive in any case. The amount of families within the farming community are shrinking, because more and more land is being bought up by larger families or companies. We see less people living on farms and more in town. The landscape has been bulldozed, flattened, burnt, shaped, the soil structure changed, mostly to grow crops. Not for human consumption, but for feedlots, for animals.

Over the years, this has led to an industrial farming area, so unlike the small farms we envisage when thinking of happy cows in a green paddock.

The value of native vegetation doesn't seem to be recognized and people we personally know, this year have cropped over 100,000 hectares!

Now, since the reports mentioned above and with the knowledge we all have about what to expect in the future, there must be changes. Vegetation corridors must be established urgently within these vast landscapes, to maybe offer some hope of enabling native flora (and fauna) to return to these seemingly sterile systems.

## **3. Fires**

Since the devastating fires here 6 years ago, there has been apparent paranoia at allowing any fire to burn where there are crops nearby.

However, the great western woodlands area has been allowed to burn because there is (seemingly) nothing of value there.

I find it arrogant, that in this day and age there is not more appreciation of how important the other living things we share this planet with are, but we continue to allow their habitat to be destroyed, so long as there is not threat of loss to human life.

The burning regime statewide is shocking, and even though it was brought up in the issues paper, it certainly hasn't been addressed in this draft. That needs addressing if we are even going to have a conversation about native vegetation conservation, especially as we are already experiencing in WA hotter and dryer conditions.

Since it's inception in the 1990's, the 200,000 hectare prescribed burn target per year can no longer be validated, in our warming, drying and vulnerable state.

This simply does not make sense!

There is a wealth of scientific research into fire management in the natural environment and the adverse effects of fire on biodiversity. It proves that frequent burns will change the composition of many vegetation types and that some areas, once allowed to fully regenerate to their original form, simply do not need to be burnt, they are in themselves fire retardant!

In any case, as noted, First Nations people have knowledge of more efficient burning techniques we must now adopt. I'm sick of my money being spent on firebombing our state.

Since the workshops and ensuing issues paper, we have seen horrendous loss of endangered Numbats (our state fauna emblem) literally fried in their seemingly protected reserve. We have seen the loss of ancient peat bogs, which will never recover. Even where I live, the burnoff fire targets are way outside any community or threatened loss of life and do immense damage to our globally recognized landscape, unique flora and fauna.

Yet, I don't see a mention of this issue within the draft document.

Also, taking into account, the government has increased funding to \$22 million of taxpayer's money on this destructive practice over the next 4 years, it has to be reviewed urgently and there can be no argument that there isn't enough resources for that.

## **4. State of the Environment Report**

I note that in the issues paper, participants have requested the return of a State of the Environment Report, so that everyone can have access to how the environment is responding to



various threats, pressures and management responses, including the extent of cover and condition of native vegetation.

Even though it used to be a hard copy, now it could be in digital form, available to everyone. We all have the right to know the full extent of what we have, what is at risk and what is being lost.

## **5. Planting**

On my trips to Perth, I note the extensive verge planting and even on farm planting around the Corrigin, Quarading, Brookton area, but sadly down here, the verges are struggling in many areas, due to the drying climate. There must be resources so that farmers can plant their verges with native plants from their area. We should not be relying on volunteers for all this work, we are all tired, and originally the farmers have contributed to the (in some cases) tiny strip of vegetation between their land and the road. There are plenty of species that can be low growing which will not affect the safety aspect of travellers, but will give wildlife and vegetation, some chance of survival.

## **6. Gathering Data**

Strong support for monitoring and evaluation is evident in the issues paper, to understand and improve the effectiveness of regulation and conservation efforts.

The rangers program for on country stakeholders should also be included in this data collection, as well as their existing knowledge. This would enhance their technical skills and allow them ongoing input into the preservation of their areas of concern. First Nations people already have deep knowledge of the vegetation and their expertise should be acknowledged and valued. However, I see no reference to how this would be done in the draft document.

The need for adequate resourcing to collect, collate and maintain data is mentioned in the issues document and the need for baseline data to support monitoring and evaluation, so along with drone technology, existing satellite data would enable that. We must embrace the emerging technologies and not rely only on the ground data collection.

I would have thought farmers and graziers would be good researchers in this area, if given grants for purchase of drones. After initial data collection, they could submit regular updates, available on the system, so departments can see damage or regeneration over time and in real time. Mining companies would also be valuable data collection agencies, which they possibly already do.

Surely, as well as on ground surveys and satellite imagery, this advancing technology could also be used for government departments to map areas within the bioregions.

Maybe in hindsight, such technology may have saved the decimation of a Numbat population in our south west!

## **7. Climate Change**

Within the issues paper, climate change and its impacts has been raised and acknowledged and we should be including Commonwealth and International Union for Conservation of Nature goals, especially now since the release of the IPCC report, this is an urgent issue.

We need to keep in mind that any preservation and restoration of native bushland all around the state will help to mitigate the effects of the changing climate.

In the issues paper, there was high priority for transparent and evidenced based decision making and of improving protection for native vegetation, but even since then, our rapidly changing world has proven to need more protection and regeneration, so I think clearing of land generally must be re evaluated, and in my view stopped. There is enough degraded farmland now to plant what we need to keep us in wood and restore habitats which have been decimated.

## **8. Urban**

I am also concerned about the lack of reference to urban land clearing. Surely, we must all be aware that the breaking up of bushland areas creates loss of species, both vegetation and animals living in it, and knowing the effects of loss of habitat, we should be allowing corridors to stay



within those developments. The whole idea of clearing everything, digging up and sterilizing the ground, then building an energy inefficient large home just does my head in. It has been proven that the suburbs without bushland or green cover are 3 degrees hotter than others.

### **9. Carbon Farming**

The issue of carbon farming and land management incentives, must be tied in with the Government's Climate Action policy.

However, there should not be incentives to clear bushland to get carbon soil credits, even though these are seen as valuable in creating wealth. There is still the loss of habitat, which must be taken into account, and we can't afford to lose any more habitat.

### **10. First Nations People**

There is also wide support and recognition for the Aboriginal Rangers Program, which should be enabled to use their ecological knowledge and traditional fire management techniques.

There is also a call to preserve cultural corridors and ensure compliance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act and the Native Title Act. First nations people need to play an important part in the preservation and regeneration of their traditional lands, without any further loss to their areas of significance.

### **11. Tourism**

Nature Tourism has been recognized as a valuable asset to our state and the value of our vast, varied and unique native vegetation plays the major part in that. Since the pandemic, more West Australians have travelled within our state and I have no doubt will now be more appreciative of what we have and will need to be assured that as West Australians, we all value it and realise what a diverse and unique state we live in. For the children travelling within it, we want to assure them, that we have them in mind when we make decisions about what we need to conserve and regenerate into the future.

### **12. Volunteers**

There is also recognition of the roll of philanthropic organizations and the excellent job they do, but I am worried that we are all aging, and even though still enthusiastic, there needs to be a younger generation of people who understand what needs to be done and will take up the baton of preservation and improvement in the years to come. Programs for regeneration need to be shared on social media to attract younger people to get involved.

## **CONSULTATION QUESTIONS**

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

The draft policy uses wonderfully descriptive words in recognizing the values of our native vegetation, but within the document there isn't the urgency now required to make the changes needed.

The ongoing and urgent issue of the state's threatened species loss hasn't been addressed as a challenge, along with the growing threat of feral plants and animals to native vegetation.

We all know about how many endangered species (both flora and fauna) we have on our state list and also how many have already been lost. It's in our hands now to provide safe and appropriate habitats for what remains and even to support organizations, which have for decades been working to bring some back from the brink of total extinction. They already have the expertise and tools, but of course lack resources.

It's imperative that the international obligations, national frameworks and strategies, the areas of State Government responsibility and the organizations, businesses and individuals all need to be



on the same page with what's to be done. There will of course be opposition, as there is with any change of old ways, but it's now or never.

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

As stated in the document and what has been well known and understood for a long time, is the declining state of WA's vegetation and condition. The values, practices, opportunities and challenges which have been outlined in the document have been well known for decades, so we need to put these principles into action.

There will be irreversible damage done to our native vegetation, if we continue to delay in taking decisive action and investment. The lack of immediate monitoring and restoration will have long term detrimental effects.

Indeed, point 13 states "native vegetation can help mitigate global climate change by sequestering carbon and conversely climate change, including it's impacts on water, fire and temperature regimes, poses a major risk to the health of native vegetation". I would have to say that this issue has become much more urgent even since this document has been released. Since the IPCC report, followed by the IUCN report, we are reminded of the urgency of preserving nature in all it's forms. Globally we need 30% by 2030.

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

The outcomes for the management of native vegetation need to ensure a statewide net gain is the goal. We need to reject any further clearing and invest in a statewide land restoration program. The threats listed are well known, including inappropriate fire regimes, which need immediate review, see notes above. **Feral** animals and weeds are not listed as threats, but have a huge impact on both native vegetation and the whole of biodiversity. Goats especially in the Murchison region have done untold damage to that fragile land.

The use of technology, especially drones must be used to collect data, then as ongoing progress or deterioration, so there is the transparency (V1) required.

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

As we see over many Government policies, departments seem to overlap and become less efficient. I would have thought that this should have been addressed earlier, but in any case, the fact that the whole of government coordination and strategic planning to support native vegetation should now be a priority.

As tax payers, we need to know that transparent decision making is taking place to ensure certainty that our native vegetation is not continually declining.

We need to be ensuring that digital systems to support biodiversity has the priority it deserves and has substantial investment to support it. The public should be able to have access to data used to make decisions, so they can be assured nothing is done without rationale for that decision.

To ensure conservation outcomes, we need to know what biodiversity we have and what it needs to survive, so all data, mapping, monitoring and enforcement must be carried out urgently

As we all know, and as stated in the document, there has been extensive clearing, which has taken place within the wheatbelt region, so this area requires significant intervention to effectively restore and rehabilitate native vegetation and should not be used as a baseline for which to achieve a net gain. As outlined in the purpose of the draft policy, this needs to be a statewide objective and an urgent whole of government priority.

**Traditional Ecological Knowledge** should be acknowledged and utilized in all management practices, including fire management. Rapid response, ecological fire regimes and the engagement of First Nations people in this process must be a matter of urgency.

As West Australians, we have a natural affinity with our unique state and it's various bioregions and their qualities. It is obvious that balance is not being achieved, (especially here where I live),



and the condition and extent of WA's native vegetation is declining, which if continues, will have long term and catastrophic outcomes.

We need to ensure that reviews of incentives, pricing and offsets are based on ecological outcomes and to make sure these regimes do not continue to contribute to the decline WA's native vegetation. People on the land should naturally be stewards for their land, so we need to make greater efforts to ensure illegal clearing is detected and laws enforced, before incentivizing stewardship practices.

#### **5. Which roadmap actions are most important?**

Priority should be given to actions that can establish a goal of state wide net gain, generate greater biodiversity monitoring (actions 2.4 and 3.2) and transparent decision making (actions 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3).

We need to understand the key drivers of deforestation and bushland clearing which are specific to each various bioregions. By reflecting on the industries and processes which are continuing to drive the destruction of native vegetation, we can lay a foundation for boundaries, which are needed to make sure threatened species not only survive, but thrive.

Due to many exemptions written in law for the clearing of native vegetation, no public data exists that reveals how much, or where it is being cleared illegally. We need to change this urgently. It has been extensively recognized and acknowledged through the issues paper that there are huge gaps in the monitoring data for the extent and condition of native vegetation statewide.

There needs to be an insurance for the public, that adequate resources are available to agencies, so they have the power to enforce laws and that clearing permit breaches are made public and cases of illegal destruction are investigated thoroughly and penalties are appropriate to deter others.

I do note that starting this year, the WA Government will increase the Exploration Incentive Scheme by \$2.5 million a year, from \$10 million previously.

Given the state of the world and the need to move away from fossil fuels ASAP, wouldn't we be wise in matching that same annual incentive scheme to preserve, enhance and restore our native vegetation?

As stated in the document, and as we all know, the amount of vegetation still on ground and what we choose to regenerate will go a long way to absorbing some of the carbon which is emitted by the very industries benefitting from the exploration incentives.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to allow the public of WA to have our say on the future of our incredible and unique native vegetation. As a state, let's lead the way with a new plan and a better outcome for the future of it.

A concerned West Australian,





## NOTES FROM NATIVE VEGETATION ISSUES PAPER WORKSHOP

### ESPERANCE

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I attended the workshop in Esperance on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> January.

I appreciated having the opportunity to be a part of the consultation process, and I hope that our issues are addressed within the draft document.

There are a few points I wish to make however.

1. When I see an area of native vegetation or 'bush', I see a thriving community of extraordinary species, some of which we don't even know about yet, all living together in harmony, and sadly nowadays having suffered from our human impact. On the other hand, some people see an area of bush as something to just 'get rid of', as it may stand in the way of more land and further production.  
I can understand that view to some extent, but given the climate crisis we are facing, and the impacts that has already had on our wonderful state, I feel apprehensive that not enough will be done to ensure a healthy landscape and biodiversity heading into that uncertain future. There seems to me to be no other way, than to compensate landholders for their loss of production, and having to preserve some of their land for conservation.  
I also feel, there are some areas of WA which should not be getting farmed at all. Maybe in the future, there will be a way to address this issue, although I know it won't be popular!
2. I didn't see any mention in this document about the use of Drones for accessibility to record difficult terrain in our diverse landscape. Surely they would be an important instrument for gathering information. Landholders may even be allocated them to keep a track of changing conditions within their own properties.
3. The urban areas of Perth are a real worry to me. On every visit, there seems to be yet more bush lost for the expansion of our suburbs and road network. First the area gets fenced, then, ever so stealthfully, the bush bulldozed, dug up for drainage and power (and in that process sterilized) then hundreds of homes are built on the sand which remains. This seems incredible to me, and my theory that the break up of relationships is causing so many people to be living alone seems to be bearing truth. I am saddened for all the wildlife which inhabited these areas.
4. Our unique and incredible Great Western Woodlands has recently been devastated by fires. Because there are no people living in that area, it seems to me it was just left to burn. I would love to think that we valued such areas enough to put effort into dousing such fires with water, just as we do when humans or homes are at risk.
5. The issues of weeds and feral animals did not seem to be mentioned to any extend within the Issues document. I hope that their impact on our biodiversity will be recognized in the draft as serious issues.
6. One last point; When the draft document is ready for public consultation, can I ask that a Text Only version is available to email. It was extremely difficult to view the issues document, so I had to print it, which took a lot of ink and paper. None of us who are likely to make submissions, need to have pretty photos of our state throughout such an important document. We all know of it's beauty. It would also save the department precious resources I would expect.

Thank you [REDACTED] 4<sup>th</sup> February 2020



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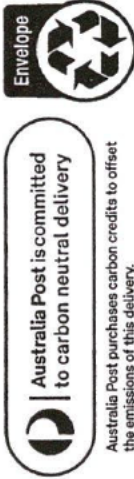




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