

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Native Vegetation Strategy](#)
Subject: Native Vegetation Issues Submission
Date: Monday, 10 February 2020 2:00:04 PM
Attachments: [SUBMISSION ON A NATIVE VEGETATION STRATEGY.pdf](#)

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find attached a Submission on the proposed Native Vegetation Strategy, for your consideration.

I submit this as a founding member of a local community volunteer group which aims to conserve and restore native fringing vegetation along the shores of the Swan Estuary, and I have nearly 20 years of experience in hands-on restoration as well as 20 years of raising community awareness of the importance of native vegetation and the need for its conservation.

Thank you for your efforts to conserve our State's native vegetation.
I look forward to the opportunity for further community comment.

Best wishes,

Margaret Matassa

SUBMISSION ON:

Native Vegetation in Western Australia: Issues paper for public consultation November 2019

I begin my submission with the observation that the great loss of our biodiversity across the State makes extremely urgent the need for a State Vegetation Policy, and I am glad that the State Government is providing this opportunity for public comment on its issues paper.

The Introduction gives a clear picture of the values of our unique native vegetation, apart from needing to include the fact that natural green spaces are also vital for people's health and well-being.

Hence the Challenge must clearly be for the Government to be proactive in prioritising the conservation and restoration of the last remaining remnants of native vegetation. The losses are too great already across the State, so **action** to conserve these vital surviving tracts should begin forthwith, using the already existing vast amount of electronic data that identifies where damage is happening right now. The government does not need a long timeline to gather data, but rather needs to use funds to increase staffing of its scientific, environment and compliance departments, so that action to stop degradation from overgrazing, weed invasion, illegal water extraction, illegal clearing and salinity that already show up on satellite imagery can be tackled urgently.

The Forward states that this review was triggered during consultation on an improved cost-recovery method for clearing permit application fees. This narrow emphasis on land clearing is greatly concerning. Scientists of many disciplines have been telling the government of the urgent need for action, yet so many of these skilled personnel have been made redundant and their research curtailed and their findings ignored. This loss of expertise needs to be reversed as part of the first steps.

The four initiatives do not seem to recognize the urgency of these losses, but seem to be focussing on policy, planning, regulation and exploring a new approach for the long term. Yes, these are needed in the long term, but given the extreme losses already evident from satellite imagery, they should be preceded by an action plan to immediately halt further losses, with a report on these actions delivered during the current term of government.

It is stated that this issues paper opens a conversation on what else might be needed from native vegetation management to get the best outcomes for the environment as well as for the community and economy. It is my contention that the community has already spoken that they are extremely concerned about the impact of climate change with dramatically reduced rainfall patterns in the South West, about the increasing intensity of extreme weather events, about increasing frequency and intensity of bushfires, and they wish to see immediate action taken, not further gathering of data when this is already available.

In Box 1, "Ecosystem services and costs incurred where they are lost" addresses the issues I have mentioned above, but in relaying the monies that have been spent over the past twenty years, the most obvious trend to me is **the decline in spending on the environment**.

Up to 2010, spending by governments of \$862 million is detailed, yet in the next decade, only \$99 million has been spent on the broad task of conservation, apart from a one-off project of

\$386 million for reducing salinity of Wellington Dam. This is a shocking change of priorities away from the conservation and care of our amazing biodiversity.

The public are already saying that they want more Government spending to halt the decline of and improve the protection of the remaining native vegetation. The current Government catch-cry of “Parks for People” is therefore a concerning trend – Previously our Nature Reserves and Parks were set aside primarily for the protection of our native flora and fauna and people’s access to them was strongly controlled so as to keep the balance on the side of protection. People supported this protective approach, for example: 92% of those surveyed in a Perth survey conducted by the Swan River Trust supported the need for keeping some areas of foreshore of the Swan Estuary closed to people for conservation purposes.

Specific Recommendations:

Priority be given to the protection of native flora and fauna – not to the rights of people to use and take and access anywhere and anything.

Funding and restaffing begin immediately to make use of the vast amount of digital satellite information already available, so as to map the full extent of the degradation of native vegetation across the State, with action to curb the loss beginning immediately.

Banning of *any* clearing of native vegetation in regions where severe loss of native vegetation has already occurred, such as in the South West Region and the Wheatbelt Region, and especially in the biodiversity hotspot of the Swan Coastal Plain.

Development proposals that impinge on areas that are already declared as having environmental / ecological significance should be automatically disqualified.

Protection of groundwater and aquifers needs much greater oversight, with private bores and use by mining companies and broad scale farming water usage all needing greater regulation.

Departments such as DBCA and DWeR have been underfunded in areas of research, monitoring and protection and they should have greatly increased funding. EPA too needs greater funding so that it can conduct independent and thorough assessments.

Reporting on the implementation of urgent recommendations of this Review be delivered during the *current* term of government.

Conclusion

Thank you to the Department of Water Regulations for this opportunity to comment, and I extend my appreciation for instigating this Review and look forward to the further public consultation period when the findings are released.

Margaret Matassa,



10th February 2020