
Submission responding Consultation draft: Native vegetation policy for WA

The Property Council WA ("Property Council") welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Consultation draft: Native vegetation policy for Western Australia ("the draft") prepared by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation ("DWER").

Executive Summary

The Property Council supports the intention of the policy as a vehicle "to promote a modern, whole-of-government approach to managing native vegetation"¹ and recognises the value in improving, "the management and protection of native vegetation".² It also recognises the strategic merit of the roadmap of priorities and opportunities.

The following submission highlights additional opportunities to improve the governance of the policy and draw attention to the need to ensure due consideration is given to the impact policy changes may have on private sector compliance.

Recommendations

Strategy 1. Planning, collaboration and coordination

Strategy 1. Planning, collaboration and coordination, seeks to develop the existing framework of interdepartmental relationships in the management of native vegetation³ and evaluate the efficacy of existing mechanisms⁴.

As identified in the explanatory notes, industry supports policy reform which drives "better consistency and transparency across State Government"⁵. Currently, the management of native vegetation falls with the remit of several government agencies, as well as the private sector. The broad cross-section of stakeholders is well outlined in the roadmap and this submission draws attention to the strong need for accountability and clear decision-making process.

Without clear governance, there is a risk that red tape will arise where decision making processes rely on native vegetation determination. Modelling prepared by the Property Council has estimated red tape costs would exceed \$80 million if they were to equal just one per cent of the value of building permits in the first six months of 2021. It is crucial that throughout the implementation phase, priority is given to ensuring processes and decisions that require a

¹ Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, 'Consultation draft: Native vegetation policy for Western Australia,' August 2021.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, 'Explanatory notes – Draft native vegetation policy for WA,' August 2021.

determination under the policy are not delayed. Holding costs in the approvals process detrimentally affect housing affordability and business operating costs.

The Property Council believes **the proposed governance required to achieve the opportunities outlined in Strategy 1 has not been sufficiently developed**. It proposes priority be placed on establishing clear governance around the development of a framework and the execution of recommendations. This framework should be developed in consultation with industry. The outcome will enable the efficient management of project timelines and to create clear decision-making pathways for transparently addressing competing priorities.

Strategy 2. Contemporary systems and practice

The Property Council supports the use of contemporary and digital systems to enable transparent decision making and identify red tape blockages. Transparent decision making is crucial to ensuring community and business confidence.

In response to the Phase 2 Planning reform consultation the Property Council released a research paper titled, *Planning to Deliver*⁶. The report recommended “a ‘digital first,’ policy to new planning instruments and planning processes.”⁷ It commends the use of this approach in Strategy 2.

The Property Council recommends [REDACTED] proposed [REDACTED] in Stage 1.

Strategy 3. Build, share and use knowledge to improve

In preparing this submission, Property Council representatives and members met with representatives from DWER. During the meetings it was acknowledged by DWER [REDACTED] that the existing methods for tracking native vegetation were limited in their ability to track native vegetation impacts in real time.

The [redacted] Council supports investment to improve real time tracking of native vegetation and improving the calibre of the datasets being relied on in decision making.

It further proposes that the policy give due consideration to both future communities and communities in place. Restoration programs to return bushland and native vegetation have in limited circumstances placed communities in place at elevated risk, when planting occurs adjacent to existing communities. State Planning Policy 3.7, which provides a framework for planning in bushfire prone areas, only considers the impact on future communities.

The Property Council urges DWER to ensure improved knowledge around native vegetation considers the impact on both community in place and future community and encourage consideration of both in decision making pathways.

⁶ Property Council of Australia, 'Planning to Deliver,' 17 August 2021.

⁷ Ibid.

The Property Council of Australia

The Property Council of Australia is the peak industry body representing the whole of the property industry. Property is Australia's largest industry, employing more than 1.4 million people, generating 13 per cent of GDP and shaping the future of our communities and cities.

It supports smarter planning, better infrastructure, sustainability, and globally competitive investment and tax settings that underpin the contributions our members make to Australians' economic prosperity and social wellbeing of Australians.

The Property Council WA membership consists of more than 270 member companies, including architects, urban designers, town planners, builders, investors and developers. Members conceive of, invest in, design, build and manage the places that matter to Australians – our homes, retirement living communities, shopping centres, office buildings, education, research and health precincts, tourism and hospitality venues.

This submission is informed by representatives from the Property Council's expert committees.

Next Steps

If you require further information or clarification, don't hesitate to get in touch with [REDACTED] Deputy Executive Director, on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

WA Executive Director
Property Council of Australia

[Submitted: 25 October 2021]