

Consultation Draft Native Vegetation Policy for WA

Thank you for formulating this policy and offering a public response.

I would like to start my comments with quotes:

“Now to these people apparently the balance of nature was something that was repealed as soon as man came on the scene. Well, you might just as well assume that you could repeal the law of gravity. The balance of nature is built on a series of relationships between living things, and between living things and their environments. You can’t just step in with some brute force and change one thing without changing many others. This doesn’t mean we must never interfere, never tilt the balance of nature in our favor. But when we make the attempt we must know what we’re doing. We must know the consequences.”

On a Farther Shore. The Life and Legacy of Rachel Carson by William Souder (2012).

“Harper wrote interestingly of the types of forest through which he and his companions passed on their 1864 journey. The first stages were through nothing but forests composed of eucalpti (sic), but on July 7, two days after leaving Doodlakine, he noted: “The first part of the day has been very interesting to us, travelling through large belts of thicket composed of accacia (sic), casuarina and hakea, with occasional strips of forest (eucalypti (sic)).” On the 10th they encountered large belts of dense thickets, and from the luxuriance of the vegetation he said they could almost imagine themselves in a tropical region”.

The Life of Charles Harper of “Woodbridge”, Guildford, Western Australia by F.R. Mercer (1958)

Well, if you look at a map east of Doodlakine now you are battling to find a tiny area of reserved bushland. This, unfortunately, is the case in most of Western Australia.

It is most evident therefore that the BALANCE of which your report speaks has long since become completely out of kilter and I support every endeavour to ameliorate this deplorable situation.

Nature must take priority from now on. Mining, pastoral, local and national road authorities and local governments as well as the state and national government must come to the party. This does not exclude person responsibility. There is no time to waste.

What I don’t think has been addressed in the Policy Draft are the elephants in the room:

As I see it now the main culprits for the degradation of the natural habitat are :

Population, Mining (minerals and sands), Roads, Housing, Agriculture and lack of Education. There is a flow on effect.

We need to make sure that we have representatives at meetings concerning Global Warming who can bring to the attention the need to stabilise and decrease world population.

The population of Australia has exceeded its viable point. Most of us are living a life style way beyond our capacity to the detriment of the natural habitat. This country has produced a society of greed and little care for “waste”. It is not necessarily entirely the fault of individuals. The economics are based on consumption. What about Refuse, Repair, Reuse, Restore, Regenerate?

Governments encourage “Jobs and Growth”. Any time there is a financial crisis and before elections there is money thrown willy-nilly for new buildings, sports arenas and the like. Very few shires or councils are going to say “No, let’s think about from where this money is actually derived”. The natural environment - always the victim.

In Australia we encourage increased population. Governments even embolden the situation with higher child payments etc. Some religious groups support large families. This leads to requirements for more housing, schools, hospitals, shopping centres, roads etc. to the detriment of any outlying bush and within suburbs, country towns and cities. Even long established backyards are being taken over by multiple dwellings. From where do we expect to gain clean air and mental well being when the trees, plants, birds, bees, insects and other creatures have disappeared? All play an integral part in the scheme of life. The plants and animals have their requirements and rights just as much as humans.

Why do we need to extract so much iron ore, coal and other minerals? A larger population leads to the need to the balance of trade - the importation of goods that individuals are encouraged to want, but don't necessarily need.

Every mine site, paddock, road, housing development, shopping mall, oval, school etc. are on what was not so long ago vast open plain, bush and forests. Mining metals, sand and rock scours the earth. So much has disappeared due to the growth in population. There has become a need for endless, crowded housing estates in order to shelter the growing population. There is a trend to knock down a perfectly serviceable house and build another more opulent one; valuable timbers, bricks, stones etc. from existing houses not even salvaged.

Roads are continually being widened as more mining interests become available and population increases.

Agriculture is required to feed more people and as an exchange for the imports which people want, but don't necessarily need. Better managed land and use of "second grade" fruit, vegetable and grain would necessitate less desire for clearing virgin and "regrowth" land. It would also encourage more jobs.

What do we see around these towns and cities and much further afield now? Spoiled bushland, if any remains at all. For example weeds such as *Watsonia* now appear along the roadsides and in paddocks for hundreds of kilometres along Brand Highway. African Daisies stemming from domestic gardens grow further out from towns along the Great Southern Highway. Most roadside verges are a mess of Cape Weed, Rye Grass (yes, even at Kings Park), Patterson's Curse, Brassicas, Cereals and other exotic grasses, much of this transported by vehicles undertaking road work.

Many farms have huge areas of land which has been cleared for production but is unusable because it is covered with Patterson's Curse, Cape Weed etc. In turn these plants throw seed and contaminate the remaining vestiges of Nature Reserves. Landholders should be encouraged/forced to deal with these situations and helped to do it without using the pesticides which inevitably end up in the soil and water system. The Agricultural Department can be supportive by disseminating their knowledge regarding what is available using the latest technology and in some cases biological control such as is the case, I believe, with the eradication of Patterson's Curse.

Shires and Councils are often central to the maintenance and management of bushland, they can control the destiny in so many ways – education of their staff is probably forefront in what goes on along local verges and areas of bushland. They need to really understand that the way to attract visitors and their spending money is to look after their bush and promote it as a selling point. It is in the interest of State and Federal Governments to support this.

On a recent trip through the Great Southern Region we found that there was a huge difference in condition of the verges as we passed through one shire into another in terms of rubbish along the roadside, weeds and the care of the lunch stops. Shires can do better, along with other agencies.

It is peculiar to find the main street of a wheatbelt town, promoting Acacias on billboards and tourist brochures whilst at the same time featuring Petunias in the main street! Likewise, other country towns within the Southwest forest grow exotics in the main street. Instead of billboards welcoming SUVs what about “This Shire cares for our/your bushland”. We have amazing, unique flowers – use them for their potential. As the song goes “You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone!”.

Respect for the bush. How is it that home and public “native” gardens seem to be where you throw your lunch take away and drink containers if you are working on a building site or driving past? Again, respect for our natural vegetation should be part of showing patriotism, not just “Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oy, Oy, Oy”. Education, education, EDUCATION and appreciation!

When newcomers to Australia are given information about Western Australia let us get clever, and as part of their citizenship ceremony, rather than inform them about cricket and football, fill them with the wonder of our unique flora and fauna (not just a gift of a stuffed toy kangaroo made in China). They need real knowledge about how valuable it is to us all and how we must care for it. Encourage them to have native gardens when they procure a house or dwelling.

This is not to say that all long-term residents are able to recognise the special nature of our bushland. However I believe that many older people do so and feel extremely frustrated, disappointed, sad and bitter about how much has been lost in their own lifetimes. Many feel powerless to alter the situation when they see the bush fall around them. Unfortunately few of them would contribute to such a submission as this because firstly they don’t know about it, they are not confident or they think they can’t make a difference. Many do what they can to actively protect what is left in terms of offering their services such as working with volunteer groups.

It is also difficult to decipher/decode the official jargon used in surveys such as this. My experience with many surveys is that the questions are ambiguous and lead to an incorrect interpretation on either side.

When volunteering at an accommodation venue hosted by Australian Bush Heritage north of Perth several years ago we found travellers to be full of the wonder at our wide open spaces, the clear skies, the stars, the coastline and the unique flora and fauna. Switzerland has its mountains, Mexico has its cacti, we have a unique natural heritage and the possibility of protecting those assets NOW. It is a pity that mining ventures and prefabricated building and other forms of human interference blot the landscape in so many places.

I question what happens with the so called “regrowth” of cleared land? I feel that there will be all out “go ahead and clear” granted (or eyes turned the other way) by some powers allowing the “regrowth” to be cleared before new laws can get through.

Where are all the pine or “softwood” plantations which are to replace Jarrah, Karri and other timber trees going to be planted? Is this to be once again to the detriment of what many see as “useless bush”?

It seems that there are many agencies involved with trying to conserve our bushland. I wonder whether anything will come out of all this or will it be meeting after meeting and “roadmaps etc. etc.” never reaching a positive outcome – which should be preserving and restoring the remaining bushland and promoting farmers to conserve what they have, including “regrowth”. We need to stop using the mining industry and housing as the main providers. We have the chance of a unique industry (including new jobs) evolving around our natural bushland. Now is the time to act upon it.

We want people to come and see our beautiful heritage of native plants but I think at present that most of them see only Patterson's Curse, Watsonia and Canola instead of recognising the wonder of the unique diversity of plants we have in WA. At the moment one has to really search for the tiny smattering of bushland (varying from semi-decent to shocking condition) around the countryside. Most of what remains has been saved from destruction by local landholders, government bodies or other concerned individuals or groups with foresight.

Our relationship to our land gives a dark reflection on how we care about our heritage. We should have learned from all the mistakes of the past two centuries. We must do better. Once again, it is now or never.

Having recently taken a trip up to Mt. Lesueur and surrounding areas I could not refrain from commenting on many occasions "Thank goodness that some who came before us had the foresight to preserve some of this beautiful inheritance – not just for the benefit of those who live here but for the animals, plants and creatures and for the health and well being of the whole world".

Our unique bushland and its inhabitants are equal to the Great Barrier Reef and should be up there on the extremely endangered list. In fact it is sad that many are in fact extremely endangered! As are humans and all the other creatures on earth especially if we continue to disregard the complete lack of BALANCE existing at present.

Let's start promoting Australia for its natural heritage instead of decimating that heritage.