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TO: consultation@dpc.wa.gov.au

CC:

Subject: Draft Perth and Peel Green Growth Plan for 3.5 million.

Introduction

This submission is made on behalf of the Nature Reserves Preservation Group. An environmental umbrella group within the Shire of Kalamunda, NRPG has been making submissions on behalf of members for 26 years, including those on 'Directions 2031' and 'Perth and Peel @ 3.5 Million: North East Sub-Regional Framework'. Over time, many areas of remnant bushland and natural wetlands have been lost to development, despite submissions for retention of such areas. The rate of loss is increasing.

Recognising the immense amount of work that has gone into the preparation of this Plan by both State and Federal bodies and, acknowledging the good intentions of this endeavour, we nevertheless have reservations over whether these intentions and the mechanisms for implementing them will produce any net benefit for the biodiversity values of the Perth Peel region.

It is misleading to describe this collection of documents as a "Plan". The documents released by Western Australian Government agencies, addressing State and Federal Environmental planning, have created an almost impenetrable maze. The almost impossible task of relating on-line map layers to local areas, the requirement to accept, on trust, figures on vegetation clearing, habitat loss and species decline, the sheer size of the component parts of this Plan and the difficulties in making informed comment on it, make compiling an effective submission extremely difficult.

The Draft Green Growth Plan is far too complicated and cumbersome. Elements are repeated, sections overlap and, in short, it presents a logistical nightmare for both State and Federal bodies. To expect informed comment on such a complex and disjointed document we consider to be unreasonable.

Having the “biological hotspot” character of the Perth Peel Region recognised within the plan (one of 35 such hotspots worldwide) initially gives hope that the plan will be of long term benefit to the natural environment. Some, though not all, shortcomings of the current system appear to be acknowledged. A failure to address these shortcomings successfully, will inevitably result in the region no longer satisfying the Global Biodiversity Hotspot criteria.

- The West Australian Government acknowledges that the historic growth patterns for Perth and Peel are NOT sustainable. This acknowledgement is a beginning. We see this as a unique opportunity for correcting shortcomings and for ensuring the long term future of the natural environment of the region. Whilst agreeing with the principle of ensuring long term certainty for the protection of the environment, we have deep concerns over the ability of this complex, multi-layered project to deliver such an outcome. The ‘streamlining’ of development processes is of great concern, particularly the intention to “*reduce delays from environmental approvals and related cost pressures*” (Strategic Conservation Plan, p.iv).
- The current rate of clearing within the region cannot continue. Despite its “biodiversity hotspot” title, vegetation complexes have been severely reduced and much of that remnant vegetation has little or no protection from the pressures of clearing and development. This concern was emphasised by the **Environmental Protection Authority**, in its Interim advice to the State Minister for Environment on Perth and Peel @ 3.5 Million. In formulating this Green Growth Plan (in the wake of the WAPC draft of 2015) has this EPA advice been heeded?
- Transferring responsibility for managing the impacts on MNES (when the Plan is endorsed by Commonwealth Minister) from the Federal Minister to the State Minister of Environment gives even more cause for concern given the, at times, poor record of this State in environmental management and, the rapidly increasing rate of habitat clearing (within and without the region) under their stewardship.

Most of our concerns focus on the need to protect our remaining biodiversity. As an environmental group based within the area covered by the North East Sub-Regional Framework, our focus is on land-based biodiversity preservation. This should not be seen as a lack of concern for matters such as the future of water supplies, the potential effects of development and infrastructure on air quality, the need for sensitive and sustainable urban design and, the potential impacts of development on lifestyle.

Whilst the good environmental intentions are not questioned, the fear remains, that commercial imperatives are driving this plan at the State and Local Government level. The modelling employed to arrive at the 3.5 million figure, is difficult to challenge without sound statistical knowledge. Past instances of such modelling, however, having produced aberrant figures, would suggest a cautious approach be taken to these current figures. Perth Airport passenger growth predictions and predictions for electricity demand and infrastructure, are two relatively recent examples of modelling missing its mark. Whilst we understand growth figures for this Plan are based on the 2008 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) report, we would emphasise the limitations of that report (pointed out by the ABS itself, pp. 2 & 3).

Our submission will refer to specific segments of the Plan. Comments will follow in the boxed format. Given the size and complexity of the complete plan, comments will be confined to the Strategic Conservation Plan and Action Plans F, G, H and I.

STRATEGIC CONSERVATION PLAN;

Executive summary (p. ii)

This outlines the importance of the region as a biodiversity hotspot and, the relevance of maintaining that status, to the *“lifestyle, culture and identity”* of the Perth Peel Region. (p. ii). See earlier comments on potentially failing to satisfy the international criteria for that status. This nexus between maintaining the biodiversity values of the region and the health of the lifestyle, culture and identity of the region, should be uppermost in the minds of those drafting the final form of this Plan. As the overarching document, it is essential that this conservation plan achieves its aim of protecting MNES and State environmental values. It must accurately reflect the intent of the action plans and associated impact assessment reports. It must also be seen to provide a comprehensive response to the Interim Strategic Advice of the Environmental Protection Authority to the State Minister for Environment, under section 16(e) of the Environmental Protection Act 1986]

“This collaborative approach has provided the opportunity to avoid, mitigate and offset the environmental impacts of future development...” (p.iv)

The use of offsets has assumed the role of the ultimate solution to problems associated with the loss of habitat through clearing. Significantly, the EPA Interim Strategic Advice, states that *“...in coming decades, greater value will be placed on the environment in the calculation of sustainable outcomes [and] believes it is important to prepare for this through maximum avoidance and mitigation of environmental impacts in long term planning.”*(p. 93). The Interim Advice from the EPA does not consider the current application of offsets to be *“a sustainable long term strategy for any species.”* (ibid.) and, *“While acquisition of bushland as a trade-off for vegetation clearing offers immediate value and certainty, it does not achieve a net environmental gain in the long term.”* (ibid.) the advice emphasises that the current use of offsets simply diminishes what is a finite asset (by *“trading”* part of its *“capital base”* to *“protect the remaining base.”* (ibid.) This approach is clearly inconsistent with the principles of sustainable development. The *“collaborative approach”* involving ‘Directions 2031 and beyond’, ‘Perth and Peel at 3.5 Million’, together with the four Sub-Regional Frameworks, followed by the ‘Green Growth Plan’, has produced an unwieldy and confusing compendium of documents.

- *Streamlined state approval under the EP Act;”(p. iv)*

Despite assurances to the contrary, we fear that commercial development imperatives will dictate that, in the interest of *“upfront environmental approval under the EPBC Act”* and *“streamlined State approval processes under the EP Act”*, the environment and biodiversity values will suffer. This fear increases, given the powers that will, once the Plan is endorsed by the Federal Minister, devolve to the State Minister for Environment. Our concern is, that too much power may then be in the hands of the State Minister, with too few checks and restraints placed on that office.

- *Optimisation of development and environmental outcomes including:*

The use of the catch-all word “*optimisation*” always gives cause for concern, given the wide interpretation placed on the word. In future scenarios, these two outcomes may prove mutually exclusive. For a developer, making the best or most effective use of an area, would have a totally different meaning from that placed on the term by an environmental officer. A “*more efficient and sustainable urban form, greater co-location of infrastructure corridors and reduced fragmentation of environmental values*” are all supported.

Co-locating infrastructure corridors: Given past experiences, this requires a dramatic culture shift on the part of individual providers, each of whom in the past, appeared to work in splendid isolation.

Reduced fragmentation of environmental values: Current State plans and schemes, eg. ‘Liveable Neighbourhoods’ 2015 (Department of Planning, WAPC), currently fail to support this aim.

- *A comprehensive conservation package that:*

Sets aside 170,000 ha of new parks and reserves...;

This figure is open to challenge, given the multiple and complex actions proposed under the plan. The creation and management of the “*comprehensive, adequate and representational (CAR) reserve system*” is stated to be a cornerstone of the State’s biodiversity conservation efforts (2.1.2 *Key commitments*). Since many of these areas are already being managed for conservation, the term “additional” or “new” may be seen as confusing or misleading. Areas covered by an earlier conservation process under System 6, (EPA 1983) appear to be included in so-called “*new parks and reserves*”. When we consider that no details are available on the type of habitat or the condition of the land included in the above figure, the extent of any benefits to the environment becomes indeterminate.

Establishes the Peel Regional Park;

The intention to establish this park is commendable and long overdue. The timeframe for its establishment however, is woefully inadequate. Effective establishment will require the creation of a Management Plan. Past experience with the Parks of the Darling Range Regional Park (originally the Darling Range Regional Park) highlights the interminable process this may involve. Twenty years of work by a Community Advisory Committee and, still no management plan! This should not be repeated with the Peel Regional Park. Creating the park in stages may prove effective but, early progress is essential and should result in the nucleus of this park being created as soon as possible. This Strategic Conservation Plan should also include a commitment to finalise a Management Plan for the Parks of the Darling Range and to consider this a top priority.

Consideration should be given to past proposals for the establishment of additional Regional Parks. Proposals for the establishment of a Gnaragara Regional Park and a Lower Serpentine Regional Park have been under consideration for many years. More recently, Nature Reserves Preservation Group proposed, to the Premier, the creation of a Perth Foothills Regional Park and the consolidation and extension of existing Darling Range, National and Regional Parks (2014).

Resolves tenure ownership and management arrangements for Bush Forever sites;

This resolution is vital for the future of all Bush Forever sites within the region. Whilst our primary concern is the fate of such sites within our Shire and the North East Sub-regional Framework, we share concerns over the fate of all such sites within the region. The Interim advice of the EPA (2015) recommends the State Government “*continue to acquire the balance of Bush Forever sites, as opportunities arise*” (p. 35) and recognises the need to create effective protection for other areas of regional significance, such as Parks and Recreation designated reserves, stating: “*...additional protection measures are required, specifically for conservation.*” (ibid.)

In the Shire of Kalamunda, we have one such area of pristine remnant vegetation (>90% of which is so classified) on Lot 59 Wilkins Road. Designated “Parks and Recreation reserve” in 1996, intended for inclusion in the Darling Range Regional Park. This is now awaiting the result of an MRS amendment (1271/41) to rezone it to Urban. The Shire Local Planning Scheme designates it as Special Use, Aged Care accommodation. Had this reserve been included in the Regional Park as intended, even that would not have provided protection from the MRS amendment. This Conservation Plan should ensure that ALL areas of Regional Significance, including Local Natural Areas are protected from clearing and development. This can only be achieved by having such areas transferred to the conservation estate. At the Local Government level, unmanaged Bush Forever sites and regionally significant areas (such as P&R Reserves, regardless of tenure) should be placed under suitable land managers and, likewise, transferred to the conservation estate

Provides for the protection of threatened species, wetlands of international significance and threatened ecological communities;

It is difficult to reconcile the first part of this statement with the fact that, under Stage 2 of the Plan, we will see the potential loss of around 90,000 ha of Bush Forever and Regional Park lands, much of it identified, initially under System Six, as important for conservation. It seems simplistic in the extreme, to simply quote hectare values, with no consideration given to the condition and therefore, the biodiversity value of those areas. In addition, the loss, through clearing, of habitat essential to the survival of the Carnaby’s Black Cockatoo also fails to align with this environmental aspiration. Consideration should be given to delaying such clearing until the additional planned plantings have reached a stage suitable for the use of the Carnaby’s.

Whilst the protection of wetlands of international significance is vital, we consider that, in line with the State wetlands policy, all remaining wetlands should be protected. In addition, we would like to see the concept of the new wetland buffer policy applied to creek lines.

The protection of Threatened Ecological Communities should remain a high priority. Strong consideration should be given to the current effort to have the Banksia Woodlands of the Swan Coastal Plain listed as a TEC and having this possibility factored into the Plan.

Commits to action to ensure the long term health of the Peel-Harvey and the Swan Canning estuaries;

Measures should be taken promptly to ensure this action is successful. This should include incorporating the findings of past and present attempts to achieve reductions of nutrient inflow into these estuaries.

- *Reduce delays from environmental approvals and the related cost pressures.*

Previous comments outlined our fears that attempts to reduce such delays and cost considerations would result in environmental damage, where attempts to reduce developmental pressures are seen as more important than the future of the natural environment and its biodiversity.

Key Commitments (p. vi)

- *Expanding the Conservation Reserve System.*

Previous comments highlight our suspicion that the figures do not reflect the true situation, the effective expansion may prove to be far less than that quoted and any net gain to biodiversity values illusory.

- *Protecting River and Wetland Systems.*

Whilst endorsing the intentions to protect these systems, we would like to see the commitment expanded to cover all designated wetlands and for the buffer system currently applied to river systems and creek lines to be revised.

- *Protecting Carnaby's Cockatoo.*

See previous comments on the apparent conflict between this commitment, the initial loss of habitat for the species and the comparatively remote and inappropriate location of some of the proposed areas suitable for the species. The removal of the foraging capacity of the pine plantations over such a short period will have a major impact on the Carnaby's Cockatoo population and, in the long term, on its recovery. The additional clearing of such foraging in the BRM 'Future Resource Areas' appears to have been ignored. In addition, details of new plantings of pines, suitable for the species, are sketchy, give neither detailed locations nor details of management responsibilities.

- *Commitments to protect Commonwealth matters and State environmental values.*

Whilst we fully endorse the commitments made, their effectiveness will depend on factors outlined in the following commitment. Once again, we have doubts as to the ability of this plan to effect these commitments.

- *Implementation and Assurance.*

The success of the Green Growth Plan can be assured only if implementation actions are carried out fully and their progress closely monitored. We have concerns that, given the additional responsibilities assigned to DPaW (already stretched to the limit by a lack of on-ground staff) under the plan, sufficient funding may not be allocated to enable them to perform their expanded role effectively. These concerns mirror those expressed in several W.A. Auditor General Reports (e.g. 2009). The assumption that the current conservation reserve system is being effectively managed, is without foundation. Shortcomings, outlined in the A.G. audits, give little hope that DPaW will be able to cope with its expanded role, unless a firm commitment is made, by the State Government, to provide adequate long term funding.

To date, there has been widespread criticism of an apparent lack of consultation with local governments. Whilst some local governments may not be totally without blame, long-term consultation protocols should be established. Provision should be made for regular input from

local governments and community groups. A “transparent” framework cannot be achieved without this input.

6. Assurance Framework.

It is reassuring to see that this framework, if followed to the letter, could ensure the integrity of the Strategic Conservation Plan. Shortcomings will be raised in later comments on Action Plan I

6.5 Annual Reporting.

Such reporting is essential, should be comprehensive and, like the five year review, available to the public and open to public comment. See later comments as above.

ACTION PLAN F. MNES CONSERVATION COMMITMENTS.

1. Introduction.

This section highlights the extent and complexity of the whole project. Effective submissions can be made only after all these documents have been consulted, in order to determine which sections require comment. Whilst an extension of the submission period, in response to requests, was welcomed, the sheer volume and complexity of the documents creates a problem. The attempt to create a single plan to address both the MNES and State environmental values has resulted in a completely unwieldy set of documents. The involvement of multiple agencies in the Plan, whilst essential, provides yet another layer of complexity. The Department of Planning (DoP) and the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC) produced ‘Directions 2031 and beyond...’ in 2010. The WAPC then produced ‘Perth and Peel @ 3.5 million’, including the four Sub-Regional Planning Frameworks, in 2015. This was followed (in December 2015) by the ‘Perth and Peel Green Growth Plan @ 3.5 million’, produced by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, now the lead agency in this initiative.

2. Conservation Framework.

This section was invaluable in giving structure to and helping explain the Strategic Conservation Plan. It also highlighted the vast amount of effort that has gone into the initiative.

3. Conservation Outcomes for MNES.

If all these outcomes are achieved, the future prospects of our biodiversity hotspot will be vastly improved. NRPG fully supports these, whilst having severe doubts as to their achievability and the completeness of the baseline data from which the outcomes will be measured.

4. Conservation Objectives and Commitments for MNES.

4.1 Over-arching Conservation Commitments.

The commitments given in table 1 for avoidance, mitigation and offsets have already been commented on. Concerns remain over the validity of the figure of 170,000 ha. provided for ‘new’ conservation reserves, the security and management of Bush Forever sites and the proposed use and, potential, inappropriate use of such offsets.

4.2 Listed threatened species and ecological communities.

Table 2. Threatened Ecological Communities.

Whilst our main concern is with the Shrublands and Woodlands of the eastern Swan Coastal Plain, we are concerned that protection and management for conservation of all Bush Forever sites, remains a high priority. Maintaining the long-term viability of the ecological community within the region, through secure conservation tenure is essential. In too many cases, ecological communities come under threat from developments adjacent to them, through a lack of suitable and adequate vegetation buffers. This threat extends to many of the Bush Forever sites. It is essential that all TEC areas listed, both by the State and under the EPBC Act, have their protection assured.

Table 3. Threatened Fauna. Birds.

Given the relevance of the three species of Black Cockatoo to our major geographic area of concern, the objectives and commitments relating to the species are extremely important. Unfortunately, the commitment to “*maintain habitat*” and “*mitigate impacts*” has a hollow ring given the degree of clearing of such habitat that will take place under the plan. The loss of this foraging habitat will reduce the chances of survival of these species.

Carnaby’s Black Cockatoo is considered to have a high risk of vulnerability to climate change (Part D MNES assessment Chapter 15 section 15-7). This vulnerability is in addition to the significant loss of habitat proposed. This loss of feeding habitat, mainly from pines harvesting, will have the largest impact on Carnaby’s cockatoo. Comments on the superior calorific value of the pines (15-11) suggests that, when contemplating replacement plantings of an alternative food source (mixed Banksia Woodlands), much larger areas will be needed. Conservation commitments shown in the table may be totally inadequate.

In the case of all three Black Cockatoo species, the objective of undertaking further research should be fully observed. More research is needed and adequate funding for such research should be guaranteed over the life of the plan.

The proposal to rehabilitate areas and plant suitable trees across the Swan Coastal Plain in conjunction with Community groups and local governments is commendable however, too much reliance should not be placed on local governments to participate fully in these endeavours. The environmental sections of such bodies are already (in our local case) under increasing pressure and frequently receive little support from Councillors.

Threatened Fauna. Reptiles.

The commitment on the potential translocation site for the Western Swamp Tortoise on the Perth Airport Estate (Munday Swamp) should bear in mind the potential difficulties posed to this commitment by both the Perth Airport Master Plan and the proposal for the third runway.

Table 4. Threatened Flora.

All the objectives and commitments are supported. Special attention should be paid to the survival of those flora found on Bush Forever sites and for ongoing research into the survival of species. Once again, concerns are raised in light of the W.A. Auditor General Report (2009) commenting, “*Regular monitoring of all threatened species does not occur*” (p. 37) and, “*information management systems for threatened species conservation are inefficient*” (p. 39). Rectifying such shortcomings will require a substantial and secure injection of funds.

5. Process for Review and Modification.

Given the extended life of this plan, the need for flexibility is paramount. The monitoring and review arrangements, if carried out to the letter, provide assurance but, see above caveat.

- *...commitments are not achieving the conservation outcomes and objectives.*

We endorse the need for such a long-term plan to be open to review and, if required, modification. If the declared commitments are failing to achieve the desired conservation outcomes and objectives, it is essential these failings be detected early. We will be making further comment on this when addressing Action Plan I.

- *...a commitment is no longer necessary.*

Should this situation arise, it is essential that funding allocated to the now redundant commitment, be transferred to another stated commitment, rather than into consolidated revenue.

ACTION PLAN G. STATE ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES AND COMMITMENTS.

1. Introduction.

Since this is based on the same format, with minor text changes, as that for Action Plan F, see previous comments for that Plan.

2. Conservation framework

See comments above.

3. Environmental outcomes for State values.

Whilst the format is the same as for the outcomes for MNES in Action Plan F, “*Conservation outcomes*” become “*Environmental outcomes.*” Where one might expect to see “*Matters of State environmental significance*”, we have “*State EPA factor themes*”. Whilst this may have little practical significance, it is puzzling. We would like to see that “*Biodiversity in the Perth Peel regions is conserved and, where possible improved*”. Whilst the following environmental commitments do reflect this intention, we would like to see it clearly stated as an outcome.

4. Environmental objectives and commitments for State values.

Table 1.

The vague description of the majority of the implementation mechanisms for the majority of these commitments is disturbing. Listing these as “to be confirmed” (TBC) or “to be determined (TBD) is completely unacceptable. These mechanisms should have been established prior to the release of this draft. Given the extent of the coverage in this table and our tacit support for all of the listed commitments, comment will be limited to those objectives and commitments of most immediate concern to our group. Commitments having, as their implementation mechanism Action Plan H, will be addressed fully in our comments on that plan.

Commitment 1.

Whilst the “objectives” are absent for commitments 1 – 5, these commitments, if carried out fully, are supported. Unfortunately, the existing “*Ministerial conditions or EPA advice*” have failed to control the increasing rate of clearing of vegetation. Given the State’s past record, it is unlikely that “*New Ministerial Statements*” will improve matters.

Commitment 2.

Whilst we have already raised concern over the accuracy of the figure for the “*new conservation reserves*” the future of Bush Forever sites and the Regional Parks, these will be addressed in detail when commenting on Action Plan H.

Commitment 6.

The need for this distinction was endorsed by the Interim advice from the EPA. It is essential that this separation be clearly maintained to avoid past instances of conflict, where Bush Forever sites have been adversely affected by “*other purposes.*”

Commitment 11.

This commitment should be extended to all designated wetlands, the loss of which would have significant impact on local biodiversity values. “Protection” should be included in the following *commitment 12.*

Commitment. 13

The use of the term “*viable*” (assuming the botanical definition – “capable of surviving or living successfully” is applied) raises the question of who will have the final decision on whether the specific complex remnant is viable? The current planning process has failed miserably in this task. Unless the action plans A and B ensure an improvement in that process, the implementation of this commitment will fail.

Commitment 14.

Currently, the protection of such vegetation complexes has failed. Unless Action Plans A and B provide a more robust mechanism than is currently in place, this commitment will also fail to be implemented. “*Due regard for retention*” is currently absent in the planning process.

Commitments 15 – 25.

These have our full support (refer to comments on Action Plan F and H, particularly with reference to the Bush Forever sites listed.) Particular attention needs to be paid to the need for effective buffer zones for the added protection of these species and the complexes.

Commitment 26.

This is a vital commitment. Without a full and detailed understanding of the importance of the Perth Peel Region to these flora species, successful management and conservation of those species will not be achieved. The lack of detail on the implementation of this commitment is disturbing, given the importance which should be assigned to it. This vagueness continues throughout the list, making the commitments far less meaningful.

5. *Process for review and modification.*

See previous comments on this section of Action Plan F.

ACTION PLAN H. CONSERVATION PROGRAM.

Explanation of terms. (p. 3)

Conservation Parks, Conservation Reserves, Nature Reserves.

These definitions are confusing. The “*Conservation Parks*” definition could also be applied to the later “*nature reserve*”. Are the two interchangeable? Both concentrate on landscape conservation (amongst other things) and both exclude activities which may harm the natural ecosystems. Whilst “*Conservation Parks*” recognise values of “*local or regional significance*” the “*nature reserve*” definition fails to make this distinction. Confusion still exists as to the status of reserves designated “*Parks and Recreation*”, so designated, under Metropolitan Region Schemes and Local Planning Schemes, for their “*regional significance for ecological, recreation or landscape purposes.*”

1. Introduction.

The claim that the Conservation Program and Plan will “*provide significant conservation gains within the Perth and Peel regions and surrounds*” is still seen as questionable and is addressed elsewhere in this submission.

The claim that the strategic Assessment has been developed collaboratively is disputed. Whilst much collaboration has taken place, our local knowledge suggests a failure to fully collaborate with some local governments, leaving this Strategic Assessment out of step with local government schemes, strategies and policies.

2. Background to the development of this plan.

Whilst this section outlines the key components of this plan and the management of environmental impacts under the classes of action, the question of funding is extremely vague. More certainty is needed at this stage. The term “*likely*” is redundant and totally out of place at this stage of the process and simply another case of inviting comment on an uncertainty.

3. Conservation Program.

We support the actions proposed under the Conservation Program to provide the stated conservation gains. We do, once again, have significant doubts over the claims being made for those gains. Although it is difficult to establish an absolute figure, the stated area to be gained must be open to question. Comment has been made elsewhere in this submission on these doubts.

3.1 Expanding the Conservation Reserve System.

Having the above doubts on the validity of the figure, we find it annoying to have that figure repeated four times in rapid succession – totally unnecessarily. To many, the figure is an inflated one, given the area is said to be “*additional.*” Expanding the Conservation Reserve System by 170,000 ha, is not accompanied by any information on how this figure was

reached. No information is provided, to explain how a net conservation benefit will accrue, to offset the loss and destruction of some high biodiversity values.

3.1.1 Phase 1- Initial package of sites.

These additions to the Conservation Reserves system, at first sight, look encouraging. The addition of 80,000 hectares to that system, in such short order, following the Federal endorsement, would seem remarkable. The costs associated with this environmental largesse and the means of funding those costs will presumably be revealed at a later date. The comments on the establishment of Nature Reserves on Bush Forever sites are puzzling and, we remain convinced that a department as stressed and overworked as DPaW will be unable to cope with the management of such additional areas.

Whilst the expansion of the Canning River Regional Park and Jandakot Regional Park are promised, the fate of the Parks of the Darling Range hangs in the balance. Addressing the Parks of the Darling Range, Appendix 2 states simply, that “*improvements will be made to the conservation tenure arrangements*” within the parks. The need for expansion of the parks, by full incorporation of land defined in the 1996 MRS amendment, specifically for inclusion in the Darling Range Regional Park, is not addressed. Advice given to the relevant Community advisory committee is that, until a management plan is in place, no areas of land may be added to the parks.

Key Benefits of the initial package of sites.

Provided implementation is thorough and complete, these benefits can only serve to improve the situation. Whether or not measures intended to address the impacts of removal of the pine plantations, are sufficient for the survival of the Carnaby’s Cockatoo, is open to question.

3.1.2 Phase 2 – ongoing additions to the conservation reserve system.

The acquisition of private land for expansion of the conservation reserves is a long overdue and welcome initiative. Yet, it simply promises to address, after many years, the full implementation of the System Six and Bush Forever recommendations. Having these remaining Bush Forever sites included in the phase 1 initial package would seem logical. The fate of Parks and Recreation reserves not designated as Bush Forever sites (mentioned earlier in our submission) should also be addressed. The “*remaining Bush Forever sites reserved for Parks and Recreation*”, if remaining assigned to priority B should, at the very least, be reassigned to Priority A. For each Local Government area of responsibility, each unmanaged Bush Forever site should be assigned to a suitable land manager.

3.2 Management of new conservation reserves.

“*Management plans will be prepared for all of the 170,000 hectares of new conservation reserves in accordance with the CALM Act...*” Given the glacial rate at which the management plan for the Parks of the Darling Range has progressed, this statement rings hollow, as does the assertion that “*Funding will be committed to implement these management plans...*” Acknowledging that “*on-ground activity...is critical to delivering the conservation objectives*” simply adds to our concerns. These on-ground activities, currently carried out by dedicated staff, are stretching those individuals to the limit. Given the geographic extent of their areas of responsibility and the ensuing workload, adding to this workload is not an option. The list of on-ground activities anticipated, emphasises the current

impossibility of honouring this commitment. Without a guaranteed long term provision of funding, (and the lack of detail on funding options to date), the increased staff required will not be engaged.

3.3 Actions to improve water quality and protect wetlands within the Perth and Peel (sic.) Regions.

We agree with the importance placed on these measures and particularly welcome the recognition of the need to reduce the nutrient runoff into the estuaries. The need to evaluate and refine the initiatives being undertaken is a vital element in the strategy. Early recognition of failed projects is essential.

3.3.2 Protection of wetlands.

Peel Regional Park.

“A community Advisory Committee will assist in the management of the Peel Regional Park.”

The creation of such a committee must ensure that membership of it enables community views to be fully considered and reflected in the management plan for the park. It is essential that the proposed committee have input into creation of the Management Plan, the ongoing management of the park and, that it not take 20 years to create the Management Plan.

3.4 Measures to support Carnaby’s Cockatoo.

3.5 Improving knowledge of State and Commonwealth environmental matters.

Whilst all measures to support Carnaby’s Cockatoo are to be supported, in the early stages of the Green Growth Plan, there will be a significant adverse impact on the Carnaby’s population. Overall, there will be a massive net loss of habitat, despite the frequent assurances, quoting the 170,000 hectares (now seen as an irrelevant and confusing figure). Even Part D: MNES Assessment, Chapter 15, fails to give clear details of the effect of clearing on the species. This chapter should be redrafted, giving clear, unambiguous, details of proposed vegetation clearing. These proposals should be shown on maps of each sub-region, at an easily interpreted scale (unlike those in the draft documents). Ongoing research, as proposed, is essential to enable effective strategies to be employed to ensure the survival of species. The need for such research and monitoring will be addressed in our comments on Action Plan I: Assurance.

4. Managing the Conservation Program.

4.1 Overview.

Given their importance to the effectiveness of the Strategic Conservation Plan, the makeup of the coordination group need careful consideration. Details of its composition should have been made available at the draft stage of this plan. Once again, we are being invited to comment on the unknown. Unless the terms of reference are sufficiently robust, this group will find their role being little more than a ‘rubber stamp’ for the decisions of the Executive body and State Government Ministers. The Executive body group should certainly include an independent scientific advisory element and representatives from community-based groups, to provide confidence in the decision making. Given the eventual removal of the Federal Department of the Environment from the process, there is great concern over the potentially unchecked powers of State Ministers. Those powers should be clearly defined before this Plan reaches its final form.

4.2 Funding Conservation Actions.

This section gives absolutely no information on how funding will be provided. Will full details of funding measures be released soon? The fact that, on release, they will be open for public comment is reassuring. “Economies of scale” is a property regularly claimed in Government initiatives. Under close examination, however, such a claim frequently evaporates. What research supports these claimed economies of scale?

4.3 Prioritisation of Conservation Actions.

Will the coordination group be the final arbiters of the priorities assigned to the conservation actions? In this respect, they must not be subservient to either the Executive Body, or the State Ministers. The terms of reference for this group should be unambiguous and binding.

ACTION PLAN I. ASSURANCE.

1. Introduction.

1.1 Overview of the Action Plan.

Will the State Minister for Environment be the arbiter of what constitute “amendments of a substantial manner”? If so, will such a decision be open to review or appeal?

4. Monitoring Programs.

4.1 Strategic Conservation Plan Performance Monitoring.

Whilst such monitoring is essential to the success of the plan and is supported, what avenues are open to amendments to classes of action?

4.2 Environmental Condition Monitoring.

The need for such monitoring is essential. Whilst *tables 7.1* and *7.2* give detailed descriptions, of the monitoring programs for the Strategic Conservation Plan and, for the Environmental conditions, we repeat our previous concerns that those agencies charged with administering the program elements will be unable to carry them out effectively. We refer, particularly, to the relevant Auditor General Reports and the shortcomings of past data gathering, from which progress will be measured.

Given the current lack of certainty over the relevant statistics for the Carnaby’s cockatoo and its habitat, the current standard of monitoring must be improved.

5. Compliance Assurance Reporting.

This is an essential section of this action plan, without which the plan would be meaningless.

5.1 Regular Compliance and enforcement.

May we take it that, where the frequency of monitoring given in *Tables and 7.2* states “ongoing” that the monitoring is carried out on a daily or weekly basis? Given the number of agencies involved in monitoring, what protocols are in place to ensure monitoring and compliance results are available to all agencies?

1.1 Non-Compliance actions.

Whilst non-compliance reports, where significant impacts on MNES are identified, will be relayed to the Commonwealth within seven days and later, corrective action likewise reported, details are lacking on the procedure for non-compliance actions, having an impact solely on State environmental objectives and commitments. What will be the reporting procedure for non-compliance where significant impacts on State environmental objectives and commitments are identified under Action Plans G and H? The procedure needs to be described, in detail, together with a timeline. *Fig. 3.1* fails to detail any such action.

1.1 Third Party Audits.

At first sight, this is an encouraging initiative. Having the capacity to engage an independent third party to audit a program, goes a long way towards ensuring an independent and transparent system is established. The makeup of the Executive body now assumes a greater importance, given its role in determining whether or not the circumstances are considered “*extreme*” enough to warrant the third party audit (see earlier comments).

2. Reporting.

2.1 Annual Reporting.

It is encouraging to see the intended extent of this reporting. It is to be hoped that the details given will be easily interpreted when made publicly available. No mention is made, however of any avenue for public comment on the reports. We need assurance that the feedback of report findings will ensure that prompt action is taken to rectify failings in the Action Plans.

2.2 Strategic Conservation Plan – five yearly review.

This Action Plan is subject to approval by the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment. Does the need for this approval extend to “*amendments of a substantial manner (sic?) nature*” having an impact only on State environmental objectives and commitments? In the latter case, will the amended Action Plan be resubmitted to the State Minister for the Environment? Whilst no mention is made of feedback into the Action Plan, *Table 3.1* indicates this will indeed take place, as with the Annual Reporting.

2.3 Publications.

Will the monitoring program information be available in printed form on request? Many individuals still prefer this. Failing to cater for this section of the community (small though it may be) may be seen as a shortcoming in the consultation process.

3. Dispute Resolution.

Whilst not entirely clear, this section may be interpreted to suggest that “Parties” may not include members of the public who find fault with the actions of the Government agencies. Who may be considered a relevant “Party” should be clearly defined in this section.

Conclusion.

The current “business as usual” model has failed to protect the natural environment. It has failed to slow the rapidly-escalating rate of native vegetation clearing, with more vegetation complexes being pushed almost to the point of extinction. The planning and development system has failed totally to protect the natural environment of this region. Whilst strides may have been made in creating wide-ranging environmental initiatives in regional areas, the Perth Peel Region continues to suffer increasing loss of valuable habitat, essential to the survival of endangered or vulnerable species. This strategic approach, once its shortcomings have been addressed, has the capacity to balance the need to preserve our valuable biodiversity with the forecast needs to accommodate a growing population. Even if the modelling proves less than accurate, population pressures will remain a reality and only a truly sustainable model will provide a solution.

In the past, areas of land containing valuable biodiversity values have been secured through the efforts of the WAPC. Thereafter, there has been a failure of process. All such areas have not been transferred to the conservation estate, nor has the management of all these areas been secured. Many Bush Forever sites have no land manager. The effective management of these regionally significant areas is essential. We request that all Bush Forever sites be secured (using MRIF) and transferred to the conservation estate as A-class Nature Reserves, with conservation and passive recreation the only use allowed. This would be in line with the EPA Interim advice, recommendation 1 *“that the State Government protect regionally significant natural areas”*

This action should be completed within a defined time and with an adequate level of staffing and funding guaranteed. Protection of all regionally significant Natural Areas (including P&R designated reserves) should receive similar attention.

Clearing of native vegetation should be avoided. Banksia woodland, is both habitat for critically endangered black cockatoos and is proposed to be declared a threatened ecological community in its own right. Where clearing of native vegetation must occur, the only suitable offset is one that can deliver a net conservation benefit. It must guarantee a ‘like-for-like’ habitat is provided. Failure to ensure this will result in an unacceptable impact on the Carnaby’s Black Cockatoo population and on its long-term survival prospects.

Whilst it is encouraging to see climate change acknowledged and factored in to the IAR State Impact assessment (7.5.2), no consideration appears to have been given to the effects of a warming, drying climate on the increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires. Such events cause severe environmental damage to the biodiversity of affected areas. Recent fires within the region have severely damaged many thousand hectares of valuable habitat, rich in biodiversity. The impact of these fires has been ignored in the impact assumptions of the Plan’s proposed clearing. The final form of the Plan should be seen to take these new factors into consideration.

In its final form, this Plan will need:

- To guarantee a net environmental benefit for the Perth Peel Region. In the current draft, no such assurance can be given. Conservation commitments, objectives and outcomes must be quantifiable with defined measures, timeframes and responsibilities.
- To explain fully and to guarantee the funding arrangements.

- To address the inherent failings of the offsets mechanism and the acknowledged lack of accurate data within the Environmental Impact Assessment information provided.
- To acknowledge the significant increase in the State's greenhouse gas emissions (around 9 million tonnes per year) resulting from the net loss of almost 20,000 hectares of pine plantation.

State and Federal legislation and policies are already in place. If fully implemented, these could ensure future development is "ecologically sustainable." The fact that the EPBC Act already incorporates the principles of ESD, raises the question of, how could so much patently unsustainable development have already taken place under the Act? Unless this draft plan is substantially revised, our biodiversity hotspot will soon fail to satisfy the Global Biodiversity Hotspot criteria.

We request that a significantly redrafted Plan be resubmitted for public comment and that the redrafting team include representatives of the State's peak environment organisation, (recognised as such by the Premier in 2011), the Conservation Council of Western Australia.

Should you require any further information, please feel free to contact me or, in my absence, the Vice President, Steve Gates. A hard copy submission will follow.

Tony Fowler
President
Nature Reserves Preservation Group (Inc.)