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**Nature Reserves Preservation Group, Inc.**

Shire of Kalamunda  
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5 April 2012

**TO: Andrew Fowler-Tutt, Manager Development Services**  
**CC: All Kalamunda Shire Councillors**

**SUBJECT: KALAMUNDA SHIRE BUDGET FOR 2012-2013**

Dear Sir,

Once again, the Nature Reserves Preservation Group (NRPG) appreciates the provision in the current year's budget for some of the environmental initiatives requested in the past and would appreciate your continued support.

We would like to request the following items for inclusion in the Kalamunda Shire budget for the financial year 2012 - 2013. Our requests and rationale are as follows:

**Environmental Human Resources:**

The support from Shire staff, in particular the environmental section, is an essential service. The excellent job they have carried out in the past financial year in helping friends groups preserve and rehabilitate natural reserves is very much appreciated.

Provision of a dedicated full-time bush regeneration team, able to concentrate on weed suppression at appropriate times (eg. post wild-fire or controlled burn or rains producing grass shoots) would, in the long run, reduce the wildfire threat and protect the natural reserve areas from weed ingress.

We note with relief that, despite a difficult year, the staffing level of the Environmental Services has increased with the presence of the full-time Bush Care and Sustainability Officers.

We request that, for the forthcoming financial year, budget allocations be made to ensure the continuance of these staffing levels and contingency allocations be made to cover extra time for the Environmental Reserves Officer, Environmental Projects Officer and Eastern Hills Catchment Management Officer where required. We also repeat our request for funding for a dedicated Bush Regeneration Team, noting its current status as “a future objective” and urging timely support for this concept as an environmental priority.

### **Wildlife Corridor Strategy (1998)**

This **STRATEGY** [not **Plan**, as referred to in the draft local planning strategy] is in dire need of revision and updating. The definition of what constitutes such corridors needs to be expanded to include suitably vegetated private properties, remnant vegetation and open spaces capable of rehabilitation. These areas need to be clearly represented on any updated maps. To this end, we request funding be made available to enable such a revision to be carried out by the Environmental section in the coming year.

### **Erosion Control Works:**

In periods of heavy rainfall, some reserves in the Shire experience very high peak water flows (due to road and other hard-standing runoff), resulting in severe erosion, the destruction of vegetation and, in some cases, significant threat to infrastructure. The associated friends groups working on these reserves will continue to liaise with shire environmental and engineering staff in attempts to reduce damage.

The NRPG once again requests a continuing budget allocation to relevant departments to address such problems on Shire-vested areas of Crumpet Creek, Poison Gully and Toornaart Creek, and on any others known to the Shire Environmental Department. Given the serious and expanding nature of the problem we request such an allocation be given a high priority.

### **Environmental Fund Contribution by Residents:**

We repeat our request that a voluntary Environmental Fund Contribution option, together with a brief description on why it is needed and how it would be used, be included in the rates notice to shire residents. The dollar amount would be optional. It should be stressed that the fund would be dedicated to Shire environmental projects and issues and would be in addition to other environmental budget allocations. (NRPG would be happy to assist with this brief).

Inclusion with the rates would cost the shire no more, potentially bring in more funds for the environmental works suggested and give concerned residents a chance to contribute. It would require only a "tick" box and dollar amount nomination on the notice. **Such a strategy would seem to provide a ‘win-win’ situation and may even be accepted as an ‘in kind’ contribution**

**when attracting outside funding.** We request that resources be allocated for the implementation of this proposal.

We note that no reason was given for the refusal to consider the levy. We therefore request that, in the event of a further refusal, as a courtesy to NRPG, cogent reasons be given.

#### **Environmental Reserve Fund:**

The allocation of 2.5% of proceeds from the reserve rationalisation project, for the “implementation of environmental initiatives”, raises the question “Why only 2.5%”, since the natural environment is stated as being of such importance to the Shire? Could you give some indication of how this figure was arrived at? Would you also give serious thought to :

- Significantly increasing this percentage and
- Ensuring that the “environmental initiatives” so funded are directed solely at saving, protecting and rehabilitating the natural environment.

#### **Native Vegetation Preservation By-Laws and Kalamunda Biodiversity Project:**

In the coming financial year we request that, as a priority, funding be allocated to enable work to be continued by CSAC and staff on updating the Tree and Vegetation Preservation Policy, as the first step in establishing the by-law. An extension of this request is that, since the Shire has no policy concerning clear felling on Shire land and has not considered taking a policy position on the topic, funding be allocated to the Environmental section to investigate creation of such a policy.

#### **Weed Control By-Laws:**

Despite the acknowledged difficulties of establishing and enforcing a by-law, the NRPG proposes that the Shire prepare an enforceable set of Prohibited Weed by-laws to stop the cultivation of invasive weeds within the Shire. We request that resources to develop this be allocated in the budget, to avoid negating taxpayer-funded and volunteer-implemented preservation and revegetation. Private properties in the proximity of reserves or other natural bushland areas should be the first to be targeted.

Taking the establishing of a by-law example given in ‘Native Vegetation Preservation etc.’ [above] perhaps the first step may be the suggested updating of the weeds brochure, with the aim of targeting residences close to areas of natural vegetation. NRPG will be relaying locations of areas of concern to the Environmental section.

The sale and cultivation of invasive weeds is an on-going problem in the preservation of our natural areas. Morning Glory, Blackberry, Watsonia, Freesias, etc are cultivated and inevitably end up as infestations in our reserves, and are particularly hard to combat in creek lines.

Much money and effort is expended controlling these weeds. All is wasted if carelessness or ignorance results in the escape of such weeds from residents' gardens.

### **Updating of Significant Trees Register:**

On last count that we are aware of, there were only 16 trees listed on the Significant Tree Register. The NRPG would like to request funding for resources to dramatically increase the entries on this list, thereby acknowledging the importance of such trees and highlighting the need to help preserve them, at least until other legislative protection is available. To this end, NRPG will be working closely with CSAC and the Environmental section.

### **Community Newspapers Environmental Page:**

Whilst acknowledging the current lack of funds to create and maintain such a page, we would like to repeat our request for funding, in this next financial year, for a regular environmental page in the local community newspaper/s (on at least a quarterly basis), Such a move would provide the Shire with an additional forum for the announcement of any worthwhile environmental initiatives it may launch. The regular provision of environment-related and educational information is, we believe, crucial to enlisting more support for preservation of the natural environment in the Shire and we welcome the steps being taken in this direction.

### **Revision of the Shire Fire Risk Pamphlet:**

Each year, we request funding be allocated for further revision of this pamphlet. While the Shire Fire Risk pamphlet (distributed with the Rates) has been somewhat revised, it still conveys ambiguous information, including:

- Cutting Height: Regardless of the way that the 5cm cutting height is presented, residents get the impression that all of their cutting must be done to this height to meet the requirements. This results in areas of bushland being cut to this level unnecessarily.
- 20 metre Safety Zone: A number of residents consider that this requires that an area 20m from the house in all directions be completely cleared, including any bushland.
- Emphasis on native bushland preservation: The pamphlet places very little emphasis on preserving bushland. There is inadequate emphasis on the value of bushland in good condition, in reducing the fire hazard and on the value of biodiversity.
- Fuel Loading: There is no method given for estimating the fuel loading a resident has on a property. In light of this, residents feel they need to err on the conservative side, clearing and cutting excessively. In fact, it is commonly accepted that native understorey vegetation is a lower fire risk than areas infested with weeds and grasses. If a simple method of estimating fuel loading (tonnes/ha) were given, residents could feel more comfortable with preserving areas of their bush.

The NRPG requests that funding be provided for the Shire to review and revise the pamphlet, addressing at least the above points. Since, in the Roleystone fire, almost half of the houses damaged or destroyed burnt from the inside out [in many cases the surrounding bush remaining intact], we suggest that, instead of the current insistence on a 20m 'Safety Zone', emphasis be placed on strategies to protect the actual building. Resources should be directed at improving home protection from radiant heat and ember attack, ensuring householders are aware of how to protect their homes and providing detailed information on products likely to provide such protection such as fire-retardant products.

Most residents have moved here to enjoy the natural setting. To expect them to adhere to the 20m 'rule' is unreasonable and unachievable. We trust that a revised brochure will emphasise the alternatives available to avoid living in the middle of a block denuded of natural vegetation.

### **Prescribed Burning Research.**

Your response on this topic gives cause for concern simply since it is dependent on action from WAPC. We repeat our request that funding be set aside for the Shire to engage the services of an ecologist to assess those reserves considered to pose the **highest** risk to housing and infrastructure. In light of recent events and the importance of tailoring a burn (when absolutely required) to the vegetation on a specific reserve, we consider such an action urgently needed. The advice from such a consultant would be used to guide both the controlled burning of the reserves and the post-fire weed eradication.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these requests and we look forward once again to a positive outcome.

Yours faithfully,

Tony Fowler  
Acting President  
Nature Reserves Preservation Group