



NATURE RESERVES PRESERVATION GROUP

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Subject: Draft Local Biodiversity Strategy

This submission is on behalf of Nature Reserves Preservation Group (NRPG) Inc. NRPG welcomes the opportunity to comment on this draft, which we hope will build on the Shire's ground-breaking District Conservation Strategy (DCS), the first such Local Government strategy in Western Australia. This initiative was followed by the first Local Biodiversity Strategy (2008). At the time of the 2008 strategy, NRPG commended the Shire for its initiative and hard work on developing the document, encouraged to see that both these strategies acknowledged and reflected the community's concern for the natural environment. Community involvement is a critical and essential component of any successful local government strategy and it is encouraging to see this acknowledged in the current draft.

1. INTRODUCTION

"When publishing its 2008 Local Biodiversity Strategy the City was the first local government in Australia to adopt a strategy developed in accordance with the State Government endorsed methodology for biodiversity conservation planning at local level (Environmental Protection Authority 2008)."

The above extract demonstrates the Shire's pro-active environmental stance in 2008, continuing its 1996 environmental initiative. The City staff must be commended for the vast amount of work carried out to date in the preparation of the current draft Strategy.

Given the length and complexity of this draft and to make for easy reading, sections of most interest to NRPG requiring comment, will be italicised and where required for clarity, page numbers given, followed by 'boxed' NRPG comments on the text (as above).

Introduction (cont'd)

"Review of the City's 2008 Local Biodiversity Strategy found the Strategy was not used effectively to support land use planning decisions or to increase the protection status of identified significant natural areas in the City".

Given this stated failure in the **use** of the 2008 Strategy, it will be incumbent on the City staff and Councillors to ensure that the hard work expended on this draft, is not squandered through lack of application or a failure to implement fully the **Section 6 Action Plan**.

“Due to changes in legislation and policy frameworks relating to biodiversity as well as in the biodiversity status in the City, an update of the 2008 Local Biodiversity Strategy is warranted. The key changes include ...”

The need for this update is clearly set out. At local government, State and Federal level, changes have rendered some earlier local government initiatives obsolete. Of particular concern are the State Government ‘infill’ requirements and the acknowledged failings of the Federal Government’s Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, in its inability to protect the environment or to conserve biodiversity.

“An update of the City’s 2008 Local Biodiversity Strategy was also identified as a priority action in the City’s Environmental Land Use Planning Strategy, adopted in July 2019”.

Whilst this priority action was welcome (being given a “high” priority), it should be noted this rating appears to be solely in relation to Section 4.7.5 Bushfire and Biodiversity.

1.1 BENEFITS OF CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY LOCALLY

“The local community values the natural environment highly”.

The remarkably high percentage of the community considering the trees and vegetation of the City important and supporting protection and enhancing of the natural environment, is both striking and encouraging. This gives a clear mandate to staff and councillors to do all in their power to protect those values (see later comments on Voluntary Environmental Levy).

“Management of natural resources provide for a range of local job opportunities, including employment of Aboriginal people whether in knowledge sharing or direct on-ground management.”

The land management skills of the indigenous peoples, are being increasingly recognised by local government and State authorities, such as DBCA and DFES. It is encouraging to see that such employment appears to be more than simple ‘window dressing’. In the case of the authorities mentioned, such staff are given important roles (rather than mere sinecures). The City has already received a ‘traditional burning’ presentation from DFES indigenous officers and, it is hoped the City will take full advantage of the traditional knowledge of such staff, directly and indirectly.

“There is also growing evidence of higher restorative benefits to human health and wellbeing when easy access is available to diverse green spaces as opposed to the simplified environments maintained in landscaped parks with a limited number of plant species...”

This differentiation of the benefits generated by natural as opposed to ‘constructed’ or ‘landscaped’ green spaces, is important. Care should be taken not to place too much stress on the value of our carefully managed green spaces, at the expense of areas of perhaps less visually attractive bushland. NRPG’s 2018 submission on the draft Public Open Space Strategy (POS), was highly critical of the Assessment matrix used (a totally unsuitable construct of the Department of Sport and Recreation). The above quote gives hope that the assessment shortcomings of the POS will not be repeated.

1.2 LEGISLATION AND POLICY SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Given the wealth of legislation directed at biodiversity conservation, an inability to arrest biodiversity decline indicates a failure to use this legislation effectively. Whilst International, National and State legislation may provide an overarching framework, it is the application within that framework, at the local level, that is perhaps most relevant. We are still seeing unacceptable biodiversity loss within the City limits. It is encouraging to hope that all these Strategies, Conventions and Protocols will play a part in framing the City's own Strategy.

“The State’s Planning and Development Act 2005, Schedule 7... establishes biodiversity as a valid planning consideration, incorporating provisions for its preservation and conservation...” “Thus, a local planning strategy and the local planning scheme provide the most effective mechanisms for integrating biodiversity conservation objectives into local decisions (WAPC 2011).”

Both these extracts support an earlier NRPNG request for such “*integration*” to take the form of ensuring all “*local decisions*” include consideration of biodiversity values (May 2018 draft Local Environment Strategy submission). To ensure the environment receives a fair hearing in “*local decisions*”, the City of Kalamunda should apply an ‘**Environment in all Policies**’ (EiAP) approach. Again, we request this be explored by staff, Council and KEAC. Implemented at the Local Government level, it would be a ground-breaking initiative, potentially capable of coping, in an environmentally sensitive way, with the requirements of State Planning Policy (SPP) 3.7, future development projects and the State infill quotas.

The Case for “Environment in all Policies”: Lessons from the “Health in all Policies” Approach in Public health. Brown, G.R. and Rutherford, I.D. (2008).

“The City’s Local Planning Scheme includes the following support for biodiversity conservation:” (p.10).

Despite the list of “*support*”, “*objectives*” and “*requirements*” designed to ensure biodiversity conservation, all are lacking in detail and vague in nature e.g. “*make provisions for the conservation...*” “*assist in the protection of...*”. This loose terminology may have contributed to the continuing loss of valuable environmental assets under the scheme.

“Opportunities for increasing provisions for biodiversity consideration and protection via the City’s land use planning tools include:” (p.11).

These four options may go some way to correcting the apparent limitations of the local planning scheme and should be thoroughly explored and if found effective, employed swiftly.

1.3 LOCAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY SCOPE

“The Strategy seeks to identify least cost opportunities for improving the protection status and condition of local natural areas and facilitate engagement with relevant stakeholders.”

The unfortunate phrase “*least cost opportunities*” generates great concern and anger. Whilst it is accepted that the City should not waste ratepayers money and should exercise restraint in expenditure, confining these opportunities to the cheapest option is not acceptable. Every “*opportunity*” to protect and improve the environment should be explored. If found effective, that opportunity should be implemented. **This phrase should be deleted from the draft.**

*“For the purposes of the City’s 2020 Local Biodiversity Strategy, **Local Natural Areas** are defined as natural areas that exist.”*

Addressed later are our concerns for the complete lack of protection for land designated Parks and Recreation (P&R). **(For correction, the later Glossary definition, in dot point 1, lacks “except for lands identified by the City as ‘City’s LNAs’.”)**

2 BIODIVERSITY ASSETS

“...native vegetation on the Swan Coastal Plain portion of the City being reduced to the critical threshold of 10% of its preclearing status...”. (p.15).

It is this bioregion of the City which is in need of the greatest protection and which, in general, should be allotted the highest priority. Development pressures within the city, together with those exerted by external developments (such as those at Perth airport and adjacent industrial areas), increase the urgency for action in this area. With the changing climate, there will be an increase in environmental threats. This section of the Strategy should be sufficient to convince council they must do all in their power to protect such unique biodiversity. The threat to these unique assets is increasing, the window of opportunity to manage them is shrinking and prompt action is needed.

2.1 VEGETATION, THREATENED AND PRIORITY ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

“There are significant differences in vegetation distribution across the City ... Less than 10% of the pre-European extent of vegetation remains on the Swan Coastal Plain portion of the City while vegetation of the Jarrah Forest bioregion is well retained.” (p. 16)

“Most vegetation complexes in the City are well represented on lands providing protection but there are five vegetation complexes not protected locally and four of these are also not adequately protected across the bioregions ... Increasing the protection status of these vegetation complexes where within the scope of the City’s influence is one of the Local Biodiversity Strategy’s objectives.” (ibid.).

Increased protection measures must acknowledge and anticipate the rapidly increasing pressures on the biodiversity of these complexes. It is encouraging to see this objective in the draft. See also comments above.

Threatened Ecological Communities

“...plant communities in Jarrah Forest are under threat from the impacts of dieback ... and high risk of altered fire regimes.” (p. 18)

There is a need for dieback protocols to be strictly observed. Whilst controls on its spread by walkers and mountain bikers appear to be operating well, the City’s emergency services may benefit from updating their dieback biosecurity protocols. This may decrease the likelihood of vehicles spreading the pathogen when on exercises or fire calls in bushland areas. ‘Updating’ may involve ‘refresher’ talks to brigades prior to the fire season. The increasing intensity of planned and unplanned fires requires closer attention be paid to protecting known

areas of peat, with their unique biodiversity, within the Jarrah Forest. A Denbarker prescribed burn (Nov. 2019) totally destroyed an ecologically significant peat system.

“Seven threatened ecological communities mapped in the City are listed under the BC Act and six of these are also listed under the Commonwealth’s Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)...” (p.18).

“The principles are in similar terms to those provided in the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (the EPBC Act)...” [Extract from Biodiversity Conservation Act 2019].

Both the WA Biodiversity Conservation Act and the Commonwealth EPBC Act (currently under review) have required amendments designed to address shortcomings in biodiversity protection. The inclusion of the principles of *“ecologically sustainable development”* in the BC Act is a welcome step yet, using the EPBC Act as a model does little for biodiversity conservation. The EPBC Act has been found wanting and in urgent need of revision, if it is to become effective. Despite the presence of both acts, biodiversity values continue to be lost.

“Priority ecological communities are ecological communities for which there is not enough information available to list them as threatened. There are two priority ecological communities listed in the City of Kalamunda, classified as:

- *P3 – Poorly known ecological communities*
- *P4 – Ecological communities that are adequately known, rare but not threatened or meet criteria for Near Threatened, or that have been recently removed from the threatened list. These communities require regular monitoring.”* (p. 19).

This monitoring should be given high priority. Staff must be provided with adequate funding and resources for the task. Tables 6 and 7 (pp. 21-23) contain a large number of *“new”* species, listed since the 2008 LBS. This fact, together with application of the underlying *“precautionary principle”* should ensure the City devotes time and money to keeping up with rapid improvements in species detection and listing.

TABLE 5: THREATENED AND PRIORITY ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES MAPPED IN THE CITY OF KALAMUNDA (DBCA 2020)

Note the discrepancies between the Commonwealth and State conservation status allotted to the communities. See also earlier comments on shortcomings of the relevant acts.

2.2 CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE PLANTS - THREATENED AND PRIORITY FLORA

“Nearly a quarter (48 reserves) of the natural area reserves managed by the City of Kalamunda retain threatened and priority plants.” (p. 20)

“This and other similar studies (Nge, F., 2019) demonstrate that focusing only on species listed as threatened or priority by legislation does not adequately describe the conservation significance of natural areas.” (p. 21).

These comments reinforce our earlier comments, stressing the need for assigning a high priority to the monitoring of all ecological communities within the City.

“6 Yule Brook region – bushland areas along Yule Brook, from Lesmurdie Falls to Canning River, including some of the most diverse plant communities on the Swan Coastal Plain such as Greater Brixton Street Wetlands and Hartfield Park.” (p.21).

NRPG, in the past, has advocated for the establishment of a Regional Park to include the above area of rich, unique biodiversity. Hans Lamber, Professor of Plant Biology at the University of Western Australia, delivered a talk to the 2020 NRPG AGM. *“A jewel in the Crown of a Biodiversity Hotspot”*, highlighting the species richness of the Yule Brook, Crystal Brook and Brixton Street Wetlands and positing the creation of a Yule Brook Regional Park.

2.3 FUNGI

“There are many more fungi in Australia than plants. It is estimated only about 10% of Australia’s fungi have been discovered and named. Yet, fungi play significant roles in bushland ecosystem as they transport, store, release and recycle nutrients.”

“DBCA’s records (January 2020) show 52 records of fungi in the City, including two Priority 3 species of fungi, one carrying the City’s name; Amanita kalamundae or Kalamunda Lepidella.”

“Building the knowledge base on local fungi will improve the understanding of ecosystem health and inform future management.”

Given the importance of fungi to *“bushland ecosystems”* and the wealth of fungi yet to be discovered, it is puzzling to find so little space devoted to this topic. This was also a failing in the 2008 LBS, in which no *“Action”* item in table 18 (p.89), related to fungi. Whilst *“building the knowledge base on local fungi”* is mentioned, no actions are contemplated. This may be an oversight but, with one species *“carrying the City’s name”* perhaps this shortcoming should be addressed in the final document?

2.4 CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE ANIMALS – THREATENED AND PRIORITY FAUNA

“Current records (DBCA, January 2020) list 407 native species and 13 introduced species of fauna in the City. Thirteen require special protection. Five new priority fauna were recorded in the City since 2008.” (p. 24).

*“26 species of mammals were known to have lived in the area stretching from Lesmurdie Falls to Brixton **Steer** (sic) Wetlands (Bush Forever Area 387) and lists 10 as considered to be present:” (Bradshaw, D. (2019)). (p. 26).*

“Maintaining the patterns of flooding and drying of wetlands is critical to retaining the diversity of frogs, reptiles and other animals that are dependent on water. Alteration of natural flooding patterns results in the loss of species like the Moaning Frog or Gunther’s Toadlet as they rely on specific water levels during their life cycle (Bamford, M. 2019)”. (Ibid.).

It is vital that monitoring of ecological communities continues to be a high priority. The continuing loss of wetlands within the City has always been of great concern to NRPG. Developments such as that resulting from the 2010 High Wycombe Urban Precinct MRS amendment, have seen the loss of significant wetlands. This development saw the loss of what could have been preserved as an iconic ephemeral wetland, serving as an entrance statement to the Shire. It is now a parking lot for heavy machinery.

2.4 (Sic) WETLANDS AND WATERWAYS.

“Maintenance of healthy waterways and sensitive management of drainage through the landscape is critical to maintaining the diversity of aquatic ecosystems and water dependent terrestrial ecosystems ...” (p. 29).

This assertion is at variance with past treatments of waterways and drainage and, whilst many improvements have been made in their management, more needs to be done to preserve such assets (see earlier comments on the loss of such areas). **This section appears to be mis-numbered and should read 2.5.**

“Increasing the protection status of Conservation Category and Resource Enhancement wetlands in the City of Kalamunda is one of the objectives of this biodiversity strategy.” (Ibid.).

With a drying climate, increases in temperature and extreme weather events and increasing pressures from development proposals, the long term species’ environmental climate tolerance and adaptive capacity should be examined and factored in to this strategy. It is important this objective becomes more than simply an aspirational ‘tick-the-box’ target.

“The proposed ‘Yule Brook Regional Park’ consists of bushland along Yule Brook and Crystal Brook from Lesmurdie Falls to Canning River, including bushland and wetlands of Hartfield Park and Greater Brixton Street wetlands (Lambers, H., 2019).” (p. 30).

See earlier comments on Section 2.2 on this proposal. With the addition of ‘Climate Action’ to the State environmental portfolio, it is hoped this proposal will gain rapid acceptance from State Government and support from the City of Kalamunda.

“In 2011, a report on 10 year monitoring of water quality at the lower end of the Yule Brook catchment found that of the monitored catchments, Yule Brook contributed the second-highest nitrogen and phosphorus loads to the Canning River ... A more recent report into water quality within the Yule Brook catchment concluded that a 25% reduction in nitrogen is required...” (p. 31).

NRPG has long advocated for wider riparian buffers when developments take place along waterways. Such an increase, when incorporated in a Local Development Plan, would help reduce the nitrogen flow into waterways from new subdivisions and their infrastructure.

3 THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY

All the *“proposed additional responses”* to listed threats are welcome and are supported. NRPG comments concentrate on actions NRPG considers require improvement.

“Threat. Introduced plants (weeds)” (p. 32).

Verges under City control, particularly those bordering natural reserves, should receive highest priority. More on-ground staff are required, together with adequate budget funding. The information provided to private landholders should include a warning of the dangers of buying plants considered weeds in the State, from retail outlets and, the community education

programme updated accordingly. The City should be proactive in approaching such outlets requesting, as a civic duty, the withdrawal from sale of such plants. This approach should not be left entirely to residents.

“Threat. Feral animals preying on native animals and reducing habitat (loss of nesting hollows)”
(p. 33).

The City of Kalamunda is already involved in these additional responses (working closely with DBCA and EMRC) and is in the process of developing Cat local laws. It continues its other pest control measures with great success in fox control and is to be commended for finally tackling the highly contentious domestic cat problem.

“Threat. Land clearing, modification of watercourses, land fill and over-use of fertilisers”
(p.34).

“Participation in the Hills Catchment Management Program or other regional catchment management initiative” (Ibid.).

Addressing these threats requires a regional approach since streams and other waterways ignore local government boundaries. Participation in such regional programmes is essential in countering these threats. See also, earlier comments on wider riparian buffer zones required.

“Threat. Arson and lack of consideration of ecological community needs in timing of bushfire risk mitigation measures” (p. 35).

- *Use the local natural area prioritisation to inform land use planning, avoiding further subdivisions in high conservation value areas*
- *Develop an adaptive weed control program to facilitate post-fire management of conservation areas*
- *Adopt an emergency wildlife care strategy to facilitate effective response to major bushfires*
- *Set up a fire frequency and extent monitoring database”*

Whilst all the proposed measures are necessary and are supported, it is essential all are implemented.

Any proposals to use a planning tool preventing creation of subdivisions in “*high conservation areas*” should be encouraged.

Any “*weed control programme*” failing to fund and carry out post-fire weed control, will simply encourage vigorous weed growth, providing increased fuel for any subsequent fires. The recent Wooroloo fires highlighted the need for such a “*wildlife care strategy*”.

The establishment of the “*fire ...monitoring database*” would provide staff and brigades with another tool with which to tackle planned mitigation measures and wildfires.

“Threat. Introduced plant diseases” (Ibid.).

- *Adopt dieback hygiene procedures for all City operations e.g. roadworks, infrastructure development and maintenance”*

These procedures should extend to the Kalamunda State Emergency Service (SES), Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and the Volunteer Bushfire Brigade (VBFB). Whilst already in place for those bodies, procedures should be updated, enforced and compliance monitored. See earlier comments on p. 18 die-back topic.

4. LOCAL BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION VISION AND OBJECTIVES.

“In implementing the Local Biodiversity Strategy, the City of Kalamunda seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- 4.1. To increase the protection **status of priority natural areas in the City**, including on Local Government managed or owned lands, and on private land;*
- 4.2. To appropriately manage local natural areas **to reduce threats**, considering the identified local biodiversity conservation priorities;*
- 4.3. To increase the viability and resilience of natural areas by **establishing buffers and ecological linkages**; considering the impacts of climate change;*
- 4.4. To **integrate** biodiversity considerations across all areas of City’s business and operations;*
- 4.5. To achieve long term community engagement in biodiversity management*

These are all worthy objectives, enthusiastically supported by NRPG. Past experience however provides a note of caution in that support. Recommendations of the October 1998 Wildlife Corridor Strategy described correctly, in the Executive Summary as: *“an innovative and pro-active initiative which originated from the Shire’s District Conservation Strategy produced in 1995”* were not fully implemented, the Strategy languishing in the archives for many years, despite the Strategy stating it should be reviewed. This present Strategy is the latest in a long line of environmental initiatives, all of which have given environmental staff a massive workload. Over many years, this has been appreciated and commended in all NRPG submissions. Given the comment at 4.1 (above), this may be a case for employing the **“Environment in all policies”** concept cited in comments on Section 1.2 of the strategy.

5. IMPLEMENTATION.

5.1.1 PRIORITISATION OF LOCAL NATURAL AREAS

“While retention of natural areas should be facilitated where feasible, there are natural areas (high priority LNAs) which should be formally protected via adequate mechanisms to ensure their long-term land tenure security and management to prevent degradation.” (p. 38)

NRPG is concerned at the lack of any protection for those areas designated ‘Parks and Recreation’ (P&R), under the Metropolitan Region Scheme. A P&R reserve (Reserve 30314 Wilkins Road Kalamunda), under threat of rezoning from an MRS amendment and later development, saw the City proposing another P&R City reserve as an offset. Given the lack of any protection for this offset reserve, this appeared to be a farcical proposal. The vulnerability of all P&R reserves containing high biodiversity should be addressed.

“It is important to note that this dataset represents a snapshot in time ... Low prioritisation scores cannot be interpreted as those areas not containing significant biodiversity.” (p. 42)
“Any final decisions regarding protection or land use change need to be based on field assessments to confirm the indicative biodiversity values. Finally, specialist’s advice is required to determine the significance of the known population of threatened plants or animals as the distribution of some threatened species can be very limited.” (Ibid.)

The above two extracts (stating the inherent shortcomings of these initial steps), should be noted and the initial assessments treated only as the starting point for the final priority assessment. The prioritisation process will need to pass through several steps before the final priorities are agreed.

5.1.2 ECOLOGICAL LINKAGES AND VEGETATION CONNECTIVITY

“...the effects of urbanisation on long term viability of plant communities is not well-understood.” (p. 44).

More research is required into these effects, given that urbanisation inevitably leads to fragmentation of habitat. Given the possibility of long term harm to plant communities, this lack of understanding should be factored into all urbanisation projects, particularly where valuable plant communities may be affected.

“To increase the capacity of natural areas to retain biodiversity in fragmented urban landscapes and adapt to climate change, the recommended management responses include the following (Molloy et al 2009, Commonwealth of Australia 2010, CSIRO 2014)” (p. 44).
“Establishment and maintenance of effective ecological linkages address many of the above recommendations.” (Ibid.)

For many years, NRPG submissions have stressed the need to establish and preserve valuable linkages such as wildlife corridors and green links. The value and importance of such areas is increasing. Given the increasing demand for infill development in the foothills and the increasing ‘heat-island effect’ (compounded by airport industrial and aviation development and large treeless industrial areas), such linkages assume even more importance, giving flora and fauna a better chance of migrating locally in response to the changing climate. The listed “*management responses*” and their implementation within this Strategy would be welcomed by NRPG.

“Regional ecological linkages for the Perth region were mapped by the Perth Biodiversity Project in 2004. Since then, land use changes affected the feasibility of some regional linkages in parts of Perth.” (p.44).

Comparing the linkages map (Fig. 9), with that in the 2008 Local Biodiversity Strategy (Fig. 5, p. 46) there is a comforting similarity. Perhaps (as they were in the 2008 map), the waterways could be included in Fig. 9, Regional and Local Ecological Linkages? It would have been interesting to have had the 2021 image overlaid on the 2008 image for comparison.

“Include areas with high Connectivity Reach values and with least cost opportunities for retention to act as stepping-stones within linkages.” (p. 46).

This sentence could see extremely valuable areas discarded, simply on a financial cost basis. Attractive as this approach may be to the financial arm of the City, this is not a sound practice in such a Strategy and should be amended as follows: **“Include areas with high Connectivity Reach values, for retention to act as stepping-stones within linkages”**. Some areas discarded on a costs basis, may have been vital to the integrity of a linkage.

5.2 TOWARDS LOCAL BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

“To allow monitoring the effectiveness of the proposed implementation mechanisms and the levels of implementation, adoption of targets specific to each objective of the City’s Local Biodiversity Strategy is recommended. Table 11 lists the recommended targets and references sections of this document which discuss how to achieve them.” (p. 47).

TABLE 11: LOCAL BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION TARGETS

The ‘Objectives’ and, ‘Targets to be achieved by 2031’ are all supported by NRPG, though we feel some targets, are not ambitious enough. Past experience reveals that such targets are seldom met, therefore they should be designed with this in mind. There is still concern over references to P&R designated land throughout this document, since no effective protective mechanism is in place or contemplated (see earlier comments). Will having a management plan for such a reserve, give any degree of protection?

Objective. *“To establish biodiversity consideration as standard across all areas for biodiversity conservation”*

“4.1. Local Biodiversity Strategy objectives are integrated into the City’s land use planning tools”

How? *“Integration into City’s Local Planning Strategy, Local Planning Scheme and adoption of Local Planning Policies -See Section 5.2.1”*

“4.2 All staff use the City’s environmental checklist procedures prior project planning and development”

Both 4.1 and 4.2 indicate a welcome move towards the earlier **“Environment in all Policies”** request (comment on Section 1.2). As with the ground-breaking nature of both the District Conservation Strategy (1996) and the adoption of the Local Biodiversity Strategy (2008), agreeing to investigate adoption of this initiative within his LBS, would again place the City at the forefront of Local Government environmental reform. To have these *“objectives”* *“integrated into City’s Local Planning Strategy”* would ensure improved biodiversity conservation within the City.

5.2.1 OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE PROTECTION AND RETENTION OF LOCAL NATURAL AREAS

“The City of Kalamunda manages nine Crown reserves with vesting purpose listed as conservation or protection of flora ... and not all are recognised as ‘biodiversity assets’ in the City’s Public Open Space Strategy (2018).”

This reinforces NRPB criticism, in its 2018 submission, of the format of this Strategy. *“It is disappointing to have the Department of Sport and Recreation, together with the Planning Institute of Australia WA, advising local government through the Public Planning and Design Guide WA and State Public Parklands Strategy.”* A totally unsuitable framework for any environmental document. (Extract from NRPB submission on POS).

“While the increase in lands reserved for Parks and Recreation in the City is significant, the land tenure under the Land Administration Act 1997 for these lands has not changed and thus no significant increase in formal protection of native vegetation in the City was recorded since 2008” (p.52).

“This MRS land use classification alone is not considered adequate at providing formal protection for native vegetation.” (Ibid.).

See comments on Table 11 (p.47) regarding this lack of protection. NRPB welcomes the proposed new reserve classifications to be introduced into the City’s Local Planning Scheme.

“To recognise conservation value of these City managed reserves, introduction of a new local reserve classification into the City’s Local Planning Scheme is proposed.” (p. 52)

Any initiative to highlight and protect conservation values is welcome. Unfortunately the phrase *“City managed reserves”* excludes valuable bushland areas such as Reserve 30314, Lot 59, Wilkins Road Kalamunda, for which the city has no management responsibility, yet which provide vital biodiversity linkages between areas under City management. This deficiency needs to be addressed.

5.2.1.1 BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

TABLE 12: BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PRIORITY CATEGORIES, AREA OF NATIVE VEGETATION MAPPED WITHIN EACH CATEGORY AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR CONSERVATION (pp. 53-57)

All recommended *“actions for conservation”* in this table are supported by NRPB and **all** should be implemented, if this Strategy is to provide any measurable improvement in the level of biodiversity protection within the City.

5.2.1.2 INTEGRATING BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES INTO LAND USE PLANNING

“Local Planning Scheme ... It is recommended that the City’s Local Planning Scheme be amended to include new local reserve classification e.g. Local Conservation Open Space and strengthen provisions for biodiversity during development approvals on lands identified as containing significant biodiversity.” (p. 57/8).

This recommendation should be implemented and, the *“Other opportunities”* certainly explored in detail. All these actions should serve to give ‘teeth’ to efforts to preserve biodiversity values.

“Update of the City’s Public Open Space Strategy (2018)” (p. 60).

“It is recommended that the City update the Biodiversity Asset POS mapping to integrate the findings of this strategy regarding the significance of POS to biodiversity conservation.”
(p.61).

See earlier comments on the perceived failings of this Strategy (at 5.2.1) and the following comment, reflecting NRPB concern over the possible threats to reserves:

“Within the City of Kalamunda, Planning and Environment Departments seem to be worlds apart. The Planning section is charged with reviewing its Public Open Space Strategy at designated times. From the list of 21 lots considered for ‘transfer’, we can only assume there was little, if any input from the City’s Environment section and, that the process of ‘consultation with internal departments’ (1.7.1, p.8.), failed. If this is so, future reviews of this strategy need to ensure this failure is not repeated.” (NRPB submission).

5.2.2.1 CITY MANAGED LOCAL NATURAL AREAS

“Implementation of several of the Local Environment Strategy actions will be facilitated by this document.”

“In addition to the specific actions listed in the City’s Local Environment Strategy, the following additional recommendations are made:

- *Develop, adopt and implement a bushland management master plan for all City managed Local Natural Areas;*
- *Secure and protect natural areas within mapped ecological linkages and undertake restoration of degraded areas to strengthen connectivity between protected areas within the regional and local ecological linkages.”* (p.61).

Anything which drives implementation of Strategy actions or recommendations is welcome. Both dot-points are long overdue, a *“bushland management master plan”* will need ‘teeth’ to be effective and once again, it is hoped council will implement these recommendations.

“However, road reserves are mapped and classified according to roadside conservation committee protocols and can act as corridors and buffers.” (p.62).

More attention is needed to the maintenance of City road reserves. Their value as potential *“corridors and buffers”* should be fully utilised, regardless of how they are defined in planning documents. Many sections of them could be treated as potential Local Natural Areas, provided they were properly maintained. Increased budget allocations will be needed to ensure there are sufficient staff employed on this task. Verge maintenance staff are already stretched to the limit. See also our comments to **Section 3 Threats to Biodiversity**, (p.32).

5.2.2.2 MANAGEMENT OF BIODIVERSITY ON PRIVATE LAND

In any discussions on managing biodiversity, reducing native vegetation clearing on private land is ‘the elephant in the room’. Over many years it has been a subject on which council has been reluctant to act, consigning any difficult option to the ‘too-hard basket’. Whilst this reluctance is understandable, growing research on the topic indicates that a failure to address the private land clearing problem will cancel out **all** benefits obtained from vegetation retention and improvement on City-managed land.

“It is recommended that the City...” (pp.65-66).

All these proposals are supported and welcomed by NRPG. Assessing and improving the environmental understanding of private land holders, emphasising the contribution of residential blocks and gardens to biodiversity, as stepping stones in linkages and corridors and, extending the *“Plants for Residents”* programme, are excellent measures. Continuing the “carrot” approach (implementation of *“an incentives programme”*) should focus on showing that, for the land owner, it will bring rewards in several forms. It is essential they can see they receive a material benefit from not clearing their land.

“In addition to the information resources the City already provides, it is recommended that the following additional information is developed:

- *Responsible cat ownership” (p.66).*

NRPG is delighted to see that this recommendation has already taken effect. The City is preparing a draft policy, designed to address the shocking level of predation by domestic cats within Local Government Areas in the Metropolitan Area.

5.2.3 INTEGRATION OF BIODIVERSITY CONSIDERATION INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

See **“Environment in all Policies”** comment on Section 1.2 and throughout submission.

5.2.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

“To effectively engage the local community and other land managers in the City, it is important to maintain consistent communication on the City’s objectives for biodiversity conservation. This should be facilitated by:” (p. 67).

All these dot point actions should be implemented, with emphasis on those below. With the developing rail link to the foothills, the second proposal assumes even more significance in helping revive the City’s tourism businesses.

“Referring to the findings of the Local Biodiversity Strategy when providing comments on subdivision and scheme amendment proposals.”

“Engaging with local business groups and tourism operators to maximise the City’s position as a destination for tourism (Bibbulmun Track, wildflowers, wellbeing stays and unique arts stays).”

“Continued support to the volunteer community groups” (p. 68).

The City has spent much time, money and energy to help establish and support these groups. NRPG acknowledges this effort and welcomes this continued support and seeing it given *“the highest priority.”* Unfortunately, more stringent safety requirements are being placed on such volunteers. These may have the effect of discouraging community members from remaining in such groups. NRPG would welcome the City investigating less onerous safety and training requirements, whilst still feeling confident it had fulfilled its ‘duty of care’

6. ACTION PLAN

The accompanying tables (pp. 69-73) contain text already addressed in the relevant sections of this submission. Selected text has been extracted for comment. Whilst it is encouraging to see no actions have been allotted “low” priority, the “complete by 2031” definition may explain this. If 10 years may elapse before an action must be completed, perhaps that category should be deleted? Given the rapidly changing climate and increasing public awareness of and concern for biodiversity, it is essential the allotted priorities are regularly reviewed.

Action. “5.4 Develop a monitoring and reporting schedule”

KPI. “Bi-annual report on progress with implementation of the Local Biodiversity Strategy and on the status of biodiversity in the Shire presented to the Council and the community”.

This monitoring and reporting is essential if this Strategy is to serve any purpose. Given the rate of staff turnover in some sections and the changes in councillors over time, there is an established potential for long-term memory loss. This can result in a strategy and its recommendations being forgotten and therefore effectively ignored, to the detriment of the biodiversity. Regular reporting avoids this possibility.

APPENDIX A: VEGETATION STATISTICS

“6. Further discussion was undertaken with City Officers and consideration of current planning processes, future plans, revegetation programs, potential future offset sites etc was taken into consideration in the final delineation of LNAs”. (p. 2).

The phrase “offset sites” always triggers a warning with NRPG. This basically flawed system together with its guidelines always results in a net loss of biodiversity. It is hoped that, in future, no P&R designated land will be offered as an offset for the destruction of vegetation and loss of biodiversity (through, for example, an MRS amendment) on another block of land managed by the City.

APPENDIX C: MAPS

TABLE C-2: PROPOSED CONSERVATION RESERVES etc. ...

Reserve 29013, adjoining R30142 and Mundy Regional Park, is **not** on this list. At the request of NRPG (because of its biodiversity values and its unspoiled condition), the Shire of Kalamunda took vesting of Reserve 29013 on 27 November 1992. The **2008** Local Biodiversity Strategy includes this reserve in “The reserves in good or better condition that should be protected further by altering the reserve purpose”. (Section 13.2.4 Darling Scarp Representation Target. p. 105). If this reserve has failed to receive “further” protection, other similar valuable reserves may have been missed. If so, this should not be surprising, given the immense amount of work required by City staff and consultants. See later comment on Appendix F, where both reserves are listed.

APPENDIX E: 2008 KALAMUNDA LOCAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY REVIEW REPORT

“This report summarises the findings of a review into the effectiveness of the 2008 LBS in increasing the protection of biodiversity in the City of Kalamunda. The key findings include:”

The report is very important in highlighting the failure of the Shire/City to act on the 2008 Local Biodiversity Strategy recommendations and, the continuing loss of biodiversity values since 2008. It also outlines actions carried out which have benefitted the environment.

Failures include:

the increased rate of clearing of native vegetation, only a *“slight increase in formal protection”*, minimal use of vesting purpose changes, a failure to increase protection of biodiversity or vegetation complexes and, a failure *“to adopt any Local Planning Policies focusing on biodiversity protection”* or to implement *“local planning scheme provisions amendments”*.

Despite these failures, positive measures taken include:

Developing a *“strategic approach to management of reserves vested in the City”*, increasing the number of Friends Groups working closely with the City *“managing and restoring the significant natural areas across the City”*, implementing many restoration projects, the continuation of the *‘Plants for Residents’* programme, a *“dedicated Environmental Services Unit”* and, a bushland information package for private landholders.

Ecological Linkages (p.10).

“The City’s ELUPS (2019) identify (sic) preparation of a ‘Green Links Masterplan’ and a ‘Street Tree Masterplan’ as the priority action (Action 8.1.1). However, the ‘Street Tree and Streetscape Management’ policy, adopted in August 2019 does not refer to ecological linkages and it focuses on public landscape management to maintain the City’s identity, contributing to improved resident’s health and wellbeing.” (p. 10).

Despite the importance of considering *“residents health and wellbeing”* the ELUP Strategy should be amended to refer to the importance of ecological linkages.

2.2 REPRESENTATIONAL TARGETS

*“Since the adoption of the 2008 LBS, vegetation representative of the Forrestfield vegetation complex **declined** (locally and regionally).” (p. 15).*

*“• Local protection target of at least 15 ha of Forrestfield vegetation complex protected **has not been achieved yet;**” (p. 16).*

*“• Since the adoption of the 2008 LBS, vegetation representative of the Southern River vegetation complex **declined (locally and regionally).**”*

*• Local protection target of at least 7 ha **has not been achieved yet.***

*• At the bio-regional scale, Darling Scarp remains **under-represented** in lands with conservation purpose (less than 10%) and its **extent reduced** across the City.*

*• **No increase in formal protection achieved** as a result of LBS implementation.” (p. 17).*

“• Since the adoption of the 2008 LBS, vegetation representative of the Yarragil 1

vegetation complex **declined locally**.

• **No increase in formal protection of Yarragil 1** has been achieved as a result of LBS implementation.
(p. 18).

All vegetation complexes have declined since the 2008 LBS. The “Summary” section for each complex (noted above), is a sad commentary on the failure of past strategies to arrest the loss of biodiversity in these complexes. This points not to a failure of the strategy but to the failure of the City to make full use of the findings of such a strategy.

3 BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION ACTIONS FOR CONSERVATION

The two columns in this section give a clear picture of the City’s failure to take advantage of the 2008 strategy. Comparisons selected from “Actions” and “completion status” columns demonstrate these failings. Unless there is a significant change of heart within council, this current Strategy can expect to receive similar dismissive treatment.

Action. “Improve the protection and management of local reserves by changing vesting purpose...”

Status. “Change of vesting purpose of reserves listed in the 2008 LBS was not implemented.”

Action. “Forming a reserves management committee,”

Status. “No reserves management committee has been established.” Even after twelve years!

Action. “Developing a Reserves Masterplan”

Status. “The City is in the process of developing a process for prioritising reserve management.” Twelve years is too long an interval for this action to be completed.

Action. “Protecting natural areas in public open space contributions ... full ecological assessments should be conducted prior to structure planning”

Status. “There is no systematic process set up to monitor whether vegetation is protected in all new areas being subdivided or developed. (p.19).

Action. “Developing Private Land Conservation Strategy including: Undertaking a survey of residents to determine initiatives that will be successful • Also include public opinion with regards to **Environmental Levy** in survey.”

Status. “While the City did not conduct a survey of residents to determine which private landholder incentive initiatives were likely to be taken up, the City published a comprehensive Private Landholder Bushland Information Package in 2013.” (p. 20).

Such a survey should now be carried out. The information package, whilst of some use, is no substitute for surveying residents’ views on a voluntary environmental levy. “**The local community values the natural environment highly, with 97% of respondents in the City’s 2017 and 2019 community surveys saying that the City’s bushland, trees and natural vegetation are important and 96% wanting to see the integrity of the local natural environment protected and enhanced (City of Kalamunda, 2019).**” (Section 1.1 p. 6).

This clearly indicates that such a levy may well be acceptable to residents. For many years, NRPG has requested a voluntary levy be explored citing as an example, the overwhelming support for a **mandatory** environmental levy in Ku-ring-gai (NSW). This levy has been in place since 2005 and is levied at 5% of Council’s total rate revenue. Every year, it funds around \$3million worth of environmental programmes. A 2011 survey showed 88% of those surveyed supported continuing the levy. In 2019 the term of the levy expired. Ku-ring-gai

Council has now succeeded in making this a permanent levy. If the City of Kalamunda fails to explore this levy option, it is failing its residents and depriving its coffers. It is time this attitude changed. Previous Council refusals to explore this option, presented specious arguments to support that refusal, none of which were convincing.

Action. *“Development of the Shire’s Environmental Services including: • Environmental Reserves Officer • Environmental Planner”*

Status. *“Briefly, a role of Environmental Planner was created but not continued.”*

The current Environmental Services do an excellent job. The unfortunately short-term introduction of an Environmental Planner was a welcome addition, ensuring, during planning and development initiatives, relevant environmental matters were conveyed to other departments, thereby relieving their staff of having to plough through reams of environmental documents.

Action. *“Update weed strategy”*

Status. *“The City’s Weed Control Strategy (2002) is yet to be updated.”*

Action. *“Review of Wildlife Corridors Strategy”*

Status. *“Review of the Wildlife Corridors will be part of the Local Biodiversity Strategy update.” (p. 21).*

These updates and reviews are long overdue. The Wildlife Corridor Strategy for example, dates back to October 1998.

Action. *“Review and update the LBS to ensure it remains up to date and any new mechanisms can be implemented.”*

Status. *“No systematic reviews have been undertaken since the adoption of the Local Biodiversity Strategy in 2008.”*

This review failure is a damning indictment of this particular aspect of the City’s environmental performance over the past twelve years. Constant review of all strategies is essential if they are to be effective. Whilst a huge amount of good work has been carried out by the environmental section, much of that work will be wasted, unless Council itself remains up to date through “systematic reviews” of strategies.

APPENDIX F: CITY OF KALAMUNDA RESERVES PRIORITISATION

Table. (p. 25)

Local Natural Area 00003 consists of R. 30142 and R. 29013. The latter has frontage on Marie Way. Perhaps the reserve name “Yorna/Alpine Road” could be altered to “Yorna Road/Marie Way” or, since it runs along Bird Road (with no residential lots on its boundary as in the case of Yorna Road), Bird Road/Marie Way? The 2008 Local Biodiversity Strategy includes “R 29013 12 Marie Way (Crumpet Creek)” on a list of “reserves in good or better condition that should be protected further by altering the reserve purpose...” (13.2.4 Darling Scarp Representation Target).

Conclusion.

Appendix E is a most damning section of this Strategy. The environmental staff and those engaged from the community who prepared and commented on the 2008 Strategy, would be saddened to see how much of their work had been wasted through a lack of Council commitment. On reading through this Appendix, Council should be feeling ashamed of their performance over the interim. We see that performance as a squandering of numerous opportunities to protect and enhance the natural environmental values of the City. Through past neglect and despite the best efforts of a hard working environmental section, Kalamunda City is now on track (despite its “clean and green” aspirations) to developing a deplorable environmental reputation.

The following extract is an introduction to a theme running throughout this draft – the lack of Council commitment in matters of environmental protection, for over more than a decade.

“Review of the City’s 2008 Local Biodiversity Strategy found the Strategy was not used effectively to support land use planning decisions or to increase the protection status of identified significant natural areas in the City.” (Introduction. p.5).

Even at this early stage of the draft, the introduction contains damning statistics, asserting virtually no increase in **effectively** protected areas and a significant (> 650 hectares) loss of native vegetation.

The City was commended for surveying its community prior to the drafting of this Strategy. Results showed overwhelmingly a love of and support for the City’s environmental values and a wish to see them preserved. This support surely gives Council a mandate to do all in its power to ensure the wishes of its residents are honoured, particularly in this time of Climate Change crisis and species extinctions. The community has spoken. Now is the time for Council to listen and act.

The environmental biodiversity values of the City of Kalamunda have been identified, the need for their protection and enhancement well established and the remedies for this protection outlined. In the past, strategies have been produced, ticking all the right boxes, only to have few of the many recommendations adopted. The significant effort invested in this current draft strategy should not be wasted.

This is a great opportunity to show that the City of Kalamunda staff and Council are doing something positive to preserve the ever-declining biodiversity values within the City. It is an opportunity not to be squandered. With some shortcomings, if fully implemented this strategy, will be seen as truly reflecting the community’s love for the natural environment and will go some way towards arresting the rapid decline of biodiversity in the city.

Anthony Fowler p.p. Steve Gates, President NRP.