



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Environment and Conservation**

Mr James Nelson
Senior Research Officer
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts
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E-MAILED
KO 5/12/11

Dear Mr Nelson

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE,
ENVIRONMENT AND THE ARTS: INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S BIODIVERSITY IN A
CHANGING CLIMATE**

At the hearing of the above Inquiry in Perth on 7 November 2011, further information was requested from the Department of Environment and Conservation in relation to:

- i) the extent of dieback in Western Australia; and
- ii) the application of phosphite by spraying.

Extent of dieback in Western Australia

The arrival and spread of dieback disease (caused by the root-rot fungus *Phytophthora* spp.) in Western Australia has been catastrophic for the biota of a number of south-west Australian ecosystems. There are several species of *Phytophthora* present in native vegetation in the south-west of Western Australia, but by far the most widespread and destructive is *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. As many as 2,000 of the estimated 9,000 native plant species in the south-west of Western Australia are susceptible to and often killed by dieback disease.

In 2008, Project Dieback found that one million hectares of the remnant vegetation in the south-west of Western Australia are currently infested by *Phytophthora* dieback. A further one million hectares of currently disease free but high to moderately susceptible native plant communities are at risk. The attached map indicates the extent of dieback in the State and can be downloaded from www.dieback.net.au. More detailed maps can also be generated upon request.

Application of phosphite

Phosphite is a biodegradable fungicide that is highly effective in protecting plants against the impacts of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and other *Phytophthora* species. Aerial phosphite application to threatened flora and threatened ecological communities is a critical conservation measure for mitigating the threat of dieback. However, the application of phosphite is difficult and expensive, and therefore is used as a last resort intervention measure. As a result, the application of phosphite is limited and targeted towards the highest priority areas.

The current aerial spraying program applies phosphite to 44 sites comprising 470 hectares across the south coast. The program primarily targets threatened flora and threatened ecological communities in the Stirling Range, Scott River, Cape le Grand and Mt Lindesay national parks as well as coastal reserves in the Albany area. Phosphite is only applied to specific targeted areas and is not applied to watercourses, creeks or riparian zones. As phosphite only provides a limited period of control, it requires regular ongoing application.

Ongoing monitoring will continue to investigate any possible environmental risks associated with the application of phosphite.

I trust that the above information is of assistance to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Keiran McNamara
DIRECTOR GENERAL

5 December 2011

Att.