



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of the **Premier and Cabinet**
Office of the Director General

Our Ref: 24-83441

The Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Email: ccea.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Zappia

**House of Representatives Standing Committee On Climate Change, Environment
And The Arts: Inquiry Into Australia's Biodiversity In A Changing Climate**

As a signatory to *Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030* and *Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-2030*, the Western Australian Government supports action to build ecosystem resilience in a changing climate to enhance biodiversity conservation outcomes.

*Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy*¹ identifies building resilience in a changing climate as a major priority for action and three sub-priorities including:

- Protecting diversity;
- Maintaining and re-establishing ecosystem functions; and
- Reducing threats to biodiversity (pages 43-46 of the *Strategy*).

Western Australia has programs in place to address this priority and its sub-priorities including:

- Establishment and management of a formal conservation reserve system supplemented by off-reserve conservation efforts;
- Regional strategies for biodiversity conservation;
- Programs addressing key threatening processes at a landscape scale, including feral animal predation and *Phytophthora* dieback; and
- Targeted threatened species conservation and recovery.

¹ Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council. 2010. *Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030*. Australian Government, Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Canberra.

Similarly, the *National Reserve System* strategy provides a framework to develop the national reserve system in the context of conserving landscapes to enhance ecosystem resilience and connectivity. In an investigation into the possible future impacts of climate change on Australia's system of formally protected conservation reserves, Dunlop and Brown (2008)² found that the national reserve system is predicted to enhance ecosystem resilience in a changing climate.

A conservation reserve system which meets the criteria of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness forms the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation efforts and can be adapted and strengthened to provide enhanced resilience of ecosystems in the face of the changing climate. Resilience is a fundamental part of the adequacy criterion. The Western Australian Government also recognises the increasing importance of off-reserve and landscape scale management to reinforce the value of conservation reserves through partnerships and land management linkages and has demonstrated this with the release of two important conservation strategies over the past year.

In June 2011, the Western Australian Government released the *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy* (copy provided at Attachment 1) and committed an initial \$63 million over the five years to 2015 to implement it. This Strategy, which is already underway, will deliver an unprecedented level of protection of the natural and cultural values of the Kimberley, and includes major new marine and terrestrial reserves and substantial on-ground action to reduce the threats to these values posed by altered fire regimes, feral animals and weeds. Through joint management of marine and terrestrial reserves, the Strategy will provide traditional owners with a direct and enhanced capability to manage traditional lands as well as significant training and employment opportunities.

The centrepiece of the Strategy is the creation of the Kimberley Wilderness Parks which will establish the State's largest interconnected system of marine and terrestrial parks covering more than 3.5 million hectares. This includes:

- the establishment of four new marine parks at Camden Sound, North Kimberley, Roebuck Bay and Eighty Mile Beach, which will almost treble the area of marine parks and reserves in Western Australia, from about 1.5 million hectares to 4.1 million hectares;
- the establishment of a Conservation Reserve Corridor which links the Prince Regent and Drysdale River national parks,
- the upgrade of the 633 000 hectare Prince Regent Nature Reserve to a Class A national park; and
- the establishment of a suite of conservation reserves on islands off the Kimberley coast.

Further linkages to connect existing parks and reserves will also be progressed as the strategy is implemented.

² Dunlop, M. & Brown, P.R. 2008. Implications of climate change for Australia's National Reserve System: A preliminary assessment. Report to the Department of Climate Change, February 2008. Department of Climate Change, Canberra, Australia.

The Kimberley islands support plants and animals that are found nowhere else and are refuges for native species that have disappeared from, or are threatened on, the mainland by altered fire regimes, introduced animals and weed invasion. The Class A classification for Prince Regent National Park, a UNESCO biosphere reserve, provides the highest level of statutory protection available under the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*.

In November 2010, the Western Australian Government released *A Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy for the Great Western Woodlands* (copy provided at Attachment 2), which sets out approaches to management and protection that will ensure the long-term conservation of the area's unique natural and cultural values. The Government committed \$3.8 million to the development and initial implementation of the strategy over four years including improved fire management and feral and weed control.

The Great Western Woodlands has been one of the most explored and mined regions in Australia for the last 100 years and remains an internationally significant area of great biological richness and the largest remaining area of intact Mediterranean climate woodland on Earth, covering almost 16 million hectares. It contains about 3,000 species of flowering plants, equating to about one-fifth of all known flora in Australia, and a diverse array of mammals, reptiles, frogs and birds. The area is predominantly unallocated Crown land, but also includes significant areas of conservation reserve and pastoral lease. It supports significant mining and exploration activity, and is increasingly popular for recreation and tourism. The Strategy aims to integrate the planning and management of the various uses to ensure continued sustainability.

The Kimberley and Great Western Woodland strategies represent significant and extensive initiatives at a landscape scale, across land tenures, addressing biodiversity conservation. There are many other examples, at a variety of scales, pursuing connectivity between ecosystems and ecosystem resilience in Western Australia, as well as further opportunities to develop and implement such programs.

The Western Shield program has been a major success story for Western Australia which, over the past 15 years has successfully conserved a range of small and medium-sized mammal, bird and reptile species through control of predation by foxes and feral cats. Western Shield operates at a landscape scale over about 3.5 million hectares of lands managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation. This scale of operation provides a significant buffer against localised impacts of foxes and helps enhance the resilience of native habitat.

The Western Australian Government's approach to landscape scale management of ecosystems, which is underpinned by a core of formal conservation reserves where threatening processes such as altered fire regimes, pest animals, weeds, dieback and salinity are managed at a system-wide scale, should allow flora and fauna to respond through adaption or movement across the landscape to new more favourable habitats and so improve their resilience to a changing climate. In highly cleared and fragmented landscapes, such as Western Australia's south-west agricultural zone, management for biodiversity conservation can be complemented with native vegetation based farming systems, such as oil mallee farming, that assist with ecological connectivity and provide

secondary benefits through broadscale plantings such as reducing the impacts of rising ground water. Non-government groups also continue to play a key role in large scale management of ecosystems in Western Australia. In particular, the Gondwana Link project is successfully re-establishing ecological links between the Fitzgerald River and Stirling Range national parks in Western Australia's south west.

The Western Australian Government's participation in the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew Millennium Seed Bank project and the development of a high technology seed storage facility for rare and threatened species, the Threatened Flora Seed Centre, provides an insurance policy against the loss of plant species in the wild. The centre also supports species recovery and advanced studies in collaboration with other institutions, both nationally and internationally. The Threatened Flora Seed Centre currently protects seeds of 73 per cent of all threatened species in Western Australia, and has utilised 15 per cent of that seed in threatened species recovery and restoration programs. As such, Western Australia has exceeded target 8 for 2010 in the *Global Strategy for Plant Conservation* of "60 per cent of threatened plant species in accessible *ex situ* collections, preferably in the country of origin, and 10 per cent of them included in recovery and restoration programmes", which no other jurisdiction in the world has matched. In fact, Western Australia has almost reached the 2020 target of "75 per cent of threatened plant species in *ex situ* collections, preferably in the country of origin, and at least 20 per cent available for recovery and restoration programmes".

It is noted that the term 'nationally important ecosystem', used in the Inquiry's terms of reference, is currently not formally defined. However, a number of ecosystems/habitats/geographical areas that are defined by other terms or included in the definition proposed by the Hawke review³ could be consistent with the concept of a 'nationally important ecosystem'. These include 'threatened ecological community', 'biodiversity hotspot', 'biosphere reserve', 'nationally important wetland', or 'climate change refuge of national significance'. Western Australia has many significant internationally and nationally recognised biodiversity values, such as numerous listed threatened species and ecological communities, nationally important wetlands including 12 Ramsar sites, high conservation value aquatic systems, three natural World Heritage sites, two biosphere reserves, Australia's only internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot, and eight terrestrial and one marine biodiversity hotspots recognised nationally.

³ Recommendation 8 of the *Report of the Independent Review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* chaired by Dr Allan Hawke recommended that the Act be amended to include 'ecosystems of national significance' as a new matter of national environmental significance. The 'matter protected' Western Australia's the ecological character of a listed ecosystem. The criteria proposed to identify ecosystems as being of significant national value included for one or more of the following reasons:

- (a) it has high comparative biological diversity, within its ecosystem type;
- (b) it provides critical nationally important ecosystem functions;
- (c) it has a significant potential contribution to building resilient sustainable landscapes;
- (d) it contains high value remnants of a particular type of habitat;
- (e) it contains high value areas that create connectivity between other ecosystems;
- (f) it is significant in building a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of habitat types in Australia;
- (g) it provides habitat critical to the long-term survival of a significant number of threatened species listed under this Act;
- (h) it is a climate change refuge of national significance; and/or
- (i) it is under severe and imminent threat

The Western Australia Government is developing a Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Strategy to provide a long-term framework to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to adapt to climate change and ensure Western Australia is prepared for the impact of a carbon constrained future. Western Australia's unique environment is particularly susceptible to climate change impacts. Projected climate change has the potential to fundamentally shift, reduce or eliminate some ecosystems. Species in the south-west of Western Australia with low tolerances to temperature change may become extinct in a hotter and dryer climate and/or more acidic waterways. Potential relocation of species may result in new environmental microsystems and changes to host-pest relationships. The Strategy will identify key actions for Government, industry and the community to help reduce the impacts of climate change on biodiversity values.

The Western Australian Government believes that thorough consultation is needed between the Australian Government and the State during the development of any new policy directions by the Australian Government on these matters. This will ensure that any new measures are complementary to those already in place in Western Australia.

Thank you for the opportunity to present Western Australia's views to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Peter Conran
DIRECTOR GENERAL

~ 8 SEP 2011