

# SOUTH WEST ENVIRONMENT CENTRE (INC)

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*Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts*

*Department of the Senate*

*PO Box 6100*

*Parliament House*

*Canberra ACT 2600*

*Australia*

20.9.08

[Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee](#)

**The following is a reply to your request for input on this matter. I have addressed the terms of reference as they have had relevance for our group as applied mainly to College Grove and environs on behalf of the South West Environment Centre.**

## ***Inquiry into the operation of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999***

The operation of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and other natural resource protection programmes, with particular reference to: I

a. the findings of the National Audit Office Audit 38 Referrals, Assessments and Approvals under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999; Some environmental assessments are based on very cursory visits to the sites and often during non-breeding seasons when birds or animals are inactive or absent (re: College Grove development; the bee-eater is seen in this area but because it is migratory was not accounted for in any assessments). Assessors are hampered by timelines and environmentally-friendly outcomes are not seen as a priority by developers. When one's employment is largely dependent on the favour of development companies (especially government-sponsored ones), unbiased assessments are not employment-friendly. Recommendations (clearing protocols) made by scientists (EPA) and assessors are not necessarily followed up and there seems to be no accountability for this other than community groups doing long hours of observations of developers and their clearing methods (with photographs to prove it). This is unacceptable and needs enforcing somehow.

- a. lessons learnt from the first 10 years of operation of the EPBC Act in relation to the protection of critical habitats of threatened species and ecological communities, and potential for measures to improve their recovery; **No comment.**

c. the cumulative impacts of EPBC Act approvals on threatened species and ecological communities, for example on Cumberland Plain Woodland, Cassowary habitat, Grassy White Box Woodlands and the Paradise Dam; **this also applies to the College Grove bushland in Bunbury WA, where successive approvals have negated Western Ringtail habitat, Carnaby's Black cockatoo feeding areas and Tuart transition woodlands. The same applies to the Dallyellup area where same/similar species are present. Although we have been reassured by your officer that this "death by a thousand cuts" was taken into consideration it seems implausible given the following effects. Moving these species into adjoining woodlands, often unsuitable (ie few Peppermint trees for Western Ringtails) or already full with competing or more aggressive species. For example, Western Ringtail possums are much less aggressive than the larger Brushtail possums and yet they are expected to compete for territory in these same niches that are often already occupied. **If surveys are done preparatory to transferring possums into adjoining territory there is certainly no follow-up or on-going monitoring of the threatened species and therefore no effective penalties for not doing so.** So although the Act seems just, the application and outcomes are generally disappointing.**

d. the effectiveness of responses to key threats identified within the EPBC Act, including land-clearing, climate change and invasive species, and potential for future measures to build environmental resilience and facilitate adaptation within a changing climate; **Apart from the ecosystem services (clean air, fresh water and healthy soils all needed for good healthy habitats for animals, plants and humans), carbon storage and accounting thereof, all of which have an effect on the climate and subsequently the biodiversity overall. Reacting to a problem will only be a temporary fix, it needs to be guided by an overall strategic plan. This needs to be coordinated with the West Australian Dept of Conservation using their **draft for ecological linkages, north-south and east-west across the state.** This could achieve a more sustainable outcome allowing more movement and gene pool transference instead of isolated communities. **These key linkage areas should be withdrawn from development and maintained as priority seed or gene pool banks. This would also involve Local Government to co-operate in extending these areas by joining up linkages to increase their effectiveness.****

e. the effectiveness of Regional Forest Agreements, in protecting forest species and forest habitats where the EPBC Act does not directly apply; **how can Regional Forest Agreements seriously protect forest species and habitats when their primary function is to allow the harvesting of wood at unsustainable logging levels using third-world clearfelling methods? **Biodiversity protection is ignored in the clearing fields of forest management in Western Australia.****

f. the impacts of other environmental programmes, eg EnviroFund, GreenCorps, Caring for our Country, Environmental Stewardship Programme and Landcare in dealing with the decline and extinction of certain flora and fauna; **unknown**

g. the impact of programme changes and cuts in funding on the decline or extinction of flora and fauna. **Probably fatal to most programs' "robustness".**

Yours sincerely

Susan Hill

(on behalf of SWEC)

(Hard copy sent to The Secretary, Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts, PO Box 6100 Parliament House, CANBERRA ACT 2600.