



WILDFLOWER SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA (Inc)

Position Statement

Clearing of Native Vegetation in Western Australia

Position Statement

We call on the Western Australian Parliament to halt the continuing over-clearing of native vegetation in the southwest of Western Australia. This can be readily achieved, by:

1. Reframing legislation and regulations that, at present, almost always approve clearing except in exceptional circumstances. These must operate to prevent clearing except in exceptional circumstances.
2. Ensuring that developments and activities that would otherwise destroy native vegetation are only allowed in areas that are already cleared.
3. Begin rewilding Western Australia by setting targets for expanding native vegetation and the habitat for our native plants and animals.

Background

Issues

1. Native vegetation clearing remains an issue in Western Australia, particularly in the Southwest and Wheatbelt and on the Swan Coastal Plain. Many areas that are substantially over-cleared (i.e. have little remaining native vegetation) are still experiencing high levels of clearing of remnants, particularly along roadsides and for urban development
2. Current legislation, regulations and guidelines operate in a way that, in effect, approves clearing applications as a default. For this reason, most applications for clearing are approved, subject to conditions. Conditions usually relate to issues around threatened or priority species or ecological communities, and are weak and weakly enforced.
3. Cumulative impacts of clearing are not being adequately considered.
4. All government and private development strategies need to be assessed to determine the clearing of vegetation that results from their implementation is acceptable, before they are adopted.
5. Clearing of urban bushland and roadside native vegetation continually demonstrates that irreplaceable native vegetation has no value. This is the bushland and native vegetation that is most visible to the majority of Western Australians and visitors.
6. At the very time when our environment, our species and our communities face accelerating threats from climate change, pests and weeds, fires, and other impacts, native plants and animals in Western Australia are suffering death by a thousand cuts through the piecemeal consideration of the clearing of their habitat.
7. Continued loss of native vegetation by clearing in over-cleared parts of Western Australia is unacceptable and must stop.
8. The south-west of Western Australia has been declared a global “biodiversity hotspot”, not because of its distinctive and unique plants and animals, but because so many of our plants and animals have become extinct, endangered or threatened through continued over-clearing of our landscape.

Action

The Society’s objectives

Two key objectives of the WSWA are:



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- a) To encourage the conservation and preservation of Western Australian flora by, among other things, supporting efforts to strengthen laws and regulations for the conservation of Western Australian flora, encouraging enforcement of laws and regulations and making submissions on the preservation of Western Australian flora to government and other organisations.
- b) To raise public awareness about the value of, and need to conserve, bushland.

The key objective of the Society is to substantially reduce the current rate of clearing of remnant native vegetation on public and private land in Western Australia, through a mix of strategies, in conjunction with effective and lasting regulatory and legislative change.

Society Strategies

Our strategies for meeting this objective are as follows:

1. Measure, to the degree possible, all land clearing applications and approvals in the Wheatbelt and Swan Coastal Plain.
2. Assess applications and approvals for compliance with government policy and regulations, and provide information to the Auditor-General's office for auditing as appropriate.
3. Keep a watching brief on applications and approvals and be prepared to take legal action through appropriate mechanisms as test cases for current practice.
4. Work with and encourage local government in the Wheatbelt and Swan Coastal Plain to adopt a pro forma land clearing policy for local government-controlled lands.
5. Develop a set of media materials (photographs of native vegetation clearing, statistics, key facts and talking points) to help support a media campaign on this issue.
6. Prepare two classes of media releases (for both state-wide and local media) to raise public awareness of land-clearing activities, particularly in the Wheatbelt where public awareness is currently limited. One class will comprise general media releases about the issue; the other will be specific media releases on live clearing actions.
7. Coordinate with other groups the development of a statewide Native Vegetation Policy. This must extend beyond the Government's current and likely future policies, which will almost certainly retain the default approval of applications.
8. Work towards adoption of key aspects of a statewide Native Vegetation Policy into all political parties policy platform.

Reference

Environmental Protection Authority, 2000. Environmental Protection of native vegetation in Western Australia. Clearing of native vegetation, in particular reference to the agricultural region. Position Statement No.2. Perth.

Endorsed by the Society's Management Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2022

Wildflower Society of Western Australia (Inc.) www.wildflowersocietywa.org.au