



WILDFLOWER SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA (Inc)

19th September 2023

Native Vegetation Regulation
Department of Water and Environmental Regulation
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CPS 10277/1 Midland Brick Pty Ltd; Lot 6 on Deposited Plan 49665, Muchea, Shire of Chittering. Purpose of clay extraction with native vegetation clearing of 2.09 ha.

The Wildflower Society of Western Australia (the Society) would like to submit these comments in response to the proposed application for a purpose permit to clear 2.09 ha of native vegetation to extract basic raw materials (clay) in Muchea; under section 51E of the EP Act.

- The Society would like confirmation on the application form excerpt, and if this permit proposal is still in active application? As the index of permit 10277/1 has only one application form excerpt but it is titled 'redacted'.
- A cumulative impact assessment report should be considered regarding this permit application as this proposal is stated as an "*expansion area of the Muchea 6 operations*", meaning this proposal and the subsequent impacts should be considered as a whole. Assessing these applications from the proponent individually will diminish the true extent of the impacts caused by these activities and is not an appropriate action.
- The Muchea 6 site is "*primarily agricultural areas with patches of remnant trees*", which refers to the high level of previous land clearing leaving little remnant vegetation. This area has undergone significant decline in both vegetation and diversity; the vegetation association (VA) which represents the remnant vegetation has less than 30% of the pre-European vegetation extent. Gingin 1020 (mainly *Eucalyptus marginata* and *Corymbia calophylla* Forest) is under the threshold level necessary for diversity to be maintained. Communities which are poorly represented (<30%) see accelerated species decline, and "*loss below this level should not be permitted*" (DER, 2014).



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- The lack of species present is already evident as stated in the Supporting information Survey Report (pg. 21); “...*there was a lack of fauna utilising the area*”.
- As per the application form excerpt, the proponent does not offer any security that hollow-bearing trees suitable for Black-Cockatoo breeding will be retained or protected.
 - Who will determine the ‘*necessity*’ of removing the hollow-bearing trees and what constitutes the change in need for the trees to be removed? Clarification on the specifics of the judgement, who makes the judgement, and how that judgment is made must be provided as well as formal steps reporting these decisions to DWER. This is required to ensure no deception was present in the permit application and the proponent’s intentions to ‘attempt’ to avoid high value conservation trees.
- This proposal will be knowingly impacting Black-Cockatoo breeding habitat, observed by the chewing marks in and around the hollows. The application does not address the impacts of the proposed activities to Black-Cockatoo breeding excluding the hollow-bearing trees, i.e. noise pollution, increased traffic, removal of foraging and roosting trees, removal of future breeding trees etc.
 - “*The areas of pasture have negligible value as Black-Cockatoo foraging habitat, though even scattered trees within the pasture have foraging value.*” The use of this area as a ‘stepping stone’ between foraging, roosting, and breeding grounds holds a significant amount of value, and has been omitted when addressing the impacts on Black-Cockatoos. The value of which is continuing to increase as more habitat is removed, increasing the distance Black-Cockatoos must travel between habitats.
- Black-Cockatoos have a declining population rate, **not** a stable one. So, we ask how a species is expected to avoid extinction when there is not enough suitable habitat currently existing, let alone survive with even less suitable habitat in the adjacent future?
 - The Society seeks to understand how this has been considered particularly regarding the duration of time it takes for *C. calophylla* and *E. marginata* to



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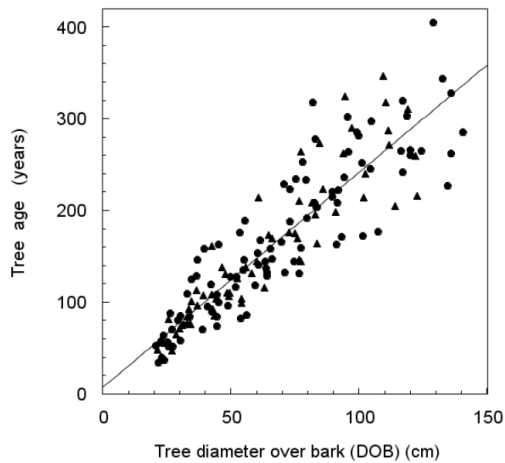
become of hollow-bearing size. Removing trees without observed hollows adds decades on to the time until these trees even have the potential to have suitably sized hollows (Figure 1).

- Under the Environmental Factor Guideline: Flora and Vegetation (EPA 2016b), vegetation may be considered significant for a range of reasons, including;
 - a role as a refuge; or
 - providing an important function required to maintain ecological integrity of a significant ecosystem.
 - It is clear the 2.09 hectares of vegetation consisting of mature trees and Black-Cockatoo habitat, is therefore relevant to the above guideline.
- Established vegetation must be protected and enhanced to rebuild the drastic loss of original vegetation and aim to increase and maintain diversity.

The Society reflects that what may seem like a ‘small’ clearing permit application, in reality, is far greater due to the high value of vegetation and habitat which is undermined and under threat. DWER’s environmental objective for flora and vegetation states “*To protect flora and vegetation so that biological diversity and ecological integrity are maintained.*”, where “*Ecological integrity is the composition, structure, function and processes of ecosystems, and the natural range of variation of these elements.*”, the Wildflower Society asks how this will be applied? If the population of species and communities are declining and are not stable, then it appears clear that ecological integrity is far from being maintained. The Society asks that DWER rejects this clearing application and follows the written objectives the department has publicly set.



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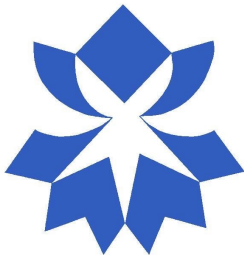


The relationship between the age of trees obtained from counts of annual growth rings and tree diameter (DOB). Data for 99 jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*) (●) and 63 marri (*Corymbia calophylla*) (▲) from six sites.

$$\text{Age} = 2.35 \times \text{DOB} + 6.97$$

where: DOB is the tree diameter measured in centimetres over the bark at 1.3 m above the ground.

Figure 1. (Whitford, 2002) Diameter growth (cm) of Marri and Jarrah relative to their age (years).



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Reference

DER. (2014). A guide to the assessment of applications to clear native vegetation: Under Part V Division 2 of the Environmental Protection Act 1986.

Whitford, K.R. (2002). Hollows in jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*) and marri (*Corymbia calophylla*) trees: I. Hollow sizes, tree attributes and ages. *Forest Ecology and Management*, 160(1-3): 201-214.

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