



**Hon. Diane Evers MLC**  
Member for the South West Region

Attn: Ms Maddison Evans, Committee Clerk  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Parliament House, PERTH WA 6000  
env@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Committee Members

### **PETITION NUMBER 140 – ROYALTIES FOR REGIONS ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT ALLOCATIONS**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs regarding Petition No. 140 *Royalties for Regions Environmental Project Allocations*. I confirm that I wish the Government/Committee to inquire into the matters raised in the petition. To the best of my knowledge, the issues described in this petition have not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

The petitioners are concerned about the increasing environmental degradation and pollution resulting from mining and gas sector activities, climate change and the insufficient effort the Government is providing for environmental rehabilitation and preservation. This includes the lack of support for community-based Natural Resource Management organisations across the State, the reduction in Royalties for Regions (RfR) allocations to environmental programs and the loss of valuable ecosystems as a result.

In its 2019-20 budget papers, DPIRD noted that climate change and climate variability continue to pose significant challenges for Natural Resource Management (NRM) across the state. However, NRM baseline has been reducing over time, with the McGowan Government committing only \$7.75 million per annum over the term of its government. Additionally, the Commonwealth funding contribution for NRM has been substantially reduced, which consequently reduces matching State matching. The outcome of these changes is significant underfunding for our environment.

In November 2019, I introduced the *Royalties for Regions Amendment Bill 2019* for the protection of the environment and the conservation of biodiversity, which are of immense value in the regions.

The Royalties for Regions (RfR) fund is an important system for ensuring that profits from our state's mining and gas resources - which are continually expanding and significantly impacting on our environment - are translated into benefits for the community and the environment that community members value and depend on. Unfortunately, the current application of this fund has little emphasis on supporting environmental programs.

The 2018–19 annual report of the Western Australian Regional Development Trust sets out both past and forecast future spending priorities. It is shocking to see that at a time when environmental issues



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are of increasing importance in the regions and require urgent action, the trust has spent just under five per cent of funds on environmental programs - \$42 million of a total spend of \$896 million in the 2018–19 financial year. This is only about half as much as the trust spent on administration in that year! Furthermore, the trust is forecasting that that spend will be slashed even further over the forward estimates, so that by the 2022-23 financial year, its investment in the environment will be just \$15 million - a mere 1.6 per cent of the total funding allocation. Meanwhile, it must be noted that \$200m - \$300m annually has been allocated from RfR to cover the cost of the Country Water Pricing Subsidy, an expenditure that had until now been covered out of general revenue through the Water Corporation.

At a time when our drying climate is becoming more prone to extreme impacts of events such as bushfires, drought, and heatwaves, the health and resilience of the environment and our incredible biodiversity is under increasing threat. We must make a more concerted effort to address these problems across every government branch and program.

We also need to consider the long-term health of the regions. Increasing environmental spending now will deliver intergenerational benefits, ensuring that industries such as agriculture and tourism can be sustainable, and our biodiversity and natural environment is able to be enjoyed into the future. Over the past two decades, significant research has gone into community-generated management plans that are available for implementation. This vital work must continue and be better supported. The urgency grows daily.

Directing a small and important portion of total expenditure to support the efforts of community organisations will provide multiple benefits to the environment, the local economy, the wellbeing of the community, and in developing careers based on the environmental sciences. The future of our regional communities is dependent on the health of the landscape, and this request addresses the purposes of the Act to provide services, broaden the economy and improve career opportunities.

The petitioners are **requesting the Council to request Government to direct a minimum of 10% of all RfR funding on an annual basis to environmental rehabilitation** and for the preservation of the State's unique biodiversity. This would provide up to \$100 million for environmental programs.

I strongly support the petitioner's request for the direction of a minimum of 10% of all RfR funding to be directed to environmental rehabilitation programs. The important role of not-for-profit environmental organisations and environmental programs in towns and shires across Western Australia should be formally recognised and valued through this increased support.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Diane Evers MLC  
**Member for South West Region**

20 December 2019