



**Minister for Environment; Disability Services
Deputy Leader of the Legislative Council**

Your Ref: Petition No 53 (A686400)
Our Ref: 62-08032

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environmental and Public Affairs
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Mr Swinbourn

Thank you for your letter received in this office on 14 May 2018 requesting comment on the terms of Petition No 53, which seeks to protect high conservation value forests, submitted by Hon Diane Evers MLC. I appreciate the opportunity to provide comment to the committee.

The petition proposes the immediate protection of high conservation value forests and transition of a native forest products industry to plantations and farm forestry. In response to the information supporting the petition, I provide the following comment.

The current extent and location of the comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system of Western Australia's south-west forests is the product of extensive work carried out over the last three decades. This work comprised a series of review and planning processes that supported the preparation of Western Australia's Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) and the 2004 to 2013 and 2014 to 2023 forest management plans. This included detailed analysis of the high conservation value attributes of the south-west forests. The objective of reserve design is to protect a range of biodiversity values.

Planning for RFAs between the Commonwealth and individual States began back in 1992, when the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments signed the *National Forest Policy Statement*, agreeing to work together towards a shared vision for Australia's forests. Western Australia's RFA process began in 1996 with the Comprehensive Regional Assessment as the information base to draft the agreement, which was signed by Western Australia and the Commonwealth in May 1999. The Comprehensive Regional Assessment involved more than 40 scientific projects assessing the environmental, heritage, social and economic uses and values of the forests. Contributing experts came from such fields as forest ecology, soil science, geomorphology, hydrology, archaeology, botany, zoology, geography and geology, as well as economics, social planning and regional development.

The *Forest Management Plan 2004-2013* (FMP 2004-2013) reflected a significant change in the protection and management of the State's south-west forests. It was the vehicle to implement the Gallop Government's *Protecting our old-growth forests* policy. The policy also committed to assessing high conservation value areas to include in the reserve system.

The *Review of High Conservation Values in Western Australia's South-West Forests* (2002) was prepared by environmental consultants Ecoscape (Australia) Pty Ltd and the findings presented to the former Conservation Commission of Western Australia. The review assessed 106 forest blocks and four general areas across the south-west (list attached) using four broad categories relating to high conservation values, these are:

- old-growth forest;
- biodiversity;
- wilderness; and
- areas of special significance in terms of high level of community attachment.

Further to the review's findings, the Conservation Commission recommended that the Government add select areas of State forest to the formal conservation reserve system to consolidate and capture old-growth forest and other identified values, as well as informally reserving around 36 hectares of Darling Scarp ecosystem in State forest. The remaining forest blocks assessed in the Ecoscape report were recommended to remain as State forest and continue to be available for timber harvesting.

A further assessment of 'moratorium' forest blocks stipulated in the *Protecting our old-growth forests* policy was carried out by environmental consultants URS, with findings submitted to the Conservation Commission (*Assessment of the Scientific, Economic and Community Values and the Impact of Logging on Salinity of Areas Subject to a Moratorium on Logging*, August 2001). The recommendations to Government were:

- to add Lennard, Davis and Gervasse forest blocks and a part of Lowden forest block to an expanded Wellington National Park (around 25,000 hectares);
- to add part of Westralia forest block to Westralia Conservation Park; and
- retain as State forest (therefore, available for timber harvesting) Arcadia and Yabberup forest blocks and the balance of Mungalup, Lowden, Palmer, Leach and Helms forest blocks.

Protecting the values of areas retained for timber production was recommended to be managed through the application of appropriate management prescriptions.

Copies of the Ecoscape and URS reports can be provided to you and the committee.

The Conservation Commission's recommendation in relation to high conservation value forests and 'moratorium' forest blocks were implemented through the FMP

2004-2013. Around 500,000 hectares of forest was added to the conservation estate in the south-west, creating (at the time) 29 new national parks and 10 new conservation parks.

Prepared in accordance with the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act), the FMP 2004-2013 was subject to widespread community consultation including a formal public comment period to meet the requirements of the CALM Act and the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*. The FMP 2004-2013 was approved on 10 December 2003 by the then Environment Minister, Hon Dr Judy Edwards MLA following consideration by Cabinet. The FMP 2004-2013 introduced a suite of initiatives to protect biodiversity.

Preparation of the *Forest Management Plan 2014-2023* (FMP 2014-2023) followed a similar approach to that of the FMP 2004-2013 including wide-ranging consultation within Government and across industry, conservation groups, local government and with Noongar representatives. Development of the FMP 2014-2023 was supported by a review of silviculture in south-west native forests, a social and economic impact assessment and an independent review of the calculation of the sustained yield of forest products. It was informed by climate change projections developed by CSIRO, being the best available information of potential changes in temperature and rainfall through to 2070.

The settings from the FMP 2004-2013 were carried forward into the FMP 2014-2023 and further measures introduced to protect biodiversity, including:

- proposing to add 4000 hectares to Whicher National Park, near Busselton, to protect biodiversity in the Whicher Scarp;
- varying the existing fauna habitat zones to keep the number and systematic location of zones, but amend their size and location to allow, for example, a much larger area to be set aside in Batalling forest block which is a recognised fauna hotspot; and
- changes to silviculture that better protect the habitats of a variety of species, such as retaining large marri trees which provide food and nesting sites for black cockatoos and logs on the ground for numbats.

The FMP 2014-2023 is the key policy for managing Western Australia's south-west native forests. Of the 2,515,700 hectares of land from Lancelin to Denmark vested in or proposed to be vested in the Conservation and Parks Commission under the FMP 2014-2023, approximately 1,554,000 hectares are in protected areas, representing around 62 per cent of land in the plan area. This provides large areas of structurally diverse native vegetation, as well as protecting rivers and streams, diverse ecotype zones and sensitive habitats. Just over 334,000 hectares of old-growth forests are in existing or proposed formal conservation reserves and informal reserves.

A key objective of the FMP is to conserve biodiversity. This is achieved by strategies:

- at the whole-of-forest scale with the network of formal conservation reserves (national parks, conservation parks and nature reserves), informal reserves and fauna habitat zones;

- on a landscape level through fauna habitat zones, which are areas of forest distributed across the landscape and set aside from timber harvesting to provide a refuge for wildlife, allowing native animals to recolonise disturbed areas as they regenerate; and
- locally to protect black cockatoo and numbat habitats (and those of other species) by leaving habitat trees, dead standing trees, large logs on the forest floor, large marri trees and mid-storey shrubs and small trees in jarrah forest. Large marri trees are an important food source and preferred nesting sites for black cockatoos. As such, they are retained in addition to the existing requirement to leave habitat trees standing in harvested areas.

The McGowan Labor Government's priority now is focused on delivering on the election commitment to expand Wellington National Park. This has the potential to add several thousand hectares to the park. I am pleased to say that work has progressed in this regard and consultation with the community and industry on any proposed expansion is anticipated to occur in coming months. These additions to Wellington National Park, together with previous additions to the conservation reserve system and the creation of informal reserves and habitat zones, are designed to protect high conservation value forest.

I understand the Forest Products Commission (FPC) has achieved independent certification through the Forest Stewardship Council International and Australian Forestry Standard processes. Both of these certification processes involve consideration of measures to protect high conservation value forests and broader biodiversity conservation requirements. These processes point to a broader international perspective.

Regarding a response to the petition's support for transiting the forest products industry to plantations and the financial management of the native forest products industry, the Minister for Forestry is best placed to advise in these matters and I recommend the petition is forwarded to him for his consideration.

Should you require further information or any clarification on the information provided, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



**HON FRANCIS LOGAN MLA
ACTING MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT**

Att

31 MAY 2018

**Blocks assessed in the
Review of High Conservation Values in
Western Australia's South-West Forests**

Swan Region

Amphion	Cooke	Howse	Talbot
Balmoral	Curara	Keats	Taree
Bannister	Dale	Lang	Tumlo
Bombala	Flint	Leona	Wandoo around Mundaring
Boonering	Flynn	Pindalup	Wearne
Brady	Geddes	Qualen	Yarragil
Churchlands	Hakea	Sullivan	Young

South West Region

Adelaide	Chalk	McAlinden	Red Gully
Barrabup	Chester	Molloy	Roseneath
Bednall	Dalgarup	Moonah	Schroeder
Bell	Darradup	Morgan	Sherwood
Bidella	East Margaret River and west Sues Road = Bramley and Chapman	Mowen	Sollya
Blackwood	Forest Grove	Mullalyup	Stockyard
Butler	Hester	Munro	Storry
Canebreak	Hovea	Nelson	Telerah
Catterick	Hunt	Preston	Treeton
Central	Kerr	Rapids	Witchcliffe

Warren Region

Boorara	Dwalgan	Lindsay	Spring
Boyndaminup		Little Quinninup Brook system	Stoate
Brockman	Easter	Mersea	Strickland
Challar	Flybrook	Mindanup	Sutton
Chitelup	Gobblecannup	Muirillup	Swarbrick
Cleave	Graphite	Murtin	Walcott
Collins	Gray	Nairn	Warren
Corbal	Iffley	Northcliffe	Warrup
Court	Kingston	Poole	Weld
Crowea	Kinkin	Poorginup	Winnejup
Dombakup	Lane	Rocky	Yardup
Dudijup	Lewin	Shannon- Frankland link = Burnside and Mossop	Yornup

Total: 106 forest blocks and four general areas