



MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT; WATER

Your Ref: pet164
Our Ref: 42-16515

Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
Harvest Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr ~~Ellis~~ Brian

PETITION NO 164 – PROTECTION OF ENDANGERED SPECIES INDIGENOUS TO WA

Thank you for your letter dated 16 August 2012 regarding Petition No 164 – Protection of endangered species indigenous to Western Australia.

This State is recognised as one of the most biologically diverse areas in the world. The south-west botanical province is one of 34 globally recognised biodiversity hotspots, and the only one in Australia. It is estimated that there are over 12,000 native flowering plant species in the State, with the south-west alone containing more than 32 per cent of Australia's total and approximately 79 per cent of these being endemic to WA. There are estimated to be over 5,000 native vertebrate fauna species and well over 100,000 invertebrate species in the State. With the State covering one-third of Australia's land mass, conserving biodiversity involves considerable practical and technical challenges.

As identified in the 2009 Auditor General's report "*Rich and Rare: Conservation of Threatened Species*", WA has a range of conservation programs for threatened species, many of which operate through the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). Given the enormity of the challenge to conserve WA's flora and fauna, I am satisfied that there have been many achievements in threatened species conservation, with no species known to have become extinct for many years. Major conservation successes have been achieved through a range of initiatives including the landscape-scale Western Shield program, which continues to conserve a range of species, including quenda, tammar wallabies and brushtail possums.

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In recent years significant breakthroughs have been made in fighting *Phytophthora* dieback, including the successful management scale eradication of a spot infestation in Cape Arid National Park under State Natural Resource Management (NRM) funding. DEC also leads Australia in successful establishment of new populations, and re-establishment of former populations, of threatened flora.

In threatened species conservation the first results of successful efforts often will be to slow rates of decline before there is detectable population growth. Given that many species that are now threatened have become so due to unforeseen consequences of actions over the past 175 or so years, including the establishment of feral animals, particularly foxes, goats, feral cats and rabbits, as well as through excessive land clearing historically and other land use changes, it is understandable that it will take many years before threatened species are fully recovered and removed from threatened species lists. Given the naturally limited ranges of various species and the extent of impacts such as vegetation clearing in the wheatbelt, some species will always remain threatened.

Ongoing biological survey work has also led to rediscoveries of populations of previously 'presumed extinct' species. The number of presumed extinct flora species has fallen from 53 to 14 since 1991 due to survey effort.

Recognising the priority for threatened species conservation programs, the State Government has, since the 2009 Auditor General report, allocated an additional \$15.5 million to threatened species conservation programs, including the *Phytophthora* dieback project. This funding has been provided through the State NRM program and additional budget allocations to DEC. This additional funding is helping DEC and its partners to increase and expand its conservation efforts, including efforts at a landscape scale, as recommended by the Auditor General.

The Government recognises that the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950* requires updating and I am seeking advice from DEC on this. Our priority in this term of Government in respect of conservation legislation has been to deliver the long-awaited amendments to the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* and the *Wildlife Conservation Act* in respect of Aboriginal joint management and cultural outcomes. I expect that the need for modern biodiversity conservation legislation will be an important area for consideration next year.

Environmental impact assessment and regulation of native vegetation clearing under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* ensure full consideration of the protection of important habitat for threatened species and threatened ecological communities.

The principal agency for conserving the State's biodiversity is DEC. Important work is also being done by other agencies such as the Perth Zoo, Western Australian Museum

and Botanical Gardens and Parks Authority. The attached extracts from DEC's 2010-11 Annual Report (p.14-19) and Yearbook (p.26-79) illustrate the range of nature conservation programs carried out by the DEC, to both conserve threatened species and ecological communities as well as to prevent ecosystems becoming threatened in the first place.

I trust this information is of assistance to the Standing Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Marmion". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**HON BILL MARMION MLA
MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT; WATER**

16 SEP 2012

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