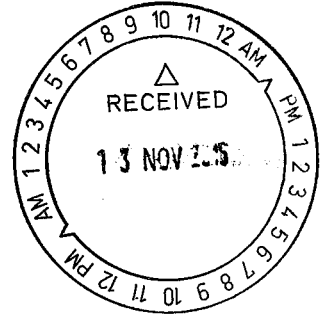




Hon Albert Jacob MLA
Minister for Environment; Heritage

Your Ref: Petition No 97
Our Ref: 50-10712



Hon Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Simon

Dear ~~Mr O'Brien~~

Thank you for your letter dated 15 October 2015 regarding Petition No 97 – Prescribed Burning in South West Region.

The first request in Mr Muir's petition proposes a prescribed burn target of eight per cent of lands managed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife. This actually corresponds directly with the notional target of 200,000 hectares in the south-west that the Department has maintained for two decades.

This target is regarded as incomplete as a single reporting measure because it does not portray the distribution of burns, the state of fuels across the landscape or the bushfire risk in relation to populated areas. On its own this single measure does not effectively contribute to community understanding and appreciation of the prescribed burning program's community protection and biodiversity management outcomes. In recognition of this, three additional performance and reporting measures that better reflect outcomes and residual risk have been developed. Nevertheless, the 200,000 hectare or eight per cent target remains in place and will continue to be reported on annually.

It is likely that Mr Muir is aware of this and that his mention of the eight per cent target is a reflection that the Department has not been able to consistently meet it in recent years. This provides some context to his second request that sufficient funding be made available to provide for day and night burning. Parks and Wildlife has been allocated \$20 million over four years from 2015/16 through the Royalties for Regions program to provide for an enhanced prescribed burning program in the south-west of Western Australia. These funds are to provide additional capacity and flexibility to the prescribed burning program including, if deemed necessary, extension to night time burning. It is certainly expected to assist the Department in more consistently meeting the 200,000 hectare target.

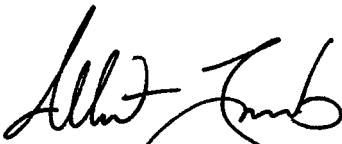
I would like to also address Mr Muir's comment in his complementary submission that Parks and Wildlife has a "no burn policy" adjacent to private property. This is far from the case and the Department makes every effort to ensure its bushfire mitigation activities provide protection to private property. However, Mr Muir's farm is adjacent to the Unicup and Tone-Perup nature reserves which have previously included several small fire exclusion reference areas (FERA).

A network of FERA is maintained in the south-west forests to provide reference sites for scientific studies of the effects of fire on the environment. The location of FERA is based on corporately agreed criteria that have been in place for nearly a decade. Periodic review of FERA is necessary to address issues that may arise through unplanned fires and changes in management of adjoining areas that affect bushfire threat. It is intended that FERA be reviewed on a five-yearly basis.

The previous existence of FERA adjacent to Mr Muir's property appears to have given him the view that avoiding burning adjacent to private property is a more general policy. This is not the case. Coincidentally, a review in line with the process mentioned above was conducted in May 2015 and has resulted in the relevant FERA being removed from the network. This means that the areas Mr Muir is concerned about will now be considered for prescribed burning as part of Parks and Wildlife's standard burn program planning.

In view of the above, I respectfully submit that the matters raised in the petition are already adequately addressed and that no detailed investigation into the matters is required. However, I would be pleased to provide any supplementary information that the Standing Committee may require.

Yours sincerely



Albert Jacob MLA
MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT; HERITAGE

12 NOV 2015