



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Mines and Petroleum**

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COMMENTS ON AUSTRALIA'S BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STRATEGY 2010-2020 CONSULTATION DRAFT

The Western Australian Department of Mines and Petroleum (DMP) provides the following comments on Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2020 Consultation Draft (Strategy).

DMP is keen to contribute to an effective Strategy which protects Western Australia's biodiversity while allowing the State to fulfil its economic potential. It is important for the State that resource development activities, including mineral, petroleum and geothermal exploration and production, are able to co-exist with biodiversity protection and enhancement. In respect of this, a significant role for DMP is to facilitate responsible resource development by participating with Australian Government agencies in the formulation of environmental strategies associated with the resource sector.

General Comments

DMP agrees that the Australian community and industry sector both have responsibility for biodiversity conservation as it underpins the provision of many ecosystem services. These services are essential to industry as they provide, for example, clean, good quality and reliable fresh and sea water for use in industrial processes. The role of the minerals and energy resources sector in protecting biodiversity is important and should be included in both the introduction and Section 1.1 "Building on current work".

This sector makes significant contributions to understanding and protecting biodiversity through funding and conducting research projects, including re-vegetation, and using leading practice technologies to minimise environmental harm. This sector in Western Australia is regulated under the *Mining Act 1978* and petroleum legislation to ensure environmental management programs are rigorous and accountable, and that penalties apply for non-compliance with approval conditions.

DMP considers that part of Priority 2 "Mainstreaming biodiversity", should emphasise the roles that the community must play to ensure they recognise that biodiversity conservation should be part of their core business. DMP suggests this

should be linked to the actions of Priority 3 "Knowledge for all" by providing mechanisms that can assist companies and government agencies to share the information and data they gather from conducting research. Companies and government agencies hold a great deal of knowledge and expertise that needs to be readily accessible for the benefit of protecting biodiversity.

In Western Australia, legislation and regulations already exist which deal with biodiversity protection including:

- *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950, Conservation and Land Management Act 1984, Environmental Protection Act 1986 and Fish Resources Management Act 1994.*
- The *Mining Act 1978* and petroleum legislation provide rigorous environmental protection approvals specific to mineral, petroleum and geothermal exploration and production. These include unconditional performance bonds under the *Mining Act 1978* and environmental insurance under the petroleum legislation to ensure rigorous environmental conditions for closure and rehabilitation on mine and petroleum sites respectively are met.

DMP is concerned that there is little reference in the Strategy on the contributions made by the resources sector in Western Australia to the protection and management of biodiversity (particularly research in remote and previously not well studied areas). DMP suggests that one way to incorporate industry into the Strategy could be through the inclusion of a Western Australian based industry case study. Examples of case studies which DMP could assist DEWHA incorporate into the Strategy are:

- Annual Golden Gecko Awards – these are awarded to companies in WA in recognition of environmental excellence and leadership in responsible resource development.
- Earth Assist program – a partnership between Conservation Volunteers Australia, the WA Department of Environment and Conservation and Rio Tinto aimed at supporting long-term, sustainable environmental programs involving school students.

DMP also considers that the Strategy will be better received if the work that is currently undertaken by Government, the private sector and conservation interest groups, towards maintaining biodiversity is acknowledged. Without this acknowledgement the Strategy could be perceived as not reflecting the high standard of biodiversity conservation work these groups have undertaken. This needs to be better reflected in the Action Statements for example by reading "build on current..." rather than "Prepare and implement...".

DMP also considers that the Strategy main text is too general, with most of the detail contained in the appendices. DMP believes the content in the appendices has value and should be incorporated in the main text. For example, the Strategy should focus on the key elements of biodiversity protection and provide targets that are practical to achieve and are measurable.

Vision

DMP considers that the Vision does not adequately express the importance of biodiversity to the resources sector. The resources sector requires good quality marine, surface and ground waters (both fresh and saline) for production and

processing. Controls on access to these waters are rigorously regulated under key environmental and water legislation and this is also reflected in the *Mining Act 1978* and petroleum legislation. DMP suggests that the Strategy expresses the wider scope of beneficial uses of water and the capacity of legislation and company activities to ensure these water resources are protected with the implication that biodiversity is also protected.

As already expressed above, many of the mining companies support ecosystem and biodiversity programs that benefit not only their areas of activity but also supporting their neighbouring communities to enhance biodiversity. For example, many of the mining companies in Western Australia contribute expertise, funding and machinery to landcare groups (e.g. to support strategic tree planting programs and rehabilitation of degraded areas in catchments). DMP suggests the Strategy should reflect existing Government and industry programs.

DMP notes that biodiscovery and bioprospecting in the marine and terrestrial environments are not well addressed in the Strategy and suggests the Strategy should discuss this issue further.

While the Vision outlines key goals for biodiversity protection, DMP considers that some of the goals require refinement and rewording. DMP makes the following recommended change to the wording. The Vision "Australia's biodiversity is *ecologically* healthy, *tolerant* to climate change, *valued for its life* and essential contribution to our existence". Ensuring the Vision is sound, will result in a better top-down implementation of the Strategy to protect biodiversity.

The changes are discussed below.

- "Australia's biodiversity is healthy" - The term "healthy" implies a state of well being and free of disease. For biodiversity, health should refer to the ecosystem and provision of ecosystem services.
- "resilient to climate change" - The term "resilient" implies that ecosystems should always be returned to their original condition. Ecosystems are dynamic, always evolving and undergo ecosystem succession. Also, it would be difficult to ensure species (e.g. micro organisms) become resilient to adverse changes in temperature and moisture levels in their habitat. Conservation therefore needs to be about conserving for the future.
- "valued for its essential contribution to our existence" – The simple fact is we would not exist without it. But, as mentioned above, we must include the intrinsic value of biodiversity in the vision.

Specific comments

- The Strategy is principally focussed on government actions in protecting biodiversity and is limited on its comment of community responsibilities that should also be included. DMP suggests that the focus should include individual and private sector actions that include such things as providing direct assistance to biodiversity conservation programs (e.g. funding, conducting research and facilitating knowledge sharing).
- DMP is concerned that one of the main threats to WA and South Eastern Australia's biodiversity, namely salinity, is not addressed in the Strategy. Salinity needs to be addressed to ensure the risk loss of habitat for species is

minimised. In WA, 1500 plant species are likely to suffer from salinity and fauna species are likely to be reduced by 30%. Thus, DMP suggests that the Strategy should address salinity as one of the main threats to biodiversity.

- Action 1.1.5 needs to consider other uses (or potential uses) of private land, such as mining interests, at the same time as considering any off-reserve programs. This will ensure all user interests can be identified to ensure appropriate biodiversity conservation measures are developed.
- Appendix A1.5 lists all natural resource industries except for mining and petroleum activities. These should be added to ensure the Strategy provides a comprehensive coverage of all sectors with biodiversity conservation responsibilities.
- Appendix A1.6 does not recognise that industry undertakes scientific research in remote marine and terrestrial areas, holds a vast amount of scientific knowledge and its practical application of biodiversity management. Thus it is important that partnerships with industry are fostered to obtain this invaluable information.
- Appendix A1.9 refers the reader to Appendix 3 instead of Appendix 4.
- Appendix A5.3 could include case studies to explain how each category can be applied. It is important that such practices are explained well.
- The Strategy's glossary should be expanded to include key terms (e.g. precautionary approach, ecologically sustainable cities) and their definition, which will assist the general audience to understand how these can be implemented.
- On page 9, paragraph 6, DMP believes that public land outside of reserves should also be managed for responsible resource development – i.e. "... need to maintain and manage public lands for responsible resource use, water conservation, forests, recreation, heritage value and cultural activities."

I appreciate the invitation for DMP to comment on Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2020 Consultation Draft. It is important that industry is recognised as a major part of the protection and conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems. I also would appreciate DMP to be consulted in the further development of the Strategy. If you have any queries, please contact Mr Ian Briggs on (08) 9222 3600.

Yours sincerely



Tim Griffin
ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL

29 May 2009