

## **Acknowledgements:**

- Greens MP Hon Lynn MacLaren MLC
- Opposition Environment spokesman Chris Tallentire MLA
- CCWA Director Piers Verstegan
- CCWA President David Harries
- Former Senator Jo Vallentine
- Ladies and Gentleman

## **Introduction**

- Good afternoon and thank you very much for the invitation to speak at the 2015 Conservation Council of WA Annual Conference.
- It's a great opportunity to outline the State Government's priorities in the Environment portfolio and participate in the panel session where we can discuss conservation and environmental protection in Western Australia.
- In a State as large as WA, with its varied and unique environment, our conservation actions need to be both wide ranging and targeted.

## **Legislative Reform**

- As you are all aware, Western Australia is renowned for its unique plants and animals, many which are threatened, and as Environment Minister, I'm committed to securing the long-term future of the State's ecological heritage.

- In line with that, the State Government continues to make excellent progress on its commitment to replace the existing Wildlife Conservation Act, which has remained substantially unchanged for 65 years.
- The drafting of the proposed Biodiversity Conservation Bill is well underway and, as the Premier announced on 17 February 2015, we are endeavouring to have the Bill introduced into Parliament by the end of this year.
- There has been extensive consultation on the need to replace the Wildlife Conservation Act over more than 20 years and we have received overwhelming support for this.
- I am confident the Parliament will support the draft Bill, which will include significantly increased penalties for damage to native plants and animals, and provide greater relevance to today's conservation needs.
- It will include fines of up \$500,000 for harming critically endangered species and \$50,000 for harming non-threatened species compared with \$10,000 and \$4000 fines currently in place.
- It will standardise the criteria for threatened species listings based on the international IUCN Red list as well as providing greater alignment with the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

- There will be enhanced protection for whales, dugongs and dolphins and the new legislation will also include a focus on positive conservation actions as an alternative to financial penalties, where appropriate.

### **Threatened Species**

- Conserving our natural environment, particularly threatened species, is a top priority for Government.
- There are currently 247 native animal species listed as threatened in WA, including 49 which are critically endangered. There are also 422 species of threatened plants, of which 163 are critically endangered.
- The State Government coordinates and funds a number of conservation programs, taking an integrated approach to the recovery of threatened species, with a priority given to works supporting critically endangered species.

### ***Western Shield* and Eradication**

- Work continues on wildlife conservation with the State's flagship program, *Western Shield*. Now in its 19<sup>th</sup> year, the program is working to recover native animal populations in the wild through broad-scale control of foxes and feral cats, giving native animals a chance to bounce back.

- At least 53 threatened mammals and bird species can be found in *Western Shield* baited areas, and two species, the quenda and tammar wallaby, have since been removed from the State's threatened species list thanks to this program.
- Currently, about one million fox and feral cat baits are laid annually across more than three million hectares of Department of Parks and Wildlife-managed land, from as far north as the Pilbara, through the forests of the south-west, to areas east of Esperance in the south.
- We now have a new weapon in the fight against feral cats with Eradicat®, a new bait that has been developed over the last decade by Parks and Wildlife scientists.
- It was recently registered by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority for operational use in WA following successful trials in the arid and semi-arid zones of the State, including at Matuwa (Lorna Glen) in the Goldfields, Faure Island in Shark Bay and the Montebello Islands.
- It has also been successfully used at Dirk Hartog National Park – WA's largest island – with aerial Eradicat baiting undertaken in May 2014 south of a purpose built feral cat barrier fence.
- No signs of feral cats have been seen in this area since October 2014 and baiting on the northern part of island has just been carried out.

- The integration of Eradicat® with existing fox control under *Western Shield* is now being rolled out in key locations, such as the Dryandra Woodland in the western Wheatbelt, to safeguard the future of wild woylie and numbat populations thanks to \$1.7 million in financial support from the Federal Government under the Threatened Species Strategy.

### **Community engagement/Parks for People**

- Parks and Wildlife manages 100 national parks, 13 marine parks, and numerous conservation reserves – in all more than 28 million hectares of conservation estate. In addition, it manages the heart of Perth, the Swan Canning Riverpark.
- Conserving the long-term future of WA's conservation areas is a collaborative effort – it needs to be a partnership between Government, industry and the community if we are to ensure our natural areas are accessible for all to experience and enjoy.
- A key priority in the Government's broader conservation strategy is the *Parks for People* initiative.
- This \$21.05 million, four year Royalties for Regions-funded initiative forms part of the Government's five year, \$43.5 million Western Australian Caravan and Camping Action Plan.

- Once completed, *Parks for People* will deliver at least 450 new campsites and caravan sites across WA. I am pleased to say that more than half this target has already been reached, after less than two years.
- The aim of this initiative is to attract more visitors to WA's national parks. Improving accessibility and diversifying people's experiences in national parks underpins the Government's focus to engage the community and build appreciation and support for parks and the wider conservation effort. Providing quality infrastructure also helps ensure the enjoyment of natural areas by increasing numbers of people is able to occur in a managed, sustainable manner.

## **Kimberley**

- I cannot talk about the Government's conservation priorities without mentioning a signature policy, the \$81.5 million *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy*.
- Launched by the Liberal National Government in 2011, the strategy is delivering unprecedented focus on protecting the natural and cultural values of the region.
- It is one of the most significant conservation initiatives in WA's history and the largest ever targeted investment in conservation in the Kimberley.
- The *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy* moves beyond managing reserves on an individual basis and takes a landscape-scale approach to conservation, as well

as integrating contemporary science with traditional Aboriginal practices and knowledge.

- The centrepiece of the strategy is the creation of the Kimberley Wilderness parks, which includes the State's largest interconnected system of marine and terrestrial parks covering about five million hectares.
- New marine parks have already been created at Camden Sound and Eighty Mile Beach, and work is underway with traditional owners to create the proposed Lalang-garram / Horizontal Falls and North Lalang-garram marine parks and the proposed Oomeday National Park.
- This work is focused on conserving one of the last untouched wilderness areas left in the world and it is delivering significant social outcomes as well as unprecedented conservation benefits
- More than 200 traditional owners are now engaged in works programs on country as a result of this Government's investment in our Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy. Before the Strategy, there were only about 15 fee- for-service aboriginal employees.
- Parks and Wildlife is working with some 29 traditional owner groups around the State to promote employment and training opportunities, establish joint management arrangements and facilitate customary activities on country. This

compares with about 10 groups 10 years ago. I am very proud of the way in which this engagement has grown over the years. .

- I am very pleased to report that just last week, amendments to the Conservation and Land Management Act passed Parliament. These amendments will further strengthen Joint Management arrangements by allowing for joint vesting of parks with Aboriginal traditional owner groups.
- This change builds on the amendments to the CALM Act made in 2012 which provided for Aboriginal joint management and access to Parks and Wildlife-managed land for Aboriginal customary activities, as well as introducing a new objective into the CALM Act to protect and conserve the value of the land to Aboriginal persons.
- The latest joint vesting provisions have already enabled the signing of an Indigenous Land Use Agreement in the Kimberley associated with the marine and national parks being created under the Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy, and will greatly assist with other negotiations between the Government and exclusive possession native title holders in the Kimberley and elsewhere.
- The *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy* is also working to manage threats caused by fire, feral animals and weeds across five million hectares of the north Kimberley.



- Already these efforts have been successful in halving the amount of destructive late dry season fires across the north Kimberley and increasing the number and distribution of key threatened mammals to parts of the Mitchell Plateau.

## **Fire management**

- In terms of fire management, Parks and Wildlife has had a very successful start to its spring prescribed burning program, which is underway throughout the State's south-west regions. As well as helping protect communities from bushfires, prescribed burning is also a tool that helps protect the State's biodiversity.
- The department's spring prescribed burning program so far has capitalised on favourable weather conditions to reduce forest fuels in national parks, conservation reserves and State forest.
- Last year's result of 147,000ha now means that 35 per cent of department-managed lands in the south-west has a fuel age of less than six years. This is important because as forest fuels get older than this they can support intense bushfires in summer, so prescribed burning significantly assists in reducing the severity of bushfires.
- So far this spring, the department has prescribed burnt 77,000ha.

- The program involves careful planning, consultation and monitoring and burns are planned and carried out in accordance with the International Standard for Risk Management and only when weather conditions are favourable.
- Prescribed burning is an essential tool in minimising the threat of bushfires through the State's forest regions, but is not without risk, particularly in a drying climate.
- The aim is to have 45 per cent of Parks and Wildlife-managed lands with a fuel age of less than six years as this had been shown to provide an effective level of strategic bushfire risk mitigation across the landscape.
- Low intensity prescribed fire also maintains the variety of habitats required by our marvellous array of native plants and animals.

### **Western Australian Waste Strategy**

- Another key area of my portfolio is the waste sector, which remains an important focus for the Liberal National Government.
- In 2012–13, about 39 per cent of resources were extracted from the waste stream across the State. The rest of the material, more than 3.5 million tonnes, was lost to landfill. Increased diversion rates deliver significant economic and environmental benefits.
- The State Government increased the landfill levy from 1 January this year as an incentive to improve recovery of waste.

- To complement the levy increase, the Government has significantly increased funding for key initiatives such as the recently announced Recycled Construction and Demolition Product Procurement Incentive Program.
- This will provide \$10 million over three years to encourage the uptake of these products by local governments, State Government and the private sector.
- Construction and demolition waste makes up about half of all materials sent to landfill and the increased recovery of these materials close to where they will be used will reduce transport impacts in the long term.
- It will also lead to lower demand for raw material extraction, which will benefit the natural environment in the Perth and Peel regions.
- Another important initiative is the Better Bins Program, which provides funding support and guidance to local governments to implement better practice kerbside collection services to achieve higher recovery of recyclables.
- Seven local councils have signed up to the program, launched in January 2014 as a \$7.5 million pilot. With increased funding announced in April this year, \$20 million is now available to extend the scheme.
- The Cities of Stirling and Rockingham and the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup intend using Better Bins funding to introduce new three bin systems to provide source

separation of household green waste, alongside normal kerbside dry recyclable collection and residual waste collection.

- The City of Bayswater, the Towns of Cambridge and Cottesloe and the Shire of Capel are aiming to use Better Bins funding to improve their existing three bin systems.
- The Western Australian Government is also committed to improving the Household Hazardous Waste program and a revived Western Australian Transitional E-waste program, to increase diversion of these wastes by promoting better practice collection and drop off networks.

### **Illegal dumping**

- The Liberal National Government also is also piloting a program to provide financial support to charities to implement measures to reduce illegal dumping at their premises.
- The Better Practice Program for Charitable Recyclers is being developed to address concerns about the amount of illegal dumping at charity bins, which is a significant financial burden for the not-for-profit organisations.
- To take effect from next year, the program will include grants for charities to implement measures such as lighting, fencing and education to discourage illegal dumping. The State Government will also provide rebates to participating charitable recyclers for the cost of disposing of the waste at landfill sites.

- The program will be complemented by the Department of Environment Regulation's illegal dumping team, which will patrol dumping hot spots and use covert electronic surveillance to identify offenders.

### **End-of-waste materials**

- A key issue in waste management is what we call 'end-of-waste'. In other words, when can waste be deemed to be a product that is safe for re-use. To address this, we are implementing a framework to regulate the use of waste-derived materials to ensure their use does not cause an unacceptable risk to the environment or human health. Waste derived materials can include fill materials and construction products. The use of waste-derived materials diverts waste from landfill, and reduces the demand for raw materials and fossil fuels.
- The Department of Environment Regulation published a guidance statement in November 2014 and material guidelines for clean fill and construction products were published in January 2015. A guideline for submitting an application for case-by-case determinations for the use of waste-derived materials was published on 15 July 2015.

### **Climate change policy**

- The Western Australian Government's climate change strategy, Adapting to our Changing Climate, was released in October 2012. The strategy acknowledges the

government's role in adapting to climate change through decision making, asset management and service delivery, and support to other stakeholders.

- Assessment of the climate risks and planning to adapt and take advantage of any potential benefits is in the State's economic, social and environmental interests. Adaptation is a sensible part of good strategic planning for governments, businesses and other stakeholders and can help our State to prosper and become more resilient.
- The Western Australian Government has provided important support for renewable energy and low emissions technologies in the State, including \$20 million for the 10MW Greenough River Solar Farm, Australia's first utility-scale solar farm.
- Assistance is also provided through the State Government's Low Emissions Energy Development Fund, which supports innovative technology projects at the pre-commercialisation stage, for example, investing \$10 million to assist the development of wave power technology.

### **Environmental Impact Assessment**

- Another important area of environmental protection is that of impact assessment. The process set down in the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* is an independent and transparent process, with requirements on proponents to demonstrate how

their project could be undertaken in an environmentally acceptable way. There is also considerable opportunity for community input into this process.

- One particular area that may be of interest is mining in the banded iron formation ranges of the Yilgarn region. In 2010, the Liberal National Government established a broad framework for nature conservation and mining in the Mount Manning area, which noted that development proposals would continue to be considered under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act and the *Mining Act 1978*.
- I have asked the Environmental Protection Authority to reassess two proposals to mine iron ore in the Yilgarn – the Jackson 5 and Bungalbin East deposits by Polaris Metals and the expansion of mining on Mungada Ridge by Sinosteel Midwest Corporation at the level of Public Environmental Review to ensure a more thorough and public process.
- You may also be aware that I recently asked the EPA to further consider the impacts of a proposed regional waste disposal facility in the Shire of Cuballing. This decision reflects my view, based on information presented to me at the time, that there is some uncertainty about the impact on terrestrial fauna, in particular the numbat, and therefore the project should be assessed more fully. . I look forward to receiving the EPA's advice in respect to this matter.

## Offsets

- The State Government recognises the need to develop a comprehensive offset framework to ensure that offsets applied under environmental processes are reasonable and transparent and based on sound information.
- The WA Environmental Offsets Register was launched in August 2013 to facilitate transparency and accountability of approved offsets, provide a central, publicly accessible record, allow for monitoring of offset implementation and outcomes, and improve auditing and quality control of offsets.
- It now contains records of the establishment and ongoing implementation of offsets for the last two years.
- The WA Environmental Offsets Guidelines published in August 2014 give guidance in applying the 2011 WA Government Environmental Offsets Policy to achieve consistent and fair decisions, which protect important environmental values and manage the impacts on these.
- The Department of Environment Regulation and the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority are developing a quantitative methodology for determining offsets in the intensive use zone in south-west WA, as well as in the mining and pastoral zone.



## Bilateral Agreements

- As part of the Commonwealth Government's "One Stop Shop" reforms, Western Australia has signed an assessment bilateral agreement under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) for its environmental impact assessment and clearing permit processes.
- The agreement commenced on 1 January 2015 and is working well to date.
- The Commonwealth and State Governments are continuing to negotiate an approvals bilateral agreement, the draft of which was released for public comment early this year.
- If signed, this agreement will accredit Western Australian environmental approvals under the EPBC Act, removing the need for separate duplicative processes under both jurisdictions.
- Public submissions have closed and the draft agreement is being revised. The finalisation of the agreement depends on amendments to the EPBC Act, which are currently before the Senate.

## Strategic Assessment

- The Liberal-National Government is planning for the future by undertaking the largest and most complex strategic land use planning exercise in the State's history .
- The State and Commonwealth Governments are jointly undertaking a Strategic Assessment of the Perth and Peel Regions to protect our important environmental values.
- I consider that this is the most important planning blueprint for WA since the Stephenson Hepburn plan of the 1950s.
- Through this plan, we are taking the opportunity to sustainably support the growth of the Perth-Peel regions to 3.5 million people to support an efficient and liveable city while protecting our most important environmental features.
- The assessment is considering the environmental impacts from future development and ways to avoid, minimise and mitigate these impacts.
- I note that the Environmental Protection Authority has strongly backed the Government's Strategic Assessment and has also endorsed the Western Australian Planning Commission's vision for a more compact city as the best way to protect the environment in the long term.
- The Government looks forward to releasing relevant documentation for a 3 month public consultation period by the end of this year.

## Conclusion

- Today I have given you a broad overview of our key environmental priorities and the success we have had in implementing initiatives to support these as part of the Government's commitment to conserving the natural environment.
- As I stated earlier, partnerships with organisations such as yours and the wider community are important contributors to this success. Community engagement in and appreciation of the natural environment is essential if we are to ensure environmental values are conserved and well managed into the future.
- Thank you again for the invitation to be here today. It has been a great opportunity to share the Government's environmental vision and achievements and be part of the on-going conversation about conserving, managing and protection Western Australia's environment.