

Wildflower Society
of WESTERN AUSTRALIA (INC.)



9th December 2012

The Secretary
The Senate
Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Dunstone,

Re: inquiry into the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia.

The Wildflower Society, established in 1958, has as one of its main objectives: working for the protection of the flora and vegetation of the state, and it has over seven hundred members.

We believe it is very timely that the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' legislation is reviewed.

With respect to the terms of reference we have the following comments:

(a) Management of key threats to listed species and ecological communities.

Of particular interest are the Banksia Woodlands of the Swan Coastal Plain and the Banded Ironstone Formations (BIF) of the Mid-west and Yilgarn. Neither of these is listed although the Banksia Woodlands have recently been nominated by the community. This was by the Urban Bushland Council (UBC) and the Wildflower Society. The listing procedure is a significant challenge for a community group. However without this occurring little would be happening in Western Australia as there seems to be a reluctance by either the Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) or the WA Government to list ecological communities. Conservation management in Western Australia is also hampered with the State's Wildlife Conservation Act being more than sixty years old. This very much seems to suit the State's rampant mining industry.

Communities are not being listed and certainly the areas mentioned are not being adequately managed. The Banksia Woodlands are being cleared for urbanisation and the groundwater they depend on is being depleted by both climate change and over pumping to provide water for the Perth population. Once common vegetation is being threatened. Almost every BIF area in the Mid-west and Yilgarn is being targeted for mining despite being home to endemic flora and fauna. In many cases whole habitats are being destroyed.

It would be a great help if assistance was provided to community groups to assist with the listing process.

(b) Development of recovery plans.

The Society has been involved in some of these, particularly for plant species associated with the Yilgarn BIF area. The process is very slow, expensive and seems to rely heavily on funding from mining companies. Our experience is that it can take at least 2-3 years or longer to progress a plan. Commonwealth funding would be of assistance as well as technical advice.

(c) Management of critical habitat across all land tenures.

This is very much hampered in Western Australia, first because of conditions in the State's Mining Act where no land can be incorporated into the conservation estate without the concurrence of the State Minister for Mines. This also leads to the State have a land zoning category called Conservation Park where, by definition, the land is set aside for conservation and mining! There are also many thousands of acres of land purchased for conservation using either commonwealth NHT or Caring for Country money where the current zoning is unallocated crown land (UCL) principally because agreement cannot be reached with State government departments on its incorporation into the conservation estate. A separate issue is the ability of the DEC to manage the areas because of the ever decreasing finance available for management.

The matters mentioned above also apply to terms of reference (d), regulatory and funding arrangements at all levels of government. Increasingly in Western Australia the DEC is relying on offset money mainly from mining companies, but also from housing developers. This is money which is only available for a short period of time and also only if the mine, and/or housing development, is allowed to go ahead. More and more our critical habitats and species are being traded away for very short term income from mining and also to provide for housing via urban sprawl.

We look forward to the Senate Committee taking these comments into account and we would also like to receive a copy of the report once it is released.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Moyle
Conservation Sub-Committee Chair