



July 29, 2011

The Clerk Assistant (Committees)
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc.) (WAFarmers) thanks you for the opportunity to comment House Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts' *'Inquiry into Australia's biodiversity in a changing climate.'*

As background, WAFarmers is the State's largest and most influential rural lobby and service organisation. WAFarmers represents approximately 4,000 Western Australian farmers from a range of primary industries including grain growers, meat and wool producers, horticulturalists, dairy farmers, commercial egg producers, pastoralists and beekeepers. Collectively our members are major contributors to the \$5.5 billion gross value of production that agriculture in its various forms contributes annually to Western Australia's economy. Additionally, through differing forms of land tenure, our members own, control and capably manage many millions of hectares of the State's land mass and as such are responsible for maintaining the productive capacity and environmental well being of that land.

In this submission, WAFarmers highlights that recent 'state-based' reviews have identified that Western Australia's biodiversity has, for a number of years, been in decline, and that this decline has been contributed too, in part, by the failure of various state agencies to respond appropriately to identified problems. This is particularly so in the case of feral pests and weeds, which negatively impact not only on native plant and animals but also significantly on farm crops and livestock.

Therefore, whilst this Inquiry's Terms of Reference are focused on the impact of climate change on Australia's biodiversity, we request that it also considers farm businesses, as these are significant managers of land in Western Australia, and therefore likely to be impacted by any recommendations which the committee makes.

To highlight to the review committee the recent assessment of Western Australia's response to identified biodiversity issues, WAFarmers draws the reviewers to the 'Towards a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for Western Australia December 2004 - Discussion Paper', which stated:

'The national pattern of decline in terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity is reflected in WA. Destruction or permanent modification of natural habitats through a combination of factors, such as removal of native vegetation for agriculture, urban development, infrastructure and extractive industries, has led to a direct decline in biodiversity. These processes are often accompanied by secondary threats, for example salinisation of land and water, predation and competition by introduced animals and competition from introduced plants, disease from pathogens and changes in management regimes, such as for fire and grazing.

In WA, approximately two per cent (or 547) of described taxa are listed as threatened at the State level, including 357 plants, 41 mammals, 42 birds, 17 reptiles, three amphibians, four fish, and 83 invertebrates. Eleven mammals, two birds, one native bee, four snails and 15 plants are presumed to have become extinct in WA since European settlement. In addition, 66 ecological communities have been identified as threatened, and three as presumed destroyed. However, the real number of species and ecological communities that may have become extinct or been destroyed could be much higher as many disappearances may have gone undetected.

WA is on the edge of substantial species extinction, if conservation action is not accelerated. In the wheat and sheep belts of south-west WA, it is hypothesised that around 450 flora species and 400 invertebrates will become extinct without management intervention to ameliorate the effects of rising groundwater on native habitat. The current rate of land becoming saline is estimated at around 14,000 ha per year.'

Further, three years after that assessment, the State of the Environment Report (2007), identified that:

- *WA currently has 362 threatened plants, 199 threatened animals and 69 threatened ecological communities.*
- *Recovery plans have been developed for less than one-third of threatened species and ecological communities.*
- *There is ongoing loss and degradation of biodiversity in WA.*
- *Knowledge about many species and ecosystems and some threats to biodiversity remains inadequate.*

The same document then commented that; forty-eight actions for maintaining biodiversity were identified in the 1998 State of the Environment Report (Government of Western Australia, 1998). Of these 46% remained incomplete, 33% have been completed but not evaluated, and only 21% have been completed and evaluated. Evaluating the effectiveness of programs to maintain biodiversity is very difficult. Indicators of biodiversity condition still largely do not exist and so few environmental outcomes can be quantified. In addition, the effects of on-ground actions are difficult to detect and it may take many years of monitoring before environmental outcomes are evident.'

As we have earlier indicated, the ongoing decline in the State's biodiversity has been identified as being significantly impacted by factors which have flourished under a poor response from government, and particularly so in the cases of the land and water salinisation and in competition and predation by introduced species. This impact on the State's farm businesses of

this was most recently highlighted in the State's Southern Rangelands Pastoral Advisory Group's Report; *'A Review of the Economic and Ecological Sustainability of Pastoralism in the Southern Rangelands of Western Australia'* (2010) which commented *'wild dog numbers have risen markedly over the last decade as a result of diminished control effort'* and in the Legislative Assembly's Economics and Industry Standing Committee Report on its Inquiry into the Department of Environment and Conservation's Management of Former Pastoral Leases (2010), which reported that *"a 2005 survey of the distribution and abundance of key pest animals in Western Australia found wild dogs, feral goats, feral deer, feral pigs, foxes and rabbits to be the key pest animals in Western Australia, particularly in the agricultural regions. When the distribution range is expanded to include the rangelands, the list also includes feral camels, feral donkeys, feral horses and feral livestock. Many of these animals represent a major threat to the pastoral industry and agriculture, cause considerable damage to the environment and pose a severe risk to biodiversity in the state."*

WAFarmers therefore requests that the review committee consider this previous management and that 'impacts of climate change or not' should not be a driver for this review to make findings or recommendations which introduce additional restraints on Western Australian farmers who are already significantly restricted in the land management practices.

In closing, WAFarmers thanks you for your consideration of this submission. We note that the hearing dates for this Inquiry have not been finalized and request that, if the opportunity arises for a forum in Perth, that WAFarmers is allowed to present evidence at that time.

To facilitate that, or should you wish to further discuss the issues raised in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact myself or WAFarmers Director of Policy, Alan Hill on

Yours sincerely

Mike Norton
President