

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

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Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Program: Environment Standards Division (ESD)
Topic: Cockatoo Surveys
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Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: It was done in 2009. I beg your pardon. What I am trying to get to is that there seems to be a lot of dispute, including from some of the scientists who gave evidence last week, about whether the three individuals identified would have had any chance at all of identifying all of the appropriate trees or the suitable trees in a couple of hours on 14 December. If they were working from the list that was generated in 2009 from the PER, there is up to 534 additional trees that may have matured since 2009 to the degree where they might provide nesting hollows. That is the reason why observers and the watchers who have been on site since the land-clearing started are observing cockatoos basically evacuating these trees as they are being pushed over by earth-moving equipment.

Ms Collins: My understanding is that the people who did the investigations on the ground were not working from a list. They were working from the guideline that said that any tree with a diameter greater than 500 millimetres could potentially qualify and to then have a look and see whether the trees of that diameter contained hollows. Only two of the 26 trees that were measured at that girth contained hollows and, as I said, they were found not to be suitable a habitat but were nevertheless retained.

Senator LUDLAM: How are they doing that from the ground? I genuinely do not understand how you do that from the ground.

Mr Cahill: We will have a look, ourselves personally, at the compliance plan that was conducted for the exercise.

Answer:

All trees in the area cleared during December 2016 were inspected by qualified fauna experts from AECOM to ascertain the presence of nesting black cockatoos. This inspection was carried out in accordance with the Fauna Management Plan's section on cockatoos (section 4.2.4), which requires an investigation of each potential breeding and nesting tree to be cleared in the area. The Department received advice that this inspection was conducted on 14 December 2016. The Department has satisfied itself that the three personnel who conducted the investigation hold relevant tertiary qualifications in environmental science, zoology and conservation biology, and together have decades of experience conducting ecological investigations within Western Australia.

The cockatoo investigation involved identification and observation of all trees greater than 500 millimetres diameter at breast height. This method of assessment is consistent with the Department's referral guidelines for Black Cockatoos. A total of 26 trees greater than 500 mm diameter at breast height were identified in the area to be cleared in December 2016.

Only two of the 26 trees were found to contain hollows, with neither being adequate in size for black cockatoo nesting. Nevertheless, the Department was advised by AECOM, Main Roads,

and the Environmental Protection Authority that as a precautionary measure, all 26 trees were taped and retained from clearing during the nesting season. The Department was advised that no evidence of black cockatoo nesting was observed in the area cleared during December 2016.