



**AUSTRALIA'S BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STRATEGY 2010 – 2020  
CONSULTATION DRAFT**

**SUBMISSION**

**To**

**National Biodiversity Strategy Review Task Group**

**Prepared by:-**

**Organisation:                   The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc)**

**President:                        Mr Mike Norton**

**Address:                         Ground Floor  
28 Thorogood Street  
BURSWOOD WA 6100**

**Postal Address:                PO Box 6291  
EAST PERTH WA 6892**

**Phone:                          (08) 9486 2100**

**Facsimile:                      (08) 9361 3544**

**Email:                          alanhill@wafarmers.org.au**

**Contact Name:                 Alan Hill**

**Title:                             Director of Policy**

**May 2009**

---

## **Summary**

The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc) (WAFarmers) is the State's largest and most influential rural lobby and service organisation.

WAFarmers welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Consultation Draft of Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010 – 2020.

In this submission, WAFarmers calls for the outcomes of the review to:

- Recognise and value on-farm biodiversity activity.
- Initiate investment by government to provide incentive for farm businesses to create an on-farm public good biodiversity outcome.

---

## Background

The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc) (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 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.

## Introduction

WAFarmers welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Consultation Draft of Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010 – 2020 (referred to in this submission as the Consultation Draft).

In this submission, WAFarmers comments are based on our understanding of Western Australia's biodiversity management although we accept that management across the various regions of Australia may vary in effectiveness. Recent reviews of biodiversity management in Western Australian highlight that a significant amount of investment is required to achieve the delivery of meaningful on-ground results.

The 'Towards a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for Western Australia December 2004 - Discussion Paper' 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, which further diminish biodiversity.'*

*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.'*

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

- *At a national level, Western Australia has 8 of 12 Australian biodiversity hotspots.*
- *At a global level, the South West is recognised as one of the world's 34 biodiversity hotspots.*
- *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.*

Identifying the lack of progress made over the previous ten years of biodiversity management in Western Australia, the same document comments that:

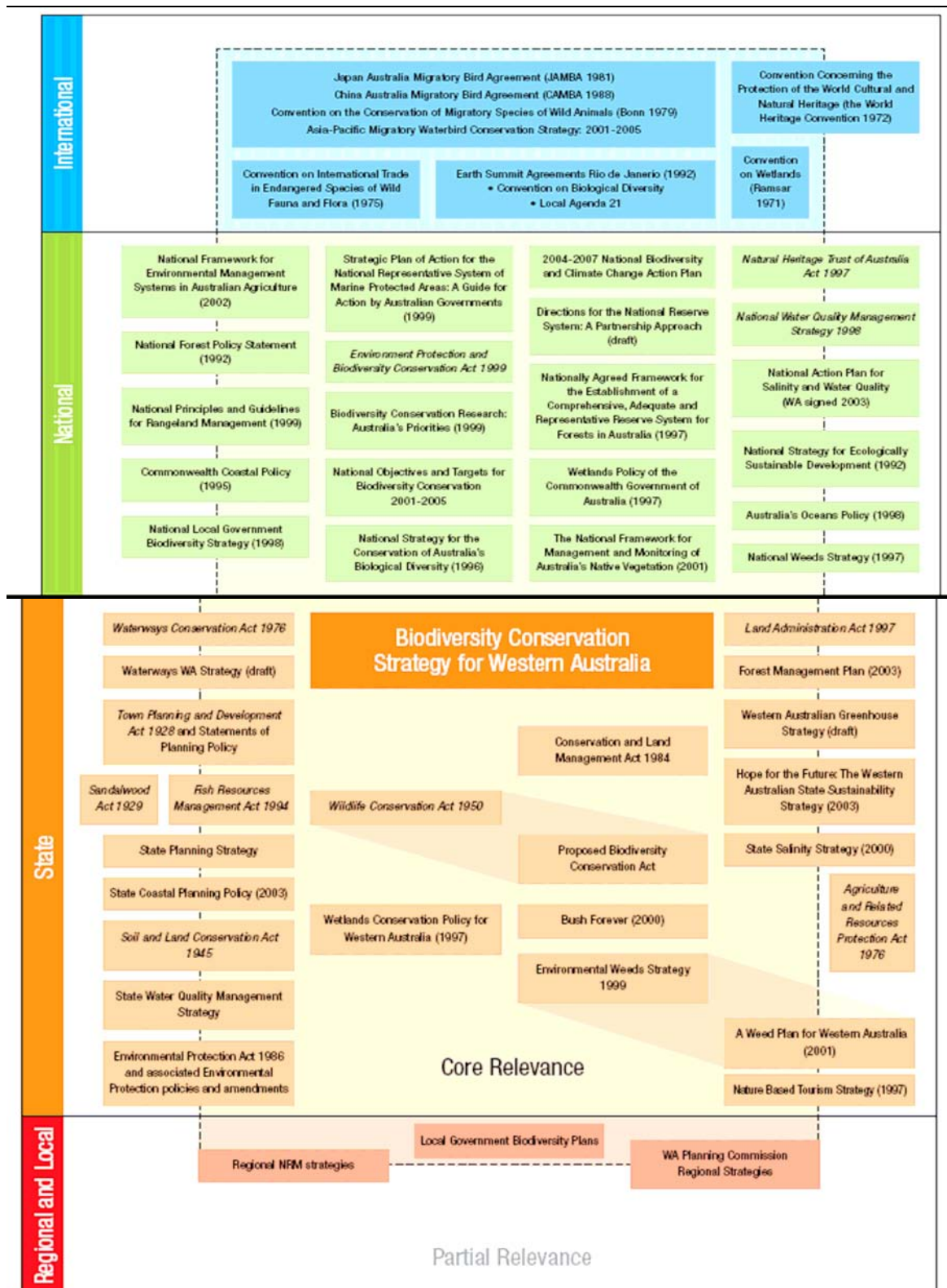
*Forty-eight actions for maintaining biodiversity were identified in the 1998 State of the Environment Report (Government of Western Australia, 1998). Of these 46% remained incomplete, 33% have been completed but not evaluated, and only 21% have been completed and evaluated. Evaluating the effectiveness 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.'*

## **Submission**

The 'Towards a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for Western Australia Discussion Paper (December 2004) outlined the existing policy environment within which a future state-based strategy would operate (Figure 1, Page 4). Whilst there has been policy change and financial investment since 2004, the Figure highlights the significant complexity which impacts on the delivery of biodiversity programs in Western Australia. Whilst the policy and planning component is crucial, without a coordinated, engagement program with landholders and investment by government there is a risk that delivery of the Consultation Draft becomes little more than 'another link in this chain'.

The Conservation Draft, and its Response Form (<https://www.nationalbiodiversitystrategy.com/>) are heavily focussed on engaging the private sector in biodiversity conservation. To be effective in the delivery of biodiversity outcomes the strong support of, and participation by a very sizable section of landholders is required. Farmers occupy and manage 61% of Australia's landmass therefore their involvement will be critical in this process. It has been WAFarmers experience that obtaining greater levels of industry acceptance requires Government and its agencies to recognise and value on-farm biodiversity activity.

Increasing calls for improved conservation and biodiversity management in the name of public good are quite justifiably met with skepticism by the farming community, as these calls rarely if ever acknowledge current sound on-farm management practices. ABARE (2008) report that in 2006/07, 95% of Western Australian agricultural businesses were involved in some form of Natural Resource Management activity, managing weeds, pests and diseases, and land and soil management practices, an investment totaling \$526 million. Whilst it could be argued that this investment is a component of modern, sustainable farm production systems, WAFarmers believes that through the



---

adoption of processes like minimum or no-till farming systems, environmental best management systems and precision farming, Western Australian agricultural businesses demonstrate that they are already making a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation.

Which raises the issue of the differential between the high level of on-farm production-linked investment, and that into the 'lock and leave' processes traditionally associated with biodiversity conservation. In previous years and through a number of submissions, WAFarmers has continually raised the need for financial incentives for on-farm conservation activities. The issue which firsts needs addressing is the Government's commitment to moving beyond the development of a 'strategy' and into providing incentives for landholders to become involved in more traditional forms of biodiversity conservation.

The general perception of WAFarmers members on the greatest disincentive to conservation is that there are no incentives. A purely financial perspective of native vegetation on farm land is that it is generally seen as a liability, not producing an return and yet it attracts local government rates the equivalent of productive farmland and incurs maintenance costs, for example through fencing and fire breaks. Family owned and operated farms manage time as they do any other farm resource, non or low productive activities are prioritised below activities tied to income generation. Until such time as realistic provision for equity adjustment (compensation) is made available for loss of potential or real productive capacity on freehold landing the name of public good, then increasing participation in biodiversity conservation schemes will be problematic.

WAFarmers believes that to ensure an appropriately scaled response to the Conservation Draft, its delivery needs to include sufficient incentive for farm businesses to create a public good biodiversity outcome. Whether these are market-based incentives, taxation based or through the allocation of public funds, is subject to further discussion and WAFarmers would welcome involvement in that process.

## **References**

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008). Natural Resource Management on Australian Farms, 2006-07.

Department of Conservation and Land Management (2004). Towards a biodiversity conservation strategy for Western Australia, Government of Western Australia.

Environmental Protection Authority (2007). State of the Environment Report. Government of Western Australia.

.....**END**.....