



**Final Report**

**Jurisdiction Report -  
Western Australia**

**National Framework  
for the  
Management and  
Monitoring of  
Australia's Native  
Vegetation**

**Prepared for  
*Environment Australia*  
November 2000**

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in association with

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 What is the National Vegetation Framework?

In June 1998, the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC) agreed to the development and implementation of the *National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation* (termed the NVF). The intention of this policy initiative was to provide a unified, multilateral forum through which to pursue improvements to native vegetation management and monitoring.<sup>1</sup>

In February 1999, ANZECC Standing Committee on Conservation (SCC) agreed that it would be appropriate to engage an independent consultant to conduct a preliminary assessment of the jurisdictions against the draft National Vegetation Framework. A report was subsequently produced - "Native Vegetation National Overview" - which documented the key challenges for vegetation management and monitoring within each jurisdiction.

For the purpose of the NVF, eight jurisdictions were identified in Australia comprising the 7 states and territories, and the Commonwealth. Following endorsement of the NVF and the jurisdiction interim Work Plans by ANZECC in December 1999, each jurisdiction continued preparation of an interim Work Plan that is considered to be the principal means of implementing the National Vegetation Framework. The Work Plans identified the vegetation management and monitoring activities, time frames for when each activity was to occur, responsibility for implementation of the activities and indicators for measurement of success.

The native vegetation outcomes being sought in the Framework are:<sup>2</sup>

- a reversal in the long-term decline in the extent and quality of Australia's native vegetation cover by:
  - conserving native vegetation, and substantially reducing land clearing;
  - conserving Australia's biodiversity; and
  - restoring, by means of substantially increased revegetation, the environmental values and productive capacity of Australia's degraded land and water;
- conservation and, where appropriate, restoration of native vegetation to maintain and enhance biodiversity, protect water quality and conserve soil resources, including on private managed land for agriculture, forestry and urban development;
- retention and enhancement of biodiversity and native vegetation at both regional and national levels; and
- an improvement in the condition of existing native vegetation.

The more specific vegetation outcomes being sought within the context of integrated natural resource management for the Western Australian Work Plan are described in Section 3 below.

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<sup>1</sup> Environment Australia, n.d , *Consultancy Brief*, Canberra.

<sup>2</sup> ANZECC, 1999, *National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation*, ACT.

At the ANZECC July 2000 meeting it was agreed to publicly release the Work Plans. At the commencement of the evaluation in October 2000, the Commonwealth and ACT had publicly released their final version of the Work Plan, with interim work plans available from other jurisdictions.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Evaluation

At the December 1999 meeting, the ANZEC SCC noted that an independent evaluation of progress against the National Vegetation Framework and the fulfilment of Work Plan Commitments should commence mid 2000, with the report presented to the Council at the December 2000 meeting.

ANZECC identified the purpose of the evaluation was 'to assess progress against the *National Framework for the Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation* and fulfilment of the Work Plan commitments' (that were developed by each jurisdiction). Incorporated into the evaluation process was the additional focus of evaluating the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Work Plans for achieving long term sustainable vegetation management. The Terms of Reference for the Evaluation are provided below.

### Terms of Reference

#### A. Assessment of Effectiveness of Work Plans and their Implementation

1. Assess current vegetation management and monitoring practices in jurisdictions against those set out in the respective Work Plans and against best practice.
2. Assess anticipated long term vegetation management and monitoring outcomes against the Work Plans.
3. Assess progress by jurisdictions in meeting the Work Plan success measures within the identified timeframes.

#### B. Propose Improvements

4. Propose improvements to Work Plan management mechanisms that are feasible, practical and relevant to jurisdictions and take into account best practice. Proposed improvements should be within the context of National Framework objectives.
5. Suggest a process for jurisdictions to review and refine Work Plans on a continuing basis, to provide, amongst other things, for improvements in understanding of how best to achieve best practice native vegetation management.

#### C. Propose suitable ongoing independent evaluation arrangements

Propose a mechanism and time frame for independent evaluation of Work Plans on an ongoing basis, noting that vegetation management and monitoring activities are to be evaluated against agreed native vegetation outcomes and identified best practice.

#### D. Assess progress against the National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation

Evaluate how far actions in Work Plans enable each jurisdiction to achieve the vision and principles underpinning the National Framework especially the national goal to reverse the long-term decline of native vegetation in Australia.

The evaluation examined the performance of the jurisdiction Work Plans, from the release of NVF by ANZECC in December 1999, until September 2000. Our work examined the vegetation management and monitoring activities undertaken by the lead agencies in each jurisdiction that contribute to the progress of the Work Plan.

The review was implemented within a tight time frame to meet the reporting requirements of ANZECC. The following state agencies were the primary contributor to the Jurisdiction Work Plan evaluation – The Departments of Conservation and Land Management; and Environmental Protection; Agriculture Western Australia; Water and Rivers Commission; and Ministry for Planning. Non-government stakeholders' views were also sought from local government, indigenous landholders, rural industry and conservation group perspectives, but the timetable contributed to a reduced level of interaction by some stakeholders. A list of participants involved in this jurisdiction review is provided in Annex 5.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Evaluation Approach

A central component of the evaluation was to devise an effective method that would allow evaluation of the eight jurisdictions Work Plans in a restricted time frame, while still allowing for jurisdiction input and discussion. The following provides a description of the approach employed for the evaluation, and method used to evaluate the jurisdiction Work Plans.

The approach to the evaluation consisted of the following :

- **Team meeting to confirm evaluation approach** – all members of the team that were leading the evaluation in the various jurisdictions met over a two day period, shortly after signing of the contract. The purpose of this meeting was to ensure an evaluation approach was devised that addressed the Terms of Reference and ensure that all members of the team had an opportunity to input and understand the agreed approach to ensure consistency in data-gathering and familiarity with process.
- **Contact with Jurisdictions** – managers of each Jurisdiction evaluation directly contacted agency stakeholders to inform them of the NVF evaluation process and invite participation. A time for a stakeholder meeting to be undertaken to discuss the Work Plan was confirmed. In Western Australia, the lead agency contacted was the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), and representatives from CALM, Agriculture Western Australia, Water and Rivers Commission, the Ministry for Planning, the Department of Environmental Protection and the Western Australian Municipal Association were invited to participate in the meeting.
- **Pre-meeting Preparation** – Due to time limitations, a preliminary desk-top analysis was undertaken by the consultant team, reviewing the Western Australian Work Plan against a number of criteria. This information was circulated to all participants prior to the Work Plan evaluation meeting to allow for stakeholder review.
- **Jurisdiction Evaluation Meeting** – a jurisdiction meeting was conducted to discuss progress of Work Plan and identify opportunities for improvement. Representatives from CALM, Agriculture Western Australia and the Western Australian Municipal Association attended the meeting, with apologies received from other agencies. The process used during the meeting is described in Section 2.2.
- **Separate stakeholder consultation** – was undertaken with representatives of agencies not present at the Evaluation Meeting (Ministry for Planning, Water and Rivers Commission and the Department of Environmental Protection) and non-government scientific, indigenous, farming industry and conservation organisations. Organisations contacted in the latter category were: School of Environmental Science, Murdoch University, Indigenous Land Corporation, Western Australian Farmers Federation, Conservation Council of WA, Wildflower Society of WA, World Wildlife Fund of Australia and Greening Australia (WA). It is stressed that the views obtained were individual, and not necessarily organisational responses.
- **Draft Jurisdiction Report** - the manager for each jurisdiction evaluation prepared a draft report that documented the outcomes from the jurisdiction meeting and included points made during consultation with other stakeholders such as non-Government agencies and select interest groups external to the formal jurisdiction evaluation meeting.

- **Jurisdiction Review** –the draft jurisdiction report was then sent to all invitees to Western Australian Work Plan evaluation meeting for comment. Comments were received from representatives at the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Agriculture Western Australia and the Water and Rivers Commission. Based on findings at the Evaluation Meeting, the Original Work Plan (Annexure 1) was upgraded and improved and presented as a Revised Work Plan (Annexure 4).
- **Jurisdiction Final Report** Comments were then incorporated into the Western Australian jurisdiction report and presented to Environment Australia as the Final Jurisdiction Report.

## 2.2 Evaluation method

A consistent approach was employed in each jurisdiction meeting to address the Terms of Reference. Each section is briefly described below.

### *Session A Review Work Plan against Key Challenges*

Key Challenges were identified for each jurisdiction in the Dore Report. As these were developed prior to the Work Plans, they were presumed to be drivers for the Work Plan Actions. Therefore, to determine the effectiveness of the Work Plans, the Actions were reviewed to determine how well they address the challenges. A matrix was prepared that compared Western Australian key challenges with Work Plan actions and level of influence. For each Management and Monitoring Mechanism (MMM), a rating was given for the level of influence each action could have in addressing the Key Challenge for that mechanism. The completed WA matrix as developed at the Jurisdiction Evaluation Workshop is shown in Annexure 2.

Following discussions with the primary WA Work Plan contact (the Department of Conservation and Land Management), the draft matrix was presented at the Jurisdiction evaluation meeting and revised for its validity and for the individual and collective impact of the action(s) in addressing all the key challenges listed for the Jurisdiction. Modifications to the list of Actions was made to increase the beneficial impact on the Key Challenges and applicability of the Key Challenges for their current relevance to the achievement of the outcomes listed in the NVF. Where Key Challenges have become less relevant – i.e. they have been addressed or the program has moved in a different direction; the need for contributing actions was reviewed. Where new challenges were identified these were incorporated into the Work Plan.

### *Session B. Assessment of Work Plan Success Measures*

In order to evaluate Work Plan progress, quantification of achievements was provided against the Success Measures (or Performance Indicators) for each Work Plan activity. For each listed Success Measure, quantified information on the achievement to date was provided by the jurisdiction and further discussed during the evaluation meeting. If no progress was made, this was also noted and discussed during the meeting (what was the reason for lack of progress, what needed to change etc.) Where performance indicators were deemed inappropriate, these were reviewed and amended during the evaluation meeting.

### ***Session C      Appropriateness of Work Plan Activities against the NVF Management and Monitoring Outcomes***

Our initial reading of the NVF, the Dore report and the individual Work Plans suggested that the relationship between the management mechanisms in the Work Plans and the Key Challenges is generally straightforward. However the relationship with the Desired Outcomes in the NVF was less so.

Our approach to assessing this relationship was to test how well the individual actions in the Work Plans contributed to the Desired Outcomes using another matrix. The completed WA matrix as developed at the Jurisdiction Evaluation Workshop is shown in Annexure 3.

Each action for each Management and Monitoring Mechanism (listed across the X-axis) was assessed in regards to contribution to the NVF Desired Outcome, listed on the Y-axis. The rating criteria used in Section A (High/Medium/Low Influence) was applied in Section C.

Recognising that a desk-top assessment was undertaken subjectively, and relying on limited information, the jurisdiction evaluation meeting was used to review the matrix for its validity and the implications for achievement of the NVF outcomes. The jurisdiction meeting was then used to modify the list of Actions to improve contribution to the achievement of the NVF Desired Outcomes where necessary.

### ***Session D      Best Management Practices***

A key criteria of the Terms of Reference was to determine if and how Best Management Practices (BMP) are being applied when undertaking vegetation Management and Monitoring Mechanisms and Activities in each jurisdiction.

The National Vegetation Framework identifies a range of BMPs against the seven Management and Monitoring Mechanisms. Due to the time limitations associated with the evaluation, the URS/Griffin nrm team nominated one Management and Monitoring Mechanism per jurisdiction that will be investigated in depth from a Best Management Practice perspective during the jurisdiction meeting, rather than the entire set of MMM's. This process will, across the jurisdictions, address the range of BMP's identified in the ANZECC framework for the nominated mechanism, and be reported as a Case Study in the relevant jurisdiction report.

For Western Australia, the BMP for establishment and management of the Formal Reserve System was used as the Case Study example. The ANZECC framework BMP's were used as the main guide to discuss the Formal Reserve System in WA with key stakeholders both at the Jurisdiction evaluation meeting and separately. This information was then compiled into a 'snap shot' of BMP for inclusion into the Jurisdiction report.

***Session E Visioning - evaluation of overall progress and likely long term impact of the National Vegetation Framework***

This session in the Jurisdiction evaluation meeting looked collectively at the Visions in the Work Plans to assess how effectively the mechanisms being implemented now, will achieve those Visions in future. Plausible process methods were used for this assessment. In using plausible process, you work back from a major goal or vision to identify what would be needed now to achieve the goal or vision within anticipated timeframes.

For instance, if an overall goal is to better integrate management of native vegetation management, you might expect the work plans to include management and monitoring measures which will effectively support integrated management. If an overall goal is to attain a net gain in extent and quality of native vegetation, then the work plans ought to include measures which are likely to have the effect of controlling clearing and/or compensating with equivalent plantings within the anticipated timeframe of the Framework. From this type of assessment, number of key indicators of overall progress were identified and analysed to evaluate the likely long-term impact of the National Vegetation Framework.

## 3 Western Australian Work Plan Output

Assessment of the quality of the Western Australian Work Plan was done with reference to the Plan as it was at the start of the evaluation – termed the **Original Work Plan** in this document (shown in Annexure 1). The findings presented in Section 3 relate to this version of the Work Plan and also document general views about the adequacy of Western Australia's contribution to achieving the outcomes given in the NVF.

The deficiencies and omissions in this Original Work Plan were addressed through the evaluation in preparing a **Revised Work Plan** (shown in Annexure 4). The improvements made are discussed in Section 4.

### 3.1 Work Plan – Setting the Scene

Development of the Western Australian Original Work Plan was coordinated by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) as the lead Agency for vegetation protection and management in WA (under the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*), with inputs from:

- Agriculture Western Australia (AGWEST) – who have legislative responsibilities under the *Soil and Land Conservation Act 1945* and manage requests for clearing in agricultural areas through an inter-agency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) – Notices of Intent for clearing in other areas are processed by previous arrangements which include referral as appropriate to the Departments of Conservation and Land Management and Environmental Protection;
- Water and Rivers Commission (WRC) – who are responsible for state-wide water quantity and quality under the *Water and Rivers Commission Act 1995* and who regulate clearing in five Water Resource Recovery Catchments under the *County Areas Water Supply Act 1947* and who own and manage some land supporting native vegetation and timber plantations;
- Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) – who have responsibility under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* for broad environmental outcomes in Western Australia;
- Ministry for Planning (MfP) – who have coordinated the development of *Perth's Bushplan* which after Cabinet approval (expected November 2000) will progress the establishment of a CAR Reserve System in the Perth Metropolitan area, and
- Western Australian Municipal Association (WAMA) – who are the peak body for local government authorities (LGAs) in Western Australia and who are coordinating projects in vegetation protection through Natural Heritage Trust projects.

Some key Western Australian instruments for environmental management that were relevant to the preparation of the Original Work Plan are:

- The *State Salinity Strategy* – whole of government strategy for investment of \$40 million per annum in tackling altered hydrology and the consequent increasing salinisation of land and water,

- The development of *Perth's Bushplan* for the establishment of a CAR Reserve system in the metropolitan area, which is seen as a model by MfP for conservation planning in other closely settled areas;
- The *Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy* which is a whole of government program for 're-design' of the southern rangelands including commitment and funding to acquire a CAR Reserve System for the region, and
- The emerging State framework for natural resource management (NRM) which is being managed through a Cabinet sub-committee, with strong regional groups developing whole of government-community strategies for NRM.

The Original Work Plan focused on showing actions initiated in response to the key challenges in the Dore Report and with less emphasis on documenting existing programs and activities.

### 3.2 Linking the Original Work Plan with Key Challenges

The links between the Original Work Plan and the key challenges are shown in Annexure 2. Comments below relate to the allocation of influence shown in that matrix for each mechanism.

- **Roles and responsibilities of Government and community (Mechanism 4.1).** No key challenges were listed.
- **Planning and Assessment (Mechanism 4.2).** Most actions will have a high influence in addressing the challenge, but with a key weakness being that there is no specific mention of protection of native vegetation *per se* in the state legislation. This point, mentioned also by people interviewed outside the workshop is seen as a deficiency, in that vegetation protection in WA currently relies on being addressed as a 'side-effect' of other Acts dealing with biodiversity (*Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*) and soil and water conservation (eg. *Soil and Land Conservation Act 1945*). The planned WA Biodiversity Conservation Act is expected to address threatened communities, but not vegetation protection as an objective in its own right.
- **Reserve System (Mechanism 4.3).** Most actions addressing these key challenges have medium influence. Notable gaps are in the area of establishing change in pastoral lease status to reflect conservation needs in 2015 when the leases are renewed, and there are no actions dealing with management for conservation values on the very large area of Un-allocated Crown Land in WA. Progress is being made in CAR reserve system acquisition in the Gascoyne-Murchison Region.
- **Communication and capacity (Mechanism 4.4).** The quality of the actions in addressing the key challenges is very mixed. The regional NRM strategies are seen as being of high influence in building capacity and developing community-based action; with a range of specific extension programs being seen as high value, but insufficient to address the need. However, there are agency concerns that these groups may not yet be able to demonstrate the maturity required to handle devolved decision-making. While research, development, and extension is included in the State Salinity Strategy, there is some doubt about the ability to address the enormous need for re-designed

farming systems in WA. A key gap inadequate training for on-ground extension staff with an erosion of technical, behavioural and process skills and knowledge.

- **Incentives (Mechanism 4.5).** Key actions, such as building grant structures for individuals and the covenanting and REIWA schemes are obviously of high influence. However, rural interests remain concerned about the lack of equity in compensation for land not cleared, although conservation groups are very opposed to any further compensation for an inability to clear on the basis of the known damage that occurs from further clearing. Recent decisions by Government (Native Vegetation Working Group Report, October 2000) have been generally welcomed by rural and conservation groups in that they see opportunities to improve the level of funding support for vegetation protection in individual situations. At the other end of the scale, there are no actions dealing with major structural adjustment in WA landholdings that will advantage vegetation protection and there is no action for devolving funding responsibility to regional groups, although this may flow in future from the WA NRM framework.
- **Regulatory measures (Mechanism 4.6).** Regulatory programs are in place and improving. Acts are being reviewed and new legislation for biodiversity being developed *albeit* slowly. The dramatic reduction in the area of approved clearing of vegetation over the last five years in WA is seen as an important outcome from the inter-agency MOU being managed by AGWEST. However, given that the area of land remaining uncleared in the agricultural areas is now very small, clearing statistics should also be presented as a percentage of the vegetation remaining at local and regional scale. Further, previous comments about the lack of legislation dealing with vegetation protection as a stand-alone objective is relevant. Key gaps include an action dealing with monitoring biodiversity in the rangelands and an action addressing regulation of clearing in subdivision planning in urban areas. However, the former is being addressed through the National Land and Water Resources Audit and the latter may be addressed for the metropolitan areas through the Urban Bushland Statement of Planning Policy that is being prepared.
- **Monitoring and evaluation (Mechanism 4.7).** Actions in this area are inadequate to address the challenge. The only exception is in the rangelands where the Western Australian Range Monitoring System provides comprehensive coverage. Elsewhere, monitoring is poorly resourced and coordinated, and often operating at scales that may not be appropriate. While this is recognised and being addressed as well as can be done within resource constraints, a key gap is the lack of feedback link between data and management response.

### 3.3 Measuring Original Work Plan Success

Participants in the Jurisdiction Evaluation Meeting recognised that several of the success measures in the Original Work Plan are either not valid indicators of progress, or deal with outputs and not outcomes or are difficult to measure. Where this was noted, changes were made in the Revised Work Plan, as discussed in Section 4.2.

In assessing progress with the actions, the comments below relate to the success measures in the Original Work Plan; but *only those* where progress is not in line with stated timetables and measures.

**Roles and responsibilities of Government and community (Mechanism 4.1).**

- New legislation is being prepared, but timeframes are slipping. In particular the enactment of the Biodiversity Conservation Act (to replace the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*) is not proceeding at all, the Government has abandoned plans to introduce Amendments to the *Environment Protection Act 1986* to deal with environmental harm before the State election in 2001.
- Reform of local government regulations is also not proceeding to plan.
- The development of a Foreshore Management Policy by December 2000 given other pressing demands is completely unrealistic. In the interim, elements of the planned policy will be incorporated into a Statement of Planning Policy that will govern the recognition of foreshores.
- The local government seminar series on bushland issues will not be completed until May 2001.

**Planning and Assessment (Mechanism 4.2).**

- While the framework for comprehensive State-wide coverage of native vegetation is proceeding to completion within CALM, concern is expressed within another agencies whether the methodology will be satisfactory to allow for full analysis and decision-making at all scales.
- The Land Monitor evaluation of degraded and salinised land is ahead of schedule and well-regarded by community groups. However, some methodological concerns remain within scientific circles.
- The comprehensive database of ecosystems throughout the state, to be completed by August 2000 is patchy.
- Specific vegetation planning in West Midlands is struggling, but the work has been completed in for Scott River.

**Reserve System (Mechanism 4.3).**

- Developing the CAR reserve system in the West Midlands is experiencing difficulty and is behind schedule.
- The State reports annually on the conservation status and progress towards achievement of CAR criteria on a state and regional basis (information for the area under conservation management in 1997 and 2000 is shown in Table 3.1).

**Communication and capacity (Mechanism 4.4).**

- More activity is required in coordinating advisory services and management advice for landowners and community groups.
- While the research and development actions are proceeding as outlined, the general feeling is that a major increase in R&D is needed to build land use systems for the agricultural areas that will deliver economic and ecological benefits.
- The level of investigation into carbon trading and sequestration is not well known.

**Incentives (Mechanism 4.5).**

- The release of the Native Vegetation Working Group Report, with acceptance of recommendations by the Minister for Primary Industries (October 2000) is a

significant step in improving equity in support for individual efforts in vegetation protection.

- The planned Revolving Fund will not be operational by 2001, although *Perth's Bushplan*, if endorsed by Cabinet in November 2000, contains a capacity to establish a fund for the metropolitan area.

#### **Regulatory measures (Mechanism 4.6).**

- As mentioned previously, enactment of a new Biodiversity Conservation Act has been stalled for some time.
- Progress is being made in reviewing and extending the inter-agency MOU for clearing.
- Review of Environment Protection Policies for wetland protection has not been very effective.

#### **Monitoring and evaluation (Mechanism 4.7).**

- A baseline data set of the state's vegetation resource is in place as at 1997, but there is no capacity to monitor trends.
- It is unlikely that the State will meet the commitment to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan for the State Salinity Strategy by December 2000, and concern was expressed whether this would adequately address social indicators.

### **3.4 Linking Original Work Plan outputs with National Vegetation Framework Desired Outcomes**

The process adopted in the Jurisdiction Evaluation Meeting was for the Agency representatives to assess performance against the outcomes listed in the NVF, using the methodology described in Section 2. The process was less structured for consultations with representatives of Agencies not at the Jurisdiction Evaluation Meeting and representatives of the NGOs, with the process relying more on direct questioning about the state's performance in each mechanism in respect of the required outcomes.

As well as capturing commentary on the link between outputs and outcomes, the process also gathered more general information about the issues facing government and community in vegetation protection and management in WA.

The key findings are given in summary form for each of 6 mechanisms, with the information gained from representatives of agency and NGOs sectors presented separately. Following that, the findings are presented from the perspective of each of the 8 outcomes. The relationship between output and outcomes in respect of the Formal Reserve System (Mechanism 4.3) is described as a Best Practice Case Study in Section 3.4.

It is important to note that these findings are drawn from the comments of those consulted and may not equate to official organisational views.

## **Roles and responsibilities of Governments and Community (Mechanism 4.1)**

### ***Agency representatives response***

- The Original Work Plan was adequate in the area of documenting actions in building the community role, but only if the increasing responsibility being carried by regional groups (e.g. Blackwood Basin Group) for natural resource management is adequately supported and resourced.
- The outputs for local government are generally inadequate, given their increasing role. Much depends on delivery and outcomes from the NHT funded local government biodiversity project.
- The State government contribution to outcomes listed in the *National Framework* will allow progress in most areas, although there is general agreement that the Original Work Plan and indeed the sum total of the effort is still insufficient for full achievement of the outcomes. In some cases, Agencies 'pass' tasks between them in strategic documents (eg. between the Salinity Strategy and the Goldfields-Esperance Development Commission's Strategy)
- The very reduced rate of land clearing in recent years is evidence of increased effectiveness of coordinated government action. Government performance is seen as poorest in delivering stated outcomes for indigenous peoples and in addressing climate change.

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### ***NGOs representatives response***

- The lack of over-arching legislative and administrative 'leadership' for vegetation protection and management is a major concern. NGOs still perceive far too little coordination between instruments and agency programs. The slow pace of legislative reform is a concern.
- Concern was also expressed that government agencies are still not sufficiently accountable for actions relating to native vegetation and monitoring, with strategies produced but then not resourced. Community groups picking up responsibilities require additional support and coordination from government.
- Local Government role in native vegetation management has improved with appointment of Environmental Officers and a patchy implementation of Agenda 21, however remains poorly understood and with limited commitment. Local Government is often the 'first point of contact' for environmental matters but generally has inadequate resources or trained/experienced staff to properly handle this contact. Local Government now better represented on peak bodies but often is still seen as a token representation and involvement.
- Aboriginal people have not engaged in Landcare activities therefore do not come in contact with Government agencies. Aboriginal groups (ILC) are keen to see some form of NRM forum for WA. They receive conflicting and confused information from the Pastoral Lands Board /CALM/AGWEST regarding land management of pastoral leases.

## **Planning and Assessment (Mechanism 4.2)**

### ***Agency representatives response***

- The Original Work Plan documents actions that will make a sound contribution to an understanding of the vegetation resources. However, it needs to say more about how

the information will be used in planning land use and management at regional, local and site scale.

- There are concerns in Agencies outside CALM about the methodology used in vegetation assessment, in that the information is difficult to use, and may not be at the right scale. The three questions to be answered in planning for the management of an ecosystem are: How much is currently reserved? How much is remaining? What is the level of threat? There is no framework yet to deliver this information.
- A general concern shared by Agency and scientific opinion is that the extreme diversity of biodiversity in type, process and spatial terms in the South West Land Division is too great for conventional systems of vegetation description and mapping to handle – a point not recognised in the Work Plan or in National and State resourcing.
- Actions in this area will be generally relevant for Aboriginal people holding land, but there are no specific actions dealing with their needs. The major requirement is for actions that increase indigenous engagement in the processes of vegetation planning and assessment.
- The prospect of climate change is currently ignored in planning and assessment activities listed in the Work Plan.

#### ***NGOs' representatives response***

- Regional conservation targets have been set by CALM but these are perceived to be not subject to public comment or use by the regional groups in planning. In general terms access to available information for regional vegetation planning is regarded as difficult.
- There are few if any good examples of regional planning – *Perth's Bushplan* is well regarded and the SCRIPT regional strategy is a good example. Environmental planning in the Gascoyne-Murchison is supported as being effective.
- There is still no overall strategic plan for biodiversity conservation within WA. There is concern that current planning is more about 'stamp collection' than conservation of landscapes and conservation from a landscape perspective. What planning does occur is really at gross scale and does not deal with the full range of species, ecosystems and ecological functioning.

#### **Communication and Capacity building (Mechanism 4.4)**

##### ***Agency representatives response***

- The actions in the Original Work Plan dealing with community education will have a high influence on most outcomes, although Agency people express concern that it is increasingly difficult to meet the demand for service.
- There are no actions dealing with capacity building in Aboriginal communities, who are now very large landholders.
- The actions on research, development and extension are weak and in their current form will have little impact on outcomes – investment in developing new farming systems that are able to protect vegetation in their midst will need to be greater than envisaged in the State Salinity Strategy.
- Inadequate attention is given to social research and the development of behavioural change skills to assist in managing the enormous changes in behaviour required to ensure adequate vegetation protection and management.

### *NGOs' representatives response*

- The NGOs consulted during the evaluation were all very vocal about shortcomings in this area. Basically, they are of the general view that community involvement in all aspects of native vegetation planning and management at regional scale has been minimal. For instance, the common perception is that reserves are 'CALM' reserves rather than reserves for the greater public good – i.e. 'community reserves'. There is also inadequate collaborative off-reserve conservation management.
- The perception is that Agencies appear to be unable to trust community groups to assist in management, planning or monitoring, for fear of loss of authority.
- While there are concerns about reserve management and general planning, NGOs recognise the enormous value of programs for conservation off-reserve such as Living Landscapes, Land for Wildlife, Bushcare, covenanting schemes although the level of service is seen as being well below demand.
- Aboriginal/Indigenous groups have been excluded from the process or the involvement has is seen as tokenism. Opportunities for Aboriginal groups to be involved in management for conservation objectives either on-reserve or off-reserve but very few examples of this happening. Government is not good at handling the communal decision making processes of Aboriginal communities and information flow to Aboriginal landholders usually 'misses the mark' with Aboriginal land holders- but Pastoral Memos seen as satisfactory.
- Urban and peri-urban 'friends groups' are seen as good examples of community involvement in taking a de facto role in management, in the absence of Government commitment.
- Community needs to be actively involved in monitoring programs which should be designed from the bottom up i.e. community assists in defining the objectives for the monitoring program and then assist in the required measures.

### **Incentives for public conservation service (Mechanism 4.5)**

#### *Agency representatives response*

- Actions for grant programs are sound and these programs are beginning to have impact, although the level of resourcing is seen as inadequate. Adoption of the recommendations of the Native Vegetation Working Group may enhance the options and resources.
- Property rights measures such as Bush Brokers and covenanting are working.

#### *NGOs' representatives response*

- A major continuing concern for farmers is the lack of equity in not compensating for land not cleared in previous years when clearing was readily allowed. Allied to this, farmers believe much large investment in direct support for people managing remnant vegetation is required. This should attract much more support than funds for replanting. Adoption of the recommendations of the Native Vegetation Working Group may improve the level of support.
- There is no state wide or even zoned approach to establishing which incentives will have the greatest impact and where these should be used.

- While at a local scale criteria for allocation of incentives have been established (e.g. for remnant vegetation protection. The perception, however is that the people doing the ‘right thing’ are not being rewarded by current incentive schemes. The Community sees Government regarding off-reserve conservation as being much less important than acquisition of reserves, which has been interpreted as meaning that incentive schemes will always remain under-resourced.
- Aborigines are concerned about government investment in conservation in the pastoral areas. Aboriginal communities often own the most marginal properties but are being forced to run these as operational pastoral properties. They would like to see a program that rewards people for managing for conservation of biodiversity purposes – ie provide incentives. They question the value of CALM spending \$6m through the Gascoyne Murchison Strategy to acquire properties when this money could have been used to assist local Aboriginal groups (and others) to manage their land to achieve the same outcomes. CALM needs to consider off-reserves conservation far more seriously. They see the current program is depopulating the bush and resulting in national parks ‘on paper’ – ie un-managed lands.

### **Regulatory measures (Mechanism 4.6)**

#### ***Agency representatives response***

- The thrust of the actions in the Original Work Plan will have a high influence in regulating vegetation protection and management. Revision of the clearing controls MOU will extend its action into areas where it doesn’t currently apply.
- Concern was expressed that the new Biodiversity Conservation Act will not deal adequately with the protection of ecological processes.
- More support is needed in urging local governments to develop and adopt best management practices for vegetation management (e.g roadside vegetation management).

#### ***NGOs’ representatives response***

- Concern was expressed that there is no over-arching natural resource management legislation that can cover the whole needs for vegetation protection and management – in no Act is vegetation protection treated as an objective in its own right.
- Conservation interests want to see a complete moratorium on clearing – without access to compensation. Conversely, farming groups accept that future clearing will be generally minimal, they strongly favour compensation for land not cleared either in the past or in the future.
- The main focus of the planned Biodiversity Conservation Act remains the protection of rare and endangered species. While this is important, protection and management of habitat and ecosystem process is of more importance and is not receiving sufficient attention.
- Commonwealth funding is linked to achievement of protection of rare and endangered species and achievement of CAR reserve systems. NGOs question the appropriateness of these links and suggest that greater importance be given to ecosystem processes and off-reserves conservation.
- Existing Land Act and interpretation by the Pastoral Land Board seen as outdated in the concept of ‘pastoral leases’ – with a suggestion for ‘rangeland leases’ with more explicit covenants for allowed land uses and duty of care.

- The state's conservation legislation is perceived to constrain CALM's involvement in off-reserves conservation – future legislation must reflect CALM's broader goal of nature conservation over all lands, not just on land vested in the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority.

### **Monitoring and evaluation (Mechanism 4.7)**

#### *Agency representatives response*

- While the actions in the Original Work Plan are the right ones to address the needs, Agency representatives report that there is no routine capacity to comprehensively monitor or report on Western Australia's native vegetation resources at a level appropriate for policy development, evaluation or reporting.
- Except in the rangelands, current vegetation monitoring activities are piecemeal and poorly resourced. Biodiversity monitoring is not adequately addressed anywhere.
- There is no action that shows how information acquisition will inform future management.

#### *NGOs' representatives response*

- Monitoring needs to primarily address ecosystem process and not just rare and endangered species.
- Accountability of agencies is lacking – programs tend to be personality driven rather than community driven and there is no sense of being accountable to the community.
- Funding is inadequately linked to outcomes via monitoring (e.g. NHT funded projects)
- Monitoring is virtually non-existent within conservation areas except for some minor community based monitoring.
- *Land Monitor* generally highly regarded by NGO's
- WARMS gets recognition in pastoral areas but not enough known of results.

### **Summary of actions versus outcomes**

Based on the matrix in Annexure 3 and the comments on specific mechanisms, a summary of Actions against NVF outcomes is presented below.

<i>Biodiversity</i>	The general thrust of the Actions will be beneficial. The complexity of the natural diversity in the South West Land Division requires special attention.
<i>Soil and water resources</i>	Most actions do not operate at the scale at which the issue needs to be addressed, especially in areas affected by altered hydrology
<i>Hydrology</i>	Most actions do not operate at the scale at which the issue needs to be addressed, especially in areas affected by altered hydrology
<i>Land productivity</i>	Most actions will lead to improved biological productivity of vegetation resources, especially those actions that will increase the CAR reserve system
<i>Sustainable land use</i>	Most actions will lead to improved biological productivity of vegetation resources, especially those actions that will increase the CAR reserve system
<i>Natural and cultural heritage</i>	Most actions will make a useful contribution, especially where regional planning and CAR reservation applies
<i>Indigenous peoples</i>	Many actions will have an impact, but there is no specific attention to Aboriginal needs.
<i>Climate change</i>	Poorly addressed in the Original Work Plan.

## 3.5 Best Management Practices – Formal Reserve System

### Introduction

The National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority is the accountable body in Western Australia for the identification, acquisition and management of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) conservation reserve system. Land acquired for the CAR system is held in the Authority's name. The Department of Conservation and Land Management is the government agency responsible for delivering best practice in establishing and managing a formal conservation reserve system.

### Case study methodology

The adoption of best management practice in the management and monitoring of the Formal Reserves System within Western Australia was assessed against the requirements specified in the *National Framework* (pp. 48-50) as follows:

1. general review of the process within the Jurisdiction Evaluation Meeting;
2. semi-structured interview of lead agency (Department of Conservation and Land Management) using focus questions as discussion prompts;
3. semi-structured interviews with representatives of three NGO organisations (Indigenous Land Corporation, Greening Australia (WA), Would Wildlife Fund for Nature) using focus questions as discussion prompts; and
4. circulation of draft Case Study reports for feedback and comment by those interviewed and document revision.

### Focus questions:

Focus questions were derived from the published best practice standards for establishing and managing a formal Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) conservation reserves system as defined in the Framework document (pp. 48 to 50):

#### *Establishment:*

- Have targets been established for CAR properties across the state and if so how well has this been done?
- Use of state-wide implementation plans including funding requirements.
- Extent of community involvement in CAR planning – landholders/indigenous people.
- Is the process for identifying CAR properties effective?

#### *Management:*

- Are there effective management plans for separate CAR properties (e.g. threats identified and managed)?
- Have sufficient resources been allocated to manage existing and proposed reserves?
- Are arrangements in place for complementary management of surrounding areas?
- Extent of community involvement in management.

#### *Monitoring:*

- How effective are monitoring programs in assessing CAR properties' impact on native vegetation.

*General overview:*

- Comments on anticipated long-term impact of the Original Western Australian Work Plan on the establishment and management of formal CAR conservation reserves.
- Comments on whether the National Vegetation Framework will make a difference to the establishment and management of formal conservation reserves in WA.

**Guidelines for best management practice for establishment and management of formal conservation reserves (ANZECC 1999)**

1. Selecting the most appropriate areas for formal reservation for the protection of the full range of vegetation types.
2. Establishing reservation categories over such areas that are appropriate for the objective of the protection of all vegetation types in any region.
3. Managing those areas for the purpose of protection of the vegetation types the reserves were established to protect and integrating this management with other conservation programs and land management programs operation outside the reserve boundaries.
4. Involving the community in all aspects of the program.
5. Planning and administering all activities mentioned and monitoring and reporting progress in establishing the reserve system relative to predetermined goals.

**Results**

Table 3.1 provides information on the percentage of each Interim Biogeographic Region (IBRA) in Western Australia managed for conservation and formally protected as part of the Nature Conservation Estate, using information provided by the Department of Conservation and Land Management. The percentages in the Nature Conservation State include lands held as national Parks, Nature Reserves and Conservation Parks. The remainder of the lands managed for conservation occur variously as Multiple Purpose Crown Reserves under CALM management (including State Forest, Timber Reserves, Special 5(g) Reserves and Multiple Purpose Reserves) and as Non-Crown Reserves acquired as leasehold and freehold land.

The changes in percentages between 1997 and 2000 show considerable progress in increasing the area managed for conservation across the Gascoyne-Murchison area with minor gains elsewhere. However, these data also show that the required level of protection is achieved in only a few of the regions and many of these are located in very remote areas of the state where competing demands for land use are very low.

**Table 3.1 : Percentages of Western Australia IBRAs managed for nature conservation (and in the Nature Conservation Estate)<sup>3</sup>**

Regional grouping	IBRA Number	Name	June 1997	June 2000
<b>Rangelands</b>	9	Carnarvon	6.92 (6.81)	10.44 (6.81)
	12	Central Kimberley	4.32 (0.17)	4.32 (0.17)
	16	Central Ranges*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
	14	Coolgardie	11.26 (7.72)	12.28 (8.50)
	21	Dampierland	0.84 (0.84)	0.84 (0.84)
	30	Gascoyne	1.93 (1.93)	8.36 (1.93)
	32	Gibson Desert	11.87 (11.87)	11.87 (11.87)
	35	Great Sandy Desert*	2.64 (2.64)	2.64 (2.64)
	38	Great Victoria Desert*	8.26 (8.26)	8.26 (8.26)
	39	Hampton	10.32 (10.32)	10.32 (10.32)
	42	Little Sandy Desert	4.85 (4.85)	4.85 (4.85)
	49	Murchison	2.05 (1.08)	5.02 (1.08)
	53	Northern Kimberley	12.60 (11.38)	14.12 (12.90)
	56	Nullarbor*	16.95 (16.95)	16.95 (16.95)
	57	Ord-Victoria Plains*	6.14 (4.62)	6.14 (4.62)
	59	Pilbara	6.67 (5.80)	8.34 (6.63)
	70	Tanami*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
	73	Victoria-Bonaparte*	5.31 (5.31)	5.31 (5.31)
80	Yalgoo	2.64 (1.08)	6.44 (1.08)	
<b>Agricultural areas</b>	2	Avon Wheatbelt	1.92 (1.71)	1.96 (1.73)
	24	Esperance Plains	28.11 (10.18)	28.14 (28.02)
	34	Geraldton Sandplains	13.76 (7.08)	13.73 (13.66)
	44	Mallee	16.98 (14.62)	16.91 (16.90)
<b>Forests</b>	40	Jarrah Forest	34.44 (3.44)	34.33 (3.53)
	76	Warren	58.53 (25.75)	58.49 (25.67)
<b>Urban areas and adjacent coastal plain</b>	69	Swan Coastal Plain	13.98 (11.07)	14.23 (11.22)

\* shared with neighbouring jurisdictions

Tables 3.2 to 3.5 document the responses from Agency and NGO representatives to the evaluation of best practice in establishment and management of the formal reserve system in WA. As outlined in Section 2, the responses below represent the views of those individuals consulted, not necessarily official responses.

<sup>3</sup> Dr Ken Atkins, CALM

**Table 3.2 : Reserve identification**

*Selecting the most appropriate areas for formal reservation for the protection of the full range of vegetation types*

*Establishing reservation categories over such areas that are appropriate for the objective of the protection of all vegetation types in any region.*

Focus questions:

- Have targets been established for CAR's across the state and if so how well has this been done?
- Use of state-wide implementation plans including funding requirements.
- Is the process for identifying CAR's effective?

<b>Agency response</b>	<b>NGO response</b>
<p>Program seeks to be comprehensive but is not adequate or representative. Currently moving from an opportunistic acquisition program to a more strategic approach however the process is still rudimentary.</p> <p>Disproportionate emphasis on acquiring land for CAR's in one region within rangeland.</p> <p>Agency funding is sufficient for minimal acquisition (e.g. a few hundred hectares per year within the agricultural regions). One-off Federal funding is being used within one pastoral region.</p> <p><i>Perth's Bushplan</i> is the vehicle for identifying CAR's within the Perth region and is expected to be endorsed by Cabinet in November 2000.</p>	<p>Difficult to set meaningful targets for CAR. SW botanical region is one of world-scale high diversity and is practically impossible to protect the full range of vegetation types.</p> <p>CAR selection appears to be too 'species' focused. Ecological processes and habitat have not been adequately considered in CAR selection.</p> <p>Emphasis on formal reserve approach is questioned. Significant support for far greater resources allocated to off-reserve conservation from Aboriginal and Conservation groups.</p>

**Table 3.3 : Reserve management**

*Managing those areas for the purpose of protection of the vegetation types the reserves were established to protect and integrating this management with other conservation programs and land management programs operation outside the reserve boundaries.*

Focus questions:

- Are there effective management plans for separate CAR's (e.g. threats identified and managed)?
- Have sufficient resources been allocated to manage existing and proposed reserves?
- Are arrangements in place for complimentary management of surrounding areas?

<b>Agency response</b>	<b>NGO responses</b>
<p>The provision of regional and reserve-specific management plans lags a long way behind the need.</p> <p>Funding for management is probably only a half to a third of what is required.</p> <p>Complimentary management approaches are more or less in place surrounding reserves within forested areas. Limited to no complimentary management for reserves in the rest of the state</p> <p>Increasingly, urban and peri-urban reserves rely on 'Friends Groups' for management.</p> <p>Some limited opportunities for displaced pastoralists to manage reserves in rangelands through management contracts.</p>	<p>With a few exceptions there is totally inadequate resourcing for reserve management and very few management plans.</p> <p>There are difficulties in attracting suitably qualified/experienced staff to manage reserves.</p> <p>While some displaced pastoralists have been offered management contracts, proposals from Aboriginal groups for similar arrangements have not been successful.</p> <p>A suggestion that some reserves are 'over managed' and that if they are left alone they may fare better.</p>

**Table 3.4 : Community involvement in the reserve system**

*Involving the community in all aspects of the program.*

Focus questions:

- Extent of community involvement in CAR planning – landholders/indigenous people.
- Extent of community involvement in management.

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**Agency response**

Community input for planning CAR reserves may come through development of regional strategies. Acquisition is often commercially sensitive which limits opportunities for community involvement.

The establishment and management of CAR reserves is a role for government, with community support through public consultation in the development of management plans, specific management actions etc.

There has been minimal contact with indigenous people.

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**NGO responses**

Token community consultation.

A huge gap exists between the rhetoric of community consultation and reality. For example, a consultation agreement between Government and Aboriginal groups is currently under negotiation however, recently National Parks were announced within Kimberley where there appears to have been no community consultation.

There are opportunities for acquisition of land for both Aboriginal and Conservation purposes, but no process exists to enable this to happen.

Aboriginal groups are interested in working as park rangers or in related activities, but very few are employed.

Current CALM pastoral lease acquisition program for CAR's is depopulating the bush and resulting in 'paper National Parks' which are un-managed.

Community groups are active within urban reserves but there is little involvement of either local or state government

Local Agenda 21 committees are beginning to take an active role in urban bushland management.

**Table 3.5 : Monitoring and reporting progress**

*Planning and administering all activities mentioned and monitoring and reporting progress in establishing the reserve system relative to predetermined goals.*

Focus questions

- How effective are monitoring programs in assessing CAR impact on native vegetation.
- Comments on anticipated long-term impact of the Western Australian Work Plan on the establishment and management of formal conservation reserves.

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**Agency response**

Desktop monitoring only. No resources allocated or available for vegetation monitoring.

Annual reporting on acquisition of land for CAR reserves.

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**NGO responses**

Landscape function and process monitoring are important but not considered.

Broad-scale monitoring approaches using remote sensing (e.g. land monitor) should be considered.

Local community is a neglected 'on-site' resource for monitoring.

### 3.6 Evaluating against NVF Vision and Goals

Table 3.6 shows a set of plausible progress indicators to prompt an assessment of performance towards the vision and goals contained the *National Framework*. The assessment was made by the attendees at the Jurisdiction Evaluation Meeting.

**Table 3.6: Western Australian performance towards vision and goals**

NVF Vision	Plausible process indicators	Comments on Progress
A reversal in the long term decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation  <b>(Reasonable progress – planning in place at many levels, requires more resources and skills)</b>	Planning undertaken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding mechanisms in place</li> <li>• Improved coordination at regional scale</li> <li>• Plans being prepared but more technical expertise needed – some concerns about methodology</li> </ul>
	Plans resourced and being implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased acquisition of CAR reserves</li> <li>• State Salinity Strategy partly resourced</li> <li>• Perth’s Bushplan nearly through.</li> <li>• Covenanted programs in place</li> <li>• Some big \$\$ projects in place</li> </ul>
	People with knowledge and skills required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand for technical skills is outstripping supply</li> <li>• Inadequate understanding of community dynamics</li> <li>• Inadequate mentoring in the regions</li> <li>• Training system inadequate</li> </ul>
	Monitoring and evaluation of all aspects leading to revision of plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor progress – generally no feedback loops</li> <li>• Some regional NRM strategies are tackling it</li> <li>• State Salinity Strategy has been revised</li> </ul>
<b>Goals</b>		
Conservation and where appropriate, restoration of native vegetation to maintain and enhance biodiversity, protect water quality and conserve soil resources, including on private land managed for agriculture, forestry and urban development  <b>(Overall – still downhill trend, but the rate of decline has slowed substantially)</b>	Native vegetation is protected by effective clearing controls on all land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement - clearing in ag areas has almost ceased (except for ‘passive clearing’)</li> <li>• Clearing still an issue in urban areas - being addressed</li> <li>• Some pastoral clearing occurring</li> </ul>
	Programs in place to restore, where appropriate, native vegetation to maintain/enhance biodiversity and protect land and water resources on private all land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occurring, but may not be as fast as the decline process</li> <li>• No statutory processes – advisory only</li> <li>• Development of mega-corridors in agricultural regions (e.g. Gondwana corridor)</li> <li>• Good programs in place – e.g. Living Landscapes can’t satisfy the demand</li> <li>• Up-swelling of individual and community activity</li> </ul>
	Programs and measures in place to encourage development and adoption of best management practices for native vegetation management in rangeland, agricultural, forest and urban enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good programs – Land for Wildlife, RVPS, Bushcare.</li> <li>• Development of EMS in the Gascoyne-Murchison, but some issues to be addressed</li> <li>• Acceptance of NVWG recommendations will increase funding support</li> <li>• Beginning to invest in high water use farming systems, but more needed</li> </ul>
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation quality and geographic extent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rangelands monitoring is sound</li> <li>• Land Monitor well accepted in the regions</li> <li>• Remote-sensing coming along</li> <li>• Lack good benchmarks</li> <li>• Inter-agency cooperation is poor</li> </ul>

Retention and enhancement of biodiversity and native vegetation at both regional and national levels  <b>(Performance is patchy – site and issue based information only. No region-specific information)</b>	Appropriate environment protection policies and measures are in place to protect biodiversity at regional and state levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair only - commitment to increasing CAR system, but it will never be enough to deal with spatial variability</li> <li>• Current policies, species based, not community or process based</li> <li>• Clearing MOU to be revised</li> </ul>
	Biodiversity and native vegetation targets are set and measures are in place to achieve those targets at both regional and national levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targets generally absent, beyond generic ‘no further decline’, NRM regional strategies don’t have targets</li> <li>• Clearing limits set at shire level dependent on amount of remnants remaining</li> <li>• Perth’s Bushplan, the RFA and rare flora has targets</li> </ul>
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have information available at gross scale</li> <li>• Generally not at regional scale – eg SWCC has biodiversity plan – unable to tell if progress being made</li> <li>• Good in rangelands</li> <li>• Monitoring undertaken for rare flora</li> </ul>
An improvement in the condition of existing native vegetation  <b>(Obvious improvement in Kimberley and riparian improvement in many places; site –specific improvement elsewhere; declining in the urban area; not bad in peri-urban areas)</b>	Policies and programs are in place to manage native vegetation to conserve condition as well as cover-through duty of care; native vegetation covenants, partnerships etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good programs – eg. Land for Wildlife, RVPS (80,000 ha covenanted), riparian repair funded, investment in water resource recovery catchments</li> <li>• Lagging far behind demand and need (1 year behind in meeting requests for land for wildlife assessments)</li> </ul>
	Policies and programs are in place to restore native vegetation quality where appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duty of care not yet addressed in government programs and policies</li> <li>• Covenanting schemes are helpful</li> <li>• State Weed Strategy</li> <li>• State Salinity Strategy</li> </ul>
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good in the rangelands (WARMS)</li> <li>• Generally poor elsewhere</li> </ul>

## 4 Evaluation of progress against Work Plan Commitments and the National Framework

In summary, the evaluation found that the Original Western Australian Work Plan was generally deficient with some specific gaps in that it:

- Does not describe all the activities occurring in WA that relate to the *National Framework* outcomes, the key challenges listed in the Dore Report and best practice for the management and monitoring mechanisms;
- Does not address the need for increased leadership, coordination and partnerships in legislative and administrative actions;
- Has success measures that are inappropriate for measurement of performance,
- Fails to address adequately a number of unique bio-physical challenges in Western Australia that despite current efforts, will prevent achievement of the *National Framework* outcomes, and
- Fails to address outcomes dealing with Indigenous peoples' needs and climate change.

These issues are explored more fully in following sections. In recognition of these difficulties, the WA Agencies have prepared a Revised Work Plan, which is assessed under Section 4.2.

### 4.1 Assessment of the effectiveness of the Western Australian Work Plan and its Implementation (TOR A)

#### Assessment of current vegetation management and monitoring practices against the Original Work Plan and Best Practice (TOR A1)

Most people consulted in the evaluation recognise that major improvements have been made in recent years in the protection and management of vegetation in WA. The Original Work Plan does not acknowledge some of these past and current achievements.

Significant improvements have been:

- The near cessation of clearing in the agricultural regions through the Clearing MOU and altered community behaviour and farmer expectations;
- Improved information quality through the vegetation surveys and projects such as Land Monitor;
- Increased level of direct community landholder and community management of vegetation resources;
- Increased acquisition of land for the CAR reserve system, especially in the Gascoyne – Murchison Region;
- The initiation of activities such as the Remnant Vegetation Protection Scheme (RVPS), 'Land for Wildlife', 'Bush Brokers' and other covenanting schemes, and
- The development of *Perth's Bushplan*, although this is yet to be formally approved and resourced by Government (as at October 27, 2000).

Significant challenges seen by those consulted that are not adequately addressed in either the Original Work Plan or current practice in WA are:

- The extreme natural diversity in the South West Land Division – one of the world’s 25 bio-diverse ‘hot spots’ and the only one in Australia - means that the measures and resources being applied are simply not adequate to achieve the outcomes in the NVF – additional recognition is required in National and State Policies;
- The slow pace of legislative and administrative reform that will deliver desired vegetation protection outcomes;
- The difficulty in capturing and providing information on vegetation quantity, quality and distribution in a form that enables planning to occur at regional and local scales;
- Continuing difficulties with coordinating Agency activities and in providing sufficient support and encouragement to local governments, community groups and individuals;
- Extending clearing controls, operational in the agricultural areas, into other areas of WA;
- A perceived over-reliance on the CAR Reserve System to achieve conservation of biodiversity, with insufficient emphasis on off-reserve conservation;
- The lack of specific actions in the Original Work Plan that engage Aboriginal peoples in conservation management, particularly in the rangelands where they now manage a significant portion of the pastoral leasehold land;
- The lack of specific actions that describe how outcomes will be achieved in the face of predicted climate change, and
- Inadequate investment in long-term commitment to and inter-agency collaboration in monitoring and evaluation.

### **Assessment of long-term vegetation management and monitoring outcomes against the Original Work Plan (TOR A2)**

Overall, the collective view of the representatives of the Agencies and NGOs consulted in the evaluation is that the Actions described in the Original Work Plan are leading to progress towards the NVF outcomes, but not at a sufficient rate. This assessment includes a consideration of the content of the Original Work Plan *per se*, and peoples’ knowledge and understanding of the work being undertaken that is not referenced in the Work Plan.

The areas requiring further investment are referred to in the previous section. Addressing many of these would require considerable new resourcing by Government and relative re-direction of resources from on-reserve to off-reserve conservation including a commitment for greater community knowledge and participation in vegetation protection and management. For example, it is clear from the responses of NGO representatives that they do not fully understand the requirements for the establishment of a CAR Reserve System.

### **Assessment of progress in meeting success measures in the Original Work Plan (TOR A3)**

The evaluation showed that Western Australia Agencies are making reasonable progress towards the success measures in the Original Work Plan, although many of the measures were recognised as being inadequate. Significant concerns about the rate of progress relate to:

- The slow rate of legislative reform, particularly in the enactment of the planned Biodiversity Conservation Act;
- Engagement of local government in vegetation protection and management;
- Completion of the comprehensive data base of WA ecosystems, with the information being widely available in a form suitable for regional and local planning;
- The Revolving Fund will not be operational by the planned date in 2001;
- Review of Environment Protection Policies for wetland protection has not been very effective;
- A baseline data set of the state's vegetation resource is in place as at 1997, but there is no capacity to monitor trends, except in the pastoral area of the rangelands.
- It is unlikely that the State will meet the commitment to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan for the State Salinity Strategy by December 2000, and concern was expressed whether this would adequately address social indicators.

## 4.2 Proposed improvements to Western Australian Work Plan (TOR B)

### The Revised Western Australian Work Plan (TOR B4)

The key agencies with responsibilities under the Work Plan have used the opportunity presented by the evaluation to rectify the areas of deficiency identified through the process in the **Original Work Plan** (see Section 4.1.) and have developed a **Revised Work Plan**, as shown in Annexure 4. The agencies that have contributed to this process are the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Agriculture Western Australia, and the Ministry for Planning. Table 4.1 sets out areas of significant change from the original, with presentation of the item changed, the issue being addressed and an assessment of the impact of the change.

**Table 4.1 : Revisions to the WA Work Plan**

Mechanism	Issue being addressed	Impact of change
<b>Roles and responsibilities</b>	Insufficient detail on legislative Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture Management Act will enact a duty of care; and clearing controls</li> <li>• Biodiversity Conservation Act is expected to protect communities, address weeds and provide for covenanting</li> </ul>
<b>Planning and Assessment</b>	Insufficient detail about information dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions included that commit Government to providing community groups with access to status and trend information</li> <li>• Major regional maps will be provided for the GMS, West Midlands, Scott River, South West Catchments and South Coast in January 2001</li> </ul>
	Insufficient attention to regional vegetation planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic approaches in place in the GMS,, including off-reserve conservation (December 2002); and the Avon Region</li> <li>• Actions included that recognise planning occurring under the State Planning Strategy</li> </ul>
<b>Formal Reserve System</b>	Investment in acquisition, management and monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of Pilbara in survey work;</li> <li>• Action recognising continuing investment in preparation and implementation of management</li> </ul>

Mechanism	Issue being addressed	Impact of change
		plans
<b>Communication and capacity building</b>	Inadequate description of R, D & E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action for investment in high water use farming systems, productive use of saline water, productive use of salinised land, best practice for reducing off-site water quality impacts, addressing tree decline, use of native grasses</li> </ul>
	Inadequate attention to carbon trading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarification of role of multi-stemmed species (mallees) in carbon trading</li> </ul>
	Management information availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actions dealing with increased provision of management information</li> </ul>
<b>Incentives</b>	High demand for services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action to expand the Land for Wildlife Scheme</li> <li>Reference to CALM covenanting scheme</li> <li>Action addressing the need to formalise off-set provisions</li> </ul>
<b>Regulation</b>	Revision of clearing MOU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action broadening revision to address protection of remnant vegetation throughout the state</li> </ul>
	Off-site impacts of vegetation management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action addressing air quality impacts of land clearing</li> </ul>
	Best management practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action to increase LGA commitment to best practice roadside vegetation management</li> <li>Action to support industry accepted EMS's for agriculture</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring and evaluation</b>	Inadequate attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actions providing more detail on how monitoring activity will occur</li> </ul>

In summary, the Revised Work Plan is substantially improved compared to the Original in that it provides:

- A more complete documentation of what is happening in Western Australia;
- A better coverage of the mechanisms for management and monitoring of vegetation; and
- A better guide to community and agencies about the requirements and responsibilities of vegetation protection and management in WA.

### **A process for regular review and refinement of the WA Work Plan (TOR B5)**

The key NRM Agencies have taken the opportunity as part of this evaluation to improve the Western Australian Work Plan as described in the previous section.

The State framework for natural resource management provides a structure for future reviews of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Revised Work Plan. This framework is developing regional NRM strategies that will be signed off by Government as a objectives and activities to be undertaken by the government-community partnership in each region.

The point of sign-off will be an opportunity to compare and contrast each region's strategy with the NVF outcomes and mechanisms and the Revised Work Plan in identify inconsistencies and gaps across the documents. The Work Plan can be continually reviewed and updated as the Regional Plans are presented for sign-off. This process is underway, with strategies for the South Coast and South West well advanced. This

review process should be led by an Working Group, comprising representatives of those Agencies responsible for actions in the Work Plan.

It is likely after sign-off, these regional NRM strategies will be reviewed periodically, providing an opportunity for complementary reviews of the Work Plan.

This process will link the NVF to the State's Work Plan, through to the regional NRM strategies and ultimately to the investment in on-ground outcomes.

### **4.3 Proposed ongoing Independent Evaluation Arrangements (TOR C)**

Consistent with the recommendation in Section 4.2, independent evaluations should be timed to coincide with internal State reviews of the regional NRM strategies and Work Plan. As well as desk-top evaluation of the quality of the Work Plan against NVF requirements and regional delivery structures, evaluation should extend to on-ground assessments through direct inquiry of regional groups and Agencies with responsibilities for delivery.

### **4.4 Western Australian Progress assessed against the National Vegetation Framework (TOR D)**

Assessment of overall progress towards the vision and goals of the *National Framework* considered:

- The content of the Original and Revised Work Plans;
- Progress towards objectives;
- Evaluation of activities not addressed in the Work Plan; and
- Agency and NGO views about WA's performance in vegetation protection and management in general and the Work Plan in particular.

The conclusion presented is that sound progress is being made in WA towards the vision and goals of the *National Vegetation Framework*, although this is not necessarily recognised in either the Original and Revised Work Plans and the degree of progress is rather uneven across the NVF outcomes.

Most progress has been made in the dramatic reduction in clearing in agricultural land, in the extension of the CAR Reserve System, especially in the Gascoyne-Murchison, and in the provision of incentives and services to community groups.

However, virtually all the people consulted during the evaluation are of the opinion that the rate of progress is not sufficient to reverse the net decline in vegetation quantity and quality across the state, although this decline is perceived to be occurring at a much reduced rate than in previous decades. However, it remains a concern that there are no data to either confirm or deny this assertion, which is a significant omission facing the state in discharging its responsibility for vegetation protection and management.

## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The overall view is that the Western Australian community is managing vegetation resources better than in previous decades, mainly due to the near-cessation of clearing in the agricultural regions, increased Commonwealth investment in reserve acquisition and greater community activity in direct vegetation protection and management. Despite this positive shift, the people consulted are generally of the opinion that net decline in quantity and quality of vegetation is still occurring, *albeit* at a far slower rate than previously, although these observations cannot be substantiated with data.

The conclusions and recommendations below are framed to improve the alignment of the Western Australian Work Plan with the desired outcomes of the NVF.

### 5.1 Specific conclusions and recommendations

The **Original Work Plan** for Western Australia was found to be deficient in many areas. This was mainly because the original did not include sufficient detail on new actions and ignored many existing programs. Many of the deficiencies have been addressed in developing a **Revised Work Plan**. This will provide a better basis for WA to meet the key challenges in the Dore Report and the outcomes listed in the *National Framework*. The WA Work Plan has an important role to play in providing a link between the outcomes in the *National Framework*, objectives at state scale in WA and regional and local scale activities.

***Recommendation 1 : ANZECC acknowledge and support the improvements made in the Revised Work Plan for Western Australia and encourage investment in those items where additional resources are required, in particular in measures that increase off-reserve conservation linked with greater community participation.***

***Recommendation 2 : The Western Australian Government should continue to build the WA Work Plan as an important instrument for use in ensuring that WA agencies and community groups meet NVF outcomes and state requirements for vegetation and protection, with the initial step being consideration of the recommendations below for inclusion as Actions in the Work Plan.***

Related to the previous conclusion is the general agreement that resources being allocated to vegetation protection and management in Western Australia, while generally being invested wisely are quite inadequate to achieve the outcomes listed in the *National Framework*. The key factor is the nature of the natural diversity and threats to that diversity in the South West Land Division, which is recognised as one of the 25 bio-diverse ‘hot spots’ on the planet. The extreme spatial variability and the high threat to this diversity require greater national consideration.

***Recommendation 3 : In allocating national resources for vegetation and management, the National Framework needs to recognise the bio-physical imperatives facing biodiversity and vegetation protection in the agricultural areas of the state, which is one of the 25 most important regional locations in the world in terms of natural diversity***

***and threats to these values.*** Resources are needed for a wide range of activities, including:

- Improved documentation and analysis of the requirements for vegetation protection and management at all scales;
- Increased scientific and community capacity to develop best management practices for identification and management of vegetation values as all scales;
- Increased incentives and rewards for off-reserve management of important vegetation and biodiversity values;
- Consideration of how the state's conservation investment will be impacted by predicted climate change, with development of plans to manage this change; and
- Increased commitment to monitoring and evaluation that is able to inform future management.

There is concern, both within Government and community members consulted about the inadequate level of leadership and coordination in vegetation protection and management. Key points raised by those consulted are:

- The failure to move quickly enough to enact suitable legislation and introduce administrative arrangements to protect and manage vegetation at all locations in the state;
- The poor inter-agency coordination and cooperation in developing and implementing programs for vegetation protection and management;
- Inadequate recognition and support for the role that local government can play;
- Inadequate support for Regional NRM Groups and regional NRM planning that properly addresses vegetation protection and management; and
- Inadequate incentives for individual contributions to vegetation protection and management.

***Recommendation 4 : The WA State Government should consider comprehensive natural resource management legislation and strategies that inter alia provides for the protection of biodiversity at genome, species, eco-system and ecological process scale;***

***Recommendation 5: The Western Australian government should promote and support:***

- ***coordinated delivery of government services at state, regional and local levels, with greater accountability for that delivery;***
- ***the role of local government can play in the protection and management of vegetation;***
- ***increased community involvement in vegetation protection and management;***
- ***a formally recognised role for Regional NRM Groups and Regional NRM Strategies, and***
- ***an increased level of coordinated incentives for vegetation protection and management on private landholdings.***

Concern was expressed that in view of the sheer complexity and extreme spatial diversity of biodiversity across the landscape, particularly in the south west, there is an over-emphasis in trying to capture the biodiversity within the CAR reserve system. Expert scientific opinion is that less than 50 per cent of the biodiversity will be conserved within

the CAR system planned. A relative shift in emphasis to off-reserve conservation is required.

***Recommendation 6 : Given the distribution of biodiversity across the landscape, and the inability to capture the majority of that within the CAR Reserve System, the Department of Conservation and Land Management in cooperation with other Agencies should increase their commitment to establishing off-reserve conservation areas within existing tenure arrangements (especially in the pastoral areas).***

*Perth's Bushplan* provides a framework for progressing towards the establishment of a CAR Reserve System for the metropolitan area, which retains a rich resource of native vegetation rare in extent for a city of Perth's size. The Plan has been welcomed by those consulted in the evaluation with strong support for its implementation. It is expected that the WA Government will formally adopt *Perth's Bushplan* and provide \$100 million over 10 years for implementation. It will need to be complemented by actions taken by at local levels by LGAs, including Agenda 21 activities. The 'Bushplan' model is an attractive means of linking conservation needs with land use planning in closely settled areas of the State.

***Recommendation 7 : The WA Government should:***

- ***Encourage Local Government Authorities to develop their own 'bushplan' strategies to ensure protection and management of locally significant vegetation;***
- ***Use the 'Bushplan' concept in developing plans for the CAR Reserve System in other closely settled areas of the state; and***
- ***Continue to encourage community involvement and consultation through support for Agenda 21 activities in local government.***

Acquisition and dissemination of information about the status of Western Australia's vegetation resources and the threats to those resources is being done through a number of scientific programs within government. These programs are recognised in the Revised Work Plan. However, Agency and NGO people consulted are of the view that while the information being collected and made available is sound, it is difficult to access and often in a form that is not suitable for use in regional and local vegetation planning. Specifically, agencies and community need a framework to analyse the importance of an ecosystem in respect of the area remaining, the area already conserved and the threats to the ecosystem. That framework for analysis is not available.

***Recommendation 8 : The WA Government should ensure that mechanisms and capacity are available for the analysis of areas of vegetation in terms of their relative importance for conservation. This information is needed by community groups operating at all scales to enable regional and local vegetation planning can proceed on a secure information base and with adequate human resources.***

Although, the community is increasingly active in vegetation management there is discontent over Government's consultation processes and mechanisms to enable landholders and community groups to participate actively in government funded programs. Management and monitoring of Western Australia's native vegetation requires far greater inputs than government can provide and demands greater community involvement in all phases to achieve NVF outcomes. As a starting point, increased resourcing and coordination of the array of support programs (e.g. Land for Wildlife,

Bushcare facilitation) and skilling programs is required to allow supply to catch up the demand for these services.

***Recommendation 9 : State government procedures and consultation processes be modified to ensure greater community participation in:***

- ***Identifying conservation and native vegetation management strategies;***
- ***Management of off-reserves conservation***
- ***Biodiversity monitoring.***

***Recommendation 10 - In the light of the demand for management information about remnant vegetation in the agricultural areas, WA Government to provide a fully coordinated and expanded service based on existing successful programs such as covenanting activities, Bushcare and Land for Wildlife.***

Aboriginal groups feel they are excluded from activities related to the NVF and this observation is supported by the absence of Actions related to specific Indigenous needs. Consultation regarding conservation activities, especially in the pastoral areas, is inadequate and while there are many opportunities for joint Aboriginal/conservation acquisition of pastoral (and other) land for mutually compatible objectives, not enough is happening. Opportunities are large – for instance, a significant area of the State’s pastoral land is now held by Aboriginal people. There are also many social benefits to be gained from employment of Aboriginal people in conservation management on land held by Aboriginal people but few are employed outside the formal reserve system.

***Recommendation 11 : Government should initiate special programs to facilitate greater Aboriginal involvement in management and monitoring of native vegetation, including:***

- ***In collaboration with Commonwealth funding, the State Government put in place support programs to employ local Aborigines in the achievement of vegetation protection and management objectives on Aboriginal landholdings;***
- ***State Agencies and the Indigenous Land Corporation explore mechanisms for acquisition and joint management of pastoral leases, in particular, to meet both conservation and Aboriginal objectives.***

The evaluation revealed that Western Australia’s commitment to monitoring and evaluation programs that are inadequate to meet the requirements stated in the NVF. Further, the resources for achieving stated actions are inadequate, with a failure to meet the timetable given. The only exception is in the rangelands where state-wide monitoring of general vegetation change is in place, although this does not extend to biodiversity monitoring. The other major omission are actions that link information from monitoring and evaluation programs through to decision-making for future management.

***Recommendation 12 : WA Government Agencies should increase their commitment to and investment in comprehensive monitoring and evaluation programs that are able to report trends in vegetation management outputs and outcomes (vegetation cover and condition) and use this information to guide future management.***

## Glossary

<b>Abbreviation/Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
AFFA	Agriculture Fisheries Forestry - Australia
AGWEST	Agriculture Western Australia
ANZECC	Australia New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council
BMP	Best Management Practice
BRS	Bureau of Resource Sciences
CALM	Department of Conservation and Land Management
CAR	Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative
CWMB	Catchment Water Management Board
DEH	Department of Environment and Heritage
DEP	Department of Environmental Protection
EA	Environment Australia
IBRA	Interim Biogeographic Regions of Australia
LGA	Local Government Authorities
MfP	Ministry for Planning
MMM	Management and Monitoring Mechanisms
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NHT	Natural Heritage Trust
NVF	National Vegetation Framework
SCC	Standing Committee on Conservation
TOR	Terms of Reference
WAMA	Western Australian Municipal Association
WP	Work Plan
WRC	Water and Rivers Commission

