



The Forests of the Future

Mark McGowan
WA Labor Leader



One of our State's greatest natural assets and tourism icons – the majestic forests of the South West – is under threat from climate change and disease.

Only WA Labor can be trusted to preserve our precious native forests and national parks.

We took the historic step of ending logging in old-growth native forests under the Gallop Government.

As well as protecting our environment for our children and creating a world-class parks system, our strong decision boosted tourism and other local industries and helped to broaden and diversify the South-West economy.

But the Barnett-Grylls Government's mismanagement of our native forests and forestry industry has resulted in a disastrous period of forest decline since its election in 2008.

The Barnett-Grylls Government won't listen to Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) warnings about the health of our forests, leaving our forests and the timber industry hanging in the balance.

The EPA has highlighted, in particular, the Barnett-Grylls Government's laziness in failing to establish conservation reserves in the South-West.

WA Labor has a strong plan to protect our forests for our children and create jobs for the future, both in the tourism and sustainable forestry industries.

That's why we make it a priority to expand the Wellington and Greater Kingston national parks, draft a new Forest Management Plan which addresses the urgent threats affecting the health of our forests and re-start the process of establishing conservation reserves.

Better priorities for a better future.

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A McGowan Government will:

- 1. Look to expand the Wellington and Greater Kingston national parks by beginning an urgent review of the current listing of iconic conservation blocks like Arcadia, Chester, Coonan, Helms, Lowden, Merribup, Mundlimup, Mungilup, Palmer, Warrup and Yabberup which have been earmarked for future logging**
- 2. Restart the process of establishing conservation reserves**
- 3. Plan for the forestry jobs of the future**
- 4. Draft a new 10-year Forest Management Plan to commence on 1 January 2014, which will include:**
 - (a) Developing a State Dieback Strategy**
 - (b) Abolishing the timber industry's exemption from threatened species laws**
 - (c) Reviewing the governance around native forest planning and management**
 - (d) Promoting sustainable native forest management**
 - (e) Banning the felling of native forests for electricity generation and domestic firewood**
 - (f) Supporting plantation timber**
 - (g) Conducting an economic assessment of the value of native forest carbon**

WHY OUR SOUTH WEST FORESTS ARE AT RISK

The Barnett Government's mismanagement of our precious native forests is risking the future of one of our most spectacular resources.

The community has lost confidence in the Barnett-Grylls Government's ability to manage our native forest. Just as the Court Government spent the 1990s promoting the logging of old-growth forest, the Barnett-Grylls Government has presided over a disastrous period of forest decline.

The 2010 Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) review of the current Forest Management Plan (FMP) identified some serious concerns around the way our forests are being managed.

In particular, the EPA highlighted serious threats which have not been managed by the Barnett-Grylls Government, including the effects of climate change, such as declining rainfall and rising temperatures; the spread of various diseases and pests, predominantly jarrah dieback; mining; wood removal; recreational use; fire; and land management practices.

The EPA also pointed to serious problems with governance arrangements, highlighting the problems caused by splitting responsibility for native forests between the Conservation Commission of Western Australia (CCWA), the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and the Forest Products Commission (FPC).

The EPA also highlighted how the Barnett-Grylls Government had not established any new conservation reserves.



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The current FMP proposed that 800,000 hectares of conservation reserves be established. Of these, 570,000 hectares have been established since 2004, all by WA Labor Governments. This leaves 339 areas with a total area of 230,000 hectares, most of which are already reserved as State Forest (which are managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation), which need to be established as formal conservation reserves.

The Environmental Protection Authority has also raised concerns about this lack of action by the Barnett-Grylls Government, advising then Environment Minister Donna Faragher that this is a significant issue which “affects the credibility of the FMP (current and new) and the commitment to the FMP”.

The timber industry has been facing increasing pressures, with one large mill forced into closure and small millers squeezed out of the supply chain. The Barnett-Grylls Government has been unable to answer questions about large mills being propped up by special deals involving guaranteed supply, while the quality of logs supplied to small mills has declined dramatically.

After four years of Barnett-Grylls Government mismanagement and inaction, the timber industry has had a dramatic fall in employment and is plagued by uncertainty, declining skill levels and lack of training opportunities. Many jobs in logging and milling have been outsourced to casual labour and there is widespread concern about the drop in skill levels and professional expertise among operators. The Government has been forced to admit that

the problems plaguing the timber industry are serious but its response has only been band aid solutions.

By the Barnett-Grylls Government's own admission, plantation timber investment is at an all-time low with no new plantings for sawn log production in 2010 and 2011 and none planned in the next five years (Hansard, 19 June 2012). Even Forestry Minister Terry Redman has admitted in a media statement that the FPC, which runs commercial forestry in State-owned native forests and plantations, needs reform and “would have been in receivership by now had it been a private business”.

The Barnett-Grylls Government has refused to admit that the severe decline in the populations of some of WA's most treasured species - like the western ringtail possum, woylie, chuditch and black cockatoo - is associated with its failure to protect enough of the forests in which they live. The activities carried out under the FMP continue to involve the destruction of wildlife habitat, including nest trees, refuges, logs and loss of canopy.

The Barnett-Grylls Government doesn't understand the issues affecting our forests, with Colin Barnett continuing to say that “Forest is, by definition, a renewable resource...”. Yet consider the facts:

- A jarrah tree takes 250 years to reach maturity. Clear felled jarrah forests will not regenerate until the middle of the 23rd century.
- Forest diseases and pests including dieback, kanker and armillaria in jarrah, marri, tuart and karri have the potential to destroy much of our remaining native forest, including the old-growth forest that WA Labor protected.



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- Higher temperatures and lower rainfall have already damaged the northern forest and these adverse impacts are expected to increase and spread.

The sustainability of our use of forest resources is dependent on the integrity of the FMP's management practices and policies, and on the State's ability to enforce full compliance with those practices and policies by all the agencies involved.

Treating forest products as a renewable resource in the absence of a robust management system is a recipe for disaster. We cannot run the risk of the irreversible damage that another four years of the Barnett Government will bring to our forests and local industries that depend on them.

With a rapidly dwindling supply of quality timber, loggers are forced to take more and more trees in order to fill their contracts, resulting in more logging for a steadily diminishing quality of product.

This is clearly not a sustainable position, and WA Labor believes that the time has come to act.

HOW WA LABOR WILL PROTECT OUR FORESTS & JOBS

1. Look to expand the Wellington and Greater Kingston national parks by beginning an urgent review of the current listing of iconic conservation blocks like Arcadia, Chester, Coonan, Helms, Lowden, Merribup, Mundlimup, Mungalup, Palmer, Warrup and Yabberup which have been earmarked for future logging



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A McGowan Government will look to expand the Wellington and Greater Kingston national parks by commencing an urgent review of the current listing of high value conservation blocks which have been earmarked for future logging.

We will review the current listing of iconic high-conservation blocks, like Arcadia, Coonan, Yabberup, Lowden, Mungalup, Merribup and Warrup, which have been earmarked for future logging. We will also review the listing of the Chester, Helms, Palmer and Mundlimup blocks. "Use but don't abuse" will be WA Labor's guiding principle in planning these areas.

Just as Kings Park is often referred to as the soul of our capital city, our forests will be protected as places of inspiration, relaxation, recreation and wonder for people living in and visiting the South West.

2. Restart the process of establishing conservation reserves

A McGowan Government will re-start the process of establishing the conservation reserves identified in the Forest Management Plan 2004-2013.

The current FMP identified 800,000 hectares of high-value native forest to be established as new conservation reserves.

While the Gallop Government protected nearly 75 per cent of these areas, under the Barnett Government there has been no addition to these conservation reserves.

Furthermore, the EPA has found that there is no timetable within the life of the Barnett Government for the remaining conservation reserves to be implemented.

Under a McGowan Government, all Government agencies will be asked to develop a timetable to move the remaining 339 blocks into conservation reserves.



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3. Plan for the forestry jobs of the future

A McGowan Government will take several approaches in helping to plan to create the forestry jobs of the future.

This includes examining the feasibility of making the education campus in Manjimup a hub for courses in sustainable forest management to create skilled jobs.

Sustainable forest management not only builds up the skills associated with selective timber harvesting and value-adding, but also creates other new, secure jobs in dieback control, plantation forestry, improved fire management, the development and management of ecotourism infrastructure, the restoration of degraded forests and reforestation associated with improving water quality.

WA Labor believes that a sustainable timber industry is not inconsistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable forest management (ESFM) and will work with industry, unions and consumers to ensure that industry can plan confidently and provide secure jobs for the future.

A McGowan Government will provide the necessary assistance and support to timber workers and industry should the planned reduction in logging in new conservation areas impact on the workforce and industry.

4. Draft a New Forest Management Plan

A WA Labor Government will immediately begin drafting a new FMP to commence on 1 January 2014.

The current FMP, the main strategy for managing and conserving forests, is due to expire at the end of 2013. It is the first to separate the management of forests from commercial timber operations and is supposed to regulate the significant areas of native forest where mining and logging activities are permitted.

Our plan will be based on a reassertion of the ESFM principals outlined in the CALM Act:

- (a) that the decision-making process should effectively integrate both long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and equitable considerations;
- (b) that if there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, the lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation;
- (c) that the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations;
- (d) that the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration in decision-making; and
- (e) that improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms should be promoted.



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In preparing the draft of the new FMP, a McGowan Government will establish a stakeholder reference group reporting directly to the Minister for Environment to ensure that community consultation is comprehensive. WA Labor will propose an ongoing role for the group in the new FMP to ensure that the community has active and ongoing involvement in the operations of the new FMP. This involvement will include a regular schedule of forest inspections carried out by community representatives, local government, FPC and DEC staff to monitor management systems and compliance. The group will operate as an adjunct to the statutory and non-statutory consultation processes.

WA Labor believes that our native forests are a unique community asset. Under the Barnett-Grylls Government, the community's voice has been excluded from the day-to-day implementation of the FMP.

(a) Develop a State Dieback Strategy

A McGowan Government will develop an overarching whole of government strategy for dieback management and control as part of a new FMP.

Under the Barnett-Grylls Government, Western Australia's principal dieback advisory body has been sidelined by the Environment Minister for years while the "biological bulldozer" has wrought havoc on pristine, previously dieback-free areas of the State.

WA Labor recognises that the new FMP must contain the threats posed by soil disturbance and movement of plant material and will develop a new State-wide dieback strategy to inform the implementation of the new FMP based on the well-established principles that:

- prevention is the most cost-effective management strategy;
- eradication is costly and suitable only for small infestations; and
- where knowledge about dieback is limited, the precautionary principle should be applied.

A McGowan Government will develop a whole of government strategy on dieback management and control. The EPA will coordinate the development of this strategy.

(b) Abolish the Timber Industry's Exemption from Threatened Species Laws

A McGowan Government's new FMP will not allow automatic exemption for the timber industry from laws that protect threatened species.

Like other industries, the removal of trees from the State's native forests will take place only if millers can show that their actions will not have a significant impact on any threatened species. WA Labor's new FMP will include measures to ensure recovery plans and forest management, conservation and planning guidelines are monitored, updated and include provisions for ensuring compliance.

WA Labor believes that our grandchildren should not live in a State where black cockatoos, chuditch and ringtail possums are seen only in museums and old photos. One of the ways in which the current FMP has failed is that logging operations are not subject to the laws protecting threatened species.



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The new Biodiversity Conservation Act already announced by WA Labor will provide the framework for implementing this aspect of the new FMP.

(c) Review the Governance around Native Forest Planning & Management

WA Labor will undertake a review of existing governance arrangements relating to the planning and management of native forest use. The review will focus on the need to define clearly the responsibilities of agencies in implementing the FMP and the compliance mechanisms necessary to ensure the provisions and requirements of the FMP are enforced.

The Barnett-Grylls Government has refused to admit there are problems with the way the three agencies responsible for the FMP work together, despite the EPA identifying governance as a “critical matter” and noting that:

“Unless the governance arrangements relating to information, planning, management and activities in the forest areas, within clear policy settings, are resolved, there will remain levels of mistrust and justifiable challenges to [the CCWA, DEC and the FPC].”

(d) Promote Sustainable Native Forest Management

A McGowan Government will promote policies and practices that will see our native forests regrow so that timber becomes a genuinely renewable resource.

The Barnett-Grylls Government has taken the extraordinary step of refusing to include a firm sustainable yield proposal in its draft plan for the next 10 years of native forest logging. It also refused to include the findings of an expert review in its draft documents.

Before our draft plan is released for public comment, WA Labor will establish a genuinely independent review of sustainable yield levels which will include an assessment of regeneration and regrowth rates under the existing FMP.

The review’s focus will be on how best to restate the clear objectives that have underpinned WA Labor’s forest policy approach since we banned the logging of old-growth forest: the principles of adaptive management and the precautionary principle. The findings of the review will inform the sustainable yield rates proposed in WA Labor’s new FMP.

(e) Ban the Felling of Native Forests for Electricity Generation and Domestic Firewood

A McGowan Government will legislate to ban the clear felling of native forests to provide fuel for the generation of electricity. It will also ban the felling of native forests for domestic firewood supplies.

WA Labor believes that the days when a 400-year-old tree is cut down to be sold as firewood at \$9 a tonne are over. While WA Labor supports the use of woody biomass as an energy source, it is vital to ensure native forests are not regarded as a fuel source for any new bio-energy plants planned for WA.



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Nobody who has delighted in the beauty of our native forest believes that felling a tree simply for firewood is an acceptable practice, yet data shows that more than 80 per cent of logs end up as woodchips, charcoal or firewood. While domestic users will still be able to collect fallen timber to use as firewood, WA Labor will halt the felling of trees solely for firewood.

(f) Support Plantation Timber

A McGowan Government will ensure that the continued support of a sustainable forest logging industry based on plantation timber will be a key element of our new FMP.

There is currently very little financial incentive for private landowners to grow native species for plantation purposes. The Barnett-Grylls Government has wound back plantation timber investment to an all-time low with no new plantings for sawn log production in 2010 and 2011 and none planned in the next five years (Hansard, 19 June 2012).

While some species are clearly not suitable for plantations because of the time they take to grow, karri has been shown to reach a harvestable stage after 10 years.

WA Labor believes that encouraging the use of karri as a plantation timber is a responsible move towards sustainable forest management as well as an economically attractive offset to ending the clear felling of mature karri forest.

(g) Conduct an economic assessment of the value of native forest carbon

A WA Labor Government will undertake an economic assessment of the value of native forest carbon and ensure that decisions about forest resource management are informed by this assessment.

Part of this assessment will involve weighing up the potential economic and regional development opportunities arising from managing our native forests for the protection of their carbon values.

As a recent Australian National University report shows, protecting and managing biodiverse carbon stores is likely to be economically rewarding for regional communities.

While an accurate financial value of preservation of WA's native forests is difficult to assess because the price of carbon credits is yet to be set, recent research suggests that forest protection in WA could earn more than \$16 million per annum over the next 20 years. These benefits could be used to offset costs associated with implementing a new sustainable native forest management plan.

WHY ONLY WA LABOR CAN BE TRUSTED TO PROTECT FORESTS

In 2001, the WA Labor Government led by Geoff Gallop took the historically unprecedented step of legislating to end logging in old-growth native forests. We created 32 new national parks and conservation reserves.

The new policy was the first step in honouring WA Labor's commitment to protecting our environment for our children by preserving our spectacular native forests and creating a world-class parks system.



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The ending of old-growth logging was widely hailed by the community and seen by environmentalists as a major step forward in implementing modern environmental management practices.

Our policy effectively placed 100 per cent of old-growth forest into categories unavailable for logging as opposed to approximately 60 per cent under the old Regional Forest Agreements requirements.

The end of old-growth logging boosted forest tourism and other local industries that laid the foundations for the diversification of the South West region's economic base.

WA Labor put into place management and conservation practices which were sufficiently robust to sustain our native forests so that they can be enjoyed by generations to come.

In 2001, logging practices had left only about 10 per cent of our original old-growth forest remaining.

Today, there is about 2.6 million hectares of native forest, 90 per cent of which is on public land. Of this, 55 per cent, which includes all the old-growth forest, is protected in formal and informal reserves, including national parks, conservation parks, nature reserves, forest conservation areas, informal reserves and fauna habitat zones. As a result of WA Labor's strong decisions 10 years ago, this can never be logged.

Sustainability should underpin the set of principles on which the management and conservation of our native forests is based. If we do not give the highest priority to the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecosystem health and vitality, the protection of heritage and the socio-economic values of our forests we will have failed both ourselves and our children.

WA Labor believes that even with the threats of climate change, disease and changing world timber markets our forest can survive and the communities that make a life in the forest can thrive and prosper. That is our vision and we are committed to making it a reality.



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