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CIRCULATE TO ALL EMPLOYEES

NATURE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION RESERVES IN THE JARRAH FOREST

BACKGROUND

Up to the 1980s few reserves with the primary purpose of nature conservation and recreation had been created in the jarrah forest.

There were several small national parks (e.g. John Forrest, Serpentine) and nature reserves, but these were in no way representative, nor could they be considered adequate in size or to be properly distributed across the forest.

However, in the early 1970s the Forests Department had established a network of *de facto* reserves, i.e. State forests managed for the primary purposes of flora and fauna conservation and recreation. These areas were known as Management Priority Areas (MPAs).

This system had several strong points:

1. It was scientifically designed. Reserve areas were chosen on the basis of decades of ecological survey and research.
2. It incorporated the best of the remaining virgin stands, especially in the northern jarrah forest.
3. Each nominated area was buffered by surrounding State forests which in turn were managed in sympathy with the reserves.
4. As the reserves had been developed from within the Forests Department, there was a strong sense of ownership by management and field staff.
5. The system was independently examined and endorsed in reviews by both the EPA and a special inter-departmental Reserves Review Committee.

The system also had some deficiencies, namely:

1. The reserves had no security of purpose. The tenure (i.e., State forest) was secure, but not the purpose for which the State forest was managed. This could be changed by a minister without reference to Parliament.
2. There was no single large reserve in the forest.

3. There was ambiguity about what comprised some of the Forests Department's reserves. Some were designated as Core Areas (the area of principal concern) and buffer zones (a surrounding area designated for special management to provide the core with special protection). Within the Department, the actual conservation reserve was considered to be the core area only.
4. Although the reserves could be kept free of timber cutting (controlled by the Forests Department) they were not protected from mining (controlled by the Mines Act, or condoned by Special Agreement Acts which over-rode the Forests Act).

This was the situation inherited by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) when it was created in 1985.

WHAT TRANSPIRED?

1. The Lane Poole Reserve

At about the time CALM was being created, the Lane Poole Reserve came into being. This amalgamated and linked a number of the Forests Department MPAs and accommodated the demand for a single, large reserve in the jarrah forest.

Alcoa, who had a mining lease over the area, agreed to forego access rights to the parts of the Lane Poole Reserve with the highest conservation value. In the so-called "recreation zones" of the reserve, they have retained legal access to the bauxite resource.

A management plan for the Lane Poole Reserve was released in 1990, after a lengthy period of public participation and detailed planning procedures.

2. CALM's Forest Region Plans

In 1987, CALM published management plans for its three forest regions. Jarrah occurs in each of these regions. The development of the management plans involved the release of draft plans and calls for comments and a public participation program. In the end, the final plans were endorsed by the EPA and government.

The plans proposed two broad changes to the reserve system and its management in the forest: (i) the introduction of a new hierarchy of reserve classifications; and (ii) the reclassification of the *de facto* reserve system within State forest, so as to ensure that nature conservation and recreation reserves would have security of tenure and purpose.

When finally implemented, the forest region plans will have enlarged the secure conservation reserve system in the forest by 340%. A range of new national parks and nature reserves and conservation reserves are steadily being created in the forest, and a series of conservation parks are scheduled to be established as soon as the CALM Act is amended. The new reserve system encompasses the karri, wandoo and tuart forests of the South-West, as well as the jarrah forest.

When the proposed reclassifications are complete, the area of jarrah forest managed primarily for nature conservation and recreation will be:

National park	88,000 hectares
Nature reserve	70,000 “
Conservation park	151,000 “
Total	309,000 hectares

Approximately 30% of all the remaining old growth jarrah forest will be within the reserve system, and overall, about 25% of the jarrah forest will be reserved for nature conservation and recreation.

Commercial timber cutting is not permitted in national parks, nature reserves or conservation parks. Mining can occur only if agreed to by Parliament.

3. The fate of the buffer zones in the Central Forest Region

All of the core conservation and recreation areas in the Forests Department's forest plans were designated in the 1987 regional plans to be converted by CALM to national park, nature reserve or conservation park. Some of the areas designated by the Forests Department as buffers are to be retained as State forest.

In the plans CALM said of these buffers: “[These areas] will be retained as State forest and managed for multiple use. However this management will be sympathetic with the values for which the core areas have been reserved.”

NATURE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION OUTSIDE RESERVES

In addition to the reserve system, there is approximately 1.2 million ha of jarrah forest within State forest. This area is managed for multiple uses, including nature conservation, recreation, timber production, water supplies and the production of minor products. Mining also occurs in State forest in various forms and places.

The aim of management in State forests is to provide for demands, but also to sustain forest values. To do this, harvest must be followed by regeneration, and special measures must be taken to prevent permanent damage by injurious agents, alienation or misuse.

Nature conservation values are disturbed by operations such as timber cutting and regeneration, mining or construction of water supply dams. However, so long as the natural forest returns (or is retained) as happens following timber harvest in the jarrah forest, flora and fauna also quickly recover. Following 150 years of European use, no single case of a species of vascular plant becoming extinct as a consequence of timber cutting in the jarrah forest has been recorded. Many species of mammal which have become extinct elsewhere have survived only in the forest, including regrowth forests.

The value of regrowth forests for recreation is widely accepted. Although timber cutting is a rather ugly business, the jarrah forest quickly recovers and the regrowing stands contain the values sought by forest visitors: wildflowers, running streams of fresh water, birdsong, solitude and peace, or simply “the bush” to enjoy.

The use of forests for water production severely constrains recreation. The public is banned from many State forests near Perth because these areas are also water catchments. Recreation is also constrained by dieback control measures, e.g. quarantine.

A significant portion of the State forests designated for multiple use is not scheduled to be harvested for one reason or another (for example, they could be wetlands, rock outcrops, or stands retained beside streams or roads), and the proportion of the forest harvested for timber each year is about 1%. Regrowth forests are scheduled to be regrown for at least a century, and very possibly it will be much longer. Jarrah timber comes from "selection" harvesting methods, not clearfelling.

CONCLUSION

During the last decade, and especially in the last three or four years, a secure and representative system of conservation and recreation reserves has been established in the jarrah forest. The system includes one large reserve and is distributed across the whole range of the northern, central and southern jarrah forests. The reserve system is ecologically based, but also includes important recreation areas.

In addition, nature conservation values and recreation are provided for in State forests, which in turn provide a major buffer zone around the nature conservation and recreation reserves.

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