

Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy

Western Australian Planning Commission

**A submission by the Environmental Protection Authority under
Section 16(j) of the Environmental Protection Act**

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The primary purpose of this EPA report is to provide advice under Section 16(j) of the Environmental Protection (EP) Act. Section 16(j) empowers the EPA “to *publish reports on environmental matters generally*”. Because the EPA reports publicly its advice can be seen and considered by the public, industry, State and Local Government and other stakeholders.

1.2 Scope

The EPA’s advice on the Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy is provided to ensure environmental issues are adequately recognised and integrated into future planning in a sustainable way.

1.3 Key Principles Guiding the EPA Advice

In considering the Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy the EPA was guided by the following key principles:

- ecologically sustainable development;
- conservation of biological diversity;
- interdependence of physical and biological systems, food webs and natural cycles;
- precautionary principle; and the
- prevention of pollution.

1.4 EPA advice issued under Section 16(j)

This report is advice provided under Section 16(j) of the EP Act. It does not constitute a formal assessment under Part IV of the EP Act and does not lead to the setting of legally binding environmental conditions. In compiling this report, the EPA has considered the information in the Avon Arc Sub-regional Strategy, specialist advice from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and information from other government agencies. The EPA will take into account the advice set out in this report, when determining the level of environmental assessment for proposals referred under Sections 38 and 48A of the EP Act.

2. Background and Context

The Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy is one of a number of area plans which have been prepared by the Western Australian Planning Commission as part of its commitment to strategic regional planning in country areas.

The Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy has been prepared to provide a framework and direction for the long-term land use and development of the Avon Arc which includes the local governments of Brookton, Beverley, York, Shire and Town of Northam, Toodyay, Chittering and the area east of the Brand highway in Gingin (Figure 1).

The Strategy provides:

- the overall planning context, and identifies the planning issues for the region;
- a vision and guiding principles providing a foundation for the Strategy;

- objectives, strategies and recommendations for addressing planning and environmental issues;
- a strategic policy framework including statements about land use categories and general policies for each; and
- guidance for the implementation of the Strategy.

The area covered by the Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy is under increasing pressure to accommodate future development while maintaining a regional identity. The Strategy provides the strategic planning framework for the next 30 years during which time it is expected that the area will experience a substantial population growth. It is anticipated that by 2026 the population of the Avon Arc may double to 40,000 people.

The Strategy provides direct guidance for future land use and management needs to facilitate growth in a sustainable manner, to balance the competing needs of conservation and management of natural resources with those of housing, employment and associated community infrastructure. Underpinning this guidance is a need to protect agricultural productivity of the land while enhancing the natural landscape, economic, tourism and social values of the area.

The EPA recognises that the Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy is a strategic planning document which would be implemented through local government planning schemes, rural strategies and other local level planning processes.

The EPA recognises that other mechanisms are also relevant in addressing and solving environmental issues.

3. Environmental Considerations

This section addresses environmental issues relevant to the Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy, and the EPA's response and recommendations on these issues.

The EPA recognises that regional landuse planning can play a major role in natural resource management of an area and to this end encourages and supports liaison such as that facilitated by the WAPC's Environmental and Natural Resource Committee. It is pleasing to note that the Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy has embraced natural resource management as a key component with recommendations for landuse to fulfil the needs and requirements of the expanding population based firmly on the capacity and values of the natural environment.

The Steering Committee is congratulated for the approach taken during the development of the Strategy and the general suite of recommendations that have resulted. The EPA considers the Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy has achieved a high standard of approach and sets a benchmark against which future regional strategies should be considered. Further advice and comments on specific items within the Strategy, which should be considered to be fine tuning of the Strategy, are provided below.

3.1 Salinity

The Western Australian (WA) government has identified salinity as an issue of highest priority for government and community action. It has been recognised that government has a role in encouraging a fundamental change to traditional farming systems and unprecedented effort is required from all sectors to manage land salinisation (SOE, 1998).

The Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy represents an opportunity to guide landuse in this area to prevent further degradation and, in some cases, reverse degradation that has occurred in the past.

To address salinity issues adequately, major changes to landuse are likely to be required in some areas. These landuse changes will be necessary to achieve the hydrologic balance required to prevent further rises in groundwater tables. Implementation of these landuse changes will need to occur in a coordinated, structured way to minimise disruption and inconvenience to the current landholders while providing opportunity for sustainable development in the future.

The WA and Federal Governments are currently implementing a number of programs to combat salinity in the wheatbelt. It is critical that these programs are clearly identified in the Strategy and there is opportunity for input from these programs during the implementation of the Strategy. Specific programs that should be recognised by the Strategy are the Salinity Strategy (Government of WA 2000) and the Swan-Canning Cleanup Program Action Plan (Swan River Trust 1999). Implementation of these programs is likely to have a significant effect on proposed landuses within the Strategy area.

It is recommended that as the Strategy is progressively implemented through planning processes, the Strategy is periodically examined to ensure consistency with government programs to combat salinity. Opportunities for these programs to provide input and guidance during the implementation of the Strategy should be clearly identified within the Strategy.

3.2 Biodiversity

Biodiversity, like salinity, has been identified by the WA government as an issue of highest priority for government and community action. It is recognised that many activities are already underway to conserve biodiversity but the continuing success will require a commitment from all Western Australians and improved methods of monitoring and management (SOE, 1998).

While the Strategy generally recommends retention of vegetation, development of vegetation corridors along waterways and infrastructure routes, the relative importance or prioritisation of activities has not been addressed. There is an opportunity for the Strategy to incorporate a process for the analysis of the regional significance of vegetation and wetlands within the study area that would be used to establish priority areas. This process may include activities associated with the update of areas identified by System 4 and System 6 (EPA 1975, 1983).

It is recommended that a process to analyse the regional significance of vegetation and wetlands be developed in conjunction with the DEP for incorporation into the Strategy to guide planning processes. This process would then be used to help set priorities for revegetation and wetland management activities within the Strategy area.

3.3 Buffers

Buffers are recognised in the Strategy as a means of ensuring impacts associated with a particular landuse do not have unacceptable impacts on adjacent landuses. There are several instances in the Strategy where certain minimum buffers are recommended between incompatible landuses however the recommended setbacks would be inadequate for some situations. For example, the recommended minimum setback of 300m for non-rural uses may not be an adequate setback between non-rural and some rural landuses. Landuse restrictions to help manage impacts due to aircraft operations associated with the RAAF flight training area and proposed improvement of aerodrome facilities at Beverley should also be recognised and considered in the Strategy.

The EPA also recommends the use of buffers to help manage incompatible landuses. EPA's Draft Policy No. 3 for 'Industrial - Residential Buffer Areas (Separation Distances)' provides recommended buffers for a number of landuses. This Draft Policy is also referred to by the DEP when attaching conditions to Licences and Works Approvals issued under Part V of the *Environmental Protection Act (1986)*.

It is recommended that buffer requirements in the Strategy are reviewed to ensure consistency with those in the EPA's Draft Policy No. 3 for 'Industrial - Residential Buffer Areas (Separation Distances)' and that these buffers are incorporated into statutory planning documents implementing the Strategy.

3.4 Waste Management

The Strategy rightly recognises waste management as a significant issue and, in the short-term, indicates that existing facilities in the region should be adequate. Long term waste management is proposed to be based on total re-use of wastes rather than creation of larger waste disposal sites.

Considering the projected population increases and development for the area by 2026 there is a need for the Strategy to address waste management more fully. It is recommended that the Strategy include a specific section to address waste management issues including consideration of:

- the projected type, location, and volume of waste generation in the region;
- options for environmentally acceptable management of waste produced in the region;
- a requirement that appropriate waste management processes or facilities can, and will, be available prior to development; and
- value added waste management to encourage re-use and re-cycling of waste from within the region and adjacent Perth metropolitan area.

The Strategy should recognise the need for future waste management facilities to support the Perth Metropolitan area including the likelihood of a future waste management facility for the northern suburbs being located within the Avon Arc study area. In particular, the planning of the sub-region should be responsive to the recommendations of the Waste 2020 Strategy which is currently being prepared.

3.5 Infrastructure

The Strategy shows a number of infrastructure proposals within the study area either on figures in the report or in the text discussion. Whilst the EPA recognises the implementation of the Strategy would require development of supporting infrastructure it should be noted that many of these infrastructure proposals have not undergone environmental assessment by the EPA. Many of the infrastructure proposals would require referral to the EPA for assessment and until this assessment has been completed the EPA is unable to provide advice on the environmental acceptability of these proposals. Significant changes to the infrastructure proposals may be required as a result of the EPA's assessment of each individual proposal.

Examples of infrastructure proposals in the Strategy that may require referral to the EPA for assessment include the Perth-Darwin Highway, Perth-Adelaide Highway, a new town site to the south of Bindoon, a network for the transport of dangerous goods, additional rail services to Northam, changes to high pressure gas transmission pipeline routes or characteristics, and a number of other transport routes and bypasses.

3.6 Raw Materials

The EPA supports the extension of the Draft WAPC Basic Raw Materials Policy (WAPC 2000) and the development of Basic Raw Materials Strategies by Shires to provide a framework which identifies and protects valuable resources within the Avon Arc. The WAPC Policy and Shire Strategies would be implemented through the statutory planning process to minimise costs to the community, amenity and environment.

These strategies and the extension of the Policy should be developed in consultation with the EPA. This consultation should include consideration of EPA policies relating to issues such as

noise, dust and vibration as a result of extraction operations as well as the potential for impacts on the biophysical environment. Impacts on the biophysical environment may occur due to the location of the raw materials, off site impacts during extraction and site rehabilitation. The EPA should be consulted to ensure these impacts are managed at environmentally acceptable levels.

The EPA also supports the preparation and implementation of Rehabilitation Management Plans that are consistent with EPA and WAPC Policies and the Shire Strategies as part of the condition of Extraction Licence or Mining Lease to ensure adequate rehabilitation of sites is achieved once extraction and mining have ceased.

4. Summary of EPA Advice

The EPA considers the Avon Arc Sub-Regional Strategy has been prepared with a high regard for the environment and generally serves to support sustainable natural resource management within the Strategy area.

The EPA recommends that:

- a) The Strategy be examined to ensure consistency with government programs to combat salinity. Opportunities for these programs to provide input and guidance during the implementation of the Strategy should be clearly identified within the Strategy.
- b) A process to analyse the regional significance of vegetation be developed in conjunction with the DEP for incorporation into the Strategy. This process would then be used to help set priorities for revegetation activities within the Strategy area.
- c) Buffer requirements in the Strategy be reviewed to ensure consistency with those in the EPA's Draft Policy No. 3 for 'Industrial - Residential Buffer Areas (Separation Distances)' and WAPC Statement of Planning Policy No.4 'State Industrial Buffer Policy'.
- d) The Strategy include a specific section to address waste management issues within the Strategy area including the implications for the sub-region of the potential need for the provision of waste management facilities for the Perth Metropolitan region.
- e) The Strategy recognise that many of the infrastructure proposals have not been assessed by the EPA and such assessment could result in significant changes to these proposals.
- f) The EPA be consulted during the preparation of policies and plans for the extraction and long term management of basic raw materials to ensure potential impacts on the biophysical environment are adequately addressed.

5. References

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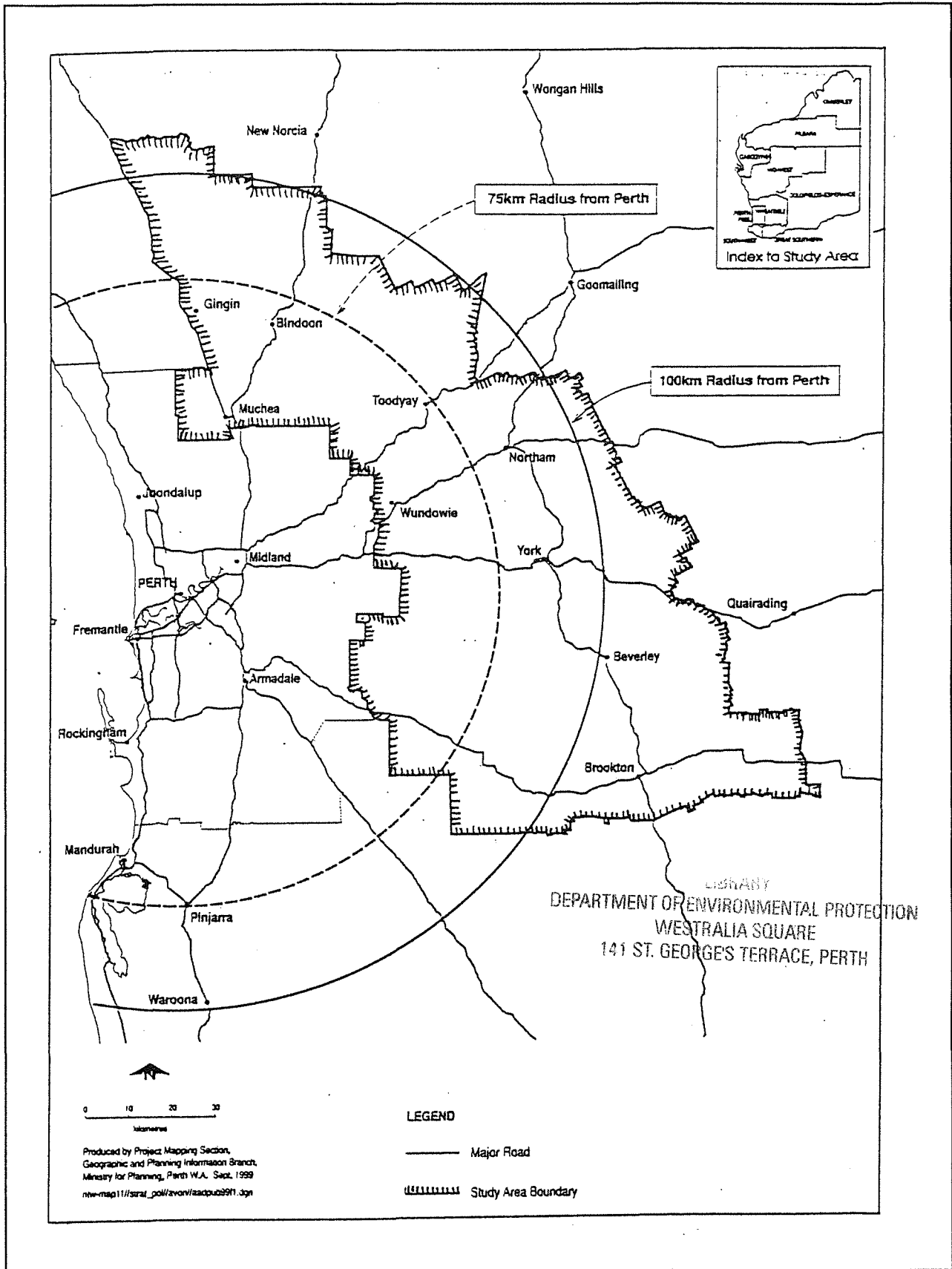


Figure 1. Strategy Area.