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Clearing Regulation
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To whom it may concern

Submission – Regarding Application for Clearing Permit – Commissioner of Main Roads, Western Australia, Purpose Permit, various road reserves and properties, City of Belmont and Shire of Kalamunda, road construction for the Gateway WA Project, 114.8 ha, (CPS 5242/3) – amendment to increase clearing size by 11.8 ha.

The Urban Bushland Council wishes to present the following submission regarding the abovementioned Application for a Clearing Permit.

The Urban Bushland Council has made previous submissions regarding the Gateway project and has made it abundantly clear it objected strongly to the amount of clearing of native vegetation it entailed. The UBC also expected that rehabilitation works would be given complete priority before, during and after the construction process – given that so much valuable native vegetation and habitat was to be destroyed. The Council has subsequently learned that a great deal of essentially horticulture-based landscaping will be replacing cleared native vegetation and we regard this as an environmentally unacceptable outcome. We do not believe our views on the need for native fauna tunnels and the problems with noise walls creating a barrier to wildlife have been heeded.

The UBC also objects to the offsets used to compensate for the environmental impacts of this project as they are generally not directed to the local area and they do not involve the conservation of an additional large total area of bushland in the local area. The UBC actually opposes the use of so-called offsets on principle as we have seen far too many thoroughly unsatisfactory offset packages deemed acceptable in assessment processes. However, in an instance where every level of government is wanting a project to proceed we would at least expect the proposed offsets to be reasonable, local, and substantial.

Members of our group are reasonably familiar with the area associated with the Clearing Permit Application and the submission will address the 10 Clearing Principles associated with assessment of such proposals.

1. Native Vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises a high level of biological diversity.

Remnant vegetation on the eastern side of the Swan Coastal Plain is known to be the most floristically diverse on the plain. The ecology has distinct features as it lies on a border area between the deep sands of the plain and the heavier alluvial soils nearer the foothills. We note it “intersects 3 geomorphic wetlands” and would make the point that, even if the project area does not contain much wetland vegetation, as such it could be rehabilitated and it would certainly provide additional habitat for fauna utilising those wetlands. This would include such fauna as frogs and the

Southern Brown Bandicoot. A point that receives no mention in the Gateway documentation we received is that the project area cuts across Crumpet Creek – an important seasonal watercourse in the area. The existence of the creek would contribute significantly to the overall biological diversity of the area.

The site contains some Type 20a Floristic Community vegetation and this is known to be a species rich community. We would suggest that some vegetation of this Floristic Community type is located south of Berkshire Road within the project area and that it is not only located north of Berkshire Road as is described in the Gateway documentation we received. We also note the presence of a “gradient” between Type 20a and Type 3a. There are many impressive Jarrah and Marri trees in the project area and they doubtless provide additional habitat for the many bird species utilising the nearby bushland remnants. In our view the vegetation exhibits sufficient biological diversity to render the project at variance with the Principle stating that “Native Vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises a high level of biological diversity.”

2. Native Vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of, a significant habitat for fauna indigenous to Western Australia.

Our limited survey opportunities did not allow us the time to observe any fauna other than several native bird species in the project area. But it is highly likely that it provides habitat for the Southern Brown Bandicoot – as this species is quite mobile and it is found in Bush Forever Site 319 and other bushland remnants directly adjacent to the project area. It is our strong view that the remnant vegetation in the project area would almost certainly provide a fauna linkage between Bush Forever Site 319 (Dundas Road Bushland, Forrestfield), Bush Forever Site 123 (Sultana Road West Bushland, High Wycombe) and Bush Forever Site 440 (Pioneer Park Bushland, Forrestfield). The Southern Brown Bandicoot and other fauna, including reptile species, would be able to utilise the cover afforded by the project area vegetation to move between these three important remnant areas.

It is also highly likely that the Vulnerable Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo makes use of the Marri and Jarrah trees in the project area for feeding – Gateway’s documentation refers to them having been heard in the vicinity of the site during surveys. Similarly, Carnaby’s Cockatoo would be expected to utilise some of the remnant vegetation in the project area for feeding. Indeed All Marri is regarded as the most important foraging habitat species for both species of Black Cockatoos (Ron Johnstone pers. comm. 2013), and Jarrah is also very important habitat. Both these listed endangered species and other fauna would be able to drink from water available in the area – such as that water flowing in Crumpet Creek.

Therefore, it is our view that the Clearing Permit Application is at variance with the Clearing Principle stating that, “Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of, a significant habitat for fauna indigenous to Western Australia.”

3. Native Vegetation should not be cleared if it includes or is necessary for the continued existence of, rare flora.

Gateway documentation admits clearing the vegetation in the project area would result in the removal of 19 plants of the Declared Rare Flora species *Conospermum undulatum*. It also concedes that 7 plants of the Priority species *Isopogon drummondii* would be removed. The UBC is very concerned at the potential loss of yet more *Conospermum undulatum* specimens through this project

and it must be understood that not only are these plants being removed but any existing propagules in soil will also be removed. The project is clearly at variance with the Clearing Principle that stating that “Native Vegetation should not be removed if it includes or is necessary for the continued existence of rare flora.”

4. Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of a threatened ecological community.

Gateway’s documentation concedes that 3.05 hectares of Threatened Ecological Community will be cleared if the project is approved. We would also suggest that the project area could otherwise be rehabilitated and regenerated to provide additional space for adjacent areas containing Threatened Ecological Communities. Floristic communities lying in this zone on the eastern side of the Coastal Plain are generally of a threatened type as it has been so extensively cleared. Furthermore, it is well known that roadsides are subject to all kinds of littering and disturbance. The existing vegetation in the project area generally shows signs of such disturbance but it does provide a buffer between the road and very high quality vegetation consisting of Threatened Ecological Communities in adjacent bushland areas. This is no small consideration. Clearly the project is at variance with the Clearing Principle stating that, “Native Vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of a threatened ecological community.”

5. Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is significant as remnant of native vegetation in an area that has been extensively cleared

The eastern side of the Swan Coastal Plain certainly has been “extensively cleared” and it has been the UBC’s understanding for some years that, according to Bush Forever policy, there is supposed to be a “presumption against clearing” on the eastern side of the Plain.

There are some very impressive areas of remnant vegetation in the project area – even though they are not large – and we would consider their loss to be just another nail in the coffin of the magnificent natural heritage of the far eastern part of the Coastal Plain. So much of it has been lost to farms and orchards and housing developments and factories and warehouses and roads that it is important to protect every last existing remnant. We would also suggest it is about time that native trees were recognised as having conservation significance in their own right. We can see no justification for ignoring the conservation value of impressive specimens of hugely depleted tree species just because there is little or no native understorey underneath them. The project area has many trees of considerable heritage value in themselves and together they constitute an excellent resource for native birds and other fauna.

We believe the project is clearly at variance with the Clearing Principle stating that, “Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is significant as a remnant of native vegetation in an area that has been extensively cleared.”

6. Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is growing in, or in association with, an environment associated with a watercourse or wetland.

There are wetland areas abutting the project area and Crumpet Creek flows directly across it. Some of the wetland areas nearby are in magnificent condition (such as those in Bush Forever Site 319) and the project area vegetation, being mostly woodland, could be seen to complement this environment. The low heath and emergent *Kingia* sp. in Bush Forever Site 319 is one of our more attractive landscapes and it is really quite rare. We believe the project is at variance with the

Clearing Principle stating that, “Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is growing in, or in association with, an environment associated with a watercourse or wetland.”

7. Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to have an impact on the environmental values of any adjacent or nearby conservation area.

The project area’s vegetation currently provides a linkage between 3 Bush Forever sites that fauna can use to move between them. This linkage may prove very useful if and when large fires deplete suitable habitat areas in one or other of the sites. Terrestrial fauna such as the Southern Brown Bandicoot would almost certainly utilise this roadside vegetation and move between remnant bushland sites. This would help keep the gene pool from shrinking and buffer the animals against population decline. It has been our observation that long term isolation is death for this species in small to medium sized blocks and wildlife corridors could be expected to enhance the prospects for survival of populations considerably. The same could be said for reptile species and small bird species that are very reluctant to break cover.

The project area vegetation also provides a buffer against the environmental disturbances that come with busy roads and freight transport – roadside weeds, rubbish and more frequent fire being some of them. Furthermore the project area contains many excellent habitat trees that contribute to both the flora and the fauna values of the adjacent bushland areas generally. It is our view that the project is at variance with the Clearing Principle stating that, “Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to have an impact on the environmental values of any adjacent or nearby conservation area.”

In conclusion, the UBC submits that the Clearing Permit Application proposes clearing that contradicts and violates the Clearing Principles we have cited, being at variance with 7 clearing principles. Each principle states that clearing should not be approved if it is at variance with that principle. We trust that the clearing permit should therefore be rejected. Much better means of avoiding impacts to vegetation should be devised.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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