

11th April 2008

Fiona Stanley Hospital Project
PO Box 448
Leederville WA 6903

RESPONSE TO INVITATION FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

EPBC Act Ref: 2008/3970 Fiona Stanley Hospital

The controlling actions for this proposal under Part 3 of the EPBC Act are:

- (i) *Listed threatened species and communities (sections 18 and 18A) – Calyptorhynchus latirostris, Carnaby's (short billed) Black-Cockatoo and Caladenia huegelii, Grand Spider Orchid.*

Preamble

The Urban Bushland Council of WA regrets that the Environmental Protection Authority of WA (EPA) determined that this proposal would not be formally assessed but would be dealt with under Part V of the Environmental Protection Act through a clearing permit. (Clearing Permit 1773/1) The development has a "development footprint of 29.4ha within a 32.4ha project area of which 25ha is intact Jarrah-Banksia or Banksia-Melaleuca woodland." The Clearing Permit 1773/1 includes conditions relating to minimisation of clearing (amongst other conditions), but when around 90% of the bushland/wetland is to be cleared, the condition of "minimisation of clearing" is not specific and is thus open to selective interpretation. It is a pitiful condition and is most likely to result in almost total loss of vegetation as has happened with a recent example at the AK Reserve where the same condition was applied. .

We address our comments to the endangered species Carnaby's cockatoo and Caladenia huegelii and Drakea elastica. We make some points on Quenda and Rainbow Bee-eaters.

CARNABY'S COCKATOO

1. Status of Carnaby's cockatoo and clearing

Populations of Carnaby's cockatoo are "declining dramatically due to land clearing for agriculture in regional areas and for urban development around Perth. The last 45 years have seen a 50% decrease in the species' range and abundance....." (Birds Australia, Swan Coastal Plain Project, Bansi Shah.) Shah's Report concludes that the studies undertaken during the project "show that Carnaby's Cockatoos use the entire landscape of the Swan Coastal Plain, with a significant preference for large tracts of native vegetation and pine plantations. These results have important conservation implications for the Carnaby's Cockatoo population with respect to clearing, and possibly fragmentation, of the remaining native vegetation in and around the Perth Metropolitan area....**Measures will need to be taken by the government to ameliorate impacts on this endangered endemic species.**" (our emphasis)

There is no argument that this is not the case. The argument by environmental consultants Coffee Environments is not considered to have any validity.

Dr PD Berry states:

"It appears to be a shortcoming of both the State and Federal environmental review process that impacts of individual development proposals are assessed in isolation, and on an *ad hoc*

basis. Carnaby's Cockatoo, being highly mobile, long-lived and migratory is thus particularly vulnerable to a 'death by a thousand cuts' outcome."¹

The elimination of around 25ha of feeding habitat at the proposed site is one of these thousand cuts which will be detrimental to the Carnaby's cockatoo group in the area.

As the GHD Fiona Stanley Health Precinct Site Investigation, Fauna Assessment states (page 22);

“Cumulative impact by removal of individual sites is likely to have a long-term impact on the survival of this species.”

No matter how brilliant “on-site retention of 3ha of vegetation and re-establishment of flora species suitable as a food source in hospital landscaping and streetscaping”, and “abutting vegetation,” this can in no way compare with the destruction of 25 hectares of bushland habitat.

2. Misunderstanding of the phrase ‘moderately common’ by GHD Pty Ltd

In the Referral of proposed action March, 2007, (2007 Referral), it is stated that ‘In the Jandakot region, including Murdoch, Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo is moderately common in pairs and small flocks, occasionally seen in larger flocks, and very rarely seen in larger aggregations’ (page 9).

The phrase ‘moderately common’ quoted from Johnstone, R. E. and C., 2004, is misunderstood by GHD Pty Ltd. Were Carnaby's cockatoos moderately common, they would not be listed by the federal government as endangered and by the state government, WA Wildlife Conservation Act 1950, as threatened.

‘Moderately common’ means that the birds are seen in the region (‘Jandakot, including Murdoch’) moderately often. It does not mean that they are there in great abundance.²

3. Feeding by Carnaby's cockatoo

It is also stated on page 9 that “the Project Area does not appear to be one of the primary feeding areas for the species.” Carnaby's cockatoos seek food where it is available and quality of food is likely to be critical.

There appears to be a correlation between food resources available and numbers of Carnaby's cockatoos. Thus there are more Carnaby's cockatoos in the area of Gnangara, where pine trees provide high energy food, as compared with numbers in the western suburbs³. Within bushland areas food is seasonally available and not necessarily available from year to year. For example Marri (*Eucalyptus calophylla*) does not flower every year.

4. Addressing ‘5 Nature and extent of likely impacts’ (page 15)

In the 2007 Referral, ‘5 Nature and extent of likely impacts’ (page 15) Carnaby's cockatoo is discussed under a separate heading. Points made under this heading are that;

- “The proposed clearing has the potential to affect smaller groups of Black-cockatoos habitually or occasionally utilising the Project Area,
- decreasing the availability of food and
- affecting habitual movement of such groups across the area.
- The cumulative impact of clearing of non-breeding habitat on the Swan Coastal Plain is also of concern.”

¹ Lot 4 Underwood Avenue: Comments on Preliminary Documentation Under the EPBC Act 1999 by PF Berry M.Sc. Ph. D

² Kim Sarti, (colleague of Ron Johnstone), personal communication, 20th March, 2008.

³ PF Berry; *ibid*.

The UBC strongly disagrees with the next statement:

“The potential impact on the species of clearing feeding habitat in the Project Area will be reduced through a combination of on-site retention of key areas of vegetation and re-establishment of flora species suitable as a food source in hospital landscaping and street scaping.”

This statement is nonsense because approximately 25ha of the 32.4ha area will be cleared; thus there is a large net loss of intact vegetation.

The statement that "The significance of clearing of 25ha of vegetation is tempered by the existence of larger areas of feeding habitat to the south of the Project Area (Figure 9) which exists as ‘stepping stones’ of various scale across the southern metropolitan area. The retention of areas of vegetation and use of suitable species is intended to preserve the function of the Project Area as a northern ‘tip’ of these areas of vegetation (Figure 9)" - is again nonsense. The Project Area would better serve as the ‘northern tip’ if left entire.

In regards to ‘a network of landscaped corridors (greenways) and street scapes’ the UBC finds the proposal ludicrous. The motions of providing ‘greenways’ which are but a few metres wide and statements within the management actions (page 19) are desperate attempts to be seen to be complying with the EPBCAct.

The proposed actions of

- “establishing roof gardens on Hospital buildings using flora known to be utilised by Carnaby’s Black-Cockatoo” and
- “investing the potential for Carnaby’s Black-Cockatoo nest boxes to be installed in areas of retained vegetation to “add value” to these areas.” are desperate suggestions indeed.

The Department of Housing and Works “is not convinced the action is likely to have a significant impact on the Carnaby’s Black-Cockatoo species,” but its expertise is not in that area. Dr P Berry, (ibid) states that “**there is a general consensus that Carnaby’s Cockatoo is continuing to decline in numbers.**”

5. Incorrect information provided.

Table 5 Assessment of action against DEH (2006) significant impact criteria (page 17)

The UBC wishes to comment on and correct the statement which we quote below. This statement is in answer to the third question “Will the action fragment an existing population into two or more populations”);

“The species is highly mobile and travels large distances across the region between feeding areas, including crossing from the north to south of the metropolitan area.....”

Dr PD Berry has studied Carnaby’s Cockatoos almost daily in the western suburbs for 26 years. In his paper published in the Western Australian Naturalist on 31st January, 2008⁴, Dr Berry suggests that the western suburbs group *‘follows a very predictable pattern’* which he then describes. The two roosting sites of the western suburbs group are “isolated from the nearest roost to the South, at Bentley, approx 12 km away, by the Swan River. To the north they are isolated by suburbia and the nearest roost recorded by Shah is at Gnangara approx 25kms away”. Dr Berry does say that “there is probably some interchange with sites to the north and south.”

⁴ Counts of Carnaby’s Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*) and records of flock composition at an overnight roosting site in metropolitan Perth. PD Berry.

So the picture is not one large group which ranges “from the north to the south of the metropolitan area” but rather three groups with some interchange with sites to the north and south.

The question following; “Will the action adversely affect habitat critical to the survival of a species” is answered by “Unlikely” and the rationale is “The Project Area is a small portion of available feeding habitat to the species, which includes Banksia woodland and pine plantations on the Swan Coastal Plain. Nesting trees near feeding areas represent the most critical habitat to this species, which this site does not constitute.”

Professor Emeritus Don Bradshaw, Senior Honorary Research Fellow, School of Animal Biology, the University of Western Australia, has written⁵:

“Extensive clearing of native vegetation in the wheat–belt has meant that birds have moved southwards and now depend for food on remnant bushland areas and pine plantation. Both these are currently being reduced in size as a result of urban development and this will almost certainly have a negative impact on cockatoo numbers in the future.....Carnaby’s cockatoos are very long-lived and when this feature occurs in an animal it means that the probability of young surviving in any one year is very small and the adults need to live for many years and make many attempts at breeding before they successfully replace themselves. Many of the Australian parrots, such as galahs, corellas and cockatoos have co-evolved with flowering eucalypt gums, the nuts and seeds of which are their prime food source.....it is only in ‘mast years’, when all trees of any age flower and set seed profusely, that large amounts of seed are available to the birds. Masting years of trees such as Marri are thus critical for these birds to fledge young....only in ‘masting years’ will there be a sufficient oversupply of food to increase their body condition to the level where they are able to fuel their expensive reproductive effort. Food is thus very likely to be a limiting factor for both the reproduction and the long-term survival of these long-lived birds.”

How then, can GHD Pty Ltd and the Department of Housing and Works and the Minister for Health, argue that the destruction of 25ha of valuable habitat is ‘unlikely’ to adversely affect the survival of this specie?

The question following is; “Will the action modify, destroy, remove, isolate or decrease the availability or quality of habitat to the extent that the species is likely to decline.”

The UBC agrees with the comments in the last line where the proponent states that “cumulative effect of clearing of such habitat is of concern.” The UBC believes that the action will certainly modify destroy and remove a significant part of habitat, contributing to the decline of the species and in particular its breeding potential.

6. RAINBOW BEE-EATERS

“It is possible that the site is used by additional individuals of this species [Rainbow Bee-eaters] not observed in GHD (2006c).” (page 11). We can confirm that Rainbow Bee-eaters use the site as they were observed in the site on 15th February, 2008. It is highly probably that Rainbow Bee-eaters use the site for nesting.

⁵ Letter, 18-2-2008 sent to Coffey Environments in relation to Carnaby’s cockatoos and development proposal for Lot 4, Underwood Avenue, Shenton Park. Prof emeritus Don Bradshaw.

7. Comment on 6.1(d) Other initiatives

It is proposed that there is an aim to deliver 'a net environmental benefit' from this project through off-site measures proposed in the Draft Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Management Plan.

This is nonsense. The UBC asserts that although valuable work may be done by way of measures proposed in the Draft Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Management Plan there will be no *net* environmental benefit. Destruction of intact Jarrah-Banksia and Banksia-Melaleuca woodland including a wetland *cannot be off-set or compensated for*.

8. Comment on '7 Conclusion on the likelihood of significant impacts'

In this section the proponent states that it does not think that the proposal is likely to have a significant impact.

The UBC sees no evidence presented by the proponent which indicates that Carnaby's cockatoo will not be affected by the proposal. Indeed the fauna survey undertaken by GHD in October 2006c included only opportunistic surveying for Carnaby's cockatoo.

It is apparent that GHD Pty Ltd has not undertaken sufficient research on Carnaby's cockatoo. Further, a rigorous study of Carnaby's cockatoo in the Jandakot/Murdoch area would reveal data such that conclusions could be based on science rather than supposition.

9. QUENDA

Although Quenda may not be a controlling action for this referral, the UBC wishes to speak for the population of Quenda at the Site and at the adjoining Quenda Wetland. Because of continuous clearing of bushland and wetland containing quenda, scarce alternative sites may be already occupied or 'full'.

As GHD Pty Ltd point out, Quenda in the Quenda Wetland, 'will be jeopardised in the long-term if the population at the Site is removed.' (page 21 GHD Fauna Assessment)

The UBC cannot envisage that Quenda will not suffer through this proposal. Of course the population will be in danger if most of it is removed!

10. CALADENIA HUEGELII, DRAKEA ELASTICA, LEPIDOSPERMA ROSTRATUM.

The proposed site lies in close proximity to Ken Hurst Park, Jandakot Airport and the 0.8 ha which remains of Beckley Bushland (South St Murdoch). All these sites have Caladenia huegelii recorded. Four individuals of Drakea elastica were recorded at Jandakot Airport, so the UBC considers these two species could be present on the site. . We recommend that the State Government's WA Threatened Species and Communities Unit of DEC be asked to survey the site for all threatened species and communities.

It is understood that flora searches by the proponent have failed to find them.

CONCLUSION

The UBC supports the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts in assessing that the proposal under consideration is a controlled action under the EPBC Act.

Yours sincerely

C Mary Gray
President