

TREE DEATHS CONTINUE; NO GOVERNMENT ACTION IN SIGHT

By Marjorie Apthorpe and Marilyn Zakrevsky

The effects of herbicide spraying by a contractor continue to be seen in the deaths of thousands of trees and shrubs in the City of Joondalup. Since the spraying in May-June 2006, migration of the herbicide in groundwater has continued to slowly kill trees some distance from the sprayed drainage sumps. One of the bushland areas affected is Craigie Open Space bushland, on Whitfords Avenue in the northern suburb of Craigie. A large sump in the southwestern part of the reserve was sprayed, and all the immediately surrounding trees and banksias had died by winter 2007. By August 2008, migration of the herbicide in the groundwater had killed trees some distance away in a zone to the west of the sump (see photos).



The City of Joondalup has refused to say what legal action, if any, will be taken against the herbicide contractor. The city's lawyers and administration have refused to release any information on the conditions governing the herbicide spraying contract, or whether any recompense will be sought from the contractor. The costs of dead tree and shrub removal over the past 18 months have been many tens of thousands of dollars, borne entirely by ratepayers, and there has been no attempt to estimate the costs of replacing and restoring native vegetation in bushland or planted around sumps. The loss of iconic old tuart trees

and banksias has been of particular concern to bushland groups.

This environmental disaster was entirely preventable, as the tree-killing effects of the herbicide used (hexazinone) were known to all. The product information on the commercially available version of hexazinone, Velpar L made by Dupont, states that "*Velpar L is the quickest, easiest and most cost-effective way to clear unwanted timber and scrub.*" The technical information on the chemical states: "Protection of Crops, Native and other Non-Target Plants:



"DO NOT apply on or near desirable trees or other plants, or on areas where their roots may extend. As guidance this is two times their height, or more depending on the species and other conditions. DO NOT apply in areas where a surface flow of water could wash the chemical into areas where the roots of desirable trees or plants may extend. "Protection of Wildlife, Fish, Crustacea and Environment: "DO NOT contaminate ponds, waterways and drains with the product or used containers."

In spite of the clear warnings given on the effects of this chemical on trees and native vegetation, the W.A. Department of Health that regulates herbicide use has turned a blind eye to the miss-use of this herbicide. In a report from

(Continued on page 8)

INSIDE

- Draft Local Biodiversity Strategies Out for Public Comment
- Perth Urban Bushland Fungi 2009
- Group News

and more...

Editorial

The fact that the practice of clearing bushland areas in and around Perth has not yet been relegated to history clearly shows the state of Western Australia had little to boast of in terms of its protection of our magnificent natural heritage. But we also need to evaluate how well we are managing those increasingly valuable areas that have been given at least some level of reserve protection.

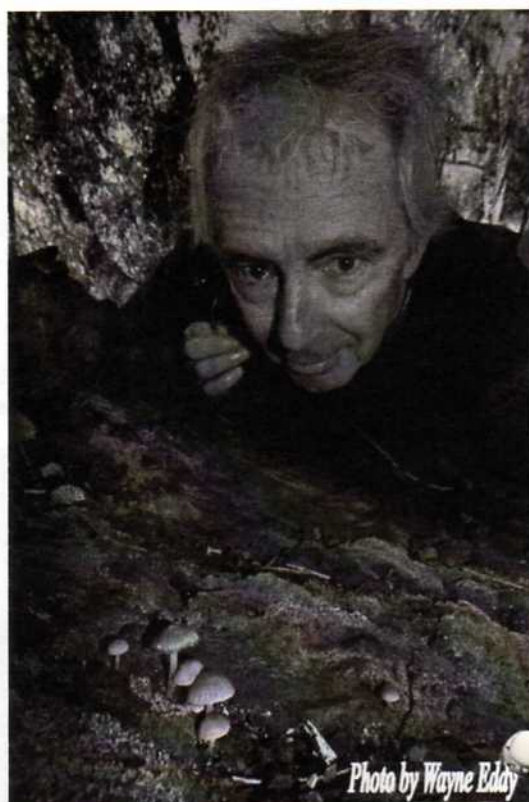
The truth is that many of our Bush Forever sites receive almost no environmental management as such at all. They are not fenced and they can be accessed by off-road and other vehicles at whim. This brings heightened risks of problems such as rubbish dumping – often including garden waste, the spread of dieback, and arson. Many of these sites also receive no weed management. And even some of the most high profile and apparently well-managed sites have very limited dieback hygiene protocols.

While protecting bushland from bulldozers is the number one priority, too many land managers are not putting sufficient planning and resources into maintaining – let alone improving – areas that have been granted some level of security as bushland reserves. The intrusion of public relations agendas and image marketing into natural area management, as in most other areas of environmental topicality, often clouds the issues and frustrates those genuinely concerned about practical outcomes. “Planting days” for school children seem frequently to be organized more around generating photo opportunities than achieving worthwhile results with inappropriate planting times, poorly supervised work, planting sites chosen for the convenience of the organizers alone, and no particular dieback hygiene practices observed.

One-off events like public weeding days can present similar problems if not properly planned and organized but creating a perception that “something is being done” often appears to take priority over allocating the resources needed to address issues seriously. A local government ranger’s work is done if he has erected a sign saying “Dogs on leads only.” Anything more than that would be beyond all expectations. Readily identifiable repeat-offender rubbish dumpers can consider themselves persecuted if a ranger puts a note in the letterbox.

Too much of the hard and time-consuming work is left to dedicated volunteers and the range of environmental abuses suffered by a great many bushland sites really raises the issue of whether they should be securely fenced and made accessible only to those who have a valid reason of being on site and who have registered with the land manager. This proposition flies in the face of worthy notions of public amenity and building local environmental awareness but most if not all remnant sites in the metropolitan area are highly susceptible to dieback and a range of other environmental pressures that are diminishing their environmental potential. It may well be that bushland reserves will have to become areas of very restricted public access to make their protection and management more successful in the longer term.

PUBF 2009



From PUBF Team
Neale Bougher, Roz Hart, Sarah de Bueger
& Brett Glossop

We are pleased to announce that the PUBF Project will be continuing next year, with fungi surveys concentrating on the Perth Hills area. Lotterywest have kindly allocated a grant to the WA Naturalists’ Club to fund PUBF activities in 2009.

The PUBF team has finished compiling data from the 2008 season and the four fungi reports for the surveys at Augusta, Lake Gwelup, Wongan Hills and Wungong will soon appear on our website.

The Perth Fungi Field Book will be re-worked over summer to improve its functionality, and a significant number of new species will be added in time for the 2009 season. Keep checking our website at www.fungiperth.org.au for updates.

Some interesting numbers from the 2008 season are

- 15 Fungi leaders assisted PUBF in 2008, 4 of whom were new trainees
- 8 of these leaders have been assisting PUBF through the whole project, since 2004. The project is always happy to hear from people who would like to train as fungi leaders. When possible we like to take on a small number of trainees each year.
- a total of 208 people participated
- PUBF recorded 412 fungi, of which
- 73 were vouchered into the WA Herbarium fungi collection.
- 35 of the fungi species recorded were new to PUBF in 2008.

We look forward to the valuable support and participation of members of the Urban Bushland Council and the WA Naturalists’ Club next year.

Local Communities Invited to Help Plan for Biodiversity Protection

Renata Zelinova, Perth Biodiversity Project

Five local governments are inviting their communities to consider local biodiversity protection actions proposed in Draft Local Biodiversity Strategies.

By endorsing the Draft Local Biodiversity Strategies for public comment, five new local governments will make significant progress in the biodiversity conservation planning process as outlined in the *Local Government Biodiversity Planning Guidelines for the Perth Metropolitan Region* (Del Marco et al, 2004).

The Collective Local Biodiversity Strategy was first endorsed by the City of Belmont in August, followed by the Town of Bassendean and the City of Bayswater. The three local governments worked together to identify biodiversity related issues and actions that were specific to their local area, focusing on the protection and effective management of natural areas directly managed by the three local governments. The collective approach enables the consideration of ecological linkages within a broad landscape beyond administrative boundaries.

The Shire of Chittering is the first local government working with the Perth Biodiversity Project outside the Perth Metropolitan Region to endorse a Draft Local Biodiversity Strategy. It is open for public comment till 21 January 2009.

Just over 32% of the pre-European vegetation extent remains within the Shire of Chittering. However, only 1% of the original extent of the vegetation is protected for conservation. This is significantly less than any other local government area within the adjoining Perth Region.

The Draft Strategy identifies the Shire's biodiversity assets, natural resource protection and retention targets, actions needed to manage natural areas, key threats and opportunities for biodiversity conservation. Regional and local ecological linkages have been identified by the Perth Biodiversity Project Ecologist based at the Department of Environment and Conservation. Analysis by the Project Ecologist has shown that most of the Shire's natural areas are currently well connected. Retaining this connectivity will be a key measure of effective biodiversity conservation.

One of the fastest growing local governments in Australia, the City of Wanneroo, endorsed its Draft Local Biodiversity Strategy in October. The City encompasses areas of high biodiversity value and natural beauty. However, the development pressure could result in clearing of over 10,000 hectares of native vegetation in the City. With the additional threat from alteration to hydrology and increased pressure from human use of natural areas, a strategic plan is needed to minimize the effects of these threats on the biodiversity assets of the City.

The aim of the Draft Local Biodiversity Strategy is to discuss with the community and other stakeholders the manner in which the City proposes to plan for its expected growth, reduce loss of natural areas and improve natural area protection and management. Some of the mechanisms to improve biodiversity protection in the City include an increase in the protection of the natural areas, increasing reservation of natural areas in public open spaces, the development of various Planning Policies, improving management of existing nature reserves, encouragement of innovative subdivision design, development of a private landholder incentives strategy and some new programs. The Draft document is open for public comment till 22 December.

The Draft Local Biodiversity Strategies can be downloaded from websites of individual local governments. All of the above mentioned Strategies were partially funded by the Perth Biodiversity Project through the Perth Region NRM and supported by the Australian and the State Governments.

The Perth Biodiversity Project is working with ten local governments on developing and implementing a strategic approach to protecting biodiversity in urban landscapes. Local governments at various stages of development are facing different challenges when planning for biodiversity protection and more effective management.

The two most progressed local governments, the Town of Kwinana and the Shire of Kalamunda are finalising their draft Local Biodiversity Strategies after community consultation earlier this year.

It is expected that in the near future, another two local governments will consider a draft Local Biodiversity Strategy or similar at their Council Meeting. The Shire of Mundaring is finalising their Local Biodiversity Strategy that will inform the Shire's new Local Planning Strategy. The City of Rockingham is reviewing the effectiveness of their current Strategies and Planning Policies and will be considering recommendations for reviews.

The latest local government to start developing a Local Biodiversity Strategy is the City of Armadale that is planning to produce the draft document before the end of June 2009.

The Perth Biodiversity Project has also provided some funding and technical assistance to the City of Joondalup and the Town of Cambridge that are developing a Local Biodiversity Action Plan to improve biodiversity conservation within their municipalities.

For more information about Local Biodiversity Strategies and other projects supported by the Perth Biodiversity Project contact the Project Manager, Renata Zelinova on 9213 2047 or email to rzelinova@walgga.asn.au.



Photos by M Owen

