

Rottnest Island Authority

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## **Draft Rottnest Island Management Plan (RIMP) 2023-28: submission by Urban Bushland Council WA Inc. (UBC)**

The UBC is the peak voluntary community organisation for the protection and conservation management of areas of bushland in urban and near urban areas. Conservation management of the Rottnest Island reserve is of particular interest to our members and supporters, and the opportunity to comment on your draft RIMP 2023-2028 is appreciated.

Comments are made under pages as follows.

### **Page 1: Highlights**

Increased renewable energy initiatives are supported, although a faster shift to 100% renewables rather than 75% would be better. Solar thermal could be installed for backup rather than from a fossil fuel.

The various developments and upgrades should not involve clearing of the natural vegetation.

The planting of over 40,000 trees should specify that they will **only** be species local to Rottnest Island. Does this include understorey plants also? The use of only local native plants in landscaping avoids the risk of invasive species from ‘garden escapees’.

**Conservation management of the biodiverse reserve covering 85% of the land mass should be a specified highlight. Landscaping exclusively with local native species is also an opportunity for tourists to see, learn of, respect, and enjoy local species of flora and fauna.**

### **Page 9: Resourcing**

The State Government appropriation for management of the environmental and heritage values is essential and is strongly supported. It should be increased. This must be a top priority given climate change, impacts of more tourists and increased island utilities.

### **Page 13: managing island visitation**

As this is a principal focus of the management plan, it is recommended that there be an **addition** of the need to focus on **biosecurity with capacity to check and enforce** that no pets, especially cats and dogs, or live animals be brought to Rottnest by visitors or staff. Rottnest’s current status of being free from cats must be actively maintained. Cats are highly damaging to native vegetation fauna. Also no non-local (ie non-Rottnest) native plants should be brought in for landscaping. Instead landscape only with plant species that are native to Rottnest.

### **Pages 14 - 17: Diversify the Visitor Base and Enhance visitor Experience**

The vision ‘*to be a destination of national significance for its recreational, environmental and cultural heritage values*’ is supported. While a priority is to ‘*promote visitor dispersal into the Rottnest Island reserve*’, there needs to be much more focus and investment in management of the biodiversity values of the reserve, to prevent decline in its condition. With excessive new RIA events and increased visitors, the risk of degradation of nature increases. Suitable events must be carefully assessed. The Key Outcome of ‘*sustainable visitation growth*’ and ‘*diversified*’ visitors seems to be an excessive focus. Use of the word

'sustainable' does not justify excessive growth (of infrastructure and visitor capacity) on this sensitive natural landscape.

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While improved visitor experiences are supported, it must not be at the cost of biodiversity loss or decline. Features needed:

It is good to keep and improve facilities for school camps at the Barracks, so that kids can learn about nature and how to respect it. Landscaping designs as described must only use native plant species which occur naturally on Rottnest, and this also presents a valuable educational opportunity. It will attract native birds, insects and reptiles for kids to enjoy and learn about. Recreational facilities should be passive only, and should not include or encourage biking.

The Key Outcome of '*increased capacity of bikes and e-riders ..*' is **not supported**. Biking in nature is a significant cause of degradation and must not be permitted in bushland at Rottnest. The key initiative of '*Pedal & Flipper Expansion*' is **not supported**. Commercial operators should not be permitted to provide biking.

The risks are likely damage to natural areas, and also human safety risks for walkers and passive recreation users. Helping people with **disability** by providing access **facilities is supported**, but allowing e-bikes and e-scooters is in conflict with this use and this must not be allowed.

### **Pages 19 – 21: Deliver Sustainable Island Infrastructure and Services**

Notably environmental management is not seen as infrastructure.

The renewable infrastructure is supported, but it could be and should be increased to provide a much greater %, preferably 100% renewable energy supply. Roof top solar panels should be required on all commercial premises, and solar hot water services could be encouraged.

Improved drinking water and improved wastewater treatment is supported and much needed.

### **Pages 22- 24: Respect and Engage the Island's Cultural Heritage**

The initiatives are supported.

### **Pages 25 – 28: Explore and Conserve the Island's Environment**

The word 'Explore' is not appropriate in this title. It would be better to change the words to '*Conserve and Manage the Island's Environment*'

Details provided under the Key Initiatives are generally supported, but little information concerning conservation management is provided. The 'Environmental Management Plan (EMP) itself is not included.

Environmental Management Plan (EMP): It is suggested that the words 'invasive species of flora and fauna' be added to the list of environmental challenges (in the third paragraph under the heading).

The outline of the content in the EMP is supported. There are, however, 3 documents which give the details of conservation management in addition to this Draft RIMP 2023-28, and they are not yet available for public comment. The EMP should be part of the RIMP.

In the EMP, there should at least be a brief description of all the Rottnest landform(s) and wetland types, the vegetation types, floristic community types, and numbers of rare and endangered species of flora and fauna. 'Key focal conservation targets' that are in the TCAP and MCAP are listed in the dot points, but this does not clearly give an overall description of the island's ecosystems.

The statement; '*the EMP will focus on the active management of species and communities to maintain the health of the island's biodiversity*' –**is supported**.

Educating island visitors as a key focus is **supported**.

How many FTEs are in the environmental management team? And will this be increased? How many Rangers will be employed? There is an opportunity to include Aboriginal Rangers and guides.

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The key outcomes of the Key Initiative of the EMP are **supported**. Some comments follow:

Undertake Island Revegetation (page 26): Active recreation of bike riding should not be included, and indeed not allowed. Walking and passive recreation, research and education opportunities are supported. It is not clear whether ‘*enhancement*’ of the woodlands for conservation and recreation will actually be restoration of the woodland vegetation community. Island ‘revegetation’ should be consistent with restoring the relevant natural plant communities, including understorey and ground level species, not just trees, and only native plants from these communities should be planted.

Investing in Renewable Energy: Initiatives to increase renewables are supported, but an increased rate of transition to 100% renewables is suggested. It is also suggested that solar panels be installed on roof tops of buildings rather than more panels in the solar farm on the island’s reserve.

Sustainability Action Plan (pages 26-27): **Supported**.

In addition, to help reduce the serious problem of soft and other plastics in the ocean, RIA should require that no plastics be supplied and delivered to Rottnest. This means no ‘take-away’ single use cups and much more. Rottnest could and should become a ‘**no plastic island**’. This would be a positive achievement for RIA to be proud of.

Coastal Management (page 27): **Supported**, recognising this may be an increasing challenge.

Wadjemup Conservation Centre (page 27): Supported, but with the need for RIA government grant funding as this is a basic need for Rottnest Island. External funding could be added as proposed, but the proposed Conservation Centre should not be reliant only on external funding.

### **Pages 29 – 31: Foster Strong Partnerships**

In building Workforce Capability, it is recommended that there be a **significant increase in a team of RIA on-ground conservation land managers** to survey and monitor species and communities, and to control invasive species of weeds and feral fauna. Also a team of **RIA Rangers** are needed. These should all be government officers, not contractors. Aboriginal officers are needed in partnerships in these roles.

**Biosecurity services** should be provided to monitor and ensure that no cats, dogs or other animals are brought to Rottnest. This element needs to be added.

**Funding** as described on page 31 is supported but with a much needed **addition to the funding** by the **State for proper protection and maintenance of the island’s environment and cultural heritage**.

**Increased** emergency services and capacity are essential for fast detection and fast control of fire.

We may be contacted for further clarification of any of these matters.

Yours sincerely

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Chairperson  
Urban Bushland Council WA Inc.

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