

1. Introduction

As owners and managers of natural areas, local governments are responsible for conserving and enhancing the values of this land for future generations. These include Crown Reserves where local governments have management orders under s.46 of the Land Administration Act 1997, local road reserves, freehold lands and sometimes management of unallocated crown land. Further, the community expectations for adequate management of natural areas in highly urbanised environments are increasing.

Currently, local governments determine priorities for natural area management according to a range of criteria. Among local governments, various criteria range from: the values of individual reserves, such as the size, location and ecological condition of reserves; community values associated with individual reserves; the level of visitation; threat abatement requirements; and historic management of certain reserves due to the support of community groups and previous resource allocation.

The aim of this document is to assist local governments in strategic planning of natural area management that reflects the biodiversity values of each natural area and the level of threat to those values.

These Guidelines are not intended to take the place of individual reserve management plans or to extinguish existing plans for natural area conservation. They have been developed to assist local government environmental officers to holistically plan management actions by ensuring that reserves are prioritised for management according to their biodiversity values, the threats that may impact upon them and that the finite resources are used to achieve best long-term outcomes.

The Perth Biodiversity Project (PBP) and South West Biodiversity Project (SWBP) provide resources, assistance and a framework for local governments to help improve their capacity to protect and manage biodiversity assets. The PBP is partially funded through the Perth Region NRM – supported by the Australian Government through the Caring for Our Country Program. The SWBP is a strategic initiative of the South West Catchments Council and currently funded by the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP); joint programs of the State and Australian Governments.

2. About these Guidelines

The *Local Government Guidelines for Bushland Management in the Perth and Coastal South-West NRM Regions of Western Australia* was produced by the Perth Biodiversity Project (PBP) and South West Biodiversity Project (SWBP) to provide local government officers direction in prioritising management actions for natural areas and to ensure that management of these areas is in line with biodiversity principles (Del Marco *et al*, 2004).

The term '**natural area**' or '**bushland**' is used to describe any physical area that contains native species or ecological communities in a relatively natural state and hence contains biodiversity. Natural areas can be areas of native vegetation, vegetated or open wetlands (lakes, swamps) or waterways (rivers, streams, creeks and estuaries - often referred to as channel wetlands), springs, rock outcrops, bare ground (generally sand or mud), caves, coastal dunes or cliffs (adapted from Environmental Protection Authority, 2003a).

Areas of rehabilitated or fabricated landscape are not considered natural areas. Even when these areas are carefully designed to support a range of local native species, they can never contain the same level of biodiversity as the natural community that would have once been present in that area, especially in an ancient and diverse landscape like Western Australia (Del Marco *et al*, 2004).

By prioritising local reserves for management actions, the following is achieved:

- Local government-managed natural areas are managed strategically for their long term sustainability;
- Funding requests are justifiable on the basis of sound biodiversity conservation principles;
- Resources are used effectively; and
- Relevant bushland management factors are considered and integrated into management action planning according to best practice natural area management principles.

This document will provide direction for local government personnel involved in reserve management to develop a management action plan that uses prioritisation of both ecological criteria and viability factors and the threats that affect natural areas. In applying this practical guide, local government officers will draw upon and incorporate information collected through the ecological assessment of reserves using the Natural Area Initial Assessment Templates (NAIA Templates, Del Marco *et al*, 2004).

The NAIA Templates were developed by the PBP and adopted by the SWBP to assist local governments in assessment of natural areas in order to determine their biodiversity values and management issues. The PBP and the SWBP have developed a database, using Microsoft Access, to collate, analyse and interpret selected contents of the NAIA Templates, allowing users to Report, Search and Export the data and importantly, to rank natural areas in order of conservation priority.

Additionally, the guidelines provide summary notes and references that refer to best practice bushland management at the time of this document's publication. This section

is intended to provide officers creating natural area management action plans, an information source about frequently applicable management considerations. The 'Management Action Plan' is expected to appear as a table, or set of tables. These tables translate the information collected through the NAIA Templates and prioritisation of threats, into an action plan. There is scope here to formulate multiple tables with varying timelines. For example, a timeline of 5 years is useful for long-term direction and forward planning. A one year working plan enables the consideration of more specific actions. While the format and detail of such tables could vary substantially, common elements have been used in the provided examples such as responsible parties, cost, timeframe and proposed actions (see Part A pp.11 -18).

Some local governments may have pre-existing management plans or other documents that will help to determine the content of the 'Management Action Plan'. Local government officers are encouraged to carefully consider the issues locally relevant to reserve management and create their plans accordingly.

This Guide is constructed in two parts:

Part A: How to Prioritise Management Actions

Part A is structured to provide a step-by step process of prioritisation in order to construct a Management Action Plan.

Part B: Bushland Management Guidelines – Management Considerations

Part B incorporates a range of frequently applicable management considerations affecting bushland reserves. An overview is provided, along with references for accessing further information, about each management issue.