Government of **Western Australia**
Conservation and Parks Commission

Position Statement No 20: Responding to climate change in the context of lands and waters vested in Conservation and Parks Commission

August 2022

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The Commission's Position

The Conservation and Parks Commission (the Commission) acknowledges the potential for significant change in environmental conditions that may occur in Western Australia's terrestrial and marine environments as a result of climate change and the impacts that this may have on biodiversity and Aboriginal cultural and heritage values.

The Commission supports the following activities being considered and undertaken on lands and waters vested with the Commission under the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act) and the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* in response to climate change:

- activities that contribute to the State Government's Climate Policy and target of net zero emissions by 2050 and public sector target to a 2030 emissions reduction of 80 per cent below 2020 levels;
- adaptive management that protects and improves biodiversity and Aboriginal cultural and heritage values, supports ecosystem and species resilience and supports ecologically sustainable use for social and economic benefits;
- research and science to inform assessment of climate vulnerability and development of adaptation strategies;
- enhancing carbon sinks (marine and terrestrial);
- prescribed burning and landscape scale fuel mitigation to reduce risk to the community and biodiversity values; and
- ecosystem rehabilitation consistent with biodiversity and conservation outcomes.

Context and Background

Western Australia is internationally recognised for its diverse plant and animal species and high level of endemism. The State's south-west is one of only 34 global biodiversity hotspots. Western Australia's biodiversity assets are vulnerable to a range of threatening processes including habitat loss and fragmentation due to clearing, competition and predation from introduced species, habitat degradation through disease, weed invasion, altered hydrological regimes, salinity, and inappropriate fire regimes.

The conservation reserve system plays an essential role in protecting and conserving Western Australia's biodiversity assets and Aboriginal cultural and heritage values. The establishment and management of a comprehensive, adequate, and representative (CAR) conservation estate remains fundamental to planning and managing for future changes in environmental conditions.

Climate change presents a complex situation for ecosystem health and vitality with broad implications. It may potentially favour some species and ecosystems above others and has wide ranging interactions with other ecosystem processes including the impacts of threatening processes, such as weeds, pests and diseases. There are several factors affecting the vulnerability of ecosystems to climate change including the:

- likelihood and magnitude of change,
- ecosystem's sensitivity to change,
- ecosystem's ability to adapt to change.

The most vulnerable habitats, species and communities will be those that are exposed to a large change, sensitive to change, and have a limited capacity to adapt.

The environmental, economic and social risks associated with climate change may be managed by:

- seeking to reduce the likelihood and magnitude of change through a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation),
- enhancing carbon sequestration in vegetation and soils
- reducing the consequences of a change by increasing resilience of the environment to cope with that change (adaptation).

Ecosystem resilience of the environment to cope with a changing climate may be enhanced by:

- increasing habitat connectivity;
- protecting key ecosystem functions and processes; and
- reducing cumulative impacts that may exacerbate impacts from climate change.

A well-managed CAR conservation reserve system provides an important base from which to support resilience and manage adverse impacts on biodiversity assets that may arise from climate change. Management of conservation reserves can support climate change mitigation and adaptation through carbon sequestration and emission reduction.