

As Coordinator of EcoServices at City of Mandurah, David agreed with the introductory comments about the need for him to learn names of local flora (he came from Queensland) and adapt to the constraints of working within local government. We need to understand the systems of local government and state planning and adapt for best outcomes. The West Australian Biodiversity Project has been approved and made a good template for the Strategy which is now ready for presentation to Mandurah City Council for acceptance. The West Australian Biodiversity Project (WALGA) has been used as a model since it has been previously approved by State Planning and Environment Departments.

The concept of the Biodiversity Strategy came out of the most recent Mandurah State of the Environment Report which indicates a decline in all environmental indicators. The long term goal is, not only to stop the decline, but to reverse the trend. The process began with defining the scope for the strategy, planning and defining the objectives. Targets were prioritised with protection of bush in ZONED areas seen as the most important task followed by maintaining, maximising bush in other areas and the management of current reserves. Focus includes areas of crown land and freehold land managed by the City. In an ideal world these objectives would be simultaneous, but financial constraints do not allow.

David outlined the approach of concentrating on natural areas (even small remnants!), maintaining habitat for endangered species eg black cockatoos or rare flora and protecting representative communities that are become scarce in our region. This led to a series of questions when assessing an area

- Is it representative of the flora and the fauna it supports?
- Does it contain or provide habitat for, any threatened species?
- Does it provide connectivity to other natural areas ie within 500m?
- Is it a wetland (they should always be protected), riparian (riverbank) or coastal vegetation?
- Is it representative of the species locally?

The State of Environment Report confirmed what many had suspected – barely 50% of natural bushland remains and most of that is DEPaW (old DEC) Reserves and that figure is less than 4000 Ha. David called this our ‘line in the sand’ moment as we cannot afford to lose any more but must work at improving this figure! To provide a framework for the work, Mandurah (and suburbs) has been divided into 5 areas. Once the State Planning Department has set a zoning (eg residential/urban) it is very difficult to save any bush in these areas except, perhaps part of the required 10% Public Open Space (much is lost to entry statements, sumps and recreation area).

EcoServices and Planning Department staff have calculated that it is possible to protect 81% of Local Natural Areas. In part the City’s draft Planning Strategy, which is currently being formulated, will assist this goal as Environmental considerations will be included. This local planning document will be the foundation for a revised Town Planning Scheme and provide definite guidelines for developers to follow.

As with many strategies, the Mandurah Biodiversity Strategy is a ‘living’ document and will be reviewed every five years and will include regular monitoring of targets and retention.

During question time, David admitted that all Reserves not yet, have a Management Plan although 14 – 16 ‘Key’ Reserves do. In seeking to improve this situation they are considering including the small reserves into a ‘district’ plan for that particular local area. He also encourage people to join (and recruit others to join) the ‘Friends of...’ Groups which are invaluable in providing manpower for planting, clean-up activities, noticing and reporting abuse (we all need to do this so the BushCare officer is alerted and can, hopefully, find a remedy).

In closing David said that City of Mandurah staff will continue with community education initiatives to elicit behaviour change and encourages environmentalist everywhere to ‘keep up the pressure’.