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PPG is a non-profit organisation devoted to the conservation of the natural environment in the Peel Region of Western Australia

To: The City of Mandurah
FAO: Natalie Lees
Date: 29 November 2016

PEEL PRESERVATION GROUP INC. RESPONSE TO PROPOSED FORESHORE AND CORE CONSERVATION RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR FRASERS LANDING PROJECT

The Committee of the Peel Preservation Group Inc. would like to respond to the invitation for public comment on the Proposed Foreshore & Core Conservation Reserve Management Plan for Frasers Landing Project, Lot 500 Wanjeep Street, Coodanup. (Here after referred to as the "Lot")

1. Local flora

Several members of the Peel Preservation Group and an affiliated group recently walked through this area and were immediately struck by the special biodiversity of this relatively small tract of bushland. It is very unusual to come across a habitat of this size that contains FOUR different species of eucalypt, namely Tuart, Marri, Jarrah and Flooded Gum, in conjunction with 2 varieties of Casuarina (Sheoak), Spearwood, Acacias, Christmas trees and several species of Banskia, as well as other species.

Quite importantly the Holly Leafed Banksia (Banksia Ilicifolia) was identified and seen flowering in the south west corner of the Lot. University of Curtin eminent botanist, and WA Scientist of the Year, Professor Kingsley Dixon has recently pointed out at a public forum in Mandurah that this species is dying in the Perth Metropolitan area due to a lowering water table. The Banksia Woodlands of the Swan Coastal Plain as a whole is now deemed a Threatened Ecological Community due to substantial land clearing along the entire coastal plain. Therefore, it is important that the Lot will be afforded the comprehensive protection that is required for these woodlands under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, which also advocates appropriate burning regimes to ensure ongoing propagation as well as weed management programs.

The diversity of trees and larger plants in this area also supports a diverse array of smaller plants, such as our beautiful and unique native orchids, some of which have a very limited domain. Native orchids are extremely difficult to propagate and virtually impossible to re-plant in any domestic garden because of their special relationship with specific woodland, soil type and soil fungus. Hence, the habitat of native orchids is continually under threat due to destruction of habitat. The general area of bushland between Wanjeep Road and the Serpentine River is well known to some local orchidologists and supports plants species that are found nowhere else outside of the lower south west of W.A.

Many signs of recent orchid flowering were noted in the Frasers Lot. Here are some photographs of these local species of orchids.


Bee Orchid


Blue China Orchid


Donkey Orchid


Hare Orchid


Jug Orchid


Pink Orchid


Purple Enamel Orchid


Rabbit Orchid


Snail Orchid


Tuart Spider Orchid


Wispy Spider Orchid


Yellow Orchid

It must also be considered, therefore, that our native orchid species (as well as other unique flora and fauna) may have a special place in ecotourism in the future, as their beauty, diversity and botanical isolation will draw substantial interest across the world, in the same way that hundreds of thousands of tourists visit Chengdu in China for the sole purpose of visiting the Giant Panda conservation reserve.

2. Local fauna

Signs of recent kangaroo and possum activity were noted in the Lot. We were also fortunate on the day of our walk through the area as the post-rain sunshine had encouraged a diversity of bird life to feed and sing with a wonderful chorus that reminded us of the special beauty of the Australian bush. Parrots (Red-capped and Twenty-eight), galahs, magpies, red-wattle birds and several species of honey-eater were noted. Of special significance is the fact that this area contains a number of reasonably old eucalypt trees (as stated in the previous section) with some old dead branches with hollows that are so very important as nesting and breeding sites for various species of parrots and larger birds in particular. It is this specific loss of breeding habitat that ornithologists agree has greatly contributed to a decline in numbers of some bird species.

Previous submissions have made particular note that the Lot has been home to at least one breeding pair of Ospreys, and that in general the species has declined due to fewer habitats because of the removal of large nesting trees. The artificial Osprey nesting pole in situ is a reasonable attempt to provide an ongoing breeding opportunity but will need regular monitoring to assess its viability as a breeding site and not just a resting site.

3. Serpentine River

The banks of the Western branch of the Serpentine River that adjoins the Lot are in reasonably good condition with quite picturesque and intact samphire vegetation especially on the Eastern bank. This is most likely due to its relative inaccessibility as the water is too shallow for power boats and there is no vehicular access to the Eastern bank. A variety of marine life has been recorded and documented in previous submissions in regard to development on this site and it has been noted that such a quiet and relatively undisturbed branch of the Serpentine River plays an important part in providing refuge, and for the breeding and nursery role of the system (prawns, crabs, mullet etc).

Small, shallow branches of river systems are an extremely important part of the overall marine eco-system and are very susceptible to not only direct, but also adjacent development which disturbs the river bed and can change the chemistry of the waterway.

The impact of development on, or adjacent to, similar waterways is often greatly understated and not well understood. A very good anecdotal story has been provided by the professional fishermen whose livelihood depended on the Peel Inlet last century. The first canal development on the Inlet, at South Yunderup in the 1970s almost led to the demise of the colloquially called Murray River Prawn (Western school prawn) due to the disruption of its prime locale and likely breeding site. It took well over a decade for the prawn to be seen again in any reasonable numbers, let alone to be commercially viable again.

Pioneering professional fishermen also attributed the gradual destruction, erosion and retreat of riverbanks and the unsightly dead tree line around parts of the Peel Inlet and Murray/Serpentine river systems to the overuse of, and under-policing of, reactional power boats. Therefore, it would be an environmental shame and a developing eyesore if this rather attractive and quiet arm of the Serpentine River was to allow power boats into the area (which may require deepening of the river branch). Power boats would also bring pollutants (eg. oil) that non-power boats would not. It is understood that this Western Branch of the river is currently declared Closed Waters to Motorised Vessels, and it is our strong recommendation that this status remains in place.

Mechanisms also need to be in place to ensure that run-off (e.g. fertilizer, detergents) from adjacent housing does not find its way into the river system.

4. Restoration

The area set aside for passive recreation is not in a good state. Apart from the disgraceful dumping of rubbish in the area (including non-indigenous plant species), there has been a huge invasion of noxious weeds, veldt grass in particular, which has a choking effect on vulnerable and less prolific native species, such as our native orchids. No evidence of recent orchid flowering was seen in these invaded areas, which were mainly adjacent to the pathways and, thank goodness, not so much in the thick bush area which was reasonably intact, and this is the area that needs to remain untouched if is to be preserved.

5. Recommendations

To protect, maintain and enhance what is a potentially a unique tract of land we suggest:

1. Rubbish and weed removal with on-going weed control program.

2. Retention of trees with a Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) >500mm and other potential breeding sites.

3. Special protection and monitoring of threatened species.

4. Non-intrusive pathways that do not disrupt small flora species (such as native orchids).

5. Monitoring of the viability of the Osprey nesting site.

6. Maintain river access to the Lot by non-power boats only.

7. Control of feral animals to protect small fauna and remedy invasions of nesting boxes by feral bees when it occurs.

8. Ensure that barriers for vehicular access to Samphire Flats are maintained.

Authored by Melvyn Tuckey, for the Committee, Peel Preservation Group Inc.
With the assistance of PPG Committee Members and Dr Robert Wroth.