

Hon Liz Behjat MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Public Administration
Legislative Council
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Your Ref: PAL
Our Ref: 2013-0000288202
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Dear Hon Behjat

INQUIRY INTO PASTORAL LEASES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Thank you for your invitation to provide a submission on the Standing Committee on Public Administration's inquiry into pastoral leases in Western Australia. The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) appreciates this opportunity to contribute to the inquiry and commends the Standing Committee for what the EPA considers to be an important and timely measure to improve the sustainability of Western Australia's pastoral industry. I will respond directly to the matters contained within the terms of reference you have provided.

The management of the increase in the number of stock and environmental damage on pastoral land

The EPA is concerned that, according to findings from the Commissioner for Soil and Land Conservation's annual report to the Pastoral Lands Board, ongoing decline in pastoral land condition is occurring throughout Western Australia's rangelands. It is understood from these reports that excessive stocking rates in combination with seasonal conditions are key factors contributing to this decline.

The EPA appreciates that in considering reported declines in the viability of pastoral industries in general, the sustainable management of the resources upon which they depend becomes difficult and complicated. Informal advice provided to the EPA is that individual pastoralists' responses to financial pressures through increased stocking may exacerbate the current decline in the condition of the landscape. The EPA considers that without reform to management of the industry and consideration of feasible incentives for pastoralists to conduct sustainable pastoral activities (such as stocking within lease carrying capacity), that the current situation is unsustainable.

The adequacy of security of land tenure

The EPA is generally supportive of land tenure reform measures that have been proposed. The reforms appear to offer a number of opportunities to assist in improving management of rangelands, including the concept of a rangelands lease which would broaden the options for managing pastoral lands to include conservation purposes.

The proposed pastoral lease excisions in 2015

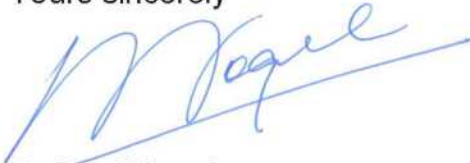
The EPA views pastoral lease areas proposed for excision in 2015 that have been identified for management by the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW) to present an opportunity to improve the representativeness of the formal reserve system in Western Australia. Some of these areas may have compromised values due to impacts caused by pastoralism and mining activities over the years. While landscape degradation caused by pastoralism could be reversed over time under the management of the DPaW, the EPA is concerned this is likely to require significant resourcing.

Any other matter

The EPA has proposed the establishment of a strategic conservation initiative for the Pilbara region as a mechanism to pool offset funds to achieve biodiversity conservation outcomes. The EPA first discussed this initiative in February 2012 in its report and recommendations to the Minister for Environment regarding Fortescue Metals Group's Cloudbreak proposal (Report No. 1429). This initiative could provide an opportunity for investment in pastoral lands, and particularly the proposed 2015 excision areas discussed above, to improve their condition.

The EPA views proposed rangelands reforms to be an opportunity for Government to manage the ongoing environmental degradation that is occurring on pastoral land and welcomes the opportunity to explore and discuss options for improving this going forward.

Yours sincerely



Dr Paul Vogel
CHAIRMAN

13 September 2013

cc: Hon Albert Jacob MLA, Minister for Environment