

THE PERTH HILLS VISION

This is a discussion document designed to elicit comment regarding the legal protection of the Perth Hills (extending approximately from Chittering to Serpentine) as an area of special significance to all West Australians.



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Document is available at: - www.saveperthhills.org

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Introduction

The Perth Hills Zone (PHZ) defines the eastern edge of the City of Perth from Chittering in the north to Serpentine in the south, a distance of 90 kilometres. From the city it is the gateway to eastern parts of the state and provides a significant physical and psychological buffer for Perth. Much of the Perth Hills Zone can be viewed from the Coastal Plain, but it also provides quite distinct faces and centres of settlement.

To date many studies have been made of the Darling Scarp and Ranges but no comprehensive plan has been developed for the region as a whole. The significance of this region needs to be recognised and procedures put in place to ensure its protection.

A “Whole of the Hills” approach is required to ensure the protection of the environment, Aboriginal heritage and the choice of lifestyles afforded by the area. Such strategies have been adopted for other significant areas such as the Swan Valley, Adelaide Hills, the Dandenongs and the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge to name a few. It is imperative that such protection is established before irreversible damage occurs and not after the event.

It is proposed that the State Government form a Steering Committee to consider current impacts on this region and to follow a process of research and analysis, together with wide community consultation with a view of developing recommendations that may include the following: -

- The identity and function of the Perth Hills Zone
- The legislation and policy required to ensure the environmental protection of the Perth Hills Zone
- Co-ordinating the implementation and management of the objectives for the Zone
- Resourcing the Perth Hills Zone
- Monitoring outcomes.

The Overall Objectives of this Vision for the Perth Hills Zone are to—

- conserve and enhance the special benefits arising from landscape elements that form the fabric of the region;
- respect and conserve its outstanding natural and cultural heritage and environmental values consistent with being recognised as part of an International Biodiversity “Hotspot”;

"Botanists call Perth the biodiversity capital of the world, home to one of the richest floras on earth. The metropolitan area is the richest zone for plant life within south-west Australia." WWF Paradise on the Edge.

- cater for population growth consistent with the planned objectives of the PHZ and provide a range of settlement options intended to enhance the economic, social and environmental functions;
- encourage the development of suitable policy for the aged and infirm of the communities, to provide facilities and care to ensure quality of life;

- promoting quality and innovation in urban design and built form;
- protect agricultural land for its economic, landscape, tourism and social values;
- encourage a mix of compatible land uses while separating conflicting land uses;
- encourage the promotion and further development of the Perth Hills as an ecotourism destination;
- facilitate a robust, diverse and sustainable economy; and
- foster a sense of community and creativity for the benefit of all residents and visitors and for future generations.

A good example of regional management strategies includes the Adelaide Hills Face Zone Review in 2004 and the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge Policy. Both these documents provide excellent examples of how areas similar to the Darling Scarp and Ranges have been recognised and are now being managed to preserve the unique nature of these areas.

The Crossroads

The Perth Hills are at the crossroads. How the management of this unique area proceeds will determine its ultimate future. With pressure for more urban development in the Perth Metropolitan area, and the availability of large allotments of land in the Hills, the area has become an obvious choice for potential developers. Add to this the increase in tourism and mining potential throughout the region and it can be seen that the time to develop a regional strategy for the ongoing management of this area is now. Only 7% of the Darling Scarp is in protected areas such as Parks and Reserves

Furthermore, the moratorium on the logging of old growth forest means that large areas of the South West have now been set aside for commercial harvesting. Other areas are to be cleared in order to increase our water production. To ignore the need for such a strategy and allow the patchwork of developments and mining, as is the current practice, will potentially see this significant resource lost forever. A co-ordinated approach across the whole of the hills is required with one statutory body ensuring the preservation of this natural resource.



Progress to Date

Research into the management of the Perth Hills Zone (PHZ) has revealed many omissions: -

- There appears to be no whole-of-Hills biodiversity survey available. The surveys undertaken and available are fragmented and difficult to find.
- The PHZ is not recognised officially as an area of significance and rarely rates a mention in any Government forward planning strategies, except as a resource in which to locate Perth's expanding population.
- Development in the Perth Hills is currently proposed and controlled largely by a combination of State Government, Local Government, commercial developers and businesses. Whilst all development is overseen by Department of Planning and Infrastructure and has input from Environment Protection Authority, the absence of any recognition of the Perth Hills as an autonomous, separate Zone within the greater Perth metropolitan area is leading to unsustainable, unintelligent and piecemeal developments. Water, land and resource management are uncoordinated; for example, at a recent Water Corporation public forum regarding the location of a proposed water treatment plant, the meeting was advised that the Water Corporation is buying properties in the Swan/Avon water catchment in order to improve water quality. In the Jane Brook section of this catchment the Shire of Mundaring has approved the development of 2 townsites – more are planned. Furthermore, the Swan/Avon catchment has been earmarked as part of the future water supply for Perth.
- There seems to be very little in the way of process for transferring skills and knowledge at local government levels, and a high turnover of planning staff across the board results in inexperienced staff facing sensitive issues.
- Local government is often under enormous pressure from landowners and developers.

Recognition of the Perth Hills as the defining edge of the greater Perth Metropolitan Area, as a primary water catchment, as the lungs of the region and as a significant Zone in its own right is long overdue.

The Perth Hills Region

The Darling Range forms a dramatic backdrop to Perth and the coastal plain and is one of Australia's biggest regional parks.

Bushland, streams and waterfalls can be explored along with old railway routes, in our premier regional park that covers 35,000 hectares. It spans 85 kilometres from Avon Valley National Park in the north to historic Serpentine in the south, and links the inner Wheatbelt to the picturesque Swan Valley and the city.

Trails connect several National and State Parks and some of Perth's most scenic attractions such as the Helena Valley, Wungong Gorge and the Bibbulmun Track.

The Perth Hills are a special place on the eastern side of the Perth metropolitan area. The Darling Range is the tilted edge of a huge plateau. In this region, some of the oldest rocks on earth are exposed. The granites, gneisses and quartzite are more than

2,500 million years old. The Darling Scarp stands 200 metres or so above the coastal plain and is a distinctive feature of the Perth horizon.

The Perth Hills Zone encompasses a broad range of uses including National and State Forests, public open spaces, farming and farmlets which support grazing, horse ownership, orchards, vineyards, horticulture, tourism, mining, small businesses and distinct and increasingly sophisticated towns and centres. There is rural and rural residential living. There is 'town' living. There are primary and senior schools both public and private and volunteer organisations that teach young people adult skills as well as protecting the community from fire and supporting it in times of crisis. The communities within the Perth Hills are notably friendly, community minded, relatively low in crime and one of the richest natural environments in the State. There are literally hundreds of enjoyable activities for residents and visitors to pursue.

The Perth Hills are an area of significance to the Nyoongah people of Western Australia, where agriculture and hunting were practiced, ceremonies carried out and retreats under the trees were enjoyed.

The Perth Hills are rich with natural heritage, Aboriginal history and culture, its settlement and heritage history, its agricultural and horticultural histories and practices and its more recent development as a friendly, safe and desirable place to live. 'Country living, City style'



Adelaide Hills Face Zone Links

- Adelaide Hills Face Zone Review:
<http://www.planning.sa.gov.au/index.cfm?objectid=CDCDAEB0-96B8-CC2B-6364179547C1C588>
- History of the Adelaide Hills Face Zone:
<http://www.ccsa.asn.au/campaigns/development/HillsFaceNetwork/History.htm>

UNESCO Biosphere Links

UNESCO Biosphere: <http://www.unesco.org/mab/BRs.shtml>

Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge Links

- Leeuwin-Naturaliste Executive Summary:
http://www.planning.wa.gov.au/publications/leeuwin/exec_summ.html
- Planning Policy 6.1 Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge:
<http://www.wapc.wa.gov.au/Publications/157.aspx>

Dandenong Ranges National Park Link

- Dandenong Ranges National Park:
http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/1park_display.cfm?park=49

Swan Valley Planning Act Links

Swan Valley Planning Legislation Act :
<http://www.wapc.wa.gov.au/Publications/917.aspx>

Desirable Outcomes for the Perth Hills Zone

It is proposed that the Western Australian State Government form a Steering Committee with powers to develop legislation and policy in order to manage future planning of the Perth Hills Zone.

To provide for a sustainable future for the entire Perth Hills, a coordinated approach is required to manage the future development and environment of the region. The proposed steering committee should consider all factors to ensure the protection of the Perth Hills Zone. Considerations for the Steering Committee should include: -

- The unparalleled importance of the Perth Hills as a clean water Catchment area for Perth, and as a source for the Swan River.
 - the necessity to protect all creeks and waterways from pollution
 - development of dams where waterways cross private land
 - degradation from land clearing.
- A clearly defined boundary for the PHZ
- The benefits of the Perth Hills Zone, in particular:-
 - Reinforce and support the defining qualities viz the natural topography, native vegetation and rural landscapes.
 - Support and enhance biodiversity
 - That all commercial developments sympathetically reflect the architectural style of the area
 - Recognise and protect areas of significance and importance
 - Aboriginal
 - Cultural
 - Historical
 - Recognise recreation and tourism, particularly eco-tourism
 - Recreational resource for the people of Perth
 - And as a natural backdrop and contrast to the Perth urban area
- Maintaining a whole of zone vision to ensure objectives are consistent
- Providing clear and significant direction to planning authorities and the community at large
- Enhancing the recognition of the Zone by pursuing the nomination of the Zone as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in its own right

- Establishing the recognition of the Perth Hills as an ecotourism destination for local, interstate and international visitors. Existing and future ecotourism initiatives will ensure commercial viability for the region, while at the same time, preserving the unique "hills lifestyle"
- Encouraging greater cooperation between government agencies, Councils and landowners in the implementation and management of the objectives of the Zone Plan.

The essential and defining qualities of the Perth Hills need to be protected and enhanced by unambiguous policies, robust land management and careful and sustainable management of resources.

Implementation

To begin this process, a Steering Committee should be formed by the State Government in order to develop policy and a legislative framework. As a part of this process, submissions should be sought from the Community, including special interest groups.

The Steering Committee should then provide proposals for legislative changes for the Parliament to debate and enact.

Conclusion

Perth currently resembles Los Angeles 50 years ago – a city of approximately 2 million people. Los Angeles now has a population greater than the whole of Australia and spreads along the coast for over 200 kilometres. Little remains of the area's natural environment. Perth is now at the point where it can remain as WA or be consumed by urban sprawl and become a gridlocked and polluted version of LA. We need to implement protection before irreversible damage is done, not after the event.

We will either recognize the significance of the Perth Hills Zone or watch it disappear.



Community feedback

It is essential that appropriate legislation is developed as the result of community input. Your ideas are an integral part of this process – please let us know what you think. You can contact us at:-

info@saveperthhills.org

or

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