



17 February 2023

Hon Mark McGowan BA LLB MLA
Premier
5th Floor, Dumas House 2 Havelock Street,
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Premier

I am writing on behalf of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation (BTF) to express our concern regarding the increasing impact of mining in WA's jarrah forest.

The Bibbulmun Track (the Track) is WA's premier long-distance walking trail stretching 1000kms from Kalamunda to Albany. The Track has gained a reputation as a world class trail attracting thousands of West Australians and visitors to the south west each year.

A 2015 survey showed that over 300,000 days are spent on the Track each year generating around \$13million in economic benefit – much of that in regional areas. In addition to individuals, families and tourists, the Track is used by schools and youth groups for outdoor recreation. Use of the Track, and hiking in general, has increased exponentially since then with the physical and mental health benefits of spending time in nature widely accepted.

In the late 1980's the Track was realigned between Kalamunda and Dwellingup to avoid conflict with bauxite mining. In the 90's the Track was again being impacted by mining, forestry operations, and water catchment issues. At this time, a major overhaul of the route occurred with only 10% of the original Track retained. The 'new' Bibbulmun Track was largely purpose built and aligned through national parks and reserves to take in the most scenic routes to provide people with a chance to immerse themselves in the natural environment.

Since the opening of the 'new' Bibbulmun Track in 1998 the rate of clearing in the Northern Jarrah Forest has accelerated with more than 11,000 ha cleared in the past decade alone. Rather than an immersive experience in nature, walkers in this region are often accompanied by the sounds of mining, and many of the expansive views are now marred by large scars on the landscape.

The rate of replanting and restoration of these areas does not appear to be keeping pace with the clearing of more forest. The success of the rehabilitation is also questionable and the cumulative impacts of logging, clearing and climate change on the forests have been profound over the decades.

There is a significant range of authoritative research casting doubt on the effectiveness of minesite rehabilitation in the Northern Jarrah Forest with respect to a range of flora and fauna and therefore the significant negative impact of yet further clearing. Examples of fauna likely to be impacted include the three species of Western Australian black cockatoo which live in the Northern Jarrah Forest, all of which are listed as threatened species under both State and Commonwealth legislation.

The capacity of further clearing to exacerbate the impacts of climate change can also be highlighted. In the context of the drying climate in south-western Australia, it is known that rehabilitated mine sites can use up to twice as much water as intact forests, transpiring ground water into the atmosphere and reducing water availability for surrounding forest ecosystems. For example, in 2018 the Institute of Foresters of Australia calculated, using research data from Alcoa, that the amount of water being lost to rehabilitated mine sites instead of going to adjacent intact forest and streams was 500,000 litres per hectare or 60 billion litres overall – more than the annual production of water by the Kwinana desalination plant.

We are thus seriously concerned about the impact of the proposed expansion of bauxite mining operations on our forest, wildlife, climate and river systems. It is critically important that the areas already cleared are rehabilitated and that the success of this rehabilitation is empirically established before any more clearing (if any) is approved.

It is also essential for future generations that the integrity of the Bibbulmun Track is maintained as:

- a continuous long-distance trail
- a quality 'wilderness' experience

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Linda Daniels', written in a cursive style.

Linda Daniels
Executive Director