



1 September 2022

Mr Mark Webb  
Director General  
Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions.  
17 Dick Perry Drive  
Kensington WA 6151

Dear Mark

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.

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.

While both the Department and the BTF have negotiated the best possible outcomes it can for the Bibbulmun Track, the quality of the experience is declining. 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. In keeping with the greater environmental awareness in society brought by climate change and other impacts, the BTF anticipates ever greater awareness on the part of Track walkers as to the quality of the bush environment they are walking through.

The rate of replanting and restoration of mined 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.

As the leader of the State's primary conservation agency, you would be aware that 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.

The BTF's Mission is: *To support the management of the Bibbulmun Track so that it remains a sustainable long distance walk trail of international significance and quality.* It will only remain so if the environment and landscape surrounding the Track is regenerated at a faster rate than it is cleared – or not cleared at all.

We have written to the Minister for the Environment and Climate Action regarding our concerns and implore the Department to do whatever it can to advocate in government for the protection of our natural environment for the sake of current and future generations. We ask the Parks & Wildlife Services to:

- help protect the northern jarrah forest from being so badly affected by mining that extinctions occur and the forest's recovery becomes impossible; and
- more specifically, to at least preserve enough of that forest, and the other forests in WA's south west, for the Bibbulmun Track to be a continuous walking path through the forest from Kalamunda to Albany with minimal visual and aural impacts from mining activities.

Yours sincerely



Linda Daniels  
Executive Director