Mr. D Lamont
9334 0423
9334 0199
davidl@calm.wa.gov.au

Professor Peter Newman
Director, Sustainability Policy Unit
Policy Office
Department of Premier and Cabinet
15th Floor, 197 St Georges Tce
PERTH WA 6000

Re: Submission for State Sustainability Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the development of the State Sustainability Strategy. This submission has been prepared by the Roadside Conservation Committee, which consists of representatives from CALM, Main Roads WA, Australian Railroad Group, FESA, Department of Agriculture, Western Power, AlintaGas, Telstra, Greening Australia, Conservation Council, Wildflower Society and Western Australian Local Government Association. The Roadside Conservation Committee is keen to provide input into the development of the strategy and work together in achieving a sustainable future. The State Government has made a commitment to sustainability and it's guiding principles and has adopted the following definition of sustainability: "*Sustainability is the simultaneous achievement of environmental, economic and social goals*." The Roadside Conservation Committee is supportive of this definition.

In Australia, more than 870 000 kilometres of roads have been established since European settlement. More than 19 per cent (171 389 km) of this vast network is found in Western Australia. Management responsibility of this transport network is shared by the following agencies: Main Roads WA (17,326 km), Local Government Authorities (123,908 km), and the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) (30,155 km). It is estimated that there are approximately 408,000 hectares of WA road reserve, which is not used for the prime function of transport, and this, equates to an area about four times the size of Stirling Range National Park. It should be appreciated that a significant proportion of the overall biodiversity in an area can often be found in transport corridors.

Often, roadsides provide the last refuge for species of plants that have become extinct in other locations. The mass clearing of native vegetation has also resulted in habitat fragmentation with small, discontinuous and isolated pockets of natural vegetation. Along with river and stream reserves, roadsides are a vital link between these pockets, and it is imperative they don't become the missing one. This is particularly true in agricultural areas, where up to 98 per cent of the land has been cleared in many areas. Currently, 348 plant species are declared rare under the *Wildlife Conservation Act* 1950-1979. Of these, more than 100 are known to be from roadside populations. In fact, roadside plants represent

more than 80 per cent of the known populations of 40 of the 'Declared Rare' species, and three of these are known only to exist in roadside populations.

Carnaby's cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*) breeds in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia, however, the populations have declined significantly in recent years. A decline that can be directly attributed to the loss of more than 30 per cent of its habitat since the 1960s. Soil types that supported salmon gums (*Eucalyptus salmonophloia*), the preferred nest sites of Carnaby's cockatoo, were considered to be the most suitable for agriculture and, as a consequence, have been extensively cleared. While the effects of salination on much of the remaining vegetation further threatens the loss of the bird's habitat. Most salmon gums now exist on roadside reserves in many areas of its habitat. Fieldwork by CALM in the late 1990's indicated that the cockatoos always nested in salmon gums when they were available, but when they were not; wandoo trees were used as a nesting site. The monitoring program also identified several important breeding areas that are not on land managed by CALM and, therefore, possibly not adequately protected. Of the 70 nest trees monitored, 34 per cent were on private property, nine per cent on shire reserves and 56 per cent on road and rail reserves. Clearly, the relation of these nest trees on the road and rail reserves is critical for the long-term survival of the Carnaby's cockatoo.

However in addition to this biodiversity role road and rail sides have other important functions and values:

- Landcare

The value of well-vegetated roadsides to agriculture cannot be over-emphasised as they provide valuable windbreaks for both stock and crops, and have the potential to increase farm productivity in a number of ways: reduction in evaporative losses from crops; stabilisation of soil and air temperatures and humidity; reduction of heat and cold stress in stock; and the reduction in damage to plants from 'sand blasting'. Many of the current farming problems such as the salination of land and water assets result from inappropriate European farming practices having been applied to an Australian landscape. It is imperative that transport corridor remnants are sustained if their important role in combating these major problems is to be perpetuated, both through the benefits to be gained from retaining the *in situ* vegetation and also for providing a local seed source for revegetating adjacent land.

By studying the roadside reserves, areas that have often had minimal disturbance and provide an insight into the pre-European soil strata and understorey composition – we can observe which species of plants grow in which particular type of soil. Roadside reserves are often the nearest we have to pristine conditions in heavy cleared areas, and seeds collected from local native species are playing an increasingly important role in regenerating degraded farmland.

- Tourism and Aesthetics.

Visitors flock to WA in their thousands to see its unique and spectacular wildflowers. In a survey conducted during the early 1990s, of tourists staying in commercial accommodation in WA, it was found that 18 per cent gave wildflower sightseeing as a reason for their stay.

Because roadside reserves are often the only exposure that travellers have to the world-renowned flora of WA, roadside vegetation is important to our wildflower tourist industry.

While it is impossible to put a price on the 'wildflower experience', the survey did find that visitors had an estimated daily expenditure of $88.33 per adult. Although accurate data is not available, trends suggest that this figure can only have increased in recent years. Consequently there are sound economic incentives at local and regional levels for managing roadsides in a sustainable manner. Just as obviously mismanagement of roadsides will quickly erode this potential cash flow.

Total expenditure by all visitors to Western Australia in 1998 amounted to $2.1 billion; and approximately 19 percent of these visitors indicated that one of the reasons for visiting WA was to view wildflowers. Wildflower tourism is often the draw card needed to entice visitors to visit rural areas away from the popular tourist icons. Unfortunately, this potential is all too often not appreciated and the sustainability of remnants in transport corridors is not considered in activities occurring there.

- Cultural and Heritage Values

Many sites of both European and Aboriginal significance can be found within the transport corridor and these require adequate protection and recognition to ensure that they are perpetuated for future generations.

- Other Functional Values

It is also becoming well recognised that remnants in transport corridors plays an important function in helps draining water from the running surface, and recent reports indicate that the effect of rising water tables on transport corridors is costing the State $500,000,000 per annum but the retention of transport corridor remnants provides a draw down effect thus ameliorating the problem with identifiable cost benefits. They also provide a corridor for utility services such as water and gas pipelines, and telecommunications and electricity transmission lines, as well as areas for stockpiling road making materials and space for the road construction and maintenance projects.

Threatening Processes
The Roadside Conservation Committee has identified a number of threatening processes to roadside conservation per se and the list below should in no way be considered as a definitive list but rather an indication of some of threatening processes

- Lack of awareness or management expertise by road manager
- Method of dissemination of information within organisation
- Lack of defined responsibility within organisation of values
- Poor or nil briefing of private contractors or workers
- Reduction in corporate/agency sense of responsibility for road/railside conservation by outsourcing to private contractors

- Loss of local knowledge by use of private contractors
- Indiscriminate use of herbicides, by adjoining landowners with herbicide provided by Shire
- Conservation issues are not included into the planning process or only included as an afterthought
- Change in road use (increases in vehicle and farm machinery size) place greater demand for road upgrades

The current government in its policy platform made several specific references to roadside conservation, e.g. "*provide statutory authority to the Code of Practice for roadside conservation*. Moreover it embraced the notion of ecological sustained development with a triple bottom line of a balance between economic social and environmental factors. For this to occur it is imperative that government policy needs to be implemented and the management of road and rail sides undertaken in a manner to ensure the ongoing conservation and functionality of these important areas for maintaining the sustainability of many areas of the developed regions of the south west

We would be pleased to provide any further information you may require or clarification on any of the issues raised here

David A Lamont

Executive Officer

May 8, 2002