

Hon Dr Geoff Gallop MLA  
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**EARTH**

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Dear Dr Gallop

EARTH is a Hills-based environmental group who formed to protect and conserve the local environment and associated habitats and ecosystems as well as raise community awareness about threats to Hills bush and lifestyle. As one of few active environment groups in our area we are constantly writing submissions on various documents that come to our attention and participating in public consultation workshops and forums.

Increasingly, EARTH has found that we are expending far too much of our energy on the above pursuits and not enough on projects that are more immediately relevant. We believe that this is the result of inadequate and tokenistic public consultation, which like that for the Draft State Sustainability Strategy, is poorly advertised and held at unsuitable times such as during business hours. In our experience, these workshops and forums are time-consuming, draining and apparently ineffectual. Insufficient feedback is given and participants are typically left wondering whether their input was received by the people it was intended for and if it made any impact at all on their decisions.

The inadequacy of the government-initiated workshops pushed the WA Collaboration to organize the successful State Sustainability Summit over the second weekend of February, for the benefit of community groups and affiliations. This should not be necessary and demonstrates a complete lack of commitment by the government to the concept of public consultation and to proper democratic practice.

It would therefore be more conducive to true and real community participation to have community form the strategy based on their hopes and dreams for the future, leaving it to government agencies to pull these together into a coherent strategy with elaborate negotiation and democratic process.

Despite the many criticisms EARTH has of the draft strategy, including its insensitive and racist treatment of Indigenous Australians, lack of true commitment to the environment and its preservation; and further privileging of business and industry interests; our primary concern lies with the strength of its promises and proposed actions. In particular, how they could protect the bush environment in the vicinity of our shire of Mundaring.

A recent threat to our local environment has come in the form of a Water Corporation proposal of a new water treatment plant for a site in Sawyers Valley. The site is currently vegetated by healthy bush consisting of Marri, Jarrah, Sheoak, Snottygobble and Banksia and was last logged in the 1880s. The site is home to a variety of fauna and flora, is situated in a Priority 1 'recovery catchment' and is proposed national park. As habitat it retains trees that have been listed as recognized cockatoo feed trees and is frequented by several species of rare and endangered cockatoos. Additionally, 178 species of fauna use hollows in the area of the proposed water treatment plant and tanks. Significant species of flora discovered during the first flora assessment survey (66 plants) were found to be strangely absent on a later survey. Understandably, speculation abounds as to how 66 plants can simply disappear. Perhaps even more astonishing, the site has been approved for development by the EPA and we are currently involved in its appeal process.

Notwithstanding the remarkable attributes of the Sawyers Valley site and the fundamental importance of preserving it, this bush is vulnerable and if not for the active concern of community members would have already been secured for clearing and development. With regards to the failure of current legislation and statutory bodies in protecting this exemplary bushland from decimation (which will eventuate if our appeal and all other best efforts fail), EARTH requires evidence that the new State Sustainability Strategy will honour its commitment to biodiversity, catchment protection and preservation of our natural environment.

We request a response that clearly indicates how the strategy intends to prevent this kind of event from occurring and demonstrates in what ways the promises of the strategy are any more binding or powerful than legislation currently in effect.

Yours faithfully

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Anne Mahon, Val  
Jael Johnson  
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