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Friends of the Tuart Forest • Greater Beedelup National Park Society • Great Walk Networking • Jarrahdale Forest
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• South West Environment Centre • South-West Forests Defence Foundation • The Wilderness Society • Warren
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Hon Bill Marmion MLA

26th April 2012

Minister for Environment
29th Floor, Allendale Sq
77 St George's Tce
Perth 6005

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your letter dated 27th February 2012 in which you replied to concerns raised by the WA Forest Alliance (WAFA) and the Conservation Council of WA (CCWA) regarding the ongoing threat to the survival of the three endemic south-west species of black cockatoo.

We understand that while you appreciate the impact of past logging on black cockatoos you believe that current logging operations are not having negative impacts.

We would like to draw your attention to a number of studies which show that continued logging of native forest in WA is posing a serious threat to the survival of the cockatoos.

Firstly, we agree with your view that the chief threat to survival of Baudin's black cockatoo (Baudin's) is illegal shooting of the birds by orchardists. This is supported by a study conducted by M.S. Weerheim in 2008. This year orchardists have reported increased loss of profit because of what many have described as the worst year yet for cockatoo inundation of their crops. Cockatoos are feeding on fruit in greater numbers because their native food sources are in short supply. Orchardists want to see protection of native food sources and replanting of food corridors for the birds.

That is the case for the Baudin's. However, the study by Weerheim (2008) and other studies have found that Forest Red-tailed Cockatoos (forest red-tails) rely on marri and jarrah seeds for 90% of their dietary needs and for the rest, they feed on blackbutt, sheoak, snottygobble, spotted gum and cape lilac (Johnstone & Kirby, 1999; Johnstone & Storr, 1998). While there has historically been illegal shooting of forest red-tails by orchardists and others, this is not considered the primary threat to these birds. The greatest threat to the survival of the forest red-tails and Carnaby's cockatoo is agreed by

the majority of studies to be ongoing destruction of habitat and the impact of that loss of habitat on the feeding and breeding of the birds. Studies that have reached this conclusion are numerous and include those by Johnstone (1997); Mawson & Johnstone (1997); Garnett & Crowley (2000); and Saunders & Ingram (1995).

In a presentation to a public seminar held this year by the CCWA, Ron Johnstone identified habitat destruction as the first in a list of eight threats to the survival of the black cockatoo in south-west WA. Habitat destruction is defined here as the “**destruction of forests and woodland habitat and the loss of food and hollow-bearing trees**” and has been attributed to clearing for agriculture, logging, woodchipping and mining within the subspecies’ range, by a large number of scientific studies including those by Johnstone (1997), Mawson & Johnstone (1997) and Stokes & Norman (2010). Stokes and Norman write:

Veteran trees (over 200 years of age) and stag trees are critical for the long-term survival of black cockatoos, particularly marri, jarrah, karri, salmon gum and white gum trees. In many forest areas, these age classes of tree are missing because of historical logging in the forests in the south-west of WA and continued selective thinning of mature trees for sawlog production.” (Stokes & Norman, 2010, p.43)

Because of the longevity of the black cockatoos, it is believed that the long-term effects of the threat have not yet been fully realized (Brouwer et al, 2000).

Garnett & Crowley (2000) found that selective removal of marri trees in forest red-tail habitat has further contributed to their decline because of the decreasing availability of breeding hollows, which develop only in trees older than 200 years. There is considerable competition for available nesting hollows from feral bees and other species such as the more vigorous breeders, galahs and corellas, and even though current forestry best practice includes leaving a small number of habitat trees per hectare, the number is considered to be insufficient. This was described by DEC's chief zoologist in 2004, Dr Mawson, in his application to have the level of threat of extinction for the forest red-tails increased. In the application Dr Mawson identified loss of mature marri trees in current logging operations to be the chief cause of their increasing decline. He recommended that all mature marri trees be retained as a management action necessary to prevent their extinction. As things stand at present, there can be no guarantee that the few trees left standing are suitable for either breeding or feeding, as studies have shown (Listing advice on amendment to the list of threatened species under the EPBC Act 1999 (*Calyptorhynchus banksii naso* Forest Red-Tailed Cockatoo, p.4), (Weerheim, 2008).

We appreciate the fact that logging in native forests has for the past decade been conducted on a relatively limited scale, at approximately 8,800 ha per year since 2001. However, we cannot agree that there is no current or future impact on the habitat of the black cockatoo from logging on this scale. Figures from the Forest Products Commission show that the *cumulative* effect of logging is considerable: from 1976 to 2011 the total area of jarrah forest logged under various silvicultural prescriptions was 590,000 ha, and this did not include forest cleared for mining or utilities. From 1976 to 2011, 53,000 ha of karri forest were clearfelled. This adds up to 643,000 ha, an area of habitat that cannot be

dismissed as insignificant. Furthermore, all logging except thinning targets old growth and mature trees, the very ones that provide the essential habitat for cockatoos. In these circumstances, with so much of their habitat destroyed or fragmented, each nesting hollow and feeding resource is now critical to the survival of the cockatoos.

Simply put, it is the preservation of the ancient marri, jarrah and karri trees that enables the cockatoos to live and breed in the south-west, and we cannot risk losing any more of these trees.

We would urge you to read the presentation made by Ron Johnstone to the 2008 symposium held by DEC and Birds Australia on Carnaby's Black Cockatoo. On page 40 of the transcript of the symposium, Johnstone states that the reason the cockatoos are managing to survive and thrive in a certain disturbed landscape as opposed to others, is because of the retention of the ancient marris. It is the retention of these trees that distinguishes this landscape from other logged areas, and enables the continued presence of black cockatoos. As he says: "You can go for miles to the south of there and not find another situation quite like that." (Johnstone, 2009, p.40)

Almost one-third of all remaining south-west forest has been degraded as cockatoo habitat in the last 35 years and this has undoubtedly led to the dramatic decline of the cockatoo population. It cannot be denied that to increase the area of degraded habitat by continued logging of ancient habitat trees is a serious but also avoidable threat to the survival of all three species of black cockatoo.

Proponents of logging are likely to argue that logged forest regenerates, and this may be true, but studies have shown that unlike most other bird species, forest red-tails do not use regenerated forest for up to 70 years after logging (Williams, Abbott et al., 2001; Weerheim, 2008). Williams et al. state that because of this fact, these birds should be regarded as the "canaries in the mine" for sustainable forest management (p.919). Studies by Weerheim (2008) and others have established clearly that when cockatoos are found in areas of forest that have been subject to logging or clearing for mining, they are not found in the regenerated areas, but in the remnant areas of unlogged forest, in the mature jarrah and marri trees which provide the birds with feeding and roosting habitat, as well as the essential canopy cover between roosting and feeding sites that cockatoos need for protection against predation by wedge-tailed eagles, which have been shown to be one of the main predators of the black cockatoo (Saunders, 2003). According to Weerheim:

feeding events by forest red-tailed cockatoos were all on mature native vegetation. The birds appeared to utilize the patches of remnant native forest among the revegetation, but did not use the revegetation itself. ... Although marri trees in Wungong were producing fruit only five years after they were planted, the known avoidance of forest red-tailed cockatoos to feed too close to the ground will probably render these young trees unsuitable as a food source for at least another two decades. (Weerheim, 2008, p.144)

Breeding hollows do not develop in trees younger than 200 years old (Abbott & Whitford, 2002; Johnstone, 1997). Black cockatoos rely on old trees for feeding and breeding and the removal of these trees is continuing to represent the single most

significant threat to their survival, as Ron Johnstone stated in his recent presentation to the CCWA seminar.

Native forest logging advocates argue that artificial hollows are a viable alternative to the natural hollows found in mature trees but this has not been established as fact: indeed, studies such as those by Groom (2010) suggest that the take-up of artificial hollows is very low. Artificial hollows require ongoing monitoring and maintenance and the science available suggests that use of these hollows will not provide a long-term solution to the loss of hollow-bearing trees through logging or clearing (Finn, 2009).

The economics of logging native forest in WA have been extensively analysed in recent times, and few would deny that this is a dying industry as market demand shifts away from native forest products towards plantation products. The FPC website claims that most of the timber from the native forests is used for high-quality products, but its own figures reveal that the amount of sawlogs is in fact very low, and that most of the logs are sold for low grade products such as woodchips and fire wood. Many other logs are left to rot and burn on site.

In fact only 15% of the total volume of jarrah logs and 12% of the total volume of karri logs sold by the Forest Products Commission last year ended up as sawn timber (FPC Annual report 2010-2011)

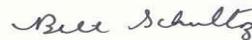
While we understand the pressure on you to maintain jobs, we believe it is unavoidably apparent that the time is approaching when the restructuring of timber industry out of native forests will need to be completed so that it can become sustainable. At the moment essential habitat trees are being cut down and wasted at great cost to the cockatoos and to the people of Western Australia, who are losing both money and iconic forests, for very questionable return.

We ask you again, as the Minister for Environment, with responsibility for protecting WA's wildlife and biodiversity, to impose a moratorium on the logging of black cockatoo feeding and nesting habitat and to initiate an independent enquiry into the availability of habitat so that the extinction of our endemic, threatened and much loved black cockatoos in WA can be prevented.

Yours sincerely,



Jess Beckerling
on behalf of WA Forest Alliance
and South Coast Environment Group



(Dr) Beth Schultz AO
on behalf of South-West Forests Defence
Foundation Inc.

cc: Premier; Minister for State Development, Hon Colin Barnett
Minister for Agriculture and Food; Forestry, Hon Terry Redman
Minister for Planning; Science and Innovation, Hon John Day