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DRAFT LOCAL PLANNING POLICY NO. 23 – PLANTATION AND AGROFORESTRY

The Forest Industries Federation of WA (FIFWA) is the industry association group for the timber industry in Western Australia. Our membership includes the major companies and businesses that operate in the WA timber industry, including commercial plantation growers and managers, harvest and haulage operators, and timber processors in both the plantation and native timber industry sectors.

We welcome the opportunity to provide comment on Draft Local Planning Policy 23 – Plantation and Agroforestry (“the Policy”).

Several of our member companies are landholders within the Shire of Nannup and will be directly impacted by the Policy. The Policy will also impact future investment in the industry so we have a keen interest in submitting comments to help shape the Policy into a valuable instrument.

FIFWA is generally supportive of the intent of the Policy and urges the Shire of Nannup to collaborate with us, as a conduit to industry, in the modification of the draft Policy to ensure it is practicable, reasonable and well-informed by subject matter experts.

We will include brief commentary in this submission, as a base for further discussion with the Shire of Nannup.

Objective 1

To promote agroforestry where integrated with other rural and/or conservation activities and where effectively managed

FIFWA generally supports this objective, with some reservation. When considering agroforestry for commercial purposes, as in the definitions included in the draft Policy, it is vital to ensure the right trees are planted in the right places (for optimal growth and distance to markets) and at the right scale, as part of a well-developed farm plan. The needs of both the landowner and the wood resource buyer must be met in order for agroforestry to be commercially viable. In decades past, these settings were not met and the collapse of managed investment schemes tarnished community perception of the plantation industry.

The objective of promoting agroforestry, while providing a happy medium between general agriculture and plantations, needs to be further refined in the draft Policy in order to appreciate the commercial realities of tree growing.

Objective 2

To outline areas favoured for plantations along with non-preferred locations

FIFWA is deeply concerned by the inherent discouragement this objective currently represents, especially in Policy Provisions 1 – General, and strongly urges modification of the draft Policy.

FIFWA queries the Shire’s discouragement of plantations and requests the Shire of Nannup provide FIFWA with contextual information to explain the reasoning behind the inequity.

Of particular note, the discouragement of plantations in Special Control Areas and Agricultural priority areas 1 and 2 as written into the draft Policy, is at odds with the current situation in the Scott River Coastal Plain and the intent of the Shire of Nannup – Local Planning Strategy November 2018, Section 9.4 Scott River Coastal Plain Special Control Area and Action C94, Strategy S155 – “provide for the continued establishment of large-scale agricultural enterprises”. Plantations generally are large-scale agricultural enterprises, and the delineation between rules for plantations in land zoned “Agriculture” and in land zoned “Agricultural Priority” is unwarranted and unwelcomed.

Plantations (especially those certified under internationally recognised schemes such as Responsible Wood and Forest Stewardship Council) are required to retain areas with high conservation value, riparian areas, heritage sites and so on, while also meeting social responsibilities. Few other large-scale agricultural pursuits follow such protocols, so the discrimination is galling.

Discouraging landholders to invest in plantations is short sighted, given the carbon sequestration benefits. The Fourth Assessment Report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC¹) says:

“A sustainable forest management strategy aimed at maintaining or increasing forest carbon stocks, while producing an annual sustained yield of timber, fibre or energy from the forest, will generate the largest sustained (carbon) mitigation benefit.”

Each year Australia’s forest industries plant more than 70 million seedlings, growing into trees that capture more than 320 000 cars’ worth of annual carbon dioxide emissions². Along with ecosystem services like improving water quality, dryland salinity, waterlogging, and erosion, plantations offer intangible benefits with the trees providing unique opportunities for relaxation and recreation. Surely the Shire would like to be proactive about encouraging and enabling plantations to provide such benefits. This would also better harmonize with the Shire’s Wood Encouragement Policy. Currently the draft Policy 23 could almost be considered at odds with the Wood Encouragement Policy.

Advice from our members indicates that 98% of Scott River landowners renew lease agreements after the first rotation. This indicates landowners recognise the benefits of multiple rotations. Discouraging investment into financially viable plantation management is in conflict with the landowner’s point of view. Requiring a Development Application for third rotations and beyond (Policy Provisions 2 – When is a Development Application Required?) will negatively impact the rights of the landowners or lease managers to cost effectively manage their trees.

Plantations are generally managed as long-term prospects, with multiple rotations. Requiring a Development Application for each rotation beyond and including the third adds an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. FIFWA suggests finding a middle ground in order to streamline the process.

FIFWA suggests that the Policy is crafted to respect the right of the landowners to make their own decisions regarding crops.

Policy Provisions 1 – General, states that the “onus of proof rests with the applicant to justify their application” when referring to applications in areas generally discouraged by the Shire. In this spirit, FIFWA urges the Shire of Nannup to collaborate on modifying the draft Policy so it may genuinely and actually encourage agroforestry and plantations

¹ *Climate Change 2007 – Mitigation of Climate Change*, Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC

² *ABARES - Australia's forest at a glance 2017*

and better meet its objectives.

Objective 3

Ensure that relevant planning considerations are suitably addressed.

FIFWA is supportive of the inclusion of the Code of Practice for Timber Plantations in Western Australia, the Guidelines for Plantation Fire Protection and the requirement of a preparation of an appropriate Plantation Management Plan.

Objective 4

Conserve and enhance environmental assets.

This objective is shared by the plantation industry. The protection and enhancement of environmental assets is a consideration for plantation managers and a requirement of certification schemes such as the Forest Stewardship Council, which confirms a company's operations are environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable – following ecologically sustainable forest management practices. All plantation companies that own or manage land in the Scott River precinct hold certification under this scheme. Additionally, such protocols are covered in the Code of Practice for Timber Plantations in Western Australia. This level of scrutiny is not usually applied to other agricultural pursuits.

The draft Policy as presented does not recognise this shared objective. There is one encouraging statement, buried in the section Administration 4 – Assessing the Development Application. The third bullet point notes the local government will have regard to the “benefits of agroforestry and plantations in addressing land degradation including salinity, waterlogging and erosion and assisting in enhancing water quality”. Certainly, FIFWA supports the inclusion of this statement but suggests these concepts are raised much earlier in the Policy and given greater recognition.

FIFWA submits that modification of the draft Policy would better inform readers. For example, a suggestion for Policy Provisions 9 – Natural Resource Management bullet point 1 is to change “*requires* that agroforestry and plantation applications, as relevant, protect and enhance environmental assets” to “*recognises* that agroforestry and plantation applications, as relevant, protect and enhance environmental assets”.

Further, the Shire should recognise that in many circumstances the level of conservation and enhancement stops at the boundary fence. In order to truly conserve and enhance environmental assets a landscape scale approach is required. This could involve Shire projects or working with Land Conservation District Committees.

Objective 5

Assist the local government in determining applications for agroforestry and plantations by setting out matters local government will have regard for in assessing applications.

FIFWA would welcome a modified Policy, that would better assist the local government in determining applications for agroforestry and plantations.

Objective 6

Provide increased certainty for landowners, the community and others and to assist in providing greater consistency in decision making by the local government.

FIFWA submits that a modified Policy will meet this objective. The current draft Policy will not provide increased certainty, for the reasons stated above.

General comments

Policy Provisions 5 – Location and compatibility with adjacent land uses

The information as presented in the draft Policy is generally acceptable, with some exceptions. Plantations are socially accepted as a resource, not only providing timber but also unique recreational and tourism opportunities not afforded by other agricultural pursuits. The extremely popular SEVEN event, held in pine plantations in the Shire of

Nannup is just one example. Being able to view plantations from the roadside would boost the image of industry, rather than it being perceived as hidden and secretive.

The Shire of Nannup therefore is aware and supportive of the tourism opportunities offered by plantations, but the wording in the draft Policy does not reflect that.

FIFWA suggests removing the fourth bullet point “the visual impact when viewed from State and regional roads, along main tourist routes and within the Landscape Values Area as set out in LPS3”.

Policy Provisions 6 – Fire management plans

Fire management plans are already a requirement of local government Planning Applications. Fire prevention planning, fire management plans, plantation design and general fire safety are captured in the Code of Practice for Timber Plantations in Western Australia. Wording in this section of the draft Policy could be enhanced to improve clarity.

FIFWA asserts that industry is proactive about fire prevention, management, mitigation, suppression and general safety. In addition to the requirements of the Code of Practice for Timber Plantations in Western Australia, industry has developed the WA Plantation Managers Fire Agreement. This agreement formalises joint fire suppression resourcing arrangements for companies that are signatories to the Agreement. The Agreement is reviewed, modified and renewed each year, ahead of the fire season. This means it always reflects best practice and incorporates recommended opportunities for improvement. Further, the Agreement is the pillar of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Fire and Emergency Services; the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; the plantation industry; and local government authorities who choose to be signatories. The Shire of Nannup are signatories, which suggests the Shire is confident in the ability of industry to meet intended obligations under the Policy.

Policy Provisions 7 – Visual impact

Similar to point 5 (location and compatibility with adjacent land uses), FIFWA strongly rejects any implication that plantations have a negative visual impact and aims to boost the image of the industry by removing obstacles such as these which can make industry practices appear opaque. FIFWA therefore recommends deleting the third bullet point “which adjoin State and regional roads and key tourist routes.”

FIFWA queries the Shire’s assertion that plantations are not visually attractive and requests contextual information to explain the reasoning.

Policy Provisions 8 – Suitability of public roads for harvesting

Industry already adheres to bullet points 1 to 3, and therefore generally accepts the wording.

Constructive discussion with industry would improve the relevancy of this section and better reflect the real-world situation. For example, bullet point 4 requires a Plantation Harvest Plan be submitted at the same time as the Development Planning Application. This is outside of the conditions set out in the Code of Practice for Timber Plantations in Western Australia, and outside practical applications. It is simply not feasible to develop a Timber Harvest Plan so far in advance.

FIFWA rejects the draft policy’s notion of local government requiring a bond to cover any road damage, when other road users who may use the same or similar truck configurations on the very same road are exempt from a bond payment. Further, the industry has a positive track record of cooperation and compliance in the use of Shire of Nannup road infrastructure so the suggestion of such a bond is unwarranted. Plantation companies have committed funding and contracted equipment for road upgrades, gravel and limestone road materials, pipes, drainage and site pruning and have undertaken road repair when requested, if not carried out beforehand. A bond is truly unnecessary.

Policy Provisions 10 – Aerial spraying

This section of the draft Policy would be much improved through consultation with subject matter experts.

For example, industry advises that aerial spraying for insects is not an event that can be planned in great detail for the future (especially considering technological advancements) and may not be relevant during a plantation rotation, and therefore an Aerial Spray Application Management Plan is not warranted at the Planning Application stage. Further, companies with FSC certification adhere to strict guidelines with regards to any spraying activity, not just aerial applications. The Code of Practice for Timber Plantations in Western Australia and FSC criteria already provide industry with clear processes on pesticide usage.

Environmental and Social Risk Assessment (ESRA) to assess conformance against FSC pesticide usage standards is industry norm. FIFWA recommends the Planning Application note the possibility of aerial spraying for insects and refer to the Code of Practice for Timber Plantations in Western Australia and FSC ESRA requirements as the base line for any Planning Application. Supplementary wording can be added to the Plantation Management Plan.

Again, FIFWA encourages the Shire of Nannup to consult with industry and be informed on current best practices, particularly in meeting FSC principles. The Policy could then be modified to accurately reflect the benchmarks already in place.

Recommendation – further, enhanced collaboration with the plantation industry through FIFWA to modify the draft Policy.

WA's plantation industry is proactive, with initiatives like the WA Plantation Managers Fire Agreement and carriage of the Code of Practice for Timber Plantations in Western Australia. Industry is eager to share any required information that will ensure the Policy is well-informed and reflective of the benefits and realities of agroforestry and plantations. We have observed the Shire of Nannup's draft policy draws on policies of other LGAs that do not necessarily best meet the needs of the community and industry. FIFWA is keen to help the Shire of Nannup set a new precedent with a best practice policy

FIFWA values this opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Policy and encourages the Shire of Nannup to contact FIFWA Project Officer Lucy Mulcahy on 9472 3055 or lucy@fifwa.asn.au at the earliest opportunity to open a collaborative discussion.

Sincerely,



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