



Saving metro Perth's biodiversity

By RYAN TAYLOR

THE DIVERSE natural flora and fauna around Perth make it a special place but clearing and urban growth threaten that diversity. The metropolitan area is undergoing a rapid population growth, with an expected 375,000 new homes needed by 2031 (a growth rate of 52% over a 25-year period). Accommodating this growth while protecting significant natural areas is a huge challenge for state and local governments.

Over the past decade, initiatives by state and local governments and the community have helped protect and manage many of Perth's special regionally significant natural areas.

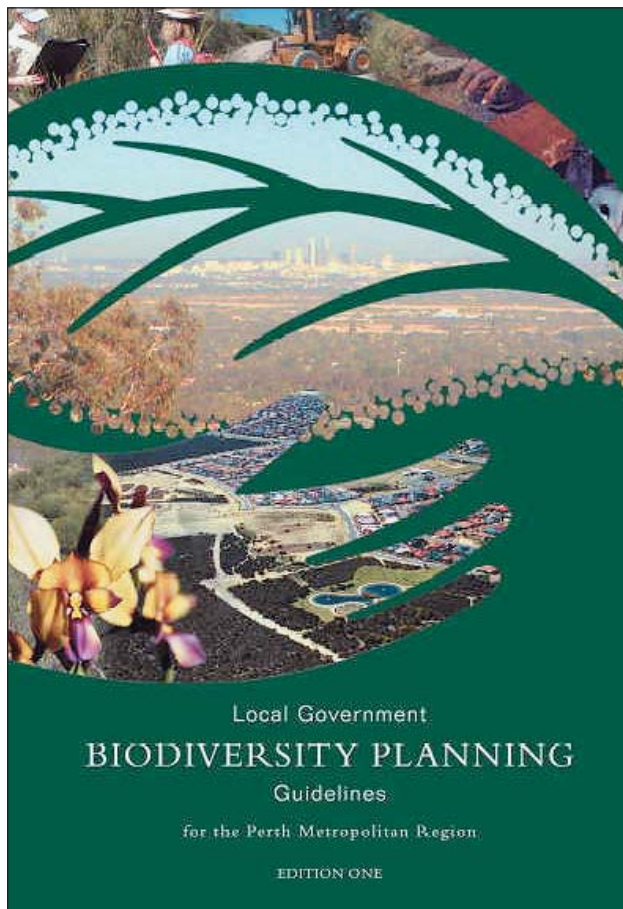
One such initiative is Bush Forever, aimed to protect 17,800 hectares of regionally significant bushland in addition to 33,000ha already protected in the public conservation estate.

Bush Forever is based on the idea that protecting regionally significant bushland is the responsibility of the State Government, and protecting natural areas is mainly the responsibility of local government.

Biodiversity project

In 2001, the Perth Biodiversity Project (PBP) was launched to help its local governments plan a future for local bushland, wetlands and other natural areas. Local governments were encouraged to become more involved in bushcare and biodiversity conservation.

The PBP is delivered by the



Front cover of the Biodiversity Planning Guidelines.

Western Australian Local Government Association in partnership with 31 local governments, the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, the Swan Catchment Council and the Australian Government's \$3 billion Natural Heritage Trust (NHT).

The project supports local government biodiversity conservation efforts in the Swan Region through direct financial aid for on-ground works and capacity building projects, as well as providing expert and technical information, advice and aid for local biodiversity planning.

So far, \$450,000 of the NHT fund-

ing has stimulated a further investment of \$1.025 million by local government.

Planning guidelines

Local government is a key decision-maker within the land planning and development process. In 2001, about 75,000ha of vegetated local natural areas were mapped in the Perth metropolitan region, indicating local government's significant role in conserving Perth's biodiversity.

To help ensure environmentally conscious planning decisions, the PBP developed the Local Government Biodiversity Planning Guidelines for the Perth Metropolitan Region (the Guidelines).

The guidelines, launched last June, provide a framework for helping local governments in the Perth metropolitan region fulfil their biodiversity conservation roles.

Local governments using them will prepare local biodiversity strategies that will influence the local government's planning strategy and town planning

scheme.

This directly affects the way a local government manages its reserves and the decisions it makes about development proposals that affect biodiversity.

The guidelines promote a four-phase local biodiversity planning process culminating in preparation and implementation of a local biodiversity strategy.

A local biodiversity strategy provides a process for assessing the ecological significance of local natural areas and for determining whether, and how, they can be protected based on an assessment of con-



Officers from the city of Wanneroo review maps showing the extent of natural areas within Wanneroo. Photograph courtesy of J. Cullity

straints and opportunities for protection.

A completed strategy will include:

Biodiversity retention, protection and management targets – Local governments are encouraged to base their targets on a standardised set of ecological local significance criteria, ensuring their efforts not only conserve the local sense of place but also contribute to regional biodiversity conservation targets.

Local planning policy for biodiversity conservation – This policy supports local government in adequately considering biodiversity in the land-use planning decision-making process. It requires development proponents to submit consistent information on those natural areas potentially affected by their proposals. Decisions to approve, modify or refuse proposals will be based on considering the relevance of ecological values of the natural area to the local government's biodiversity targets, and the socio-economic opportunities and constraints influencing retention and/or protection of the natural area.

Incentives strategy for private land conservation – Almost 80% of local natural areas in the Perth met-

ropolitan region are privately owned. Using biodiversity targets, the strategy provides a framework for identifying and prioritising the landholders to be targeted for incentives.

Action plan for managing biodiversity on local government lands – A strategic analysis of ecological values and threatening processes of all natural areas under the control of local government is undertaken to determine priorities for management.

Mechanisms to protect local natural areas – Five mechanisms for protecting local natural areas are incorporated into the Local Government Town Planning Scheme and Local Planning Strategy.

Piloting the guidelines

The association has developed a local biodiversity planning milestone program to reward and recognise local governments preparing a local biodiversity strategy in accordance with the guidelines.

Seven milestones have been developed that reflect the major achievements of local governments in the local biodiversity planning process.

The City of Wanneroo and the

Shire of Kalamunda are using the guidelines. Both are on track towards achieving the first two milestones by late this year.

State Government nod

The 10 outer metropolitan local governments contain 98% of all remaining local natural areas in the Perth metropolitan region. If each of these local governments prepared a local biodiversity strategy, estimated cost is \$1.5-\$2 million.

To encourage local governments to invest adequately in preparing strategies, it is essential that relevant parts are endorsed by the WA Planning Commission and the State Government environmental agencies.

This ensures decisions made by these agencies have regard to local biodiversity strategies prepared by local governments.

The Perth Biodiversity Project recently won a national award for integrating biodiversity conservation into planning, sponsored by the NHT.

Contact: WA Local Government Association, phone (08) 9321 5055, website <www.walga.asn.au/projServices/pbp>.