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## Environmental Protection Bulletin No. 12

### Swan Bioplan - Peel Regionally Significant Natural Areas (Peel RSNA's)

#### Summary

The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) endorses the use of the Swan Bioplan - Peel Regionally Significant Natural Areas (Peel RSNA's) information to guide strategic land use and conservation planning in the Peel Sector of the Swan Coastal Plain.

It was developed pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding with the Western Australian Planning Commission.

The information (digital mapping, spatial dataset and explanatory notes) identifies regionally significant natural areas that should be considered during strategic planning. In a highly cleared landscape, these areas represent the range of landscapes, habitats, vegetation and flora originally found in the area.

Any developments in this area will be considered on their merits. However, those impacting on regionally significant natural areas will be subjected to higher scrutiny.

Every effort should be made to locate any development in cleared areas in preference to un-cleared lands.

This Bulletin also defines the survey standards required to support any rezoning or development proposals. It also builds on previous advice by the EPA in May 2010 (EPA 2010) on the significance of the Dawesville to Binningup Region and environmentally acceptable development in that area.

Identification and selection of the Peel RSNA's was based on 2009 aerial photography and their natural values at this time independent of current zoning or existing approvals that had yet to be implemented (e.g. Ministerial approvals, clearing permits or development approvals). Proposals that have already been approved may proceed consistent with any approval conditions.

#### The EPA notes that:

- the primary protection of remnant native vegetation is best achieved by locating development in cleared areas in preference to un-cleared lands;
- the Peel RSNA's information provides a key resource to inform strategic regional planning;
- the information provides guidance to State and Local Government authorities, community, industry and developers in planning to firstly, avoid, and then minimise, the impacts of development proposals and planning schemes on natural areas; and,
- development proposals and planning scheme amendments that impact on the Peel RSNA's will require detailed investigations of their natural values consistent with EPA Guidance Statements 10, 51 and 56.

## Background – Swan Bioplan Project

The Swan Bioplan Project is a biodiversity conservation project undertaken by the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority (OEPA) and the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). The project is part of the update of System 6 conservation planning (Department of Conservation and Environment 1983) on the Swan Coastal Plain, south of the Perth Metropolitan Region.

As part of the Swan Bioplan Project, landscape, habitat, vegetation and flora values have been identified and this information is being used to delineate regionally significant natural areas. These are areas that represent the range of landscapes, habitats, vegetation and flora that existed prior to extensive clearing on the southern Swan Coastal Plain.

The Swan Bioplan study region includes the Swan Coastal Plain IBRA Bioregion south of the Perth Metropolitan Region and extends east to include the Darling and Whicher Scarps (Map 1). The Swan Bioplan Project has been divided into 'sectors' for reporting purposes. The Peel Sector was defined using the Swan Coastal Plain portion of the Department of Planning's Peel Region Scheme boundary.

Information on the Busselton Sector (Webb *et al.* 2009) and public lands on the Whicher Sector (Keighery *et al.* 2008) have been previously released. The regionally significant natural areas in these studies were previously referred to as 'reference areas'.

## Identification of Peel Regional Significant Natural Areas

The Swan Bioplan Project has identified natural areas with significant flora, vegetation and landform values in the Peel Sector. The mapped Peel RSNA's (Maps 2a and b) do not identify all regionally significant natural areas in the region but identifies areas that represent the range of landscapes, habitats, vegetation and flora originally found in the Peel Sector. The identification of the Peel RSNA's did not take into account site specific wetland and fauna values. These values should be addressed consistent with published EPA assessment guidance and technical guidelines.

Specific consideration was given to including typical and unusual areas representing the major landforms of the Peel Sector, the consolidation of public lands containing highly significant natural areas, natural areas in ecological linkages, and the conservation of Tuart communities. The selection process was informed by three key reports (Keighery *et al.* 2006, Freeman *et al.* 2009, Keighery and Muir 2010). Remnant vegetation was mapped from 2005 aerial photography and verified with 2009 aerial photography. A series of regional natural value datasets information layers was also used in the selection of the Peel RSNA's.

Key elements of the Peel RSNA's information include:

- a. This Environmental Protection Bulletin endorsing the information and outlining the EPA's expectations as to its use in environmental impact assessment in the Peel Sector;
- b. Digital maps delineating the areas identified as Peel RSNA's;
- c. Spatial dataset with attribute information attached to each Peel RSNA such as name, condition, interpretation reliability and disclaimer; and
- d. Explanatory Notes outlining how the Peel RSNA's were selected.

This information is available for download from the EPA website at [www.epa.wa.gov.au](http://www.epa.wa.gov.au).

## EPA Policy Context

A key part of the EPA's Environmental Impact Assessment reform agenda is to provide strategic guidance aimed at improving the efficiency, certainty and effectiveness of the assessment process. The EPA expects that the prioritisation of natural areas of regional significance (Peel RSNA's) and the presentation of the associated information will assist strategic land use and conservation planning. Identification and selection of the Peel RSNA's was based on 2009 aerial photography and their natural values at that time independent of current zoning or existing approvals that had yet to be implemented (e.g. Ministerial approvals, clearing permits or development approvals). Some Peel RSNA's will be more complex than others and have a greater range of natural values. Approved proposals may proceed consistent with any approval conditions. However, the EPA encourages the protection of as much of their natural values as possible through the consolidation of vegetation in regional open space.

In the EPA's report and recommendations on the Peel Region Scheme in August 2000 (EPA 2000), the EPA advised that *"a strategy to conserve regionally significant vegetation should be prepared and implemented within the Peel Region..."* The EPA also endorsed the WAPC recommendations including *"a System 6 update or "Bushplan" [now Bush Forever] be prepared for the region to determine which bushland areas should be reserved as Regional Open Space"*. The EPA considers that the Peel RSNA's information provides some guidance on these factors.

In its report and recommendations on the Greater Bunbury Region Scheme (GBRS), the EPA developed a strategy to identify regionally significant natural areas in the Bunbury Region (EPA 2003, Bulletin 1008 Appendix 3). This strategy was developed to respond to GBRS consistent with *Bush Forever* (Government of Western Australia 2000) and the System 6 (Department of Conservation and Environment 1983) update, while incorporating contemporary information and techniques.

Identification of the values of Peel RSNA's was based on the approach identified in EPA Guidance Statement No. 10 (EPA 2006).

EPA Guidance Statement 33 (EPA 2008) further clarified the framework for determining regionally significant natural areas as identified in EPA Guidance Statement 10 (EPA 2006), as well as providing guidance on the EPA's objectives, broad principles and management advice relevant to land use planning and development.

The Peel RSNA's information builds on previous advice provided under section 16e of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (EPA 2010) on the environmental significance of the Dawesville to Binningup Region and guidance to State and Local Government authorities, Government agencies, community, industry and developers on environmentally acceptable development in the area.

## EPA Assessment of Proposals within Peel Regionally Significant Natural Areas

The EPA provides the following advice in relation to the assessments of development proposals and planning schemes which may impact, wholly or in part, on Peel RSNA's. As the selection of these areas was based on previous aerial photography, ground-truthing will be necessary as the values of some areas may have changed.

Proposals that may impact on Peel RSNA's will require site specific flora and vegetation surveys to be undertaken compliant with Level 2 survey standards as outlined in EPA Guidance Statement 51 (EPA 2004a) and apply the criteria for determination of regionally significant natural areas outlined in EPA Guidance Statement 10 (EPA 2006).



Specific requirements include:

- The identification of landscape, habitat, vegetation and flora values on site, including;
  - Plot-based (10m x 10m quadrat) survey to enable comparison of floristic community types in the proposal area with Department of Environment and Conservation's Threatened and Priority Ecological Community database (DEC 2010). A database search should be requested from the Species and Communities Branch of DEC during field survey planning (further information at <http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/849/2017>); and
  - Targeted searches for conservation significant flora.
- Presentation of the best available local, regional and state context information that allows comparison of current and pre-clearing site values within the region.

Proponents may need to undertake other environmental surveys consistent with EPA guidance, e.g. fauna surveys consistent with EPA Guidance Statement 56 (EPA 2004b) as required.



**MAP 1:** Swan Bioplan study area and the sectors together with boundaries of the study areas for the Peel Harvey Eastern Estuary Area Catchment (EEEEA) (Keighery *et al.* 2006) and Dawesville to Binningup study (Freeman *et al.* 2009).

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