

Large-scale road clearing helps worsen fires, floods

Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads

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CONSTANT clearing holds dire consequences.

Today one cannot watch the TV news or read a newspaper these days without seeing startling reports about catastrophic weather or climate change somewhere in the world.

Apart from the current global COVID-19 pandemic, this seems to be the dominant topic of our early 21st Century.

It has been a worldwide concern for many top scientists far longer than this, and their alarming predictions are clearly now starting to come true.

A Federal Government State of the Environment report last month documented evidence of accelerated deterioration in all areas studied, including habitat loss, species extinction, invasive species and the pollution of waterways and the atmosphere by mining and industry.

“The general outlook for our environment is deteriorating,” the report said – and this is just in Australia.

In the four months to last January, two extreme Australian weather events linked to climate change caused 34 bushfire deaths and another 40 from floods – both on an unprecedented scale.

There are many causes both natural and unnatural but there is little doubt now that the major contributor to the accelerated deterioration in climate stability is the behaviour and actions of humans.

Most people 100 years ago had little understanding of the long-term effects of burning large amounts of coal, oil, gas and wood for energy, widespread clearing of land for agriculture and global pollution.

Our world has changed dramatically since then, and governments, industry and populations worldwide now have more than enough scientific evidence to know precisely what is needed to halt or at least slow the ongoing decline.

Last month’s national report lists more than 100 species of Australian animals that are either extinct in the wild or gone forever.

Australia has lost more mammal species than any other continent on the planet, and our country’s rate of species decline is among the highest in the developed world.

The report says this is mainly due to the introduction of new non-native species, large-scale land clearing and the ongoing destruction of natural habitat.

It is hard from the ground to appreciate the level of global deforestation, let alone in our own region, but aerial photography and satellite images reveal a dramatic loss of forest – including in most of the Wheatbelt, where it is estimated that 98 per cent of the land has been cleared since colonisation.

The remaining two per cent consists mainly of narrow roadside strips, small

stands left on farms and small government reserves set aside for species preservation.

Trees alone won’t solve our climate crisis, and continued land clearing can only worsen the ongoing decline.

Those who travel Toodyay Road will appreciate the excellent improvements the State Government has made to the road west of Dryandra Road, which was achieved with very little clearing of vegetation.

Given that the amount of traffic increases closer to Perth, this is a superb result that dramatically increases the safety of travel for heavy trucks and passenger cars alike.

An entirely different scenario is planned east of Dryandra Road, where 56ha of vegetation is planned to be removed for a major road redesign that nobody asked for.

The result will be an over-engineered superhighway to cater for less traffic than elsewhere on Toodyay Road.

This can already be seen east of Jingaling Brook Road, where the large-scale destruction of roadside vegetation is only a fraction of what is planned to occur elsewhere on Toodyay Road.

Picture what you now see at Jingaling Brook magnified from Dryandra Road to Salt Valley Road with hectares of bush removed, trenches dug through hills, enormous excavations and more overtaking lanes than the community wants or needs.

MRWA activity state wide	2017	2018	2019
Vegetation cleared (ha)	246	535	663
Revegetation (ha)	206	139	58
Offsets claimed (ha)	83	6	15

Source: MRWA Annual Report 2020, page 62.

Some see the loss of 56ha of vegetation as insignificant worldwide but our global situation is now so precarious that any loss – particularly of mature trees that cannot be replaced overnight by new roadside plantings – is unacceptable.

And this is not the only area in WA that the State Government plans to clear for further roadworks.

Main Roads WA’s 2020 annual report shows that setting aside bushland as offsets to compensate for roadworks covers only a fraction of the destruction already caused.

If you don’t want to see more of this happen, please join our online petition at sastr.com.au or sign a hard copy at the Toodyay IGA stall, Saturday 19th August, the Toodyay Agricultural Show on Saturday October 8 or the monthly Toodyay Farmers Market.

You can also write your concern to the Toodyay Shire Council and State and Federal Environment Ministers, with copies to Main Roads WA – we can provide addresses.

If you would like to join our group, please email info@sastr.com.au, and perhaps consider planting as many local tree species as your property can safely accommodate.