



THE GREAT WALK

TREE CHARTER

Introduction

The Great Walk from Denmark to Perth has been initiated by people from the south-west of Western Australia to express in a simple and direct way our appreciation of the land that sustains us.

This event in Australia's Bicentennial year is a celebration of our unique and beautiful environment.

The Great Walk is also an expression of deep concern about the detrimental impact that we have made on our environment in the last 200 years. This continuing impact is contrary to our commitment to sustainability, made under the National and State Conservation Strategies.

The Aboriginal people who lived in Australia for more than 40,000 years had an innate reverence, love and connection with the land.

In 200 years of European habitation, the wealth of our natural environment has been exploited for the building of this society. The land has given us everything. We have taken freely.

The Great Walk is a symbolic step towards the next 200 years which can be a period of healing, replenishment and achieving a sustainable use of our environment.

Our natural environment is a treasure beyond value, a treasure found nowhere else on Earth. But it is a fragile environment whose capacity is not unlimited.

Our Environment

Today what remains of our environmental wealth balances on a knife edge, even without the added pressures of global climate change.

Only one percent of Western Australia remains under native forest. Up to 50 percent of our original Jarrah, Marri and Karri forest area has been lost.

The quality of our water resources has been severely degraded. Most major river systems in the south-west are now saline and unfit for human consumption.

Of the 17 million hectares of land cleared for agriculture, only 35 percent is now regarded as stable.

In Western Australia there are over 1,000 plant species listed as rare or threatened, and 853 of these are from the south-west. 52 plant species are classified as extinct, 42 from the south-west. Only 32 percent of our rare or threatened plants are represented on existing reserves.

The state's fauna is in a similarly precarious position with at least 160 known vertebrates listed as endangered.

Our local environmental problems must also be seen in a global context. Western Australia is a very dry state in the world's driest inhabited continent. Climatic changes being brought about by the Greenhouse effect may already be evident in the fragile south-west environment, where annual rainfall in recent years is well below average.

With natural ecological processes already beginning to fail, deferring action will only compound the problems. We are at a point where fresh directions are essential, and where our only choice is to foster a common spirit dedicated to achieving solutions through long-term policies.

We recognise that it is not just the responsibility of Governments, but of every individual, to restore environmental health and stability.

Direction for the Future

It is in this spirit that the following recommendations are put forward to the Government and the people of Western Australia:

Overall Policies

- * To introduce positive measures for reducing the consumption of key resources, such as water, energy (electricity, petrol, etc), timber and some rare minerals.
- * To reduce pollution of our environment, including the discharge of waste gases affecting climate and the ozone shield.
- * To ensure that recycling becomes a mandatory requirement for all waste disposal.

For our Forests

- * The little remaining old growth forest should be left intact while the consequences of its felling are more fully investigated.
- * The current intensive management practices for timber production should be moderated until it is known how good health can be restored to the forest and land.
- * Greater sensitivity should be exercised in determining the season and frequency of prescribed burning.
- * We urge that the managers of our forests instigate urgent expansion of all aspects of research into forest ecology.
- * Our future timber requirements should be centred on supplies from plantations grown on presently cleared land.
- * In the selection of species for plantations, due consideration must be given to climatic changes expected before the seedlings reach harvestable age.

For our Water

- * Water catchments should be rehabilitated so that rivers and streams can once again supply water fit for human consumption.
- * A moratorium should be placed on land clearing in all water catchments.

For our Soil

- * The instigation, through all agencies, of a massive programme of replanting of appropriate trees and shrubs on degraded lands, especially farmlands.
- * Vigorous research should be made into the use of agricultural chemicals and artificial fertilizers.
- * Economic mechanisms should be put in place to encourage the viability of sustainable farming practices.
- * Farming practices throughout the south-west should be urgently reviewed, in anticipation of the warmer, dryer climate now intensifying.

For the Protection of Flora and Fauna

- * *It is essential that more viable reserves are created, linked where possible by natural corridors.*
- * *More informed and caring attitudes should be engendered towards the indigenous flora and fauna found outside reserves.*
- * *Clear policies should be developed, as a matter of urgency, for the retention of native vegetation remaining on privately-owned land.*
- * *A statewide programme should be initiated to restore healthy native vegetation to all rural road verges.*

To Conclude.

It is clear we have been living beyond our means for sometime and have accumulated a substantial environmental debt. This debt must be met if we are to restore sustainability to our society, and heal the damage to our environment.

To do this will require a great deal of initiative, community participation and funds. The community may have to accept some changes to its way of life, but the rewards will include an enhanced quality of life.

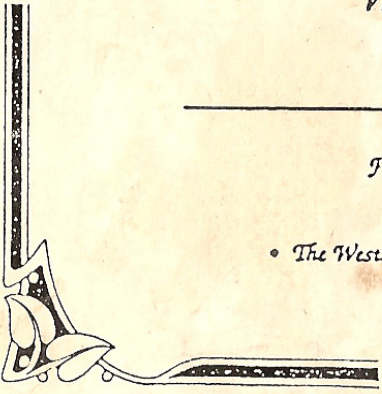
We urge the government to accept and fulfil its responsibility in educating all Western Australians about both the environmental pressures and the pathways to solutions.

It is only with knowledge and understanding of the true state of our environment that constructive changes can be implemented.

With this understanding our generation can begin to feel a personal sense of stewardship towards the land.

*We do not inherit the earth from our parents,
rather, we borrow it from our children.*

For the guiding principles and facts in this charter, acknowledgement is given to:

- *The State Conservation Strategy for WA 1987* •
 - *The National Conservation Strategy for Australia 1983* •
 - *The Western Australian Environmental Review 1986 (written for the WA Government in 1986)* •
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