

Climate Health Inquiry

Climate Health WA Inquiry Terms of Reference April 2019

The Climate Health WA Inquiry was established under part 15 of the Public Health Act 2016.

The aim of the Inquiry is to review the current planning and response capacity of the health system in relation to the health impacts of climate change and make recommendations for improvement with respect to climate change mitigation and public health adaptation strategies.

Submissions

Highlight particular challenges, strengths, opportunities and initiatives relevant to WA, that may not be evident from the national and international literature

Perth NRM is a sustainability organisation with a focus on environment, both within our agriculture sector and growing city. We are acutely aware of the impact of climate change on the environmental, economic, social and cultural values of our community, and how this relates to overall wellbeing, including physical and mental health. Our work addresses the intersection of climate change with population growth and unsustainable land and water management practices that reduce the condition of the Region's environment and ultimately impact on community health.

Hundreds of Perth residents participate weekly in environmental volunteering to protect and preserve the environment. Most are over 55 years old, with the 60 to 74 age bracket well represented. They are motivated by their desire to care for the environment and to leave a legacy for future generations. In addition to addressing on-ground threats (e.g. weeds and feral animals) they invest in building capacity to manage the impacts of climate change on natural areas¹.

A drying climate is accounted for in the selection of species and the timing of planting (rainfall and soil moisture), the impact of wildfire and how the distribution of weed species may impact on seedling survival. Groups must also consider the health and safety of their members. In the summer months the projected increase in extreme heat days with maxima over 35°C may begin to impact on groups' volunteering capacity. Ongoing community engagement is essential to maintaining the condition of our natural places and how climate change might reduce participation of volunteers and impact on their health (physical and mental) and well-being needs to be considered.

Food security has been globally identified as a critical priority, with a warming climate expected to reduce yields, lower nutrient levels in food and compromise communities through malnutrition and

entrench poverty. Perth NRM considers ready access to nutritious food as an important component of a healthy society and whilst WA's agriculture sector is predicted to reach the production targets set for 2025, climate forecasts suggest a more difficult future beyond the next five years.

The draft situation report, to *guide the strategic development of a food security plan for Western Australia* has identified climate change and the related issues of water availability and biosecurity as major factors affecting food production and security in WA. It identifies that: '...by 2030, the average temperature is projected to be up to 1.3°C warmer in WA with extreme heat days (maxima over 35°C) predicted to increase from 28 (1971 to 2000) to 36 days in 2030. Rainfall is expected to decrease by up to 6 % across the state. The falling rainfall impedes winter irrigation and has a negative impact on groundwater recharge. It is anticipated that forage production e.g. grasses, legumes for pasture and livestock productivity may be reduced by up to 10% over agricultural areas and southern rangelands. Biosecurity threats of incursions of pests and diseases will impact on human health and food security'².

It is essential that all stakeholders involved in food security – farmers, suppliers, consumers governments (federal, state and local) and researchers - are part of identifying the threats and solutions.

In recent years there has been increasing awareness of the Noongar Six Seasons and how we, in the south west of Western Australia, can benefit from applying them to our decision-making processes³. Perth NRM works closely with some Whadjuk Noongar Elders in the Perth Region and regularly engages regularly with SWALSC. We have come to see how much can be learned from their deep connection to Country and encourage this Inquiry to explore their perspectives on the impact of climate change on their communities, and to consider the different aspects they may bring to the discussion.

Outline not only what the issues are but how problems can be addressed

Perth NRM works closely with the environmental and agriculture sector, continually looking for ways to adapt to and mitigate for climate change. Perth NRM hosts capacity building workshops and seminars for environmental volunteers and will continue to do so in the future. We would welcome greater collaboration between the health, volunteering and environmental sector to build capacity of Friend's Groups to recognize potential health issues for volunteers and to develop ways to manage them.

The Food Security Plan for Western Australia – *Situation report to guide the strategic development of a food security plan for Western Australia* is stage one of a larger project. This WA Food Security project is



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supported by Perth NRM, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program and we are collaborating with a range of stakeholders from across Western Australia.

Describe what your organisation would be willing to do or how they would contribute to the Inquiry
Perth NRM would be willing to provide information to the Inquiry about environmental volunteering and sustainable agriculture and how climate change may impact them in relation to the environmental, economic, social and cultural fabric of Perth. We would be willing to work with a range of stakeholders and sectors to identify solutions and ways to adapt to or mitigate for climate change.

References

Perth NRM (2017) Community Capacity Assessment – *A report on the 2017 Survey*

Perth NRM and Curtin University (2019) Food Security Plan for Western Australia - *Situation report to guide the strategic development of a food security plan for Western Australia*

Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority (Current) Cultural Compact Agreement – *Between the Whadjuk traditional owners and the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority*