



Submitted by Meg Wilson



SUSTAINABLE HEALTH REVIEW – public submission

JBCG is the largest of many enthusiastic volunteer land-care groups in Mundaring hills. Working for many years restoring severely degraded creek-line reserves, walking trails, verges and public green-spaces, we are mindful of the vital importance of healthy natural environments for human health and well-being – physical, mental, and cultural. The community spirit generated by our work is fun, creative and very fulfilling.

We work in conjunction with land managers and policy-makers to restore habitats and ecosystems, uphold and increase the conservation estate, identify and protect wildlife refuges, and restore connectivity to fragmented landscapes. Or ensure connectivity is maintained for the movement of animals, seeds and pollen.

Our activities aim to secure a high level of environmental wellness for the benefit of our regional communities and planet generally.. Our efforts help address all the risks explained in the 'Australia State of the Environment Report 2016: Overview – Risks'. "The key risks to the Australian environment include the pressures created by climate change, land-use change, habitat fragmentation and invasive species.

Western Australia's south-west is already experiencing an historical drying trend.

'Our public health, our economy and our environmental health all stand to benefit from appropriate landcare.

Natural Biosecurity is provided by adequate bushland, and protection from pests and

diseases.

Surely the main focus of DOH needs to be on a preventative environmental health measures towards achieving sustainable human health. Land care can be broad-scale, lasting, and at minimal cost.

Preventative care through sustainable environmental health needs to be a key part of the new Public Health Act.

Importance of Environmental Health to Public Health:

We are all aware of the essential ecosystem services provided by our bushland; of their vital importance to community health and well-being. Recent neuroscience studies reveal how contact with nature is essential for healthy / improved brain and social functioning. Since “Green space and tree canopy cover are recognised as key components of future development both in relation to minimising the urban heat island effect as well as contributing to health and amenity in a variety of other ways. “Increasing empirical evidence indicates that nature provides restorative experiences that directly affect people's psychological well-being and health in a positive way” (Gidlöf-Gunnarsson & Öhrström, 2007).

Recreation, relaxation, stress relief are all some of the restorative effects of having contact with nature.

Humans not only show a preference for natural scenes and settings; they suffer health problems when their environment and lifestyle causes them to become nature-deficient.

Employment opportunities are presented. In other Australian states and other countries, work and development orders are being used successfully to allow offenders to work off their fines through community work, education or health treatment of this kind. Involvement in tree-planting, food growing and landscaping projects can be a fulfilling.

When assessing the health of individuals and communities, surely the quality of the environment, and access, if any, to green spaces needs to be factored in as much as age, nutrition, work, socio-economic status, attitude, and lifestyle.

Access to green spaces reduces stress, blood pressure, mental and emotional fatigue, anger and attention problems. Nearness to green spaces also increases levels of physical activity, reduces the severity and impact of air and noise pollution, and results in reduced interpersonal conflict. Rachel Kaplan (2008) proposes that rather than considering green space as an amenity, we should consider it is a reflection of what fosters reasonable behaviour.

SCHOOL KIDS ARE MORE CREATIVE IN NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS

New research from Curtin University has found that exposure to nature help s school children with creative

tasks, such as poetry. “We found that students who had direct contact with nature by immersing themselves in a bush or forest setting were much more descriptive and vivid in the language they used than the classroom-based writers who ‘imagined’ being in nature through photos,” Dr Paul Gardner from Curtin’s School of Education said.

Dr Gardner said research suggests that learning in natural environments could “enhance creativity and language development”.

Edith Cowan University Professor of public health and nutrition, Amanda Devine, considers the built environment could have a negative effect of nutrition on and health. Planting more gardens and street verges could help reduce childhood obesity and overall health, she says.

Community gardens could help nurture the relationship between teachers, parents, children and the wider community and promote a better understanding of the relationship ip between food and health

In Europe it has been a long tradition to retain or plant fruit trees in public places. This was found in recent times to stem vandalism.

'The key to German public gardening is thinking about plants not so much as individuals but as components of communities. This reflects an important strength of plant sciences in Germany – Pflanzensoziologie '.

<http://theplate.nationalgeographic.com/2015/11/13/to-forage-fruit-in-germany-start-by-looking-up/>

RESILIENCE as a basis for sustainability:

Sustainable health and resilient communities depend on resilient land that is able to recover from changes, and continue to support native vegetation and natural processes, as well as allow us to use natural resources within reasonable limits.

Despite water shortages, private gardens and public green spaces should remain an important part of the urban landscape to secure public well-being..

Existing gardens, streets and poorly maintained parks can be planted and landscaped with waterwise plants to provide some the health benefits of green space.

The retention of natural areas during greenfields development can provide sustainable public open spaces to complement playgrounds and sports ovals.

Schools, families and community groups can provide learning opportunities and practical experience to ensure that the art and love of gardening and landcare is not lost.

In summary, the Jane Brook Catchment Group believes that the following points should be prioritised in the new Public Health Act to achieve the sound health and wellbeing of our communities:

* The vital role of environmental health in the context of public health be fully included in the new Public Health Act.

* Retention of urban bushland with a priority given to protecting green corridors

- * Promote an increase in green spaces and street trees in urban areas.
- * Support programs that engage children in nature and other green spaces
- * Encourage programs that involve offenders working with bushland and green spaces

References:

1) Commonwealth Dept. of Environment and Energy: Government 'Australia State of the Environment Report 2016'.

2) Curry, Andrew, The Plate - To forage fruit in Germany, start looking up.

<http://theplate.nationalgeographic.com/2015/11/13/to-forage-fruit-in-germany-start-by-looking-up/>

3) Gardner, Paul: 'Green learning provides inspiration for nature poetry' - Curtin University School of Education. Scimex Breaking Science News for Australia and New Zealand.

<https://www.scimex.org/newsfeed/green-learning-provides-inspiration-for-nature-poetry>

4) Gidlöf-Gunnarsson, A. & Öhrström, E. Noise and well-being in urban residential environments: The potential role of perceived availability to nearby green areas in *Landscape and Urban Planning*, Volume 83, Issues 2-3, 19 November 2007, Pages 115-126

5) Kaplan, R., 'The nature of the view from home. Psychological benefits in *Environment and Behavior*,' Jul 2001; vol. 33: pp. 507 - 542.