

Bushwalking WA

(Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc)

Comments on

Draft mid-term performance review of the Forest Management Plan 2014–2023

(with reference to Key Performance Indicators and management activity outcomes of the FMP implementation)

Our interest

BWA is the peak body for bushwalking / hiking in WA. It represents the interests and concerns of its eleven member bushwalking clubs and the wider bushwalking community in WA. Bushwalkers comprise a small percentage of the community, but through their recreational activities across much of the state forests and reserves over the past half century, they have a unique insight into impacts that are affecting the social values of our forests and landscapes of the Darling Range near Perth, especially those values concerning recreation, visual amenity, scenic quality, and sense of place.

Context

The area covered by the FMP 2014–2023 includes extensive bauxite mining leases and active mining operations. Key Performance Indicators included in the FMP and addressed in the draft mid-term performance review ignore very relevant threats and actual impacts on recreation of mining operations and rehabilitated minesites.

Relevant threats to recreation recognised in the FMP itself (page 117) include: *“degradation of natural areas...that support recreation..”* The draft FMP plan of Aug. 2012 also included on page 141 a note that *“Management activities that disturb the landscape, in particular open-cut mining.... can have unwanted impacts if undertaken without appropriate planning.”* (This note was removed in the final Plan).

Social values recognised in the FMP, including those concerning recreation and visual amenity, scenic quality, and sense of place cannot be effectively addressed and protected under the FMP while mining operations and impacts are managed and condoned under **State Agreements** which separately minimise public transparency, scrutiny and accountability. The WA Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and State Government approvals of expansions and accelerations of the bauxite mining under old **State Agreement Acts** and the **Environmental Protection Act 1986** fail to properly consider and protect the future land-use and public amenity values of the multiple-use State Forest areas. The resulting combined effect of the FMP and the State Agreements is that the public can have no confidence that values espoused in the FMP are being effectively monitored, addressed and protected.

Today the wider community is mostly unaware of the impacts of bauxite mining near Perth, but as Perth’s population grows in coming years the demands will increase for access to recreational bushwalking and similar healthy recreational pursuits in natural undisturbed environments near the city.

Specific impacts ignored in the FMP and not addressed by the Key Performance Indicators

- i) World’s best practice’ rehabilitation strategies cannot successfully replicate or restore the original aged jarrah forest, wandoo woodlands and landscape impacted by bauxite strip-mining in the Darling Range. The implications of this essential fact are being overlooked and/or ignored. One consequence is that recreational and other values espoused in FMP 2014–2023 are not being protected.

- ii) In parallel with the extensive irreversible impacts of the strip-mining on biodiversity, landscape, unique soil profiles and water run-off, rehabilitated bauxite minesites within the Perth metropolitan area and beyond result in permanent loss of important recreational opportunities for current and future generations.
 - iii) The extent and condition of the vast areas of rehabilitated minesites (**Figure 1**) will have profound impacts on the future land-use, public amenity values and recreational opportunities throughout the multi-use State Forest areas. Expansions of mining (**Figure 2**) and rehabilitated minesites will increasingly impact on and greatly reduce quality bushwalking opportunities in the region in coming years. Long-popular, traditional bushwalking areas to be lost to the mining will in the future extend from Lane Poole Reserve in the south, across Mount Solus area and Bannister Hill, to beyond Mount Dale in the north. Many traditional bushwalking areas will be affected.
 - iv) Bushwalkers most value walking in high quality, undisturbed natural or near-natural environments (**Figure 3**). Today and in the future they will avoid the rehabilitated minesite areas as the severely altered condition of the landscape and vegetation is unsuitable for enjoyable bushwalking (**Figures 4a & 4b**): Vegetation species diversity is reduced, forest structure is dense and simplified, and earthworks remain for surface water control. Deep ripping for revegetation results in an uneven surface, generally with an extensive spread of boulders. Laterite 'breakaways' are striking, distinctive ancient landscape features of high visual amenity value at the edges of many bauxite ore 'pods' (**Figures 5a & 5b**), especially toward the eastern side of the Darling Range; They will be lost and replaced by an artificially smoothed landscape, devoid of those visual highlights.
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David Osborne

President

Bushwalking WA

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FIGURES

Figure 1 – Map of bauxite mining leases and approved (to date) mining areas in forests of northern Darling Range

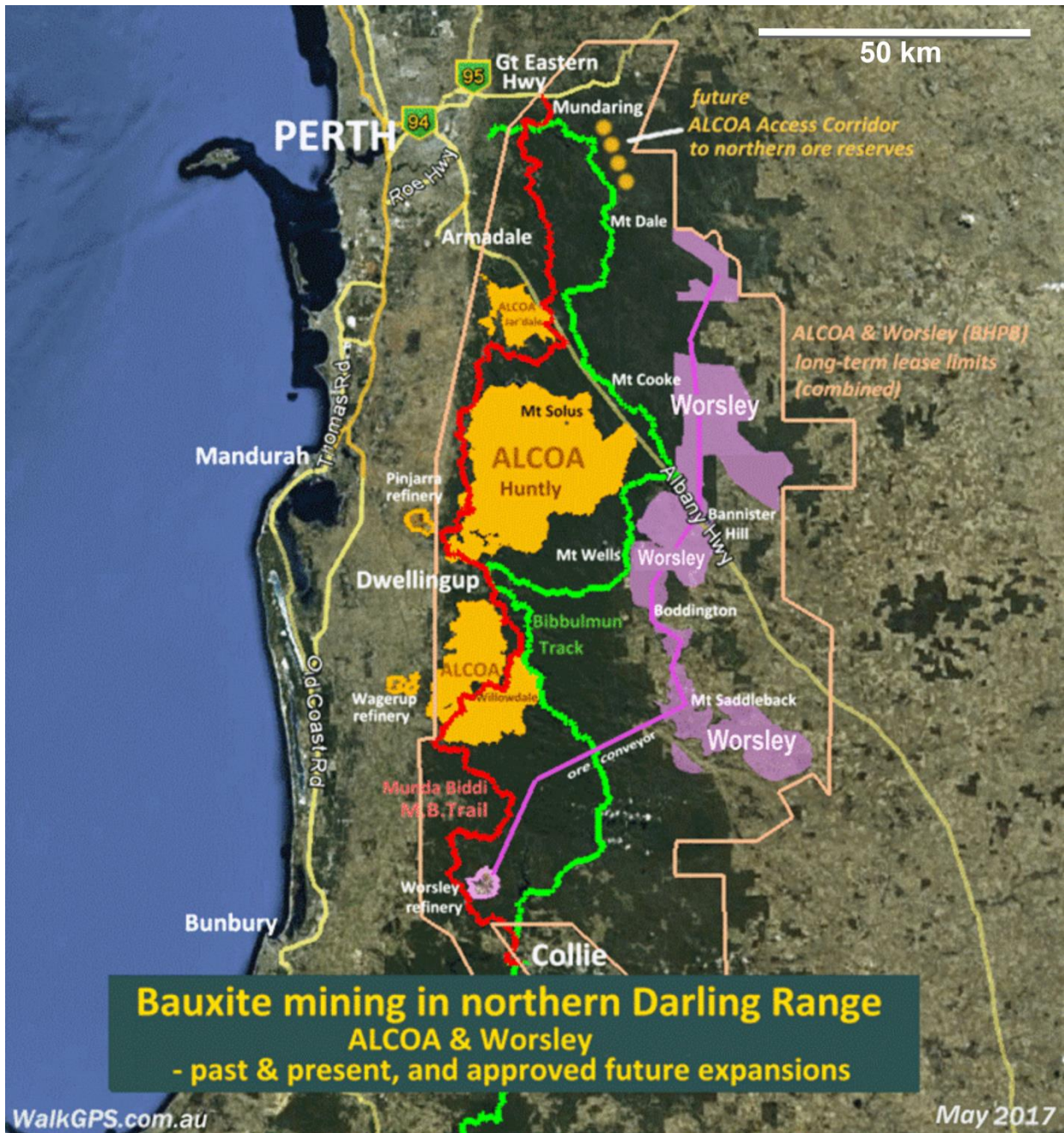


Figure 2 – Typical extensive, current strip-mining (Alcoa Huntly operations)

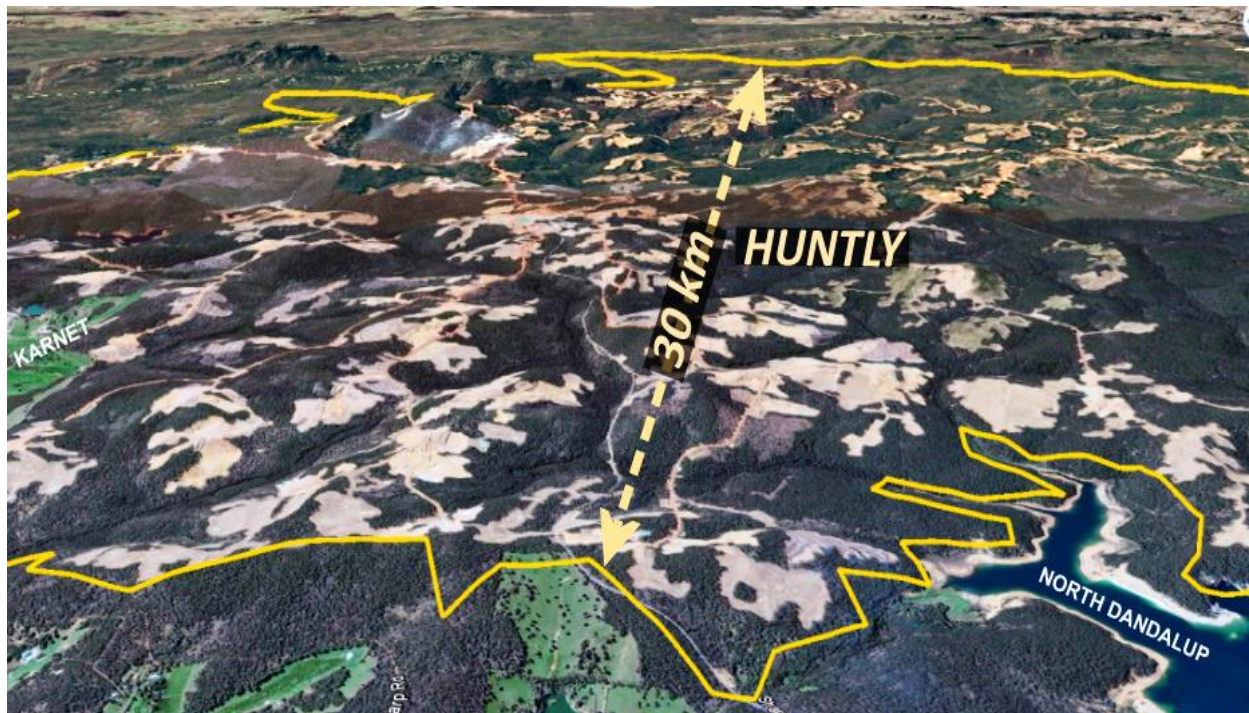


Figure 3 – Typical unmined northern jarrah forest (Eagle Hill area)



Figures 4a & 4b– Typical rehabilitated minesite (Jarrahdale area, approx. 40 years post-rehabilitation)

Figure 4b



Figure 4b



Figures 5a & 5b – Walkers on the rocky slopes of typical laterite breakaways in the wandoo woodlands (eastern Darling Range) before mining. Such landscape features cannot be effectively restored post-mining and will be replaced by smoothed, graded slopes.

Figure 5a



Figure 5b

