

a thousand cuts

Mining in the Northern Jarrah Forests

Summary of the report

The Jarrah forests of the South West of Western Australia are a key part of a Global Biodiversity Hotspot that is under enormous cumulative pressure from a variety of sources including native forest logging, mining, agriculture, urban development, dieback, prescribed burning and climate change.

A key risk of climate change, identified in the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report, is that the Northern Jarrah Forest will collapse or transition to a new ecosystem without its characteristic and framework species. However, the risk can be substantially reduced by avoiding and reducing clearing and forest degradation from inappropriate forest management practices and land use.

The primary cause of deforestation in Western Australia's South West forests is bauxite mining. Bauxite mining has cleared at least 32,130 hectares of publicly owned forest (80 times the size of Perth's Kings Park) and fragmented 92,000 to 120,000 hectares of the Northern Jarrah Forest up to December 2019, and the rate is accelerating - of that 32,130 hectares, 11,290 hectares (more than a third) were cleared between 2010 and 2020.

In recognition of the critical role that forests play in mitigating and building resilience to climate change, more than 100 countries, including Australia agreed to end deforestation by 2030 at the UN Climate Change Conference COP 26 in Glasgow in 2021. But bauxite miners Alcoa and South32 (Worsley) now seek approval to clear a further 11,109 hectares and fragment another 70,211 hectares. It has been estimated that eventually bauxite mining will clear up to 83,000 hectares and fragment 337,000 hectares. Most of the forest between Collie and Armadale is expected to be fragmented by bauxite mining by 2060.

It is unclear how much forest has been cleared on private land as a result of bauxite mining or for

other reasons. Western Australia does not keep central or complete records of the total amount of deforestation and forest degradation that is happening and the contribution that each sector makes to that total. This is wholly inadequate and needs a major overhaul to provide for accurate data on which to base management decisions. The Western Australian government conceded this in 2019 and improvement is a work in progress.

The Northern Jarrah Forest, including the areas that Alcoa and South32 now seek approval to clear, is habitat for threatened species including mainland quokkas, Carnaby's cockatoos, Baudin's cockatoos and Forest red-tailed black cockatoos. For every one of those species, habitat loss and fragmentation is a major contributor to their decline. Further, the Recovery Plans for each species refer specifically to threat from mining. There is no robust evidence that more habitat can be lost without significant adverse impacts on these threatened species. What remains of their existing habitat needs to be conserved if they are to survive. The Recovery Plans have not been effective in achieving this, not least because no funding is specifically allocated for implementing them.

Bauxite mining companies 'rehabilitate' their mine sites when mining is finished, but there are many important differences between intact forest and rehabilitated mine sites. Forest reduces carbon emissions, decreases temperature, reduces rainfall decline and provides fauna habitat - and intact forest significantly outperforms rehabilitated mine sites on all of those measures.

Given the extent of the pressure on the Northern Jarrah Forest, a strategic assessment of the cumulative effects on the region by the Environmental Protection Agency is merited to inform future management decisions. There are various mechanisms in the Environmental Protection Act 1986 that allow the Environmental Protection Agency to do this.

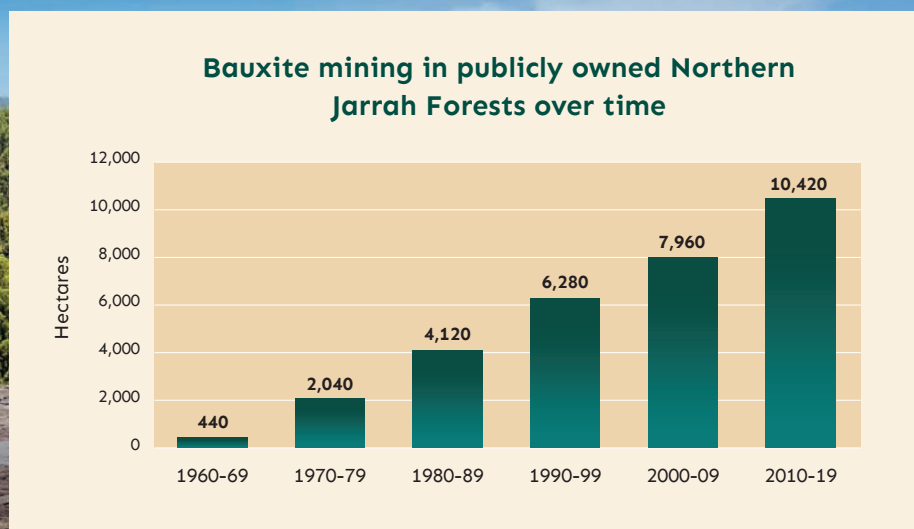


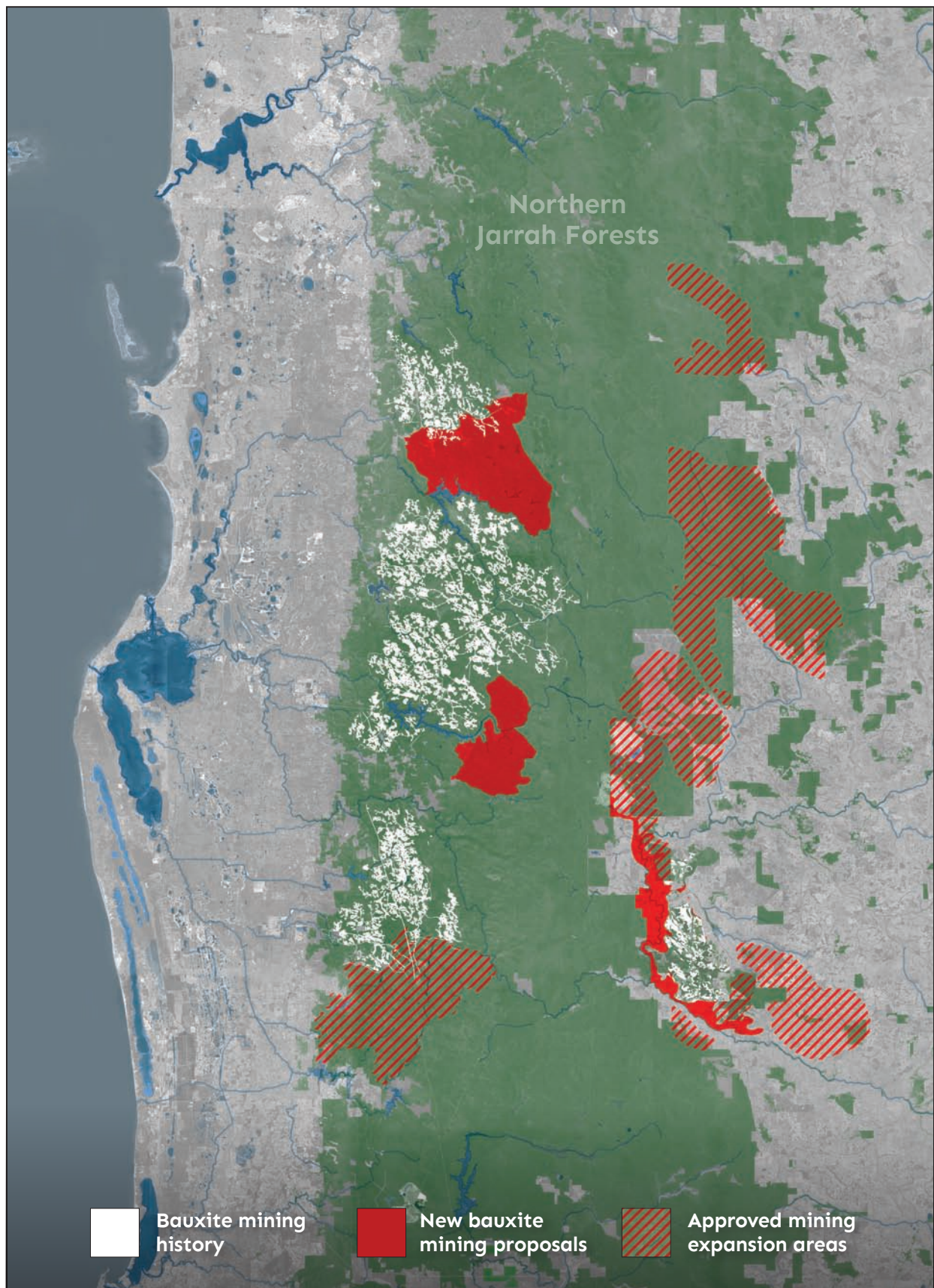
Public and Parliamentary scrutiny of the State Agreements between the Western Australian government and the bauxite mining companies is constrained because the agreements are not available in an up to date consolidated form except upon request to the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation. Following repeated questions in Parliament the McGowan government committed in June 2021 to making up to date consolidated versions of State Agreements publicly available, but has not yet done so.

This report makes five recommendations:

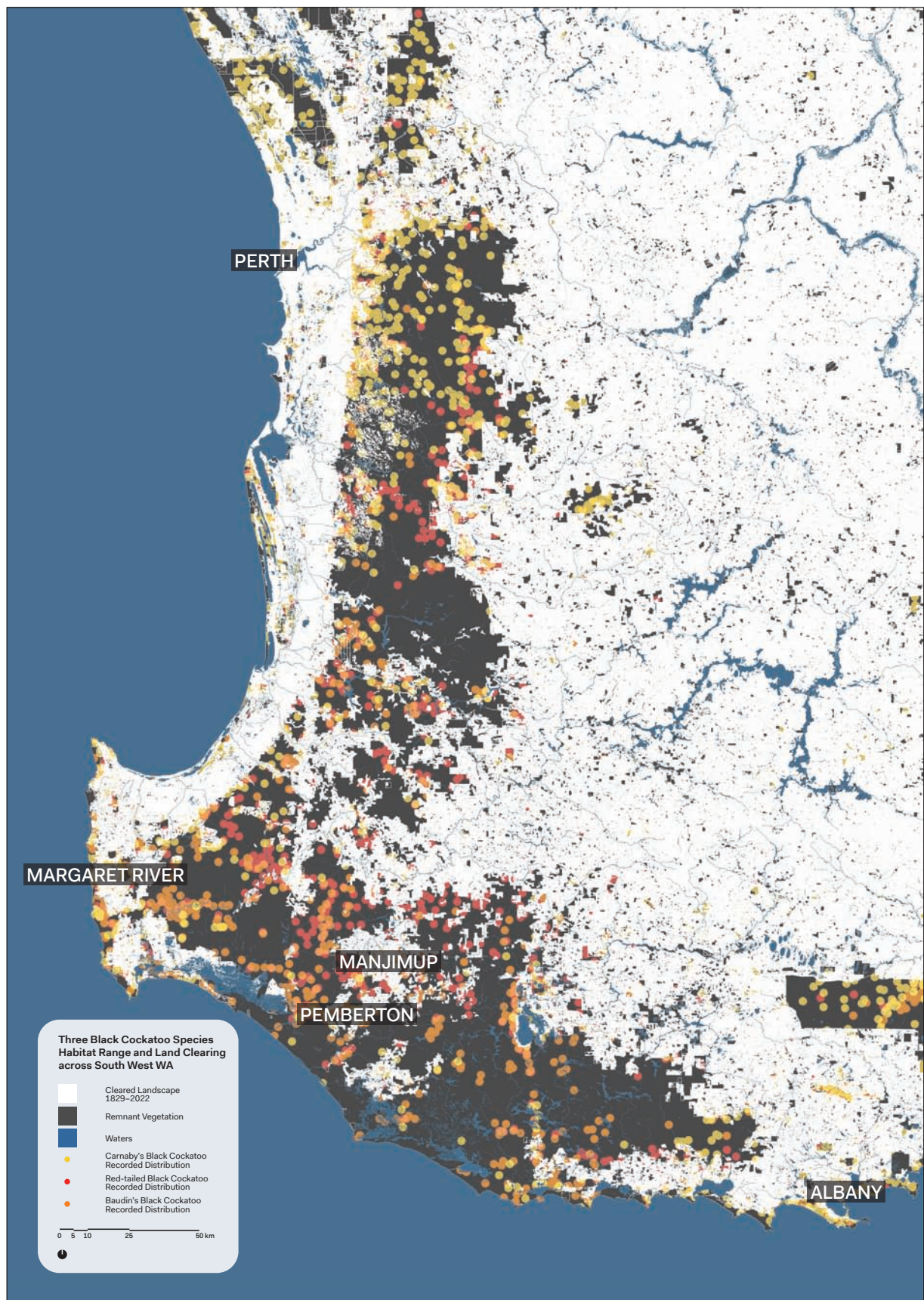
1. That no further clearing or fragmentation of native forest in the Northern Jarrah Forest for mining be authorised
2. That the Environmental Protection Agency undertake a strategic assessment of the potential cumulative impacts of past, current and proposed activities and developments (including but not limited to bauxite mining, logging and prescribed burning) on the Northern Jarrah Forest
3. That there be a WA government inquiry into:
 - a. The efficacy of current processes (including Recovery Plans and Habitat Protection Plans) in arresting the decline of threatened native forest species including mainland quokkas, Carnaby's cockatoo, Baudin's cockatoo and Forest red-tailed black cockatoo
 - b. The obstacles to implementing the recovery actions recommended by those processes
 - c. Whether there is a need for an emergency plan to arrest the decline of threatened native forest species including mainland quokkas, Carnaby's cockatoo, Baudin's cockatoo and Forest red-tailed black cockatoo
4. That the WA government create and maintain an up to date, publicly accessible central record of native vegetation and biodiversity data that shows and tracks its extent and condition across the State, including showing and tracking the proportion cleared in each bioregion by each sector
5. That the WA government immediately make up to date consolidated versions of all State Agreements publicly available.

Since bauxite mining began more than 30,000ha of Jarrah and Marri forests have been cleared and the rate is accelerating, with 11,290ha cleared between 2010 and 2020.





Historic and proposed mining by Alcoa and South32



Three black cockatoo species habitat range and land clearing across South West WA



RECOMMENDATIONS

WA Forest Alliance, the Wilderness Society and the Conservation Council of Western Australia together make five recommendations:

1	That no further clearing or fragmentation of native forest in the Northern Jarrah Forest for mining be authorised.
2	That the Environmental Protection Agency undertake a strategic assessment of the potential cumulative impacts of past, current and proposed activities and developments (including but not limited to bauxite mining, logging and prescribed burning) on the Northern Jarrah Forest.
3	That there be a WA government inquiry into: - The efficacy of current processes (including Recovery Plans and Habitat Protection Plans) in arresting the decline of threatened native forest species including mainland Quokkas, Carnaby's cockatoo, Baudin's cockatoo and Forest red-tailed black cockatoo. - The obstacles to implementing recovery actions recommended by those processes. - Whether there is a need for an emergency plan to arrest the decline of threatened native forest species including mainland Quokkas, Carnaby's cockatoos, Baudin's cockatoos and Forest red-tailed black cockatoos.
4	That the WA government create and maintain an up to date, publicly accessible central record of native vegetation and biodiversity data that shows and tracks its extent and condition across the State, including showing and tracking the proportion cleared in each bioregion by each sector.
5	That the WA government immediately make up to date consolidated versions of all State Agreements publicly available.





Dwellingup forest in the current proposed mining expansion area. *Photo: Jess Beckerling*



Willowdale bauxite mine, March 2022. *Photo: Jess Beckerling*