Range Assist

Matthew Fletcher
[redacted]

28 October 2025

[redacted]

By email:
[redacted]

Debesa – flora survey

Dear Graeme,

Following on from my email exchanges with [redacted] (Environmental Officer, Department of Water and Environmental Regulation), I'm sending you a summary outlining why I believe a flora survey is not required for the proposed clearing of 394 hectares on Debesa Station. If you wish, this summary can accompany your clearing application.

Background

- The area proposed for clearing is locally referred to as Pindan pasture (Ryan et al., 2013). It is described as tussock or hummock (spinifex) mixed grassland with an overstorey of acacias. Soils are generally deep sands, and this pasture type is distributed across the Dampier Peninsula, Fitzroy Valley, areas around and south of Broome, and small pockets around Halls Creek.
- According to Shepherd et al. (2002), the pre-European and then-current extent of Pindan pasture was 581,958 hectares. While the current extent may differ slightly, it is unlikely to have changed significantly due to minimal clearing in Pindan pastures.
- Part of the proposed clearing area has previously been considered by various agencies, including the Commissioner of Soil and Land Conservation, the Department of Conservation and Land Management, and the Department of Planning and Infrastructure between 1996 and 2004.
- In 1996, the Commissioner of Soil and Land Conservation approved the clearing of 60 hectares (refer to NOIC approval 1996). A further application for 100 hectares was submitted in 2003 and approved in 2004 (refer to NOIC approval 2004).
- In 2020, Matthew Fletcher (then with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's Rangeland Science team) visited Debesa Station with Kurt Finger to conduct plant identification and update the station's infrastructure map. They inadvertently visited the proposed clearing area and observed the same plant species reported in Bob McCartney's 2003 assessment. The ground layer consisted mainly of

ribbon grass (*Chrysopogon fallax*), annual sorghum (*Sorghum stipoideum*), and three-awns (*Aristida* spp.), with additional sightings of curly spinifex (*Triodia bitextura*). The mid-storey was dominated by Broome Pindan (*Acacia eriopoda*), and the upper storey included scattered bloodwood (*Corymbia greeniana*), Bauhinia (*Bauhinia cunninghamii*), Boab (*Adansonia gregorii*), and kurrajong (*Brachychiton* spp.).

Discussion

Pindan is an extensive pasture type in the Kimberley, covering approximately 581,958 hectares, and is not considered at risk of over-clearing. Its botanical composition has remained consistent over many years, with minimal change in local species. The only notable variation occurs after fire events, when annual grasses and forbs dominate for 1–2 years before spinifex re-establishes and suppresses these species over the following 2–3 years. The site then remains dominated by spinifex until the next fire.

Conclusion

Given that assessments of the proposed clearing area were completed in 1996 and 2003, and that Matthew Fletcher's 2020 visit confirmed the same species composition, it is reasonable to conclude that Pindan pastures are botanically stable except when affected by fire. The area has not changed significantly and is not expected to. Furthermore, the Kimberley retains a substantial extent of uncleared Pindan pasture, and the proposed clearing is unlikely to trigger any thresholds.

Therefore, I believe the flora survey component of the WA clearing application can rely on these past assessments and current observations to demonstrate the dominant plant species present—making a new flora survey unnecessary.

References

Ryan, K., Tierney, E., Novelly, P., & McCartney, R. (2013). *Pasture Condition Guide for the Kimberley*. Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development, Perth. Bulletin 4846.

Shepherd, D. P., Beeston, G. R., & Hopkins, A. J. M. (2002). *Native vegetation in Western Australia: Extent, type and status*. Department of Agriculture, Western Australia. Technical Report 249.

Regards,

Matthew Fletcher