



Clearing Permit Decision Report

1. Application details

1.1. Permit application details

Permit application No.: 3506/4

Permit type: Purpose Permit

1.2. Proponent details

Proponent's name: Hamersley Iron Pty Ltd

1.3. Property details

Local Government Area: Iron Ore (Hamersley Range) Agreement Act 1963, Mineral Lease 4SA (AML 70/4)

Colloquial name: Shire of Ashburton

Local Government Area: Silvergrass Project

1.4. Application

Clearing Area (ha)	No. Trees	Method of Clearing	For the purpose of:
9.6		Mechanical Removal	Mineral Exploration, hydrogeological investigations and fencing

1.5. Decision on application

Decision on Permit Application: Grant

Decision Date: 30 April 2020

2. Site Information

2.1. Existing environment and information

2.1.1. Description of the native vegetation under application

Vegetation Description The vegetation of the application area is broadly mapped as the following Beard vegetation associations:
18: Low woodland; mulga (*Acacia aneura*); and
175: Short bunch grassland - savannah/grass plain (Pilbara) (GIS Database).

The application area was surveyed by Pilbara Flora staff between 24 and 25 July 2008 (Pilbara Flora, 2009). The following vegetation types were identified within the application area:

Alluvial Plains Shrubland: Shrubland of *Acacia aneura* var. *aneura*, *Acacia citrinoviridis* and *Acacia bivenosa* over *Senna artemisioides* subsp. *oligophylla* and *Scaevola spinescens* over *Triodia epactia*, *Enneapogon polyphyllus* and *Aristida contorta*;

Self-mulching Clay Grassland: Grassland of *Polymeria* sp. Hamersley (M.E. Trudgen 11353), *Aristida latifolia* and *Dichanthium fecundum*;

Self-mulching Clay Themeda Grassland: Tussock grassland of *Themeda* sp. Hamersley Station (M.E. Trudgen 11431) and *Aristida latifolia* with occasional dense patches of *Polymeria* sp. Hamersley (M.E. Trudgen 11353) or *Eriachne benthamii*;

Drainage Line High Open Shrubland: High open shrubland of *Vachellia farnesiana* over *Dichanthium fecundum*, *Eriachne benthamii* and *Pimelea holroydii*;

Drainage Line Low Woodland: Low woodland of *Acacia aneura* var. *pilbarana* and *Corymbia hamersleyana* over *Hakea lorea* subsp. *lorea* over *Dichanthium fecundum*; and

Drainage Areas Open Shrubland: Open shrubland of *Vachellia farnesiana* over *Senna sericea* over *Polymeria* sp. Hamersley (M.E. Trudgen 11353) over *Astrebla lappacea* and *Chrysopogon fallax* (Pilbara Flora, 2009).

Clearing Description

Silvergrass Project.
Hamersley Iron Pty Ltd proposes to clear up to 9.6 hectares of native vegetation within a boundary of approximately 90 hectares, for the purpose of mineral exploration, hydrogeological investigations and fencing. The project is located approximately 72 kilometres north-west of Tom Price, in the Shire of Ashburton.

Vegetation Condition

Very Good: Vegetation structure altered; obvious signs of disturbance (Keighery, 1994).

To

Degraded: Structure severely disturbed; regeneration to good condition requires intensive management (Keighery, 1994).

Comment

The proposed clearing is for the purpose of undertaking a drilling program to define the eastern extent of the Silvergrass West deposit and to establish a hydrogeological monitoring bore (Hamersley Iron Pty Ltd, 2009).

The proposed works will comprise the following:

- Drill lines and access tracks approximately 9 kilometres x 4 metres;
- 118 drill pads and 236 sumps approximately 25 metres x 15 metres;
- 118 drill holes; and
- Fencing for cattle exclusion plots approximately 5 kilometres x 3 kilometres (Hamersley Iron Pty Ltd, 2009).

The application area is located within the *Themeda* Grasslands Threatened Ecological Community (TEC) (GIS Database). The vegetation condition was derived from a vegetation survey conducted by Pilbara Flora (2009).

Clearing Permit CPS 3506/1 was granted by the Department of Mines and Petroleum (now the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety) on 24 June 2010, subject to a 28 day appeals period. One appeal was received in relation to the conditions placed on the Permit.

On 15 October 2010, the Minister for Environment upheld the appeal, advising the removal of the offset condition from the permit and the addition of a permit condition focused on achieving the following outcomes:

1. Rehabilitation of the disturbed areas of *Themeda* Grasslands TEC to achieve comparable species composition and cover with adjacent undisturbed areas; and
2. Research and monitoring to inform best practice environmental management for the *Themeda* Grasslands TEC.

The amended permit CPS 3506/2 was granted on 25 November 2010, implementing the Minister's decision. Clearing Permit CPS 3506/2 authorised the clearing of 9.6 hectares of native vegetation within a boundary of approximately 90 hectares and was valid from 25 November 2010 to 31 March 2015.

CPS 3506/3 was granted on 12 February 2015, amending the permit to extend the duration in which clearing is authorised to 31 July 2020. The permit duration was also extended by a further five years to allow for rehabilitation activities to be completed.

On 3 March 2020, Hamersley Iron Pty Ltd applied to amend CPS 3506/3 to extend the period in which clearing is authorised to 31 July 2023. The permit duration has been extended by a further three years to allow for rehabilitation activities to be completed.

3. Assessment of application against Clearing Principles

Comments

The amendment application has been assessed against the clearing principles, planning instruments and other matters in accordance with s.51O of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*. Environmental information has been reviewed, and the assessment of the proposed clearing against the clearing principles remains consistent with the assessment contained in decision reports CPS 3506/2 and CPS 3506/3.

The amendment to extend the period in which clearing is authorised and the permit duration by three years is unlikely to result in any significant change to the environmental impacts of the proposed clearing. The size of the area approved to clear (9.6 hectares) and the permit boundaries remain unchanged.

Planning Instrument, Native Title, previous EPA decision or other matter.

Comments

There is one native title claim (WC1997/089) over the area under application (DPLH, 2020). This claim has been registered with the National Native Title Tribunal / determined by the Federal Court on behalf of the claimant group. However, the mining tenure has been granted in accordance with the future act regime of the *Native Title Act 1993* and the nature of the act (i.e. the proposed clearing activity) has been provided for in that process, therefore, the granting of a clearing permit is not a future act under the *Native Title Act 1993*.

There is one registered Aboriginal Site of Significance within the application area (ID 37670) (DPLH, 2020). It is the proponent's responsibility to comply with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* and ensure that no Aboriginal Sites of Significance are damaged through the clearing process.

It is the proponent's responsibility to liaise with the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, to determine whether a Works Approval, Water Licence, Bed and Banks Permit, or any other licences or approvals are required for the proposed works.

The amendment application was advertised on 30 March 2020 by the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety inviting submissions from the public. No submissions were received in relation to this application.

Methodology DPLH (2020)

4. References

- DPLH (2020) Aboriginal Heritage Inquiry System. Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage.
<http://maps.daa.wa.gov.au/AHIS/> (Accessed 14 April 2020).
- Hamersley Iron Pty Ltd (2009) Application for a Clearing Permit (purpose Permit) Mineral Exploration and Hydrogeological Investigations - Tenement ML4SA.
- Keighery, B.J. (1994) Bushland Plant Survey: A Guide to Plant Community Survey for the Community. Wildflower Society of WA (Inc). Nedlands, Western Australia.
- Pilbara Flora (2009) Flora and Vegetation Survey for Exploration Drilling Areas at Silvergrass and Supporting Documentation for a Native Vegetation Clearing Permit Application. Prepared for Rio Tinto Iron Ore. Unpublished Reported dated November 2008 (Revised December 2009).

5. Glossary

Acronyms:

BoM	Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Government
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Western Australia (now DPLH)
DAFWA	Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia (now DPIRD)
DBCA	Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Western Australia
DEC	Department of Environment and Conservation, Western Australia (now DBCA and DWER)
DoEE	Department of the Environment and Energy, Australian Government
DER	Department of Environment Regulation, Western Australia (now DWER)
DMIRS	Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, Western Australia
DMP	Department of Mines and Petroleum, Western Australia (now DMIRS)
DPIRD	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Western Australia
DPLH	Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, Western Australia
DRF	Declared Rare Flora
DoE	Department of the Environment, Australian Government (now DoEE)
DoW	Department of Water, Western Australia (now DWER)
DPaW	Department of Parks and Wildlife, Western Australia (now DBCA)
DSEWPaC	Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (now DoEE)
DWER	Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, Western Australia
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority, Western Australia
EP Act	<i>Environmental Protection Act 1986</i> , Western Australia
EPBC Act	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> (Federal Act)
GIS	Geographical Information System
ha	Hectare (10,000 square metres)
IBRA	Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources – commonly known as the World Conservation Union
PEC	Priority Ecological Community, Western Australia
RIWI Act	<i>Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914</i> , Western Australia
TEC	Threatened Ecological Community

Definitions:

{DBCA (2019) Conservation Codes for Western Australian Flora and Fauna. Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Western Australia}:-

T **Threatened species:**

Listed by order of the Minister as Threatened in the category of critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable under section 19(1), or is a rediscovered species to be regarded as threatened species under section 26(2) of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act).

Threatened fauna is that subset of 'Specially Protected Fauna' listed under schedules 1 to 3 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018* for Threatened Fauna.

Threatened flora is that subset of 'Rare Flora' listed under schedules 1 to 3 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Rare Flora) Notice 2018* for Threatened Flora.

The assessment of the conservation status of these species is based on their national extent and ranked according to their level of threat using IUCN Red List categories and criteria as detailed below.

CR **Critically endangered species**

Threatened species considered to be “*facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future, as determined in accordance with criteria set out in the ministerial guidelines*”.

Listed as critically endangered under section 19(1)(a) of the BC Act in accordance with the criteria set out in section 20 and the ministerial guidelines. Published under schedule 1 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018* for critically endangered fauna or the *Wildlife*

Conservation (Rare Flora) Notice 2018 for critically endangered flora.

EN Endangered species
Threatened species considered to be “*facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future, as determined in accordance with criteria set out in the ministerial guidelines*”.

Listed as endangered under section 19(1)(b) of the BC Act in accordance with the criteria set out in section 21 and the ministerial guidelines. Published under schedule 2 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018* for endangered fauna or the *Wildlife Conservation (Rare Flora) Notice 2018* for endangered flora.

VU Vulnerable species
Threatened species considered to be “*facing a high risk of extinction in the wild in the medium-term future, as determined in accordance with criteria set out in the ministerial guidelines*”.

Listed as vulnerable under section 19(1)(c) of the BC Act in accordance with the criteria set out in section 22 and the ministerial guidelines. Published under schedule 3 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018* for vulnerable fauna or the *Wildlife Conservation (Rare Flora) Notice 2018* for vulnerable flora.

Extinct Species:

EX Extinct species
Species where “*there is no reasonable doubt that the last member of the species has died*”, and listing is otherwise in accordance with the ministerial guidelines (section 24 of the BC Act).

Published as presumed extinct under schedule 4 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018* for extinct fauna or the *Wildlife Conservation (Rare Flora) Notice 2018* for extinct flora.

EW Extinct in the wild species
Species that “*is known only to survive in cultivation, in captivity or as a naturalised population well outside its past range; and it has not been recorded in its known habitat or expected habitat, at appropriate seasons, anywhere in its past range, despite surveys over a time frame appropriate to its life cycle and form*”, and listing is otherwise in accordance with the ministerial guidelines (section 25 of the BC Act).

Currently there are no threatened fauna or threatened flora species listed as extinct in the wild. If listing of a species as extinct in the wild occurs, then a schedule will be added to the applicable notice.

Specially protected species:

Listed by order of the Minister as specially protected under section 13(1) of the BC Act. Meeting one or more of the following categories: species of special conservation interest; migratory species; cetaceans; species subject to international agreement; or species otherwise in need of special protection.

Species that are listed as threatened species (critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable) or extinct species under the BC Act cannot also be listed as Specially Protected species.

MI Migratory species
Fauna that periodically or occasionally visit Australia or an external Territory or the exclusive economic zone; or the species is subject of an international agreement that relates to the protection of migratory species and that binds the Commonwealth; and listing is otherwise in accordance with the ministerial guidelines (section 15 of the BC Act).

Includes birds that are subject to an agreement between the government of Australia and the governments of Japan (JAMBA), China (CAMBA) and The Republic of Korea (ROKAMBA), and fauna subject to the *Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals* (Bonn Convention), an environmental treaty under the United Nations Environment Program. Migratory species listed under the BC Act are a subset of the migratory animals, that are known to visit Western Australia, protected under the international agreements or treaties, excluding species that are listed as Threatened species.

Published as migratory birds protected under an international agreement under schedule 5 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018*.

CD Species of special conservation interest (conservation dependent fauna)
Fauna of special conservation need being species dependent on ongoing conservation intervention to prevent it becoming eligible for listing as threatened, and listing is otherwise in accordance with the ministerial guidelines (section 14 of the BC Act).

Published as conservation dependent fauna under schedule 6 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018*.

OS Other specially protected species
Fauna otherwise in need of special protection to ensure their conservation, and listing is otherwise in accordance with the ministerial guidelines (section 18 of the BC Act).
Published as other specially protected fauna under schedule 7 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018*.

P Priority species:
Possibly threatened species that do not meet survey criteria, or are otherwise data deficient, are added to the Priority Fauna or Priority Flora Lists under Priorities 1, 2 or 3. These three categories are ranked in order of priority for survey and evaluation of conservation status so that consideration can be given to their declaration as threatened fauna or flora.
Species that are adequately known, are rare but not threatened, or meet criteria for near threatened, or that have been recently removed from the threatened species or other specially protected fauna lists for other than taxonomic reasons, are placed in Priority 4. These species require regular monitoring.
Assessment of Priority codes is based on the Western Australian distribution of the species, unless the distribution in WA is part of a contiguous population extending into adjacent States, as defined by the known spread of locations.

P1 Priority One - Poorly-known species
Species that are known from one or a few locations (generally five or less) which are potentially at risk. All occurrences are either: very small; or on lands not managed for conservation, e.g. agricultural or pastoral lands, urban areas, road and rail reserves, gravel reserves and active mineral leases; or otherwise under threat of habitat destruction or degradation. Species may be included if they are comparatively well known from one or more locations but do not meet adequacy of survey requirements and appear to be under immediate threat from known threatening processes. Such species are in urgent need of further survey.

P2 Priority Two - Poorly-known species
Species that are known from one or a few locations (generally five or less), some of which are on lands managed primarily for nature conservation, e.g. national parks, conservation parks, nature reserves and other lands with secure tenure being managed for conservation. Species may be included if they are comparatively well known from one or more locations but do not meet adequacy of survey requirements and appear to be under threat from known threatening processes. Such species are in urgent need of further survey.

P3 Priority Three - Poorly-known species
Species that are known from several locations, and the species does not appear to be under imminent threat, or from few but widespread locations with either large population size or significant remaining areas of apparently suitable habitat, much of it not under imminent threat. Species may be included if they are comparatively well known from several locations but do not meet adequacy of survey requirements and known threatening processes exist that could affect them. Such species are in need of further survey.

P4 Priority Four - Rare, Near Threatened and other species in need of monitoring
(a) Rare. Species that are considered to have been adequately surveyed, or for which sufficient knowledge is available, and that are considered not currently threatened or in need of special protection but could be if present circumstances change. These species are usually represented on conservation lands.
(b) Near Threatened. Species that are considered to have been adequately surveyed and that are close to qualifying for vulnerable but are not listed as Conservation Dependent.
(c) Species that have been removed from the list of threatened species during the past five years for reasons other than taxonomy.

Principles for clearing native vegetation:

- (a) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises a high level of biological diversity.
- (b) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of, a significant habitat for fauna indigenous to Western Australia.
- (c) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it includes, or is necessary for the continued existence of, rare flora.
- (d) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of a threatened ecological community.
- (e) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is significant as a remnant of native vegetation in an area that has been extensively cleared.

- (f) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is growing in, or in association with, an environment associated with a watercourse or wetland.
- (g) Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to cause appreciable land degradation.
- (h) Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to have an impact on the environmental values of any adjacent or nearby conservation area.
- (i) Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to cause deterioration in the quality of surface or underground water.
- (j) Native vegetation should not be cleared if clearing the vegetation is likely to cause, or exacerbate, the incidence or intensity of flooding.