

Deputation of Dr Ann Ward, on behalf of Nature Conservation Margaret River Region

Shire of Augusta Margaret River

Ordinary Council Meeting 22 April 2026

Agenda Item 11.1.1. WALGA CLIMATE CHANGE ADVOCACY POSITION

Good afternoon Shire President, Councillors, and members of the gallery.

My name is Ann Ward, and I am a medical practitioner and resident of Margaret River. I am presenting my deputation in my role as Chair of Nature Conservation Margaret River Region (**Nature Conservation**). We are a community-based organisation, dedicated to protecting the unique ecosystems and the biodiverse landscapes that define our region.

Nature Conservation strongly supports the Shire's position on Item 11.1.1. We commend the Council for its continued leadership in acknowledging the climate emergency and for prioritising the changes required to ensure a resilient future for our region.

You've no doubt heard of this region described as a 'biodiversity hotspot'. Sadly the consensus within the scientific community is clear: our corner of the world is also a global 'climate change hotspot.' In the Southwest, we are experiencing a rapid shift towards a hotter, drier climate. This is not just a future projection; it is a current reality. The data shows a consistent trend of rising temperatures and declining rainfall that is fundamentally altering our local ecosystems. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has made this prediction for the southwest with 'high confidence' under all future climate scenarios.ⁱ

To understand the urgency of Item 11.1.1, we really don't need to look very far. I'd like to present a few examples to remind us of the seriousness of climate change issues.

Firstly, I'd like to highlight the **declining flow** of Wooditjup Bilya (or Margaret River). This river is the lifeblood of our region, yet its flow is under severe stress. According to DWER (the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation), annual flow in the river decreased by a staggering 50% between 2001 and 2014, compared to the long-term historical average. Before 1985, the river flowed continuously year-round. Today, the flow is intermittent, and groundwater recharge - the river's 'savings account', cannot keep up with the drying climate.ⁱⁱ

Secondly, most of us will remember the 2023/24 **forest collapse**. Following the record-breaking dry season of 2023, we all witnessed an unprecedented vegetation die-off. Many of us have seen the brown, dead crowns of Jarrah, Marri, and Karri trees across the landscape. The Shire's own 2024 monitoring indicates this event was significantly more extreme than the 2011 episode of forest collapse,ⁱⁱⁱ and it is a devastating reminder of just how vulnerable our forests are to prolonged drought stress. The Bureau of Meteorology's data projects a consistent, long-term trend of declining rainfall for the Southwest, which will continue to bring years of landscape water deficit.^{iv} Our forests are not just scenery; they are critical scaffolding of our entire ecosystem. Further, we know that drier vegetation significantly increases **fire risk**, which is another threat we have all seen the results of.

Finally, I'd like to bring to your attention the impacts on our **wildlife**. As one of many examples, the iconic and endangered Western Ringtail Possums (Ngwayir) are living on the edge of their physiological tolerance. Research shows that these marsupials begin to suffer biological overheating once ambient temperatures reach 35°C and, if it continues for a few days, they die.^v

With climate change, our ‘new normal’ includes more frequent and intense heatwaves. Without shaded, healthy canopy cover and accessible water sources - both of which are threatened by the climate trends I’ve mentioned - this species could be one of the earliest victims of climate change.

The Shire's position on WALGA’s climate change policy is vital to help mitigate these impacts and find ways to adapt to the changes we cannot avoid. Conservation is no longer just about ‘keeping things as they are’; it is about active, urgent intervention to ensure that our environment and our wildlife can survive in a warmer, drier region.

On behalf of Nature Conservation, I urge the Council to endorse the recommendation for Item 11.1.1.

Thank you.

Dr Ann Ward
Chair, Nature Conservation Margaret River Region

ⁱ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2021) Sixth Assessment Report. Regional Fact Sheet, Australasia.

ⁱⁱ DWER (2015). Margaret River – Healthy Rivers Catchment Report.

ⁱⁱⁱ Shire of Augusta Margaret River (2024). 2023/24 Vegetation Die-Off Event Information Sheet.

^{iv} Bureau of Meteorology (2026). Australian Water Outlook – National Hydrological Projections. <https://awo.bom.gov.au>

^v Yin (2006). The metabolic and hygric physiology of Western Ringtail Possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*); DBCA. Western Ringtail Possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*) Recovery Plan.