

Australia's Faunal Extinction Crisis

A Joint Statement from Victorian Conservation Groups

5 August 2019

Australia's current environment laws do not adequately protect threatened species.

Since 2000 Australia's list of nationally threatened species and ecological communities has increased by more than 30% (from 1,483 to 1,947 - as at 31 July 2018). Current legislation is not designed to address the big drivers of biodiversity decline: the loss and degradation of habitat, altered fire regimes, invasive species and climate change.

The EPBC Act contains systemic weaknesses that are leading to poor outcomes for wildlife. Enforceable mechanisms to end threats to animals and their habitat are inadequate and underutilised. There are loopholes and exemptions, such as S. 38, which effectively exempts the logging industry from national environment laws. There is a lack of effective national oversight.

Existing protection mechanisms like recovery plans and critical habitat listings are out of date, not implemented and not funded, if they exist at all.

Where they do exist, Species Recovery Plans are systematically undermined: they need to be kept current and effectively implemented with adequate staffing and funding. Threatened species management should be based on the best available and most up-to-date science provided by experts and should be diligently applied according to this expert knowledge.

Timber harvesting needs to comply with Commonwealth environment laws in order to protect forest-dependent threatened species from going extinct. The Regional Forest Agreements should not be rolled over; they should be abandoned as archaic failures; they are redundant and outdated.



Victoria's faunal emblem, the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum. Photo Credit: Steve Kuitert

The National Reserve System is extremely important for nature conservation but our wildlife are inadequately protected outside the reserve system where they are most directly under threat from human activity. It needs to be expanded and connected so as to provide for continuous habitat for threatened species that will otherwise disappear as a result of localised extinction in isolated patches of disconnected habitats.

Most worryingly, we have so little data that we do not know the current status and trend of most Australian species, and monitoring of recovery actions is largely non-existent.

In the medium term, the combined groups strongly recommend a complete overhaul of Australia's national environment laws and the creation of strong and independent institutions to ensure the laws are implemented and environmental outcomes are significantly improved.

This needs to include a review of fire management. This review should look at the effectiveness or not, of planned burns and in what situations they are counterproductive. The review should also look at avoidable and unnecessary environmental damage caused by fire fighting.

There also needs to be substantial investment in feral animal research and control. The transition of native forest logging to plantations must be swiftly completed. This could be done by helping to establish or relocate jobs and by processing facilities in plantation 'hot spots'.

National leadership is necessary if native wildlife is to be effectively protected in Australia, including strong and enforceable national laws and increased funding for species recovery.

The Federal Government must significantly increase resources into recovery plans and threat abatement implementation, including establishing a Recovery Fund to facilitate creation and implementation of recovery plans.

The Australian Government must also commit to prompt, transparent and regular release of data on the conservation status and trends of threatened species, the state of and impacts upon their critical habitat, and outcome-focussed monitoring and reporting of species' conservation efforts and funding.

