

Greening Australia has a vision for '*healthy and productive landscapes where people and nature thrive*' and has been leading ecological restoration and land rehabilitation for over 35 years. A key focus of our work is to protect and restore Australia's unique and remarkable biodiversity. Our core strategy for achieving this is by restoring native vegetation at scale across Australia's cleared landscapes. We believe that together, in partnership with government, the private sector, science institutions and the community we can meet this challenge.

This submission provides Greening Australia's response to the Environment and Communications References Committee for inquiry into Australia's faunal extinction crisis.

We have addressed the items in the Terms of Reference of greatest relevance to Greening Australia:

- d. the adequacy of Commonwealth environment laws, including but not limited to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, in providing sufficient protections for threatened fauna and against key threatening processes;**
- e. the adequacy and effectiveness of protections for critical habitat for threatened fauna under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999;**

Greening Australia, along with many other environmental NGOs who are active in the Places You Love movement, supports a review of the effectiveness of the EPBC Act with a view to ensuring that Australia's threatened species and ecological communities have adequate protection. Currently, our threatened species, both fauna and flora, and threatened ecological communities are lacking adequate protection under the status quo. We are facing an extinction crisis in Australia, with more than 1,800 animals and plants currently at risk of being lost forever, and this number is growing rapidly. This is an unfolding tragedy in itself but if we stay on this current trajectory of biodiversity loss, our agricultural and economic base will be also be significantly undermined.

Any attempts to address the extinction crisis, needs to be focused on the key drivers of habitat loss, feral animals, climate change and invasive species. To properly address these threats, we need stronger environmental laws that drive a proactive approach to threatened species and ecological communities using an adaptive management framework that incorporates robust and appropriately resourced monitoring and evaluation.

An important outcome of this law reform should be to strengthen environmental offset processes so that they achieve clear conservation outcomes. We accept the [leading science](#) that current environmental offset processes have been ineffective. The internationally recognized open standards planning approach, such as the Pilbara Bioregion Conservation Action Plan, has demonstrable potential to address offset shortcomings by integrating offsets into strategic landscape plans for restoration. The strength of open standards planning is that it is applied across tenure and integrates non-government landholder management including that of traditional owners. To be effective, strategic planning should be framed through resilience thinking and adaptive management frameworks to address species loss in rapidly changing environments.

f. the adequacy of the management and extent of the National Reserve System, stewardship arrangements, covenants and connectivity through wildlife corridors in conserving threatened fauna.

Greening Australia has a particular interest in planning and creating wildlife corridor habitat to protect threatened species and arrest biodiversity decline. [Habitat loss through land use change is the number one driver of species extinction](#). It is estimated that 10% of land cleared in the southern states, or 9 million hectares, needs to be restored to meet regional biodiversity and native vegetation targets by strategically expanding, buffering and linking existing patches of native vegetation (to achieve >30% regional vegetation cover) along with the creation of new patches.

This restoration should be specifically designed and positioned to provide for the habitat needs of our threatened species in the places most needed. It will need to be targeted through the creation of corridors and 'stepping stones' between existing habitat in our National Reserve System and covenanted sites. The conservation estate can benefit from the buffering provided by restoration in privately managed agricultural landscapes facilitated by stewardship arrangements and incentivized through environmental market investment. Landscape scale corridors such as Gondwana Link and Habitat 141 provide a framework for habitat restoration at scale. Strategically rebuilding our ecological infrastructure in this manner will provide our threatened plants and animals with the best chance to survive and thrive in the face of increasing threats, including invasive species and climate change.

g. the use of traditional knowledge and management for threatened species recovery and other outcomes as well as opportunities to expand the use of traditional knowledge and management for conservation;

Greening Australia acknowledges the immense value of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and management in threatened species recovery and as such, we are committed to working with Traditional Owners for mutually shared values of conservation and caring for Country. Supporting the inter-generational transfer of TEK is an urgent issue to ensure that critical information is not lost forever, undermining our capacity to address faunal extinction and other land management issues. Our most successful conservation projects are undertaken as partnerships with Indigenous communities where TEK and management practices, such as fire management, are combined with contemporary science and innovation for greatest impact. We support the resourcing of Indigenous communities to manage Country and gain additional knowledge and skills in land management.

h. the adequacy of existing funding streams for implementing threatened species recovery plans and preventing threatened fauna loss in general;

To address Australia's faunal extinction crisis and arrest biodiversity decline more generally, a significant increase in investment will be required to deliver landscape scale restoration. An appropriate and effectively funded national conservation program is necessary, but government should only form one component of the funding solution. Together, in partnership with government, the private sector, philanthropists, science institutions and the community we can help curb the extinction crisis and make a measurable difference for our threatened species. Corporate, philanthropic and financial investment needs to play a significant role, but government will need to act as a cornerstone investor to leverage funding and more importantly, produce the legislation and policy levers to attract environmental investment funds such as corporate carbon funds, water bonds and impact investment funds.

Recovery planning more specifically, is presently lacking consistency with highly variable levels of success. The quality of recovery plans could be improved through a re-design to align plans and consolidate actions via an online modular system with a consistent lexicon and data presentation.

Further efficiencies could be made through reform of the Regional Landcare Partnerships program which is currently administered through 56 NRMs across the country. A preferable approach would be to focus on landscape scale planning, with larger management units, such as: Tasmania, southwest WA, Victoria, NSW and SA Great Barrier Reef Catchment, Northern Australia and Central Australia. Such a landscape approach would encourage a more strategic and ecologically appropriate approach to enhance connectivity and threatened species survival.

Greater funding through stronger partnerships and improved efficiency would significantly improve our effectiveness in addressing the extinction crisis, however, planning should consider prioritisation of actions and most effective use of resources.