



Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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Australia's faunal extinction crisis

It is sad that it has come to this, a senate enquiry. In about 200 years, modern Australians have overseen native flora and fauna driven to extinction, a process that has happened several times on Earth but not previously caused by one of the animals, one that prides itself on being the most intelligent. The senate is charged with reporting on a number of aspects of the crisis but we have time to address just a few of them.

Our comments follow the relevant criterion.

a the ongoing decline in the population and conservation status of Australia's nearly 500 threatened fauna species;

At the core of the problem is ignorance and greed. Surely education is urgently required. Teaching Australians that the interaction of all species, their preservation and conservation, is critical to our survival, the humans who currently show such disregard for other species on planet Earth.

b the wider ecological impact of faunal extinction;

The biggest cause of the extinctions is habitat loss so here is the first role for the Senate Committee – stop the loss of habitat and dramatically increase protected areas. Ten percent of the land area is too small to prevent further extinctions. We need to conserve more land in more bioregions, and ensure that these island refugia are adequately interconnected.

c the international and domestic obligations of the Commonwealth Government in conserving threatened fauna;

We pride ourselves on living by the rule of law. Laws are not working and must be tightened. The EPBC Act is powerless, a toothless law subverted by greedy large corporations, developers, councils and individuals. The laws must be strengthened and regulators established with real powers to ensure the law is followed.

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;

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;

One of the land managers' roles will be to minimise feral animals which are threatening many species. We have thoughtlessly introduced to Australia animals such as foxes, rabbits, deer and Indian Mynas. We have allowed our domestic animals (cats, horses, goats, pigs and camels) to become feral. Resources must be provided to enable land managers to minimise the threat caused by these introduced species. Scientific research is needed to develop better methods for the removal of these non-native animals from designated parks and reserves.

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;

Much of the traditional knowledge has been lost in the 200 years of land theft and agricultural development. However sufficient knowledge exists to adopt traditional methods of fire management and land use practices. Aboriginal managers must be recruited to teach other young aboriginal land managers and funding will be required for this.

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

Governments of all jurisdictions at the moment pay only lip service to funding for adequate land management and this needs to be urgently remedied. In the ACT half a dozen Rangers are expected to look after half the land area of the ACT in Namadgi National Park. Their tasks include looking after visitors and facilities, feral pest control, law enforcement, fire management, research and monitoring, education etc. Locally extinct fauna cannot return to the land unaided. They will not magically repopulate the land. More experts in native fauna biology will be needed to prepare the land, carry out the reintroductions and ensure their survival. This is a critical requirement. The science and scientists, the land managers must be well supported. They are currently grossly underfunded in all jurisdictions.

i the adequacy of existing monitoring practices in relation to the threatened fauna assessment and adaptive management responses;

Monitoring is essential for good management, the on-going methodical collection and analysis of scientific data is required. Again real resources must be dedicated for this task. Healthy populations of native fauna in healthy ecosystems are required in order to have the resilience to withstand the likely ravages of climate change.

j the adequacy of existing assessment processes for identifying threatened fauna conservation status;

In fact there are few assessment processes in place apart from research scientists undertaking research in protected areas funded through universities or grants from government or the private sector. There appears to be little support for scientific observations by those closest to the problem, the rangers in the parks and reserves.

k the adequacy of existing compliance mechanisms for enforcing Commonwealth environment law; and

Rangers out in the nature reserves do what they can but work an 8 hour daytime shift and are powerless confronted with armed pig hunters. The 2 police officers who monitor the bush areas of the ACT are totally inadequate for the size of the territory. Our suggestion is that more surveillance cameras be set up at known target areas for vandals and illegal 4WD vehicles and cyclists. Privacy should not be an issue where extensive and costly damage could be avoided or prosecuted.

Furthermore the states are not always fulfilling their obligations to properly regulate and protect reserves and parks. In fact they are free to pass legislation that contravenes these protections with no federal oversight.

1 any related matters.

And what will come of this inquiry? Rather than enquire and report, the Senate should have been required to determine how to urgently stop and reverse this crisis, by whatever means, and monitor the change. At the core of the problem is ignorance and greed so surely education is urgently required, teaching Australians that the interaction of all species, their preservation and conservation, is critical to our survival, the humans who currently show such disregard for other species on planet Earth

The listing above shows that yet another enquiry is not needed, the scientific data is published, 100 species threatened with extinction in our region, forty two fauna species already wiped out. In the ACT a start has been made in restoring some of the extinguished iconic species such as the Rock Wallaby and Bettong, two out of 100. Other species such as the Koala, Quoll, Magpie Goose, Dingo and Lace Monitor should be restored to their natural environments before it is too late.

To ensure that the changes the Senate will instigate actually bring about change the fauna will need to be monitored by on-going methodical collection and analysis of scientific data. Real resources must be dedicated for this task. Only by committing to this will the ravages caused by climate change be adequately assessed, a topic not even under discussion in this enquiry but likely to be the final straw after over 200 years of mismanagement.

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