

RE: Senate Committee Inquiry into 'The effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia

I am contributing this submission to this senate enquiry as I am deeply concerned about how the current legislative framework both at the State and Federal levels are failing threatened species and the places we Australians love.

Since European settlement, Australia's landscape has changed immeasurably and we have lost numerous plant and animal species. These species evolved over millions of years through the loss and survival of countless generations. The hardships of survival that each individual of these species experienced was all in vain as they were driven to extinction by our hand. Each one lost was a priceless part of Australia's natural wealth that can never be replaced.

Reflecting on the past 20 years, the trend toward extinction continues with the number of listed threatened fauna rising by 249 and the number of threatened plants by 417, to a total of almost 1700. These figures do not reflect the true number of threatened species as some aren't even listed yet so the totals are in fact much higher. As they stand currently, these figures make Australia the per capita leader in biodiversity decline. Yet this is a wealthy country with the 13th largest economy and the 6th largest per capita GDP. We rank second on the Human Development Index, a combined measure of income, education and health. Despite this, both Federal and State Governments repeatedly place the environment and in particular, threatened species, on the bottom of the three pillars of sustainability. This is not something we can be proud of nor does it place us in a higher position from which we can encourage change on a global scale.

The main pieces of legislation purporting to protect threatened species in my home state of Victoria is the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (FFG Act 1988) and Federally it is the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act 1999). However, when a species reaches a critically low population it isn't automatically listed and protected under either of these acts. To have a species listed it must be nominated but this process is slow and can take years. In the meantime, potentially threatening processes to that individual species can continue being approved until it finally is listed. This lack of timeliness and continued negative impacts can only further reduce population numbers. Even after listing, it may take a further year or two before a recovery plan is drafted (if one is written at all) and even then the recommendations outlined in this document may not be followed by any level of government nor given any appropriate funding for its management. Even if a threatened species is given some support through this process there is no monitoring or accountability. Numerous reports/audits by independent groups and Government bodies highlight the failings of our current system and argue for a need to tighten legislation and processes which effectively protect our threatened species. For examples see:

- report prepared for the Department of Environment Water Heritage and the Arts in 2010
- the Victorian Auditor General report in 2009

Any changes that weaken the EPBC Act 1999 by dissolving power from the Federal Government and hand more power to the states could be catastrophic. Looking at Victoria for example, without Federal intervention (using the EPBC Act), cattle would still be grazing incredibly sensitive alpine habitats doing untold damage to threatened species already suffering from historic grazing, fires, lower rainfall and higher temperatures throughout this region. The poor environmental record of the current State Government also includes the following policies that are potentially impacting on threatened species:

- removing restrictions for firewood collecting and increasing the area of land available
- continuing to authorise duck hunts in Victoria despite the proof threatened species are killed during the season
- logging of Barmah National Park
- committing to VicForest a 20 year contract for logging our Central Highlands and increasing the amount harvest despite the overwhelming evidence highlighting the negative impacts it has, particularly on already listed threatened species.
- Making redundant hundreds of staff from the Department of Sustainability and Environment. Many of whom worked on conservation programs and threatened species recovery.

One could argue that tighter environmental legislation and enhancing the Federal Governments powers may help intervene on some of these matters in the future.

In concluding I'd like to ask you to consider reflecting on the legal principle known as the 'Precautionary Principle'. The definition in environmental terms states "that a lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing a measure to prevent degradation of the environment where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage". This principle is included under the EPBC Act in section 391(2) in which it states the following; A Minister must consider precautionary principle in making decisions. However, all too often this seems to be ignored at the expense of Australia's flora and fauna. Compounding this is the trend toward anthropocentric changes to environmental policies which weaken our existing frameworks even more. This Senate enquiry is an important opportunity to intervene on this and prevent Australia from continuing to hold the title of the leader in biodiversity decline and extinctions.

Sincerely
Phil Rance

Please find attached a petition signed by people supporting the opinions held in this submission.

Australia is a place of incredible wealth and ecological richness. Every year we sink billions of dollars into managing threatened species and yet the gaps in effective risk management are growing. Evidence of this was detailed in the recent Auditor General's report on the state's agencies in charge of curbing ecological threats in Victoria - the report concluded that they are failing and this has massive implications. This mounting crisis is not simply confined to Victoria, the other states have similar problems so Commonwealth Senator Larissa Waters has successfully committed the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications to investigate. We are one of the wealthiest countries in the world and yet we monitor more species into extinction than any other country on earth. The 'extinction makers', both Labor and the Coalition, have little hope of securing the public's faith without an intelligent policy to address this looming crisis. If you believe environmental legislation and policy is failing and could be improved then sign onto this petition. It will then be attached to my submission and delivered to the committee for review. The more submissions the inquiry receives supporting the strengthening of our environmental laws, we can help to protect the places we love and the animals that dwell within them.

Name	Profession	Signature
KANE HAMMOUD	Mechanic	
NICOLE NOY	Environmental officer	
Ross Cooper	Environmental officer	
Ethan O'Connor	Environmental Worker	
Amy Monaghan	Environmental worker	
Michael Sypora	Bushcare team member	
Alan Noy	Director	
Claire Munro	Ops Manager	
BEN MITCHELL	Environmental worker	
Aminath Zaman	Bushcare crew member	
Jodie Portbury	Bushcare member	
Rhiannon Lainsbury	Bushcare member	
Clint Mackie	Environmental worker	

Name	Profession	Signature
Sui Hank	Environmental Maintenance Officer	
Annexes Tammes	" "	
Ka. May	" "	
Oliver Ungeheuer	Marketing Manager	
Thomas Weiss	Climate Protection Manager	
Nina Kienrich	Young biologist	