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## Re. Senate inquiry into the Australia's faunal extinction crisis.

Zoos Victoria is a zoo-based conservation organisation committed to the delivery of tangible conservation outcomes for wildlife populations, as supported by our 20 year strategic plan and our Wildlife and Community Conservation Master Plans. Consequently, we are focussed on the care of animals in our captive programs and the condition of the wild populations that they serve, and how we can foster community appreciation and action for the protection of wildlife.

### The problem.

Australia is marching species towards extinction at an alarming pace, almost faster than any other country in the world. There is more than 1,700 species and ecological communities known to be threatened and at risk of extinction across Australia, and sadly this list is growing. This, coupled with an overall reduction in threatened species funding allocated by the Australian Federal government to reverse this trend, indicates a gross lack of political will to focus attention and fund the recovery efforts that are needed to 1) prevent the extinction, 2) promote recovery and 3) maintain long-term protection of the species and their habitat across our great nation.

The IUCN Red List of endangered species, states that Australia has 86 animal species that are considered Critically Endangered, and therefore requiring urgent intervention. Sadly, not all species have Recovery Plans, many existing plans are vastly out of date (by decades in some instances) and most lack the budget required to turn around Australia's record of having the highest extinction rate of mammals worldwide. In the past decade, Australia has lost 2 known mammal species, the Christmas Island Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus murrayi*) in 2009, and Bramble Cay Melomys (*Melomys rubicola*) in 2016; extinctions that would have been preventable had there been adequate funding and functioning recovery processes in place.

ZV considers the EPBC Act insufficiently resourced and regulated to meet its charter. This was highlighted in the 2014 Government response to a similar inquiry in 2012 – where it was noted that the EPBC Act has many provisions to attend to threatened species conservation, but are not enacted, poorly understood or under-utilised. Six years on and this failing remains unchanged.

### Recommendations:

The declining trend of Australia's biodiversity is a major issue and requires an urgent assessment of Australia's ability to manage and protect threatened species. ZV makes the following recommendations with respect to halting and reversing Australia's faunal extinction crisis:

- Urgent reconsideration of the weakening of protections under the EPBC Act. Legislation needs to be stronger and further-reaching, rather than diminished.
- A commitment, with clear lines of accountability, to ensure that every threatened species has time bound action plans and recovery plans.
- Development of legislation compelling governments to fund recovery actions through a sustained and long-term model to improve the quality and effectiveness of recovery programs.
- Significant expansion of government funding allocation to threatened species recovery, coupled with increasing the capacity to monitor threatened and at risk species.





- Support of a Federal Government led and agreed framework for operation engagement at a State level where relevant, particularly for projects that span multiple state jurisdictions.
- Greater investment in the biological sciences to help in the conservation and protection of our threatened species and our understanding of activities which would serve species well in a changed future climate.
- Significant investment in social science interventions to support our communities in better understanding the loss of opportunity and other implications of declining biodiversity and less resilient ecosystems.
- Greater investment in securing indigenous knowledge and support of threatened species.
- Stronger leadership in mitigating the drivers of climate change that are progressively making the recovery of Australia's species, especially alpine species, unmanageable.
- Increase funding to support our National Reserve System and devise greater incentives to private landholders to contribute to landscape scale conservation.
- Invest in contemporary and holistic land management practices including wildlife corridors, particularly in our agricultural landscapes.
- Alignment of priorities between wildlife management agencies, land management agencies and zoos will result in more effective conservation of threatened species.
- An innovative and sophisticated effort to tackle the invasive species issues across the entire Australian landscape, particularly cats and foxes, which are identified as the most immediate and critical threat to many of our birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.
- Greater investment and more resources dedicated to upholding aligned legislation with more significant consequences for environmental destruction. For example, illegal logging/land clearing, unsustainable fishing and wildlife poaching.
- Applying conflict of interest principles to ensuring that organisations driving a key threatening process to a species are not also the legislator for protection of that species.
- Support an integrated approach to species conservation planning (such as the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group One Plan Approach) through the joint development of management strategies and conservation actions by all responsible parties, ensuring that recovery teams have interdisciplinary representatives (such as social and biological scientists, land managers, fundraisers, marketers etc. rather than panels primarily comprised of academics).
- Base conservation planning and action on sound scientific principles and data, including long-term monitoring of threatened species to allow timely interventions, and assessment of the success of recovery actions.
- Provide targets and a recovery vision with long-term objectives. For example, plans to secure species in the wild for at least the next 100 years.
- Ensuring that all data-deficient species are reviewed, with in built long-term monitoring to determine which species require immediate and future recovery action.
- Support rewilding initiatives, including the reintroduction of apex predators and species extinct from the landscape.
- Conduct a nationwide assessment of species that are likely to go extinct in the next 10 years due to declining population trends and key threats, and leverage the collective efforts of the Australian Zoo and Aquarium Association and its members to ensure that these species are secured within captive care, their husbandry can be determined and insurance populations founded before it is too late.
- Inbuilt and supported processes for gathering and collation of baseline data on health and disease in wildlife populations.
- A focus on, and use of, national guidelines on wildlife biosecurity, including mandatory use of wildlife disease risk assessments prior to translocation of wildlife species.
- Provide national leadership to implement a standardised use of scientifically sound, collaborative processes to govern the operation of Threatened Species Recovery teams that bring together people with diverse perspectives and knowledge to catalyse positive conservation change.





- Address the inherent taxa bias of species in the current Australian Threatened Species Strategy which provides zero acknowledgement and support to groups of animals such as amphibians, fish, reptiles and invertebrates.
- Appoint the Threatened Species Commissioner role as an independent statutory role reporting to parliament to remove any potential conflicts of interest and ensure the necessary autonomy and gravitas required to secure apolitical recommendations and interventions.

One of our ambitions is to see every state government committing publically, and being held accountable, to allowing no further extinctions on their watch. Each species lost depletes the health of our ecosystem, and the health and richness of our children's future.

Zoos Victoria look forward to working with relevant state and federal government agencies, in addition to our non-government partners, to secure a bright future for the incredible species that make this country the dynamic, vibrant and exciting landscape that it is.

We believe that the prevention of further extinctions in Australia is entirely achievable with appropriate political support and resourcing. Conversely, without time-critical interventions to secure species, further extinctions are inevitable.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Jenny Gray**

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Zoos Victoria

**Ms Rachel Lowry**

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