

Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications Inquiry into the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia

13 December 2012

Dear committee, I would like to add to the inquiry as a PhD Scholar who has recently submitted his PhD and been actively involved in conservation science since 2009, primarily through community action through the 'MusselWatchWA' (www.musselwatchwa.com) initiated by myself and SERCUL (www.sercul.org.au) as a 'citizen science' approach to collecting distribution data for a freshwater mussel of WA. More recently, I have been appointed as a member of the Western Australian Threatened Species Scientific Committee.

Through my studies and collaboration with colleagues and supervisors, I have come to understand many of the issues affecting species conservation.

I have very briefly outlined some of my many major concerns below.

As many of the other summitters have already outlined, Australia has an dreadfully poor record of biodiversity conservation.

Some of the issues I have witnessed first-hand, which I believe, in no particular order, to be hindering progress are listed below. I will avoid the use of names to protect identities.

Issues for consideration:

- Lack of communication and collaboration between government departments, academics, community, industry and interested parties
- Egotistical antagonism between public servants, academics, political party lines, members of the community (including Indigenous people), and others
- Misalignment of legislation (i.e. conflicting laws which cause friction between government departments, managers, researchers, community and others)
- Little or no action following species recovery planning
- Public ignorance or complacency, particularly for non-iconic species
- A majority of research investment eroded by administrative costs
- Lack of early intervention and long-term planning
- A 'brain drain' of talented young researchers, naturalists and others who leave conservation science/management to pursue often unrelated careers due to lack of funding or opportunities
- Lack of continuity of initiatives

- Economic development often takes precedence even if it means loss of habitat or species
- Adoption of IUCN Red List Guide Lines is a good start, but even then there are issues as stated in peer-reviewed literature
- Poorly-staffed conservation reserves (i.e. rangers which are required to manage areas much too large to be effective)
- Lack of protection of park managers from society's miscreants (drug and alcohol abusers and other criminals within park boundaries)
- Unregulated poaching
- A mis-guided push to reduce "green-tape"
- Online resources becoming inactive and effectively "lost in space" as governments, institutions and industries undergo restructuring
- The EPBC Act often referred to as a "Toothless Tiger"

Positive Feedback:

- The online resources, in their current form, relating to the EPBC Act are very informative and usually satisfactory, but it is essential they remain accessible perpetually
- ABRS funding is a good program, I wish there were more opportunities available, particularly to bridge the gap between postgraduate study, the thesis examination process and salaried professional employment
- Federally listed species hold more weight than state listings and offer the necessary checks and balances between Commonwealth and State Government
- Funding community action projects for on-ground works is a positive step forward, but longer-term funding and monitoring are needed to ensure success
- Passionate and driven individuals within government, academic, industrial and community departments and circles are the ones who make things happen, despite the setbacks arising from the bureaucratic machine
- Community education, on-ground action, united commitment, mitigation and monitoring are effective strategies which need to be enhanced through supportive and positive funding processes

What needs to be done?

- (1)** The Commonwealth Government should maintain its biodiversity conservation roles so state governments are held in accordance with the EPBC Act.
- (2)** Threatened species scientific committees should be open for expansion to include notable members of the community to be included in the decision-making process.
- (3)** Biodiversity funding should go where it is needed most...into threat mitigation, conservation biodiversity research, on-ground action, community education, monitoring and long-term commitment of conservation programs.
- (4)** Wasteful spending on unnecessary administrative costs need to be reduced (i.e. we need fewer generals and more troops on the ground).
- (5)** We require political will and bipartisan agreement for biodiversity conservation to be effective under the EPBC Act, which should also supersede state legislation.
- (6)** We need to communicate and collaborate more effectively and less competitively.
- (7)** Published experts should be included in recovery planning process and offered the opportunity for paid work in that regard.
- (8)** Funding needs to be made available to assess species and communities that have not been nominated
- (9)** Large-scale, long-term investment in biodiversity conservation is urgently needed. Limited three-year short-term investment and “plans” are helpful, but may not be enough to effectively conserve biodiversity. Consideration should be given to levy and GST systems for funding long-term biodiversity conservation.
- (10)** IUCN Red List Guide Line training and EPBC Act training programs should be incorporated to keep TSSC members up-to-date and well informed, particularly for newly appointed members.