

Submission to the Senate Enquiry - Nature Positive (Environment Protection Australia) Bill 2024 [Provisions] and related bills

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important legislation on behalf of our Friends group. Our group which volunteers in a local conservation reserve wholeheartedly supports any legislation that will strengthen our nature laws. They are currently failing and species are continually being added to the threatened species list. When we consider the unique nature of Australia's fauna and flora from a global perspective, this is unacceptable. It is our responsibility as a wealthy nation to protect our natural environment and the variety of habitats that support our fantastic native flora and fauna.

To this end and given this rare opportunity to make the bill fit for purpose we believe that the Environment Protection Authority should be overseen by a Board comprised of members with a level of experience and qualifications to enable them to set strategy and direction to the EPA as well as appoint its CEO.

It is the community who is on the ground and knows what is happening. They should not be ignored or their complaints dismissed out of hand. So when the community see harm being done to threatened species their complaints should be acted upon without seeking prior approval. Time is of the essence in most of these cases.

In the same way, the EPA should also respond in a timely manner to requests from the community to use the powerful Environmental Protection Orders in order to protect the environment when it is obvious that someone is breaking the law or not complying with approvals.

To date the EPBC Act has not protected our environment as it should. There are some changes that can be made now to strengthen the Act and make it more responsive to current conditions. These include:

Improving definitions within the Act so that proposals which will result in unacceptable impacts or which will destroy threatened species habitat are rejected outright and upfront.

Strengthen community rights under the Act with greater opportunities for a transparent consultation process.

The elephant in the room is climate change – it can no longer be ignored under the EPBC Act. For that reason the Act must include an explicit requirement to consider the harm to our climate caused by new fossil fuel projects when they undergo the approvals process.

We are living through the sixth great extinction and climate breakdown is happening now. The fact this bill is being considered is a step forward, but it needs improvement if we are to see any positive change to nature. I therefore urge you to consider and accept the points included in my submission.