



Sustainable Population Australia

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Inquiry into Australia's Extinction Crisis

Thank you for the opportunity to present a submission to the newly formed committee. Given our earlier submissions concentrated on the links between population growth and the destruction of biodiversity, the newly-formed Government's intention to once again ramp up immigration numbers makes this issue even more pressing.

To update the new committee members, previously we sent a substantive submission in September 2018, and a supplementary submission in August 2019. In the former we presented the results of national and international research which demonstrate the link between human population growth and extinctions.

In the latter we expressed our disappointment and even surprise at the content of the Committee's Interim Report because it selectively quoted the 2019 State of the Environment (SoE) Report, managing to shut its eyes to any of its observations directly linking population growth to extinctions. In doing so the Committee was able to construct a list of key drivers of faunal extinction which did not include population impacts.

The 2016 SoE Report stated that the key drivers of drivers of environmental change are population and economic activity. The 2019 SoE Report said the same. Yet the Committee somehow overlooked this commentary.

The 2021 '[World scientists warnings into action, local to global](#),' says of human population impacts: 'While humans constitute just 0.01% of total living biomass, the expansion of the human enterprise has eliminated 83% of wild animals and 50% of natural plant biomass. From a fraction of 1% ten millennia ago, humans now constitute 36%, and our domestic livestock another 60%, of the planet's much expanded mammalian biomass - compared to only 4% for all wild mammals combined.'

In February this year the 2021 NSW State of Environment report (SoE) was released, confirming that population growth is 'a significant driver of environmental impacts.' It revealed that land clearing has increased threefold over the past decade, woodlands and grasslands have deteriorated, and 62 per cent of vegetation is under pressure from fire. The number of species in NSW threatened with extinction has grown by 18 (to 1,043) in three years; bird populations are declining; freshwater fish are in a poor state; and 70 per cent of plants, animals and habitats are under stress from invasive animals, pests and weeds.

We are pleased the Committee has added the national State of the Environment 2021 report to its terms of reference given it reveals Australia's ecosystems are collapsing, and our unsustainable actions are threatening our very wellbeing. The SoE is explicit: population growth contributes to all the pressures on the environment, with mentions in all 12 chapters.

In the very first graphic in the SoE Overview is the statement 'Population, climate change and industry each put pressure on our environment. When combined, the threat increases and our environment is damaged, sometimes destroyed.'

In the Land chapter, it says: 'Our cities and towns are growing, and there is increasing demand for land to be used for built infrastructure to support population growth. As a result, the built environment is outcompeting other land uses, and leading to removal of land from agricultural production or clearing of natural areas. These changes in settlement patterns have also changed our bushfire exposure...'

In the Biodiversity chapter we read: 'Population growth contributes to all the pressures described in this report. Each person added to our population increases demand on natural resources to provide food, shelter and materials for living. Direct threats to biodiversity associated with human activity include those related to accommodating a growing population in cities and regional areas, with associated urban development and infrastructure for transport, power and services. Pressures also include disturbances associated with recreation and tourism, hunting, fishing and collecting, which can impact biodiversity in even the most remote areas of Australia.'

On the matter of urban expansion the report says land clearing 'is the main cause of biodiversity loss in Australia. Land clearing also exacerbates erosion and salinity, reduces water quality, increases the impact of drought and contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions'. The report notes 'New suburbs in Australia have significantly less cumulative areas of private gardens compared to established suburbs'. Reduced greenspace and tree canopy cover 'can result in significantly greater heat in these areas'. SPA notes that on a 46.6° degree day in Adelaide in January 2019, up to 3000 grey-headed flying foxes, listed as a vulnerable species, literally fell from trees in the city. The SoE report also observes that urban expansion adds pressure to areas that 'are often sensitive ecosystems that suffer from the impacts of building and infrastructure'.

To add an additional concrete example to those provided in our previous two submissions, I draw your attention to the [recent decision](#) by the new Minister for Environment and Water to approve a controversial Bunbury ring road bypass route which will destroy significant habitat of threatened species. The decision has been criticised by environmentalists and former

Greens leader Bob Brown. The impetus for this new road infrastructure is driven by population growth in Perth and the southwest region, as well as by the needs of WA's resources economy for freight and port facilities. The population of Greater Bunbury has doubled in the past 30 years. Planning documents indicate the ring road is designed to cater for a further doubling (or more) of Bunbury's population to 200,000, including the proposed new higher density city of Wanjui. As pointed out in our previous submissions, continual population growth causes unavoidable environmental deterioration despite the best intentions of those who imagine that such damage can be prevented with stronger laws or offset by protecting one habitat in exchange for destroying another.

The jury is no longer out on the issue of population impacts. In this, our third submission on this topic, we implore the Committee to follow the lead of thousands of scientists in acknowledging human population growth as a driver of faunal extinction and to recognise we cannot deal with this crisis unless we commence a path towards stabilising Australia's population numbers.

Yours sincerely



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