



TRUST FOR NATURE

10 October 2022

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Address 5/379 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000, Australia
Phone +61 (0)3 8631 5888
Freecall 1800 99 99 33 (Aus only)
Email trustfornature@tfn.org.au
Web www.trustfornature.org.au
ABN 60 292 993 543

Via aph website and cc: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Climate Trigger Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this inquiry.

About Trust for Nature

Trust for Nature is Victoria's dedicated private land conservation agency. Our goal is to protect and restore places in Victoria where wildlife and native plants can thrive, using statutory, in-perpetuity covenants pursuant to the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*. We do this for the benefit of future generations by working now with private landholders, volunteers, government agencies and others with similar vision.

Trust for Nature engages with many landholders who retain and enhance habitat for matters of national environmental significance (MNES). Our staff offer advice, support and resources to these landowners, mostly at no cost to landowners and sometimes coupled with management incentives. The Trust also has first-hand experience in approval processes through the EPBC Act, including both assisting landholders with queries in relation to EPBC Act impacts as well as supporting them in developing an offset arrangement (through the provision of first and third party biodiversity offsets).

In Victoria, more than 80% of the total extent of EPBC listed communities occur on private land, highlighting how important it is that our federal environmental laws provide adequate support to landholders to identify, manage and protect biodiversity on their land. Further, conservation covenant programs such as those delivered by Trust for Nature have been key for securing populations of key species and habitats, demonstrating their value as a tool for securing MNES in accordance with the EPBC Act.¹

On this basis we respond to this inquiry.

Climate trigger

The Trust welcomes the recommendation in the Samuel Review that climate change be a more visible consideration in the project assessment and approval process under the EPBC Act. However, the EPBC Act should go further to ensure that impacts of climate change on biodiversity are capable of being a

¹ See Department of Environment and Energy's Threatened Species Strategy, 2015.

triggering process under the Act, in accordance with international climate goals and national commitments.

This would ensure that climate change impacts are embedded in strategic planning (e.g. the regional plans referred to in the Samuel review, strategic assessments) and that high-emission projects, or projects that significantly reduce the land's bio-sequestration ability through land-clearing, have their impacts thoroughly assessed against national and international goals and commitments referred to above. This would further embed adaptation and greenhouse gas emissions reduction within the EPBC Act.

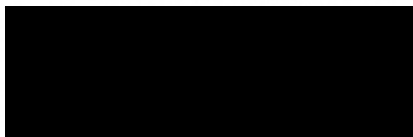
Other triggers

We note that we support other new triggers for MNES, in particular:

- a trigger to assess significant land-clearing proposals, and to prohibit unacceptable impacts on critical habitat and High Conservation Value Vegetation and Key Biodiversity Areas. This is particularly important given habitat loss has been recognised as the primary driver of species decline in Australia, with some 7.7 million hectares of endangered species habitat having been destroyed since the Act was established.²
- a trigger to guard the National Reserve System (NRS) of protected areas against significant impacts. Such a trigger would apply to NRS areas designated as strict nature reserves, wilderness areas and national parks, as well as private conservation covenanted lands.
- a trigger to identify and protect Ecosystems of National Importance, such as wetlands of national importance not covered by the Ramsar Convention, major river systems, Key Biodiversity Areas, climate refugia and High Conservation Value Vegetation. These areas would not need to be threatened, and listing would aim to prevent them becoming so.

Thank you for considering our submission. We would be happy to elaborate or discuss at any time.

Kind regards,



Cecilia Riebl
Policy Advisor, Trust for Nature

² <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/csp2.117>