

Submission to Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry into the Nature Repair Market Bill

Dear Committee members

My name is Bruce Harris. I live in Sydney. I have a life-long appreciation for the Australian natural environment and all its unique flora and fauna. It has been a great sadness of my life to watch as our natural environment has been degraded year after year, decade after decade by the impact of human activity.

I was one of the many Australians who voted for Labor at the 2022 federal election. One of my principal reasons for voting Labor was the hope that a Labor government would reverse the decade of environmental neglect that occurred under the previous Coalition government. So far, I have been encouraged by Labor's actions on the environment, including the promise to implement many of the recommendations in review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act by Professor Graeme Samuel.

I appreciate that the measures contained in the Nature Repair Market Bill could be an important step in reversing the steady decline of biodiversity on the Australian continent, including the country's shameful record of species extinction.

However, I am worried that the biodiversity certificates proposed by the Bill could be purchased by companies and developers and used to "offset" environmental destruction at development sites. Used in this way, biodiversity "offsets" do not add to the amount of nature being protected. To halt the decline in biodiversity, Australia needs to increase the amount of land under environmental protection, not trade off one parcel for another.

Biodiversity offset schemes can also have poor outcomes. A recent review of a New South Wales government environmental offsets scheme by the state's auditor general found that the scheme was failing to protect endangered species and ecosystems and was riddled with integrity and transparency concerns ⁽¹⁾.

I therefore call on the Committee to recommend that the Bill be amended to rule out allowing biodiversity certificates to be used as offsets for nature destruction.

While a Nature Repair Market could help reverse the decline of biodiversity in Australia, the government should be concentrating its efforts on implementing the recommendations in review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act by Professor Graeme Samuel. In particular, the government should expedite the establishment of an independent Environment Protection Agency, with sufficient powers and funding to oversee compliance with Australia's environmental laws.

I also call on the committee to recommend that the government provide direct assistance to landholders seeking to protect and restore biodiversity rather than relying on the market mechanism proposed in Nature Repair Market Bill.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Harris



1. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/aug/30/utterly-damning-review-finds-offsets-scheme-fails-to-protect-nsw-environment>