



27 June 2008

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Members

I write regarding the inquiry into the operation of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. I understand that the Committee is concerned at the continuing decline and extinction of a significant proportion of Australia's unique plants and animals, and the likelihood that accelerating climate change will exacerbate challenges faced by Australian species. I share these concerns.

Whilst I welcome an increasing focus on global warming and plans to address it, if action isn't taken in relation to conservating habitat and biodiversity, then a reduction in temperature and excessive carbon release will be a rather hollow achievement! We will have 'won' the global warming and carbon fight but will have lost even more species through lack of will and lack of action!

Australia has an appalling record of destroying habitat with a subsequent loss of plant and animal species. Some of this destruction has resulted from ignorance, much of it from greed. I wish to draw the Committee's attention to the ongoing loss of native vegetation and habitat for native species in South Australia, the state which has the smallest remaining area of native woodland and forest out of all the states. I use South Australia as an example, but the situation of habitat destruction is mirrored throughout Australia.

South Australia has been extensively cleared since European settlement, especially in areas such as the Yorke Peninsula, the Mid North, Eyre Peninsula, especially in the Far West and North, the Upper and Lower South-East and on Kangaroo Island. Prior to the 1980s, there were taxation incentives to help people clear and encourage them to clear and, indeed, the earlier leasehold arrangements encouraged and sometimes required people to clear. Thankfully, the enactment of legislation to protect native vegetation has provided incentives to keep native vegetation and has slowed down the rate of loss.

I am very concerned at the enormous level of destruction of native vegetation that has occurred in South Australia, not only within properties, but also on the roadside verges where the landholder had no authority to clear. Many of these areas are now barren with only a single crop (monoculture) and little or no remaining remnant vegetation.

In South Australia there is approximately 15 per cent of original native vegetation left in the Mount Lofty Ranges and 13 per cent remaining in the South-East. In the metropolitan area there is less than 4 per cent of the original native vegetation left. What little native

vegetation that is left in South Australia has been compromised by weeds and unwelcome intruders such as trail bike riders and others who have no regard for the environment.

The following figures from the Australian Greenhouse Office on the rate of clearing in parts of South Australia between 1970 and 1990 illustrate this dramatic loss of native vegetation:

- In the Eyre Peninsula and Yorke Peninsula areas, the rate of clearance during these decades was more than 10,000 hectares per year.
- In the eastern ranges (Flinders, Murray-Darling Depression), the rate of clearing was between 10, 000 and 100,000 hectares per year during 1970 to 1990.
- In the western area (the Great Victorian Desert and Nullarbor), the rate of clearance was more than 10,000 hectares per year.
- In the South-East (Mount Lofty Block, including Kangaroo Island, Naracoorte and the Coastal Plain) the rate of clearance was more than 10,000 hectares per year.

I am especially concerned about loss of native vegetation in relation to its importance as habitat for native and indigenous animals. South Australia, like much of the rest of Australia, has an appalling record of environmental vandalism.

Since the arrival of Europeans in South Australia, 23 mammals have become extinct, two birds have become extinct, and 26 plants have become extinct. We have not even studied some of those plants. We will never be able to study them in terms of whether they offer any medicinal or other benefit to humanity, let alone appreciate their intrinsic worth.

Over 1,000 species of all terrestrial plants and vertebrate animals in South Australia are threatened species. Some 63 per cent of the state's mammals and 22 per cent of the state's vascular plants are listed as threatened.

I ask that the Committee give particular attention to the operation of the EPBC Act in relation to the protection of critical habitats of threatened species and ecological communities in South Australia, and the rest of Australia, as well as to identify the potential for measures to improve prospects for protection and recovery. We need more national parks and continuing incentives for private landholders to keep remnant vegetation and generous taxation arrangements for companies and individuals who donate to Funds which seek to buy and keep remnant habitat.

Australians must learn to see themselves as being of Australia, not just in Australia and to see and value their unique flora and fauna from an ecological perspective. We need policies that assist Australians to see their natural heritage as valuable and worth keeping for present and future generations but we also need urgent action to protect what little is left of our natural heritage.

I thank the Committee in advance for its consideration of my comments.

Yours sincerely

Bob Such MP JP  
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