

# WENTWORTH GROUP

OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS



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

To The Secretary,

Please accept this letter and accompanying document, *Accounting for Nature*, as a submission to the Senate Inquiry into the operation of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The lack of an environmental accounting framework is a fundamental weakness of Australian environmental policy. It can not be fixed by simply re-structuring the delivery of existing programs. It can only be fixed by building a national system that is regionally based, for the purposes of monitoring, data collection, evaluation and reporting.

The Wentworth Group's *Accounting for Nature: A Model for Building the National Environmental Accounts of Australia* proposes a national environmental accounting framework, based on annual national, state/territory-wide and regional (catchment) scale reports. These reports would measure the health and change in condition of our major environmental assets and underpin long-term catchment management and land use planning decisions, locally and nationally.

Such a framework would provide consistent and comparable long term data from the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of a national network of key environmental sites. It would allow the Commonwealth to evaluate progress against its conservation goals and international treaty obligations and to assess the effectiveness of its investments in natural resource management – that is, to achieve some of the key objects of the EPBC Act.

I understand that a number of witnesses and submissions to the inquiry have raised concerns about the lack of an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework and recommend this paper to the committee as an effective means by which to address this gap.

A 21st century economy needs to account for nature – to reconcile with everyday living the link between future prosperity and functioning natural systems. We need to value the services that nature provides us – clean water, healthy soils, native vegetation - and we need to monitor the health of our natural world. We need to create the platform for managing our natural resources as effectively as our national economic accounting systems have underpinned the management of our economy. The Wentworth Group believes that National Environmental Accounts are fundamental to this future.

Yours sincerely

Peter Cosier