

# Minority report of Labor senators

*Labor Senators support the recommendations of the majority report; however we do not believe that they go far enough in ensuring the continued survival of Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas and the globally important biodiversity they contain.*

## Values and objectives of the conservation estate

Many of those who provided evidence to the Inquiry argued that conservation of biodiversity should be considered as a prime value of parks and protected areas. The majority report acknowledges the central value of conservation with a significant proportion of its content dedicated to the issue of conservation. As the effects of global warming continue to cause stress to the natural environment, legally protected parks and reserves will fulfil an even more important role in protecting Australia's unique biodiversity.

Furthermore, it is a widely-held view that parks and reserves are one of the most cost-effective ways of conserving biodiversity.

In this context, it is our belief that there should be a new national consensus that biodiversity conservation should be the number one priority both in the creation of new parks and in the management of existing ones – both terrestrial and marine.

## The Terrestrial Reserve System

The evidence suggests that regional delivery of NRM has reduced the priority of biodiversity conservation in NRM plans and investment strategies. The Australian Conservation Foundation reported<sup>1</sup> that from a “national NGO perspective, it has proved extremely difficult to input into regional NRM planning”, concluding that “it seems clear that the integration of biodiversity conservation into regional planning is largely inadequate at present”.

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, Northern Territory Government, in their submission to the Inquiry, wrote:

“Biodiversity conservation in the Northern Territory is primarily a Territory responsibility, but obligation and benefits extend beyond Territory borders.”

Regional NRM planning creates a situation where individual management plans can be disproportionately influenced by local pressure and interest groups, leading to a diminished emphasis on biodiversity conservation and other national priorities.

---

<sup>1</sup> Watts, Corey, Australian Conservation Foundation, *Getting on Track: Australia's Progress Towards Ecologically Sustainable Management of our Rural Landscapes*, October 2004.

There were also concerns raised about the need to refocus on the benefits of a national reserve system that extends beyond merely those who visit the areas. The importance of biodiversity conservation extends beyond the borders of an individual reserve: conservation is a national and international responsibility with many economic, scientific, cultural and aesthetic benefits for all of humankind.

The National Parks Association of Queensland Inc. in their submission to the Inquiry noted that:

There is growing pressure for “user-pays” approaches to fund parks and greater commercialisation of parks including placement of commercial, privately owned infrastructure on National Parks in Queensland. The "user pays" philosophy distorts management agency mission away from protection to one of fostering high visitor numbers.

Visitors are not the principal users of parks. The entire community benefits from the biodiversity protection and ecosystem services provided by parks whether they visit or not.

In moving to a focus on conservation as the major concern, it is important that we examine the way reserves are funded and managed. While tourism is an important and valuable concern, it should not override the main purpose of the national reserve system.

Throughout the country we were very impressed with the hard work and dedication displayed by those responsible for managing individual parks and reserves and we do not want to diminish the very important role performed by these individuals. However, we believe that the Commonwealth must take on a leadership role in the development and funding of NRM plans in order to ensure that there is a greater focus on biodiversity conservation as well as supporting the national reserve system for biodiversity conservation purposes.

## **Protecting the Marine Environment**

The majority report’s recommendations regarding the establishment of marine protected areas for Australia are inadequate given the significance of marine conservation in the context of the impact of global warming.

Consideration should be given as to whether the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA) is adequate in the face of the increasing threats of climate change and land-based run-off.

The report also notes evidence from Ms Petrachenko of the Department of Environment and Water Resources that additional Commonwealth funding of \$37.7million in 2006/07 “will enable us to reach our objective, which is to complete

the identification of marine protected areas in all Commonwealth waters, so around the EEZ, by 2012. That is in line with the international objective of having a complete network of MPAs.”

We call on the Commonwealth to consider providing funding and leadership so that the NRSMPA is established by 2012.

The majority report makes no recommendations with regards to problems with the process of establishing marine protected areas (MPAs). The committee heard evidence about the controversy surrounding the completion of the south-east MPA. WWF, in a recent policy paper entitled ‘Priorities for a living Australia’<sup>2</sup>, suggests that the south east MPA failed to deliver a “first class scientific outcomes and demonstrates that current processes are inadequate to ensure MPA declarations are based on the best science available”.

Consideration should be given to the WWF’s recommendation that an independent National Marine Parks Scientific Commission be established to guide future MPA planning process, so that the scientific evidence provides the basis of the establishment of all future MPAs.

There is an urgent need for a more consistent approach to consultation so that all parties can feel confident in the process. It is also important that this consultation and planning work quickly and fairly to resolve the issues. As Mr Paul Gamblin, the spokesperson for the Save Ningaloo Campaign said during the Perth hearings:

...One of the very interesting elements of that is that industry is often very keen for that to happen as well, because it provides them with more certainty. They may not have access to all of the areas that they may have wanted, but they will often trade that for certainty—that is what they tell us, for example. That goes for the community too: the feeling of certainty, knowing what the future might hold. Sitting around a table and trying to work that out is very, very important, and we do not do it enough.

There is a need to ensure that the process is fair, and that it balances all interests and views appropriately.

It is disappointing that the majority report makes very little mention of the potential large scale damage from climate change to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The April 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report starkly demonstrates the threat that climate change poses to the Reef. The Commonwealth Government should increase its efforts to build resilience and protect the Reef from the damage caused by climate change.

---

<sup>2</sup> Worldwide fund for Nature – Australia, *Priorities for a Living Australia: Federal Policy proposals to Tackle Dangerous Climate Change and Build Environmental Resilience*, February 2007.

The role of indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in marine protected areas has also been completely overlooked by the majority report, despite the significant expertise and responsibility indigenous Australians have in regard to our marine areas.

Consideration should be given to the continued development of the Indigenous Sea Ranger programme.

## **Threats to the Reserve System**

### ***Climate Change***

The major issue for park establishment and management is the impact of climate change on species and ecosystems located in the reserve system.

The majority report fails to adequately address the issue of climate change and its impact. Climate change poses the greatest risk to species and ecosystem survival as well as increasing the risk of other threats such as fires. For example the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report of 6 April 2007 indicates "that up to 30 per cent of plant and animal species so far assessed are likely to be at increased risk of extinction if increases of global temperature exceeds 1.5 – 2.5 deg. C"<sup>3</sup>. Increases of global temperature of at least 2 deg. C are more than likely by the end of the century. The Commonwealth Government must therefore make addressing the problems of climate change its number one priority.

The main strategy for tackling global warming must be a focus on the reduction of carbon emissions. In this light, the Howard Government's response is entirely inadequate and will do little to prevent great damage to the reserve system. The Commonwealth Government must do more to address the problem including: ratifying Kyoto, setting targets and establishing a carbon trading scheme.

The majority report identifies resilience and connectivity as adaptation measures for parks and their resident species and ecosystems. However the recommendation of "focusing on their connectivity" says nothing about how to achieve this goal.

We would add the following recommendations in response to this issue:

- That the Commonwealth, in consultation with the State and Territories, review 'National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan 2004 – 2007' with a view to developing a revised and more action-orientated program with clear performance measures and provide funding for completion of priority strategic actions;

---

<sup>3</sup> McCarthy, Michael, 'How the worst effect of climate change will be felt by the poorest'. *The Independent*, London, 7 April 2007.

- That the Commonwealth work with State and Territory Governments to initiate a research and development program on the impact of projected climate change on Australia's indigenous species and ecosystems and parks and reserves and identify appropriate adaptation measures;
- That the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments support appropriate off- reserve conservation measures;
- That the Commonwealth and States and Territory Governments provide sufficient funding to complete the national reserve system (NRS), with a particular focus of reserve system needs in the 15 National Biodiversity Hotspots announced by the Commonwealth Government in October 2003;
- That the Commonwealth take the lead in establishing wildlife corridors through both reserve and off-reserve measures to assist migrating species, including funding for detailed studies into the most appropriate strategies for the proposed Eastern Australian Great Escarpment Corridor; and
- That the Commonwealth Government takes on a leadership role in this issue to ensure a strong, national approach to national parks and reserve establishment and management that makes biodiversity conservation the main priority.

### ***Fire***

The majority report states that “fire is a natural part of the Australian landscape” with no mention of the well-established relationship between fires and global warming. It is clear that climate change poses one of the greatest threats to national parks and reserves, to the extent that it even increases the impact of other threats such as bushfires, making it even more urgent that we respond to the problem quickly and effectively.

The evidence presented to the Inquiry showed that there is still very vigorous debate concerning both the risks of bushfires and its use in protecting both the natural environment and areas inhabited by humans. This is a debate in which the Commonwealth Government must take on a leadership role in developing a national approach based on the best research and that properly balances all the risks and benefits.

### ***Feral Animals and Weeds***

Given the threat to national parks and reserves posed by feral animals and weeds, we were surprised that the majority report simply noted the Government's failure to respond to the recommendations of a previous Committee report: “Turning back the tide – the invasive species challenge”. The Howard Government's failure to respond to the recommendations contained in that report demonstrate its lack of concern for this problem.

We are also concerned that the Commonwealth's decision in 2006 not to continue funding the CRC for Australian Weeds Management has increased the threat to our national parks and reserves.

In light of the evidence presented to this Inquiry which demonstrates the threat posed to national parks and reserves, we call on the Commonwealth Government to address the recommendations as a matter of urgency.

Furthermore, we must develop an agreed national framework that can support a coordinated response to the control of feral animals without delay.

### **Threats to the marine reserve system**

The majority report has very little to say about the impact of agricultural run-off on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. It is very important that the Commonwealth take on a leadership role in finding the best way of reducing this impact.

### **Private conservation**

Australia's pastoral regions are among the most under-represented in the reserve system, but there is little discussion in the majority report about ways in which this problem may be addressed.

The concept of environmental stewardship, where government payments help to provide environmental services above a base level of duty of care, is an important idea that is currently being debated. This should be given serious examination as a way of increasing the role of private individuals and organisations in off-reserve conservation.

### **National Reserve System**

There is a great need for the Commonwealth to take on a much stronger leadership role in completing the national reserve system and undertaking off-reserve conservation.

The funding required by Recommendation 17 should work towards meeting the Gilligan Report's recommendations, in particular, the target of 80 per cent representation of regional ecosystems in the NRS by 2010-2015. A particular focus should be on reserve establishment and management requirements in the 15 National Biodiversity Hotspot areas.

While supporting the direction of the majority report, we cannot endorse its recommendations as being sufficient to address the problems raised throughout this inquiry. We call on the Commonwealth Government to show national leadership on

---

this issue, and ensure that better management systems are put in place to protect and expand Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

Particularly in the light of the new challenges we face due to climate change, it is essential that we ensure that our main priority is the conservation of Australia's biodiversity, and that we act quickly and effectively to reduce the impact of global warming on Australia's diverse and unique ecosystem.

**Senator Kate Lundy**  
**ALP, Australian Capital Territory**

**Senator Claire Moore**  
**ALP, Queensland**

**Senator Ruth Webber**  
**ALP, Western Australia**

**Senator Dana Wortley**  
**ALP, South Australia**

