



Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and
the Arts Committee

Submission from Australian Wildlife Conservancy

Summary

- Australia has the worst mammal extinction rate in the world. In addition, there are more than 1,500 species listed as threatened with extinction and more than 3,000 ecosystems that have been identified as “at risk”.
- The ‘health’ of our wildlife and ecosystems is continuing to deteriorate – eg, additional species are being added to the threatened species list; ecosystems are being lost.
- Until recently, the establishment and management of areas for conservation in Australia has been almost exclusively the responsibility of Government.
- It is now clear that the challenges we face are too great for Government alone.
- “Business as usual” will mean we lose many more species and ecosystems.
- **A new model for conservation is required – in particular, we need a new model for the establishment and management of areas for conservation which is based on a stronger role for private (non-profit) organizations and other stakeholders.** Under this model, private (non-profit) organizations would continue to work in partnership (not in competition) with Government agencies.

About Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC)

AWC's mission is the effective conservation of all Australian animal species and the habitats in which they live. AWC sanctuaries currently protect:

- more than 55% of all Australian mammal species; and
- more than 60% of all Australian bird species.

In 2006, AWC was honoured with the prestigious **Prime Minister's Environmentalist of the Year Award**, recognising our contribution to the conservation of Australia's threatened wildlife.

- AWC is helping to define a new model for conservation in Australia, under which private (non-profit) organizations establish and manage protected areas. Other relevant organizations include The Nature Conservancy, Bush Heritage and State-based organizations such as Trust for Nature (Victoria). Much of this work by private sector organizations is carried out in partnership with Governments (as well as other stakeholders).
- AWC is currently the largest of these organizations in terms of area managed for conservation – AWC currently owns and manages 14 properties covering 917,000 hectares. By December, this will be 15 properties covering 1,108,000 hectares (2.736 million acres)
- Some key statistics about AWC:
 - Over 55% of all Australian mammal species have been recorded on AWC properties.
 - Over 60% of all bird species have been recorded on AWC properties.
 - AWC sanctuaries protect more than 250 threatened plant and animal species and more than 90 threatened ecosystems.
 - Our operational budget is approximately \$5 million.
 - For each of the last three years, over 90% of our total expenditure (including capital) has been incurred on conservation programs. Less than 10% has been spent on administration and fundraising combined.
 - More than 80% of AWC's staff are based in the field, not in cities.
- A summary of AWC achievements includes:
 1. AWC sanctuaries protect a diversity of ecosystems including tropical savanna, rainforest, majestic wet eucalypt forests, open woodlands, semi-arid grasslands and mangrove lined lagoons.
 2. Brooklyn Wildlife Sanctuary, in north Queensland, is home to more species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians than any other parcel of private land in Australia. It provides refuge for more than 90 threatened species.

3. AWC has successfully implemented more than 35 translocations of rare and threatened mammal species. In 2002, AWC even began helping to restock national parks by translocating animals from an AWC sanctuary into nearby reserves.
4. Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary in the Kimberley is the largest non-government wildlife sanctuary in Australia. It is the site of a ground-breaking program to save the endangered Gouldian Finch.
5. AWC's world heritage listed Faure Island Wildlife Sanctuary is the third largest island in the world from which cats have been eradicated. Five of Australia's rarest mammals have now been reintroduced to Faure Island.
6. At Scotia Wildlife Sanctuary, AWC is establishing the largest feral predator-free area on mainland Australia and returning seven endangered mammal species to the wild as part of a project which Sir David Attenborough describes as "a vitally important project for Australia and the planet".
7. The creation of Paruna Wildlife Sanctuary by AWC has established a 2,000 ha, 14 km wildlife corridor linking two WA national parks and facilitating the reintroduction of a suite of regionally extinct species.
8. AWC staff have a proven track record of successful fire management including 10 years of effective management at Karakamia and Paruna in the forests of south-western Australia.
9. AWC's commitment to research means we have important, management-focused research projects being carried out on AWC sanctuaries including research on:
 - the Burrowing Bettong (Faure Island);
 - the Gouldian Finch and the effect of fire on tropical savannas (Mornington);
 - fire in wet sclerophyll forests (Mt Zero-Taravale); and
 - the ecology of various endangered mammals (Scotia)Our partners include CSIRO, National Parks agencies, Museums and industry.
10. AWC is a founding member of the Invasive Animals Co-operative Research Centre.
11. At Yookamurra Wildlife Sanctuary in South Australia, AWC is investing in the next generation by hosting a dedicated program of school visits. Other significant public education programs are in operation at Karakamia, Paruna and Mornington.

Acknowledging the assistance of Government

AWC would like to acknowledge the tremendous assistance and support it has received from Government agencies at the State and Federal level. The achievements identified above would not have been possible without the support of Government partners. This support from Government includes (but is not limited to):

- Significant funding from the Federal Government under the National Reserve System.
- Assistance in the form of dedicated staff resources on key projects – for example, the NSW NPWS has provided a staff member to assist with translocations at Scotia (approx 8 weeks per year).
- Technical advice and collaboration on joint projects – for example, the WA Department of Environment and Conservation works closely with AWC in relation to fire management and feral animal control.
- Provision of animals for translocation, particularly the WA Department of Conservation and Land Management, the South Australian Government and the Queensland Government.

A new model: enhancing the role of private (non-profit) organizations in the establishment and management of protected areas

- Government will always have an essential role to play in relation to the establishment and management of protected areas. In particular, Government will always own and manage more land than non-government organizations. In addition, Government has a range of responsibilities that flow from national and state legislation and Australia's international obligations. Overall, Government should do *more*, not less, to discharge its responsibilities.
- However, while recognizing the ongoing role of Government, it is submitted that a new model should be developed which promotes a greater role for private (non-profit) organizations. In other words, non-profit organizations should be encouraged to assume a relatively greater share of the overall task of establishing and managing protected areas. This increased role would continue to be carried out in partnership with Government agencies.
- There are several reasons why non-profit organizations should assume a more significant role. These include:
 - Non-profit organizations will mobilize significant private sector funding for conservation. eg, it is estimated that two organizations (Bush Heritage and AWC) will have raised more than \$20 million in private donations in 2005/06. Accordingly, increasing the role of non-government organizations will increase the level of resources available for conservation.

- Non-profit organizations can, in some cases, deliver on ground outcomes more effectively than Government agencies – eg, the two largest fox and cat free areas on mainland Australia are operated by non-government organizations (AWC and BHP), noting that in both cases assistance has been provided by Government agencies.
- There are some landowners who are happy to work in partnership with non-government organizations, but are less inclined to work in partnership with government conservation agencies.
- As indicated above, AWC works closely with Government in relation to many of its projects. As the strength of the private (non-profit) sector is enhanced, the opportunities for public-private partnership are likely to increase. Innovative new models can be developed which could, for example, involve public and private organizations sharing resources such as infrastructure and staff in relation to the management of adjacent protected areas.

Measures to facilitate private sector (non-profit) conservation

The following measures are critically important in promoting a greater role for private sector (non-profit) conservation:

- Reform of pastoral lease legislation to:
 - ensure that leases can be destocked, as appropriate; and
 - ensure that a conservation covenant can be placed on the title.
- Expansion of the Australian Government's National Reserve System (NRS) Program:
 - This is one of the most successful and effective programs operated by the Australian Government (relevant statistics will presumably be provided by the Department of Environment and Heritage).
 - The provision of funding from this program has helped leverage significant private sector funds.
 - A substantial increase is required in the funding for this program.
 - The program needs to be reformed to ensure it can recognize and support innovative new arrangements – for example, a payment to a landholder to place a covenant on a part of his or her land, where the execution of that covenant has been brokered by either Government or a non-government organization but where title to the land remains with the landholder.
- Tax reform:
 - Reform is required to ensure that the holder of a pastoral lease receives a tax deduction for the reduction in value of his or her lease if a covenant is placed on the lease land (or part of it). Currently, a tax deduction is available only in relation to the placement of a covenant on freehold land.