

ACF Additional Submission to the House of Representatives Climate Change, Environment and the Arts Committee Inquiry

4 May 2012

Australia's Biodiversity in a Changing Climate

Addressing Term of Reference: Mechanisms to enhance community engagement

THE PREMISE

In a democracy, the only way for the political system to support action that is timely and at a sufficient scale to address the problem is through leadership by decision makers, with the informed support of the community. That is, when the community and their political leaders understand the size and gravity of the problem, appropriate action to address the problem will follow. (Refer the challenge of the ozone hole and CFCs)

THE CHALLENGE

1.1 The biodiversity impacts of climate change and species decline are NOT easily seen or well understood by the mainstream community.

1.2 When the biodiversity impacts are easier to see and understand, it may be too late to stop or reverse the impact. (Refer to the recent evidence of large scale tree deaths in south west WA by the Centre of Excellence for Climate Change, Woodland and Forest health)

2.1 There are many resources and programs on biodiversity but often the accessibility of the biodiversity resources and programs for a mainstream audience is limited or overlooked. (Refer for example to the 2011 State of the Environment Report – includes extensive and valuable data but very hard for media and for a mainstream audience to find and use)

2.2 Without adequate investment to make existing resources more accessible (that help a mainstream audience understand the problem) or by not funding, or defunding, the community engagement and communications components of biodiversity programs (that would help communities experience and engage in the solutions) achieving the mainstream support needed to scale up the response to the magnitude of the problem will be difficult.

CONCLUSION

Without adequate attention to effective community engagement, technical reports with recommendations about what should be done will likely gather dust, until it is too late.

ACF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SUBMISSION WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES

ACF RECOMMENDATION 8

The Australian and State and Territory Governments resource and implement an effective national communication and community engagement plan commencing in 2012 aimed at significantly increasing community understanding of the threats to our biodiversity, the value of life support services provided by healthy ecosystems, and the goals and progress of environmental protection programs in protecting these values, including:

- The National Reserve System;
- Wildlife Corridors;
- Marine Protected Areas; and
- Other biodiversity conservation programs.

Prioritise the unfunded community engagement and communication components of the strategic plans associated with these programs. (See for example the NRS 2010-2030 plan)

ACF RECOMMENDATION 9

The Australian Government resource and lead a process to increase the understanding of the role and value of Australia's biodiversity and ecosystems by strengthening the integration of this into the **national school curriculum**, supported by increased resources and programs to enable teachers and students to experience and understand a range of ecosystems and the services they provide, including through participation in biodiversity monitoring and reporting programs.

Invest in making existing resources more accessible for schools and universities (teacher friendly, classroom ready), and by extension, for the broader community.

Identify gaps in resources and programs (particularly online tools) to improve understanding of biodiversity threats for a mainstream audience and invest in resources and programs to address those gaps.

ACF RECOMMENDATION 10

The Australian and State and Territory Governments increase investment in building **community capacity, knowledge and skills to engage in conservation planning**. This investment should be guided by clear objectives to improve the skills and knowledge of volunteers in programs to protect and restore habitats and ecosystems and to increase meaningful community participation in biodiversity conservation planning and management.

The objectives of the community capacity building programs must be linked to the implementation and management plans for National Reserve System and Indigenous Protected Areas, Wildlife Corridors, and other biodiversity conservation programs federal and state, including the implementation of the new Biodiversity Fund.