Submission 058
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House of Representatives Standing
Committee on
Climate Change, Environment and the Arts
PO Box 6021
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CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Sent by email : ccea.reps@aph.gov.au

To whom it may concern

Re: Inquiry into Australia's biodiversity in a changing climate

As the peak conservation body for South Australia, the Conservation Council of South Australia (Conservation Council SA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the **Inquiry into Australia's biodiversity in a changing climate.**

Conservation Council SA is an independent, non profit and strictly non party political organization representing over 50 of South Australia's environment and conservation organizations and their 60,000 supporters. Conservation Council SA has developed a comprehensive view of environment policy in "South Australia in a Changing Climate: A Blueprint for a Sustainable Future" (http://www.conservationsa.org.au/blueprint.html). This document sets out, at a strategic level, policy positions in six key environmental areas.

Climate change will have an impact on all aspects of biodiversity in Australia and in turn on the economic and social well being of our country. Our way of life and livelihoods depend on healthy functioning ecosystems, from the air we breathe to the food and water we consume, not to mention major industries that depend on healthy functioning resilient ecosystems. After centuries of environmental degradation in Australia we are left with a legacy of environmental problems that have a significant impact on our social and economic health.

Our fragmented and degraded natural environments now face a new threat, a rapidly changing climate. Without well funded conservation and restoration programs based on the best available science we stand to lose the foundation of our economic and social well being, a healthy environment.

The effects climate change will have on biodiversity are extensive and the Conservation Council SA has chosen not to go into detail on the science and consequences as this information is widely available. In this submission we set out

some of the key issues for biodiversity in a changing climate and some recommendations to mitigate future impacts by acting now.

The Conservation Council of SA is keen to continue to be a part of the consultation process and developing outcomes from the inquiry.

I would also be happy to meet with you or your representatives to discuss these matters in more detail.

Please contact me on Ph or email at if you have any questions or follow up in relation to this letter.

Yours sincerely

Tim Kelly

Chief Executive

Biodiversity in Australia

Australia is a Global biodiversity hotspot. It has almost 10% of the world's known species. It also has 10% of the world's threatened species.

About 92% of our vascular plants, 87% of our mammals, and 45% of our birds are endemic - that is, they are found no-where else in the world.

Human activity is causing the diversity of life on Earth to be lost at a greatly accelerated rate. In 2004 the IUCN calculated that the rate of loss had risen to 100-1,000 times the 'back ground' level of extinctions– a situation comparable to the five previous "mass extinctions" – the last of which was when the dinosaurs were wiped out about 65 million years ago. These losses are irreversible, impoverish us all and damage the life support systems we rely on every day.

Biological systems provide us with diverse and essential benefits. Vegetation protects water catchments from erosion, mitigates flooding and helps to regulate underground water tables. Wetland vegetation and forests act as water purifying systems. Biological diversity helps in the formation and maintenance of soil structure and fertility, thus protecting the productive capacity of soils for crops and pastures. Pest species are controlled by predatory species and competitors.

Components of ecosystems from bacteria to higher life forms are involved in the breakdown and absorption of wastes and pollutants such as sewage, garbage and oil spills. Biological communities can prevent landslides, safeguard coastlines and riverbanks, and prevent the degradation of coral reefs and fisheries due to siltation.

People enjoy a range of social, cultural and health benefits from biological diversity. Natural environments can reduce stress levels, improve mental health, enhance emotional development and a sense of belonging. The diversity of living forms inspires artists, poets, writers, architects and musicians. These living forms provide icons and symbols of cultural significance. Nature is of great spiritual value to many people, whether or not this is part of their religious beliefs. For example, Australia's biodiversity is of deep spiritual and cultural importance to Indigenous Australians.

Biological diversity is a feature of many areas valued for tourism and recreational purposes, which make substantial contributions to regional and national economies. Pursuits such as bird watching, nature photography, diving and snorkelling are directly dependent on biodiversity.

To address and reverse current biodiversity trends our society must recognise, understand and value biodiversity. Land managers, indigenous communities, local industries, government and the broader community value biodiversity in different ways. However, we must work together in a coordinated approach to conservation and management of biodiversity for outcomes to be effective and to ensure the continuation of these values for the wellbeing of future generations.

Recommendation 1: Invest in Biodiversity

Investing in biodiversity is essential to maintain ecosystem services and in turn provide dividends resource availability and to human health and wellbeing. Policies and regulations must ensure all stakeholders are accountable for their environmental footprint and role in implementing change for the future protection of our state's biodiversity. Ongoing monitoring must become standard practice to ensure that money and materials are accounted for in achieving biodiversity outcomes.

Management plans including actions that encourage natural ecosystem services such as biosequestration (through which plants absorb atmospheric carbon dioxide) are important. This may include maintaining original native ecosystem zones, establishing tree-planting programs or carbon sequestration forest sinks, increasing energy efficiencies or increasing renewable energy generation. Restoration of degraded riparian and wetland habitats should be seen as investments in a healthy future.

1.1 : Substantially increase investment in biodiversity and ecosystem protection, restoration and management.

Conservation Council SA believes that the Australian Government should substantially increase investment in better biodiversity management. The Boobook Declaration signatories, of which there are more than 80 groups, call for an investment of at least $9 billion over three years. They also call for the Government to establish an independent widely consultative process into future funding and stewardship of Australia's terrestrial, aquatic and marine biodiversity.

This investment will fund on-ground work, stewardship payments, water buy-back, protected area extension and management, research, education and training.

Increased investment will not only benefit biodiversity; it will help rejuvenate communities, economies and employment, mainly outside capital cities, and especially in remote Australia.

A wide-ranging national inquiry should establish the real level of need for biodiversity investment and the environmental, social and strategic benefits of meeting it.

1.2: Increase the size of the Biodiversity Fund

The recently announced Biodiversity Fund is a mechanism to secure a win-win scenario under which biodiversity is better conserved and carbon storage enhanced. We congratulate the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee on this new initiative, and hope it is the beginning of bigger things to come.

Although at this stage section 9.4 (Biodiversity Fund) of *Securing a Clean Energy Future* still focuses on adaption and does not yet adequately recognise the mitigation potential of biodiversity, we believe the Fund will be an important step in demonstrating how important this mechanism is as a mitigation tool.

The amount of revenue from Australia's carbon price scheme invested in the Biodiversity Fund should be substantially increased. Although a transformational first step, $157 million per annum will not be sufficient to address the biodiversity crisis.

Increased investment in the Fund will help tackle climate change and its impacts by reducing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and increasing the resilience of Australia's biodiverse natural environment so it can sequester carbon in the long term.

Projects on all ecosystems should qualify (including aquatic and marine).

Existing Commonwealth biodiversity funding levels should be maintained alongside the new Fund.

1.3 Restore and increase the capacity for publicly funded biodiversity research, auditing, monitoring, accounting and communication

The abolition of Land and Water Australia in June 2009, left a large hole in Australia's capacity for research to underpin sustainable land and water management. This loss compounds the research and auditing deficits identified in the preparation of the 2006 State of the Environment Report, including the lack of robust national trend data for biodiversity or marine and freshwater biota.

Australia urgently needs to establish a long-term monitoring and auditing framework for biodiversity across the continent to assess the impacts of climate change and other drivers of terrestrial, freshwater and marine biodiversity loss. Australia needs to support the sustainable management and use of our natural resources through investment in scientific research, Indigenous knowledge and education.

Information to guide biodiversity conservation must be expanded, improved an made accessible to all stakeholders. Mechanisms to share, access and correctly apply data and information held across all levels of government, Aboriginal communities, non-government organisations and the wider community need to be enhanced and where appropriate, formalised.

An expanded Land, Water and Biodiversity authority should be based on the model pioneered by Land and Water Australia, a core agency investing in and brokering research. Partnerships and formal alliances with research organisations in universities, national scientific organisations such as CSIRO, and others with capacity to undertake and implement research should underpin the work of such an authority.

Recommendation 2: Biodiversity must be the key driver of decision-making

Biodiversity is our life support system, our ability to survive on this planet is dependent on the health of the environment. We need to recognise our dependence and impact on biodiversity and reflect this in our decision making processes.

2.1 Integrated decision-making

Integrated decision making across projects, programs, planning, policy, legislation and monitoring and evaluation should be supported by greater investment in a series of informal and formal links, referrals, cross-government agreements and delivery strategies, and partnerships.

2.2 Stronger protection for biodiversity under the EPBC Act

Biodiversity must be the key driver of decision-making under the Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999, the primary piece of federal legislation dealing with nature conservation. The full suite of instruments within the Act must be used to effectively address root causes of biodiversity decline and provide maximum outcomes for species protection and recovery. Investment must be made to foster effective community engagement and partnerships for more cost effective delivery of the Act. It is essential that we move to protect what remains of our natural environment.

Put simply, the EPBC Act must be reformed in a way that makes it a more effective instrument to protect and restore environment and ecosystems in the context of growing climate change risks.

2.3 Develop biodiversity education and training programs

Environmental education both within and outside the formal education sector provides unique opportunities to connect the public to the importance and value of biodiversity and its delivery should be further supported and strengthened. Opportunities to learn about sustainable lifestyles and landscapes through participation in local biodiversity conservation initiatives should be promoted.

Stronger partnerships should be developed between educators, scientists, business, policy makers and practitioners.

We need to develop our biodiversity education and training programs so that all sectors of the Australian community and business have the knowledge to understand the magnitude of current threats to our biodiversity and the skills to take action to conserve our biodiversity and ecosystems. This is essential to transforming our nation to a healthy, sustainable society and economy.

The Australian Government should seize the opportunity presented by the International Decade of Biodiversity to launch a community-wide program to upgrade ecological literacy, and improve skills in biodiversity management. From schools to work to home, protecting biodiversity is everyone's responsibility.

A significant objective of this work should be to make biodiversity a core driver of decision-making in every sphere of human life.

Recommendation 3: Establish a suite of indicators for evaluating biodiversity resilience

Australia needs a suite of indicators for evaluating biodiversity resilience, with sound baseline data and long-term ecological monitoring in place to effectively evaluate trends and progress against management efforts. Increased research and development is required in the following areas as a matter of urgency:

- increasing understanding of biodiversity baselines, effective indicators and ecosystem services
- comprehensive baseline information relating to the extent and condition of biodiversity, ecological communities and species
- defining effective biodiversity management, the impacts of threats such as pests, plantation forestry and fire, and designing integrated threat abatement techniques including revegetation and large scale restoration and management techniques
- fire management based on sound ecological guidelines with clear links between reserve and district fire planning mechanisms
- supporting and/or establishing long-term ecological monitoring to identify changes over time.

Recommendation 4: Appointments the Land Sector Carbon and Biodiversity Advisory Board

The composition of the Advisory Board should be made up of members with expertise in threatened species conservation, adaptation science, and the climate change mitigation potential of ecosystems, to ensure that funding priorities are based on the best available science.

Funding priorities should be determined by a transparent process, made publically available, and provide clear directions to potential participants. Some funding should be set aside for monitoring progress and ensuring funds are well targeted. Regular review of the implementation of the Fund should also be made public.

Recommendation 5: Protected Areas

Biodiversity outcomes potentially provided through the reserve system for park assets, the broader landscape and carbon storage should be optimised.

- Legislative protection for biodiversity within all classifications of reserves must be strengthened.
- Strategic acquisition should be undertaken to meet objectives for a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system, including a minimal 30% representative protection that is resilient to climate change.
- Greater investment is required in management in all reserves to maintain, protect and restore biodiversity assets both in reserves and across the wider landscape.

- Impacts of mining exploration and production both in and adjacent to reserves must be minimised, with certain mining practices such as long-wall mining being discontinued unless absolute safeguards can be put in place.
- Further opportunities to manage reserves under cooperative management arrangements with Aboriginal communities must be sought.
- The community must be effectively engaged to promote education and ensure sustainable use.
- The Classification Review for Protected Areas must be completed in consultation with the community and implemented.
- The potential for aquatic protected areas should be investigated, to ensure that state reserve systems adequately cater for freshwater biodiversity.
- Ensure unallocated Crown Land is managed as an asset and contributes to broader biodiversity landscape outcomes.