

To the members of the Senate ECITA Committee

I wish to support the message to you from John Hibberd, Convenor of the South East Region Conservation Alliance regarding the above proposed amendments to the Environment and Heritage legislation.

If there are remaining problems in respect to the listing and processing of nominations for protection of threatened and endangered species in a timely manner they should be dealt with in practical terms, not by introducing new elements of arbitrary ministerial discretion that are totally at variance with the amendments' stated aims (many times repeated) of transparency and protection for the environment.

While seeking to reduce costs and time for industry is an important goal, it should not be, and does not need to be, at the expense of the protection of our unique Australian plant and animal species. This is all the more important at a time when many species and their ecological communities are coming under increasing stress from climate change, and indeed more immediately from extended drought.

In the region where I live there is an unhappy history of plant and animal species being driven to near extinction as a result of past ignorance and ill-conceived industry practices that have propped up what are now dying industries. The result, as elsewhere in Australia, has been considerable damage to ecological communities and their soils and water systems in an environment that looks beautiful but is in fact unhealthy in a number of respects. There are strong and widespread community views across the political spectrum that all levels of government need to take far more heed of the lessons of past mistakes and community concerns about the outcomes. Halting further damage and looking to reverse it, and the processes by which this can be achieved, are therefore of vital concern to us. The amendments you are considering can only weaken current processes, rather than strengthen environmental protection.

To downgrade protective provisions under the legislation is all the more foolish and short-sighted when we consider the significant and growing importance that environmental tourism has for our nation's economic well-being, and that genetic research can now open up opportunities for new Australian industries based on the unique biological inheritance of this country. Let's not throw these opportunities away.

I strongly urge your Committee and the Government to reject the amendments currently being reviewed.

Heather Kenway