

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's Faunal Extinction Crisis.



BirdLife Australia, Northern Queensland Branch

Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications,

Addendum: Our Organisation made an original submission on the 9th September, 2018. All the points made in that submission remain but we wish to make a brief addendum to our submission to add further evidence in support of our recommendations.

Terms of Reference (e): [adequacy of protections for critical habitat]

The risk to biodiversity from climate change has become even more clear and in response to that the Wet Tropics Management Authority has released an alarming statement about the threats to fauna within that World Heritage Area. Following receipt of additional data from Professor Steve Williams, the Board released a statement of concern and a 10 point climate plan.

“Concerning new evidence has shown an accelerating decline in the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area’s unique rainforest animals as a result of climate change. The Board of the Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Board) has now become aware that, following the hottest summer ever recorded, some of the key species for which the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area was listed are at imminent risk of extinction.” Wet Tropics Board, 30th April, 2019.

Many of the species at risk are birds that are endemic to the wet tropics, and our members urge the Senate Committee to consider these grave concerns and act to better protect the species. While one clear concern relates to high altitude specialists such as the Tooth-billed Bowerbird, there are many other species of concern. In addition, the effects of climate change may render existing connectivity programs less effective and we could see further increases in habitat fragmentation and consequent threats to species survival.

BirdLife NQ urges the Inquiry to make clear the likely consequences of climate change on the survival of our endemic species of birds across Australia, but especially within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, and to develop a response to ensure survival of these astonishing representatives of our natural heritage.

Terms of Reference (i). [adequacy of monitoring]

A second additional concern has been raised as a result of the Queensland Audit Office review of how threatened species are managed in the State of Queensland. This report was released on the 13th November, 2018 and provides a shocking indictment of failure on the part of the Queensland Government to undertake appropriate actions in response to threatened species. **BirdLife NQ** commends this report to the Inquiry as it shows insights about how little is achieved and how much more can be accomplished in the State of Queensland. It also has many lessons for the Commonwealth. The report noted:

“The department has no strategy or framework for conserving or managing threatened species. This is despite the Nature Conservation Act 1992 requiring the department to develop an integrated and comprehensive conservation strategy for the whole of the state.”

“With few exceptions, the department does not currently know how threatened species are faring and whether management actions are having the desired impact.”

A similar criticism might be levelled at the Commonwealth Department given that it has an inability to monitor conservation work being done for each of the listed species and it is only now putting together a framework to attempt such monitoring. Gaps in developing formal recovery plans have already been noted in our original submission.

BirdLife NQ recommends that a *thorough audit* be conducted on the National Threatened Species program so a better understanding can be reached on what has been achieved and what gaps there are at the National level. In particular, we would like to see the development of an effective monitoring program that incorporates the roles of Government and the roles of the wide range of community groups who contribute to the long term knowledge about our bird species.

At a time of rapidly increasing threats it is essential to know that expenditure is effective and productive in reaching the goal – to enable threatened species to recover. Such an audit should identify the role of various community and professional organisations in addressing the extinction crisis. This would help develop an investment strategy for future funding.

Terms of Reference (I) [related matters]

One additional concern, briefly referred to in our original submission, is Australia's National engagement with the Framework Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). Despite the closeness of the 2020 Conference of the Parties, and despite Government commitments, there seems to have been little or no engagement by the Australian Government with the wider community about how we are nationally progressing towards our CBD commitments and what specific steps we are undertaking to reduce extinctions of biodiversity.

With regard to developing the post 2020 Biodiversity Framework, the Subsidiary Body on Implementation notes:

“Given the urgency to safeguard life on Earth, it is of paramount importance to have a truly global conversation on where we stand on biodiversity and what solutions could be envisaged for its sustainable use.”

BirdLife NQ urges the Government to act swiftly to ensure the relevant processes meet the eight overarching principles developed by the SBI. These are *“participatory, inclusive, comprehensive, transformative, catalytic, knowledge based, transparent, and iterative”*.

Given that there is scarcely more than 12 months left before the COP, even beginning today the Government would be hard pressed to implement a process that meets these principles. The draft discussion paper is already completed and the review of that in other countries is underway now! Reviews on the revised discussion paper are due by the end of this year. The Australian Government is yet to establish a mechanism for the National process. One conclusion might be that the Government has no interest in such matters. As we are talking about the sixth great extinction event in the history of life on Earth, that seems unlikely. Perhaps an alternative conclusion might be that the Government lacks the capacity or leadership to effectively engage with this Convention, to which the nation is a party.

While our faunal extinction crisis might seem obvious to most, there is no sign of the crisis achieving any kind of Government attention in the national conversation – little or no attempt to engage the wider community in this critical issue. Instead, progress in recognition and action is left to community conservation groups and the wider members of the public (such as the Extinction Rebellion, a community based awareness raising activity). Rather than lead the battle for species survival, the Government seems to be missing in action. We would urge the Inquiry to foster a sense of urgency about this matter as time is rapidly running out for effective conservation action for many of our unique species.

The members of the BirdLife Australia Northern Queensland branch look for national leadership to deliver a secure future for our many threatened species and to ensure that we Australians do everything we can to address the faunal extinction crisis.

Once again we thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission and urge that this addendum be read in conjunction with our original submission.

Peter Valentine, Convenor,

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