

Dear Senators,

RE: Job cuts to CSIRO

I write with respect to the latest round of job cuts to CSIRO. Concerns about the cuts to climate change research have been raised by many others. However my concern is about the on going loss of conservation science research positions.

I am deeply concerned about reports in the media that more than 100 jobs will be lost from the Land and Water Division. Even more concerning is that these cuts appear to represent a strategy for CSIRO to walk away from biodiversity research and to cease environmental research in our under explored northern regions. Most concerning of all are media reports that these cuts appear part of CSIRO's new direction to abandon of public good research.

I believe that conservation research in Australia is currently in crisis. It is a public good endeavor- very few people make money directly from the conservation of biodiversity. But research into the nature of our biodiversity and how to conserve it, benefits us all and fulfills our moral responsibility to the other organisms in Australia for which Australians have stewardship.

Over the past 10 years, every state and federal government in Australia has slashed its environmental research staff- they've kept the bureaucrats but hundreds of scientists have lost their jobs. Biodiversity research jobs have been lost in most (if not all) divisions of land management, whether fisheries, forestry, agriculture or wildlife. Just a few years back CSIRO killed off its world-renowned Division of Wildlife and Ecology. And now almost of 25% of the remaining staff working on biodiversity related research will be lost from CSIRO with the latest proposed cuts.

Who will be left to do conservation research in Australia? The long term, large scale research that is necessary to answer many critical questions about the future of Australia's biodiversity can only be done by large scale government research organizations with stable funding bases, ie CSIRO. It won't be done by industry because it is public good research and innovative conservation solutions rarely make money. It can't be done by universities on their three year funding cycles either, and science positions at museums/herbaria have also been gutted by successive state governments.

In the past, the wildlife researchers at CSIRO have been global pioneers of biodiversity conservation whom I have deeply admired for the high quality and innovation in their research. But successive job losses at CSIRO and its commercialization approach have created a destabilized environment that stripped Australia's capacity to undertake critical research needed to understand our natural environment. Such capacity and knowledge is very specific to Australian systems and once lost will take decades to replace. The undermining of conservation research capacity in Australia across all levels of government makes the future look very bleak for conservation science in Australia. In comparison, New Zealand is currently leaving Australia for dead in terms of

innovative, forward-thinking and successful environmental research, ironically with the help of many ex CSIRO staffers.

Some argue that science around climate change is settled. But the science of biodiversity conservation is nowhere near settled. We understand just a tiny fraction of what we need to know about the hundreds of thousands of species in Australia- we haven't even named many of them let alone understand their ecologies or what they need to be protected.

Australia needs a strong and vibrant CSIRO doing public good research into Australia's unique biodiversity. The proposed job cuts in CSIRO must be stopped and stability in this unique research institution restored so CSIRO can serve the public good role expected of it.

Yours sincerely

Dr Peter Banks FRZS
Professor of Conservation Biology
School of Life and Environmental Sciences
The University of Sydney*

*views expressed here are my own