



the Jane Goodall Institute Australia

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

17 NOVEMBER 2020

*Submission to the Inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation
Amendment (Streamlining Environmental Approvals) Bill 2020*

Dear Committee Secretary,

The Jane Goodall Institute Australia (JGIA) provides this submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Streamlining Environmental Approvals) Bill 2020.

The *Jane Goodall Institute Australia* (JGIA) is an Australian registered charity (ABN 98 125 319 771) and a not for profit organisation. Our purpose is to inspire actions that connect people with animals and our shared environment. Moved by the work of our founder, Dr Jane Goodall DBE, we recognise the interconnectedness between all living things, including the impact that our choices and actions as custodians will have on present and future generations of life on Earth.

As one of 26 national chapters of the Institute around the globe, JGIA is grateful to call Australia home. Australia is one of the most ancient, naturally beautiful and biodiverse places on Earth. As an island- continent, Australia has some of the world's most diverse ecosystems, boasting a rich evolutionary history, nineteen World Heritage properties, sixty-five Ramsar wetlands, more than one million species of plants and animals (many of which are found nowhere else), and is globally recognised as one of the planet's 12 'mega-diverse' regions. However, we are a nation that leads the world in mammalian extinction and as the latest Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO biannual report on climate indicated just last week, one that is well and truly experiencing the cumulative impacts of climate change in real time. Against this backdrop, it is essential that evidence-based, meaningful, and lasting measures are undertaken to safeguard Australia's environmental integrity and ongoing provision of ecosystem services upon which we rely for life support and economic prosperity.

Our position on the current state of Australia's federal environmental law is detailed in our submission to the Independent Review of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth). In broad strokes, we stand with our colleagues at the Places You Love Alliance, a network of over 50 environmental groups representing over 1.5 million Australians, in calling for a new national environmental framework founded on five fundamental principles: national leadership, a central role for communities in decision making, trusted and independent institutions, delivering strong environmental outcomes, and ensuring resilience in the face of climate change.

Given our staunch belief in these principles, it is therefore highly regrettable that the present process has been favoured. The Bill was referred for inquiry only last week (on Thursday 12 November 2020) with submissions closing on Wednesday 18 November 2020. The timeframe for submissions is woefully inadequate, further factoring in a weekend and the impact of Covid-19 on the ability of Australian businesses, non-government organisations, and the general public to engage



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in the process. Further, the Final Report from Professor Graeme Samuel AC's independent review and the Government's response have not yet been released, let alone been given ample time for meaningful deliberation of findings towards reform. Some 3,000 unique submissions and 26,000 similar submissions were received by the Independent Review, and the manner in which this inquiry is being conducted seeks to preclude and exclude these views. Further to the latter, the present Bill contains amendments virtually identical to those sought in 2014. It is an affront to our system of representative and responsible government to have such an important piece of legislation, one that impacts the very life support and livelihood of every Australian, become the subject of a 'tick box' exercise in a process barely attempting to appear as meaningful consultation.

We note too that the present Inquiry is listed on the aph.gov.au website as "NEW" despite submissions closing tomorrow.

Current Inquiries

Environment and Communications Legislation Committee

► Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Climate Trigger) Bill 2020

Status: Submissions closed

Date Referred: 27 February 2020

[Track Inquiry](#)

► **New** Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Streamlining Environmental Approvals) Bill 2020

Date Referred: 12 November 2020

Reporting Date: 27 November 2020

[Track Inquiry](#)

Amendments to the Act should include an independent regulator and strong national environment standards, proposed as a package to Parliament. Sufficient time must be afforded for full consideration of contemporary data and expertise towards effectiveness, and public scrutiny towards accountability. The Bill, in its current forum, should not be passed as it serves only to weaken environmental protections significantly.

We close this submission by reminding the Committee of the present context and our hopes moving forward as an organisation driven by hope against all odds. The first Australian case of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was confirmed in late January of this year, and since then our supporters, fellow Australians, and members of our extended global family have watched on in horror as over a million people around the world lost their lives (with tens of millions more questioning the long term health impacts of infection). The preservation of our natural environment and ecological processes provides us with one of the most coveted ecosystem services: disease control. With more than two-thirds of emerging infectious diseases originating in animals, it is essential that active measures are adopted now to prevent disease spillover, and in turn safeguard the future of our health and economy. This includes enhancing, not degrading, habitat quality together with strengthened wildlife trade laws.



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It continues to be on the balance of political leadership and strong community solidarity that Australia's public health response to Covid-19 has become the envy of so many other countries. We request that those entrusted with the interests of present and future generations of Australians extend that rigour, deference to scientific expertise, and public accountability to the treatment of Australia's environmental laws.

Sincerely,

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