



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

Re: the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia

Dear Senate Committee,

The Wildlife Disease Association Australasia (WDA-A) is a Section of the Wildlife Disease Association (WDA), an international not-for-profit organization whose mission is to acquire, disseminate, and apply knowledge of the health and diseases of wild animals in relation to their biology, conservation and ecology, including interactions with humans and domestic animals. More than 200 of the Association's members are in the Australasian Section, many of whom are respected researchers from a variety of disciplines including veterinary science, pathology, ecology and conservation biology.

The following submission is made on behalf of our members.

The WDA-A has significant concerns about the current effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia. Given the restricted time available in which to make a submission, we have limited our comments to bullet points outlining the main areas in which we hold concerns. We would welcome an opportunity in future to expand further on these concerns.

With respect to wildlife health and disease, we have concerns regarding:

- The poor recognition of the importance of a detailed understanding of wildlife health and disease to effective management of any threatened species or ecosystem
- The lack of focus and recognition of disease as a primary or secondary threatening process for endangered species, for example Chlamydia in koalas.
- The lack of a coordinated, supported approach to incorporating wildlife health and disease efforts into threatened species responses
- The lack of recognition of the emerging role of disease as a threatening process in shrinking and genetically diminishing populations, regardless of original threatening processes
- The generally inadequate attention paid to disease risk when assessing risk to threatened species, and in particular when translocating animals or in situations where humans interact with free ranging threatened species
- The poor utilisation of existing wildlife health and disease expertise in Recovery Teams, Threat Abatement Plans and other risk assessments.

We would like to draw the Senate Committee's attention to the Australian Wildlife Health Network (AWHN), Australia's lead organisation providing access to advice and expertise in the areas of wildlife health and disease, disease ecology and epidemiology. The AWHN also manages Australia's electronic wildlife disease surveillance database. The Australian Registry of Wildlife Health (ARWH), Taronga Zoo, also provides a national service delivering excellence in wildlife diagnostic pathology, pathology data management and communication. Both AWHN and ARWH provide essential, unique services for management of threatened animal species in Australia. Their services are poorly recognised by current agencies charged with the management of Australia's threatened fauna and ecosystems. Funding for the AWHN, a national network and resource should be prioritised by Australia's agencies charged with biodiversity protection.

With respect to general management practices surrounding threatened species and ecosystems, we have concerns about:

- The low prioritisation of environmental and biodiversity protection in Australia by policy makers
- The lack of a consistent approach to threatened species management
- The short funding cycles and rapidly changing priorities (e.g. Caring for our Country) which appear to reflect election cycles and make little concession to the need for long term, stable commitment and funding to obtain best outcomes from threatened species management
- The historically poor record of state and territory governments on these matters which shows little sign of change in the near future. We would be happy to supply examples of our concerns in this area
- The excessive amounts of bureaucracy involved with many of these processes. One example is that the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act list (EPBC list) of Australian threatened species contains quite different species to the lists of Australian threatened species developed under the guidelines of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. These, refined over a 50 year period and applied globally, differ little from the criteria used for EPBC listing. Some species that merit listing under these criteria aren't listed under the EPBC Act; some species listed under the EPBC Act don't merit listing under the criteria. The difference would appear to be due to administrative inefficiency. The EPBC Act process is reactive and slow, based on an annual set of public nominations of a small set of species, and a long assessment period.

The Wildlife Disease Association would be happy to provide further detail on any of the points listed above. Please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Dr Andrea Reiss BVSc (Hons) MVS MANZCVS

Chair, Australasian Section Wildlife Disease Association

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<http://wildlifedisease.org/wda/HOME>