

Submission by David Hudson on “the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia”.

I have been involved in community based natural resource management for over 20 years and have held paid and voluntary positions in a national NGO, a regional NRM body, and various local community groups. One of my main tasks has been developing & implementing environmental projects and sourcing funding for same through a plethora of grant programs.

My partner and I also own and manage a Nature Refuge on the Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland which is part of the National Reserve System.

I am not an expert in the process of listing species and developing recovery plans or regulatory mechanisms, nor on the success or otherwise of protection mechanisms and recovery plans, but I do have extensive experience from a community perspective of developing and delivering practical on-ground responses to habitat loss and degradation. I also have a particular concern about the future of many tropical upland endemic species which are not currently listed as threatened but which are under extreme risk from the potential impacts of climate change.

So, I will confine my comments to a set of observations from a “doers” perspective about the history of funding programs for threatened species and ecological communities. In short, it has been a dogs breakfast, with:-

- Funding timeframes which are too short to provide effective outcomes;
- Funding guidelines which are too restrictive, inconsistent and in some cases contradictory;
- Funding delivery “siloed”, even within the same department; and
- Constant and unnecessary change of department and program names and makeup, and overlap or fuzziness in responsibility.

The impact of this is that it has been virtually impossible to develop an integrated project to address multiple issues around a particular species or ecological community. This was highlighted at a recent briefing for the Biodiversity Fund where we were told that we couldn't include a research component because “there were other funding programs out there for research” or words to that effect.

The Biodiversity Prospectus which has just been released does nothing to ease my concerns around this, with responsibility for individual programs spread over multiple departments, artificial distinctions between programs, and no mention at all of research! The cool, moist, upland rainforest of the Queensland Wet Tropics has been identified as one of the mega-diverse ecosystems at most risk from Climate Change (see *Queensland's biodiversity under climate change: impacts and adaptation – synthesis report A Report Prepared for the Queensland Government, Brisbane. CSIRO Climate Adaptation Flagship, Canberra. August 2012*), yet this area does not appear to rate as a national priority, despite supporting 17 EPBC listed species and a host of others which soon could be if action is not taken.

To overcome this entirely inadequate and ineffective approach I propose the creation of an “Envirobank”. Like Medicare this would be funded by a universal levy. People

(individual landholders, community groups, consortia etc) seeking to take action to protect or assist with the recovery of a species or its habitat would approach their local “bank manager” and negotiate a “loan”. There could be a sliding scale for the upfront ‘deposit’ (ie cash or in-kind commitment) depending on the priority of the issue and the approach proposed, and the ‘repayment’ period based on the real requirement to enact change. The ‘repayment’ would not be in cash, but in outputs, and the “loan” reviewed on a periodic basis against actual outcomes.

To have any hope at all of preventing further extinctions we simply must take a different approach. Thank you.