

Funding and resourcing for the CSIRO Inquiry Submission to Senate Standing Committees on Economics

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Mistreatment and disregard for other species and our natural environment over the past 200 years or so has clear and significant implications for the social, economic and cultural future of Australia. Without well informed, defensible and equitable decision-making, we stand to lose much of what we hold dear under climate change over the next century – unique biodiversity, awe-inspiring landscapes, flourishing agricultural industries and critical ecosystem services such as the provision of clean water. It is essential now, more than ever, that we improve our appreciation and understanding of how natural systems support fundamental societal values and how we can best protect, restore and enhance ecological systems so that people and nature can adapt to and flourish under the changing climate.

I am an academic ecologist working towards the improved conservation, restoration and management of our landscapes, ecosystems and biodiversity in Australia and globally. Over my thirty-year career, I have worked extensively with CSIRO staff on a wide range of project and initiatives including significant climate change adaptation work, water resources modelling, ecosystem modelling and, most recently, various projects informing the development of Australia's new Nature Repair Market.

CSIRO plays a crucial role in guiding and coordinating scientific efforts for the public good. With dwindling funding for science, research is increasingly funded and driven by narrow industry interests meaning many critical research questions are not being appropriately addressed. In this competitive landscape, there is also a risk that scientific knowledge is not sufficiently shared or scrutinised. As our national science agency, CSIRO is well placed to ensure that scientific endeavours are conducted in a more equitable and transparent manner and that scientific products are transparent, pragmatic, pertinent to current and emerging societal challenges and accessible to the broader community.

Providing essential, fundamental ecological science is major aspect of CSIRO's work that is extremely poorly resourced through other avenues and organisations and yet is absolutely vital to effective environmental decision-making at higher levels. There are enormously gaping knowledge gaps in our understanding of Australia's biodiversity and environment that urgently need to be attended to before we can truly address questions pertaining to sustainability, climate adaptation and resilience, biosecurity and agricultural productivity. We should not solely be funding the 'icing on the cake' while the cake itself remains half-baked.

CSIRO is also an important training organisation for early career scientists, facilitating an appreciation of the challenges associated with science policy interactions and nurturing inter- and transdisciplinary approaches as well as effective communication and engagement. Additionally, CSIRO is critical to the retention, synthesis and evaluation of technical knowledge and expertise and maintaining a record and long-term perspective of scientific activity in Australia – minimising wasted investments to 'reinvent the wheel'.

9th January 2026

CSIRO needs more, not less, funding at this time to support collaborative, equitable and relevant public good science for the benefit of Australia's people and biodiversity and the incredible environment on which we all depend (yet so poorly understand and appreciate). The disproportionate burden of proposed cuts on environmental and ecological research within CSIRO, and therefore within our national scientific community more broadly, is of particular concern.