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Witness – Environment Protection Reform Bill 2025 hearing 14 November 2025
Opening Statement

I pay my respects to the Ngunnawal people who have shepherded these lands for millennia. From community activism to national campaigns, the Wilderness Society seeks to give nature a voice to support the life that supports us all. We are powered by more than 150,000 supporters.

Australia is in the grip of an extinction crisis. Wildlife found nowhere else on Earth like the Swift Parrot and Spotted Handfish, are headed for extinction in our lifetimes. Australia is the worst in the world for mammal extinctions and ranks second in the world for biodiversity loss, with the Christmas Island Shrew being the latest Australian mammal to be declared extinct this year.

Wilderness Society analysis recently revealed that the Albanese government has presided over 1 million hectares of deforestation since taking office in Queensland alone. Little wonder Australia is a global deforestation hotspot alongside Borneo and the Amazon.

Australia's existing national nature protection law, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, has failed to alter this grim trajectory. Legislation that protects, conserves and restores Australia's precious wildlife and natural places is urgently needed.

The Wilderness Society has been very clear that as drafted, the Environment Protection Reform Bill risks being a backwards step. We are concerned that the Albanese government has not yet proposed the necessary changes to guarantee a healthy natural environment - something that nature, communities, and business all need.

The bills before the inquiry could offer some potential such as a Standards making power, but are riddled with loopholes that would undermine nature protection and the federal government's important role, and even take nature backwards. Community rights to information and participation in environmental decisions would be smashed, and the government has still not dealt with two pre-existing deforestation loopholes, affecting logging and agriculture-driven land clearing, that have turbo-charged forest destruction in Australia.

If the Albanese government is serious about its commitment to strengthening nature protections, no new extinctions, and restoring community and business 'trust and confidence' in environmental decision-making, it must urgently negotiate with Senators willing to dramatically strengthen the proposed package to achieve the protections that nature requires.