

Introduction

- 1.1 On 2 June 2011 the committee commenced its inquiry into biodiversity in a changing climate, in relation to nationally important ecosystems, with particular regard to:
- terrestrial, marine and freshwater biodiversity;
 - connectivity between ecosystems;
 - how biodiversity loss might affect human communities;
 - enhancing climate change adaptation;
 - sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystem services;
 - adequacy of current governance arrangements; and
 - enhancing community engagement.¹
- 1.2 The Committee considers that such broad terms of reference necessitate an extensive inquiry process, and has determined that an interim report is appropriate to update the House, and all those who have been involved with the inquiry to date, on progress on aspects of the inquiry.
- 1.3 Since the inquiry was advertised on 2 June 2011, 79 submissions and 41 exhibits have been received. To date, five public hearings and four site inspections have taken place. Through its ongoing program of site inspections, the Committee has considered case studies on nationally important ecosystems, including those which demonstrate aspects of adaptive management strategies, community engagement, sustainable resource use, and other matters relevant to the inquiry. These case studies are intended to illustrate some of the key issues arising from the

1 The inquiry was referred to the Committee jointly by the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, and the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency.

submissions and other evidence received to the inquiry, and demonstrate lessons that could be applied in similar ecosystems or circumstances across Australia.

1.4 To date, the Committee has carried out site inspections in:

- southwest Western Australia, an internationally-recognised biodiversity hotspot;
- the nationally-recognised biodiversity hotspot in the Tasmanian Midlands, and one of Australia's few alpine regions in Tasmania's Central Plateau;
- the New South Wales portion of the Australian Alps; and
- sites in Sydney that illustrate biodiversity conservation in an urban context, and have a focus on community engagement, sustainability, and biodiversity research.

1.5 Site inspections in Victoria and South Australia are planned for May. Visits to Queensland and the Northern Territory are intended to take place later in the year.

Scope of this report

1.6 As noted above, in this first interim report, the Committee provides an update on the progress of the inquiry. Additional site inspections are planned, and the Committee expects to continue to gather evidence at public hearings. To avoid pre-empting future deliberations or prejudicing impending evidence to the inquiry, the Committee has chosen to limit the scope of this report to the site inspections undertaken to date.

1.7 For the same reason, the Committee has reserved its right to make recommendations at this stage. Furthermore, Committee conclusions presented in this report are preliminary and may have only limited application outside the specific sites on which the Committee makes comment.

1.8 The remainder of this report is divided into four chapters; each chapter focuses on one region or site inspection program. The report describes the sites visited, with particular reference to the sites' relevance to the inquiry's terms of reference, and discusses the main issues explored by the Committee. A glossary, containing some of the more technical terms readers may encounter, is included at the back of the report.