



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change,
Environment and the Arts

Inquiry into Australia's biodiversity in a changing climate: the way
forward

April 2016

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Introduction

On 17 June 2013 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts (the Committee) tabled its final report on the inquiry into 'Australia's biodiversity in a changing climate: the way forward' (the report).

The terms of reference were for the Committee to inquire into and report on biodiversity in a changing climate, in relation to nationally important ecosystems. The inquiry had particular regard to:

- terrestrial, marine and freshwater biodiversity in Australia and its territories;
- connectivity between ecosystems and across landscapes that may contribute to biodiversity conservation;
- how climate change impacts on biodiversity may flow on to affect human communities and the economy;
- strategies to enhance climate change adaptation, including promoting resilience in ecosystems and human communities;
- mechanisms to promote the sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystem services in a changing climate;
- an assessment of whether current governance arrangements are well placed to deal with the challenges of conserving biodiversity in a changing climate; and
- mechanisms to enhance community engagement.

The Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to this report. The response to each recommendation contains a statement as to whether the Australian Government agrees, agrees in part, agrees in principle, notes or does not agree with the Committee's recommendations.

Responses

Recommendation 1

2.63 The Committee recommends that in the course of developing and implementing an effective and sustainable system of national environmental accounts, the Australian Government include on the agenda of the Council of Australian Governments a requirement for five-yearly reports, using the existing framework of the national State of the Environment Report, and equivalent reports of each state and territory. Such reports should include assessments of the state of all significant national parks and reserves, including:

- **Qualitative and quantitative analysis of native biota including any loss of distribution, and**
- **Qualitative and quantitative analysis of invasive species of flora, fauna and pathogens, including any increase in distribution.**

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government supports improving existing environmental monitoring and reporting to support the production of national environmental accounts, and considers this is best progressed by Environment Ministers.

The Australian Government is committed to making non-sensitive data open by default. This has been reaffirmed by the release of the Public Data Policy Statement on 7 December 2015. This is an ongoing policy position that builds on previous initiatives across many agencies to improve public access to data. As a part of the National Plan for Environmental Information Initiative the Department of the Environment is identifying essential environmental measures, for which it will facilitate delivery of open access data that can be used to track change in the environment over time. The Bureau of Meteorology has published the National Environmental Information Infrastructure Reference Architecture, to enable data to be nationally aggregated as needed. This work underpins efforts to develop a system of national environmental accounts, as successful accounts depend on the availability of underlying environmental data.

Implementation of a national environmental account system also requires a commitment from all relevant state and territory agencies, who manage the majority of the parks and reserves in Australia, and national agreement to a reporting framework. The Australian Government is committed to the continued improvement of its park management practices based on the best available science. One initiative underway is the development of an integrated Management Effectiveness Framework for Commonwealth reserves (marine and terrestrial) which, when finalised, will include indicators on native biota and invasive species. This information will feed into a 'state of the parks' reporting framework. The framework will be supported by a number of existing and new tools, such as reserve values statements and improved performance indicators. These supporting tools are gradually being rolled out to reserves, and the inclusion of the Management Effectiveness Framework principles in new management plans will be an important step in embedding the Management Effectiveness Framework into broader park management. Additional supporting tools will be developed over time and the implementation of the Management Effectiveness Framework will be an ongoing activity in Commonwealth reserves.

The Management Effectiveness Framework will complement existing long-term monitoring programmes in Commonwealth terrestrial protected areas, which have been contributing to our national understanding of the composition, structure and key processes of natural systems and informing better management practices.

Options for assessing the impact of changes in distribution and diversity of native biota, invasive flora, fauna and pathogens, inside and outside of national parks, are also being considered by the Australian Government as part of enhanced regional environmental reporting.

Recommendation 2

2.93 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Council of Australian Governments, develop a central national database, incorporating a consistent and adaptable model of uploading and storing information which is able to be scientifically accredited.

The Australian Government **agrees in part** with this recommendation and will continue to engage with stakeholders in the development of practical actions to improve open access to credible and comprehensive environmental data.

The Australian Government has demonstrated this through its establishment of the National Environmental Information Infrastructure to improve and support data discovery, sharing, quality assurance and re-use across the breadth of environmental information, including biodiversity data. This initiative is part of the National Plan for Environmental Information.

The National Environmental Information Infrastructure is a federated platform, based on international standards and specifications around core information and technology components. This approach is regarded as better practice, more pragmatic and more feasible than a single centralised database.

As noted in response to recommendation one, the National Environmental Information Infrastructure Reference Architecture was published by the Bureau of Meteorology in 2014 and describes a phased implementation over time, realised by strategic collaborations with holders of environmental information. Ongoing collaboration between the Australian Government, state and territory agencies, research organisations, industry and non-government organisations is important to maximise the benefits of the infrastructure.

Recommendation 3

4.57 The Committee recommends that ongoing funding for threatening processes, including fire and invasive species management, be provided under the National Wildlife Corridors Plan.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government is committed to protecting our nationally threatened species and ecological communities. Acknowledging that threatening processes impact across the landscape, the Australian Government will continue to optimise threat management outcomes under the full range of funding programmes available, such as Landcare, the Green Army, Indigenous Protected Areas and Working on Country Indigenous rangers.

The Australian Government also supports the science behind on-ground action. A range of research is being funded through the National Environmental Science Programme, to better understand threats to threatened species and ecosystems. The research will include exploring and trialling approaches to reduce the impacts of introduced predators and altered fire regimes. Studies will also examine methods for identifying high-priority areas for threat abatement and species recovery investment and examine approaches to managing invasive species on Australian islands.

To further this, the Australian Government has appointed a Threatened Species Commissioner. One of the roles of the Threatened Species Commissioner is to identify ways to improve reporting on the success of threatened species recovery actions, including trends in species recovery. The Australian Government's first Threatened Species Strategy, launched on 16 July 2015, includes a focus on better management of threatening processes. This includes protecting habitat through a range of techniques, including promoting better fire management practices, and a series of measurable targets to better manage feral cats.

Recommendation 4

4.62 The Committee recommends that national marine and terrestrial biodiversity corridors be included on the agenda of the Council of Australian Governments.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation and considers biodiversity corridors are best progressed by Environment Ministers.

The Australian Government is committed to maintaining Australia's natural assets, which underpin our overarching infrastructure. This commitment includes a range of efforts to maintain connectivity and resilience in the landscape. Working in partnership with local communities and other governments to establish and manage biodiversity corridors is a key component of these efforts.

In the Murray-Darling Basin, significant funding has been provided to improve the availability of water for the environment. The coordinated management of environmental water resources by the Australian and state governments has supported longitudinal and lateral connectivity throughout the river systems of the Murray-Darling Basin, benefiting aquatic and water-dependent species.

Connectivity in the marine environment is given consideration through threatened and migratory species conservation planning, marine protected area design and marine bioregional plans. Facilitating connectivity between source and sink habitats is of increasing importance, as pressures from climate change, regional and local disturbances and activities grow. On the Great Barrier Reef, this is ensured partly through marine park zoning, the design of which incorporates important connectivity principles. It is also complemented by strategic planning of developments in the marine park that consider cumulative stressors. Recent scientific research in the Great Barrier Reef indicates that to further reduce threats in near-shore environments, movement corridors for protected species like dugongs and inshore dolphins may be required.

Recommendation 5(a)

5.138 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ensure funding cycles for environmental and biodiversity data collection programmes are long enough to allow a proper baseline to be developed. This may be up to 10 years.

The Australian Government **agrees in principle** with this recommendation.

The Australian Government agrees long-term environmental and biodiversity monitoring is essential to improve our capacity to report on and manage the nation's natural infrastructure. The Australian Government supports baseline data collection, recognising that when coupled with ongoing, nationally consistent data collection, which is made accessible and reused, our collective understanding of the state of our environment is significantly enhanced.

Australia's biological collections (museums and herbaria) are the foundation of our knowledge of the nation's biodiversity, its occurrence and distribution. The Australian Government supports the provision of fundamental information on Australia's biodiversity through the Australian Biological Resources Study, which has been building Australia's taxonomic knowledge and capacity for over 40 years. The Australian Biological Resources Study is the authoritative source of information on the accurate naming, identification and distribution of Australia's plants, animals and other organisms. The Australian Biological Resources Study delivers this information through a range of internationally recognised and publicly accessible media, including electronic databases and checklists, mobile applications and book series. The Australian Biological Resources Study has close associations with Australia's biodiversity research and collection institutions including universities, museums and herbaria; and collaborates with other biodiversity information initiatives such as the Atlas of Living Australia and the Encyclopaedia of Life. The Australian Biological Resources Study is a member of the Council of Australian Biological Collections, the umbrella group representing the CSIRO and the museums, herbaria, universities which together hold Australia's national biological collections, document Australia's biodiversity and act as a key resource for taxonomy, conservation and the sustainable use of our biodiversity.

The Australian Government also provides long-term funding for monitoring and evaluation across a number of its programmes. For example, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office's long-term intervention monitoring programme is based on a five-year timeframe, in order to detect ecological changes resulting from environmental watering in the Murray-Darling Basin. Similarly, the Australian Government manages information and long-term monitoring programmes in Commonwealth terrestrial protected areas. In addition, improvements in long-term monitoring of the Great Barrier Reef are underway, with the commitment to develop an Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program under the Reef 2050 Plan.

The National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy's Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network funds essential collaborative infrastructure to increase the capacity of the Australian ecosystem science community to advance knowledge and contribute to effective management and sustainable use of our ecosystems. An example such activities is the Long Term Ecological Research Network, which links monitoring programs across a range of Australian ecosystems to better understand environmental change.

Recommendation 5(b)

5.138 The Committee also recommends that funded research needs to comply with proper governance requirements such as reporting, acquittal, and ensuring that the original project goals are still being met.

The Australian Government **agrees** with this recommendation.

To ensure accountability and proper management of public funding, all Australian Government funded environmental research programmes are required to comply with the requirements and obligations of the Commonwealth Government Grants Rules and Guidelines, or the Commonwealth Procurement Rules and Guidelines and the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*. Grant contracts typically require progress and annual reporting on project delivery, outcomes and acquittal of funds. Procurement processes require the service provider to produce a product or service that meets the original project goals, as articulated in the contract. In addition, research funded under the National Environmental Science Programme includes requirements for the handling and publication of research data such that the data is discoverable and re-usable, in line with the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy and the National Environmental Information Infrastructure Reference Architecture.

Recommendation 6

5.143 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ensures the success of the National Plan for Environmental Information by:

- **implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review of the Australian Government Environmental Information Activity**
- **publishing information about project scope and timelines as a means of helping the Plan being conducted in a timely manner**
- **consulting widely with the scientific community and other stakeholders, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics, on the design of the Plan.**

The Australian Government **agrees in principle** with this recommendation.

The Australian Government recognises that addressing the environmental information obstacles identified in the Independent Review of the Australian Government Environmental Information Activity is a shared responsibility across all levels of government, the scientific community, business and local communities and requires commitment and practical actions by many stakeholders.

Significant work is already underway under the National Plan for Environmental Information and this has been mentioned in response to other recommendations of the Committee. The Department of the

Environment is developing a set of Essential Environmental Measures, which will track change in the state of the environment over time. The Department is also developing a set of Environmental Information Principles to provide guidance to Australian government information custodians on how to make the environmental information for which they are responsible more discoverable, accessible and re-useable.

The Australian Government will continue to engage with stakeholders in the development of practical actions to improve environmental information.

Recommendation 7

5.147 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the Atlas to develop a sustainable funding model for it, which could include the involvement of non-government partners.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government is committed to working with the Atlas of Living Australia to support biodiversity data aggregation and information sharing activities, including improvements to data collection that would enhance its discovery, access and re-use.

The Atlas of Living Australia is one of several Research Infrastructure Capabilities established under the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy and will be funded until June 2017.. The Australian Government welcomes the recommendation to involve non-government partners to assist in this regard.

Recommendation 8

5.149 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide funding to the CSIRO and Atlas of Living Australia to:

- **Assess the current level of digitisation of biological collections in Australia**
- **Coordinate the digitisation of biological data into the Atlas.**

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

Australian biological collections are unique and powerful tools for measuring and modelling both past and future effects of climate change on biodiversity, including impacts on species representing resources for agriculture and fisheries and biosecurity threats. This key data source cannot currently be used effectively by the research community, as the majority of the specimens and associated material (images, sounds, genotypes) in Australian biological collections are not fully available in digital form. Australian Government funding under the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy was made available to undertake digitisation activities. The use of digitised records through the Atlas of Living Australia (with more than 4 billion records of all kinds downloaded to date) strongly indicates the demand for such research.

Recommendation 9

5.151 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consult with the museum and education sectors to develop a strategy to attract, train, and retain taxonomists.

The Australian Government **agrees in principle** with this recommendation.

The Australian Government acknowledges the current shortage of taxonomists in Australia.

The Australian Biological Resources Study is Australia's national focal point for taxonomy. The Australian Biological Resources Study National Taxonomy Research Grants Programme funds projects where the primary aim is to undertake taxonomic research on Australian species, or to develop products that aid in the dissemination of taxonomic information. The program also builds Australia's taxonomic capacity by

supporting postgraduate research training and early career researchers, and by funding students to assist their travel to national or international conferences and workshops. It also partners with the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to offer Fellowships for overseas taxonomic research. Over the past 10 years the Australian Biological Resources Study has provided more than \$20 million through the National Taxonomic Research Grants Programme and other initiatives to support taxonomic research by scientists and to build taxonomic capacity.

The Australian Government also funds Bush Blitz, which is a multi-million dollar national biodiversity discovery partnership between the Department of the Environment, BHP Billiton Sustainable Communities and the not-for-profit conservation research organisation Earthwatch Australia. The Bush Blitz programme is supporting taxonomic research by scientists within Australia's museums, herbaria and other leading institutions, further enhancing opportunities for early career researchers to pursue a career in taxonomy.

The Australian Government also acknowledges that the taxonomist workforce is one segment of the science and research workforce as a whole, which faces a number of issues, including Australia's capability within supporting disciplines such as science, technology, engineering and maths. The Australian Government is developing a national policy on science, technology, engineering and maths, which will include policies to ensure Australia has the skills needed for the jobs of the future. This will include ensuring graduate skills align with workforce needs through schooling, higher education, Vocational Education and Training and research training.

Recommendation 10

5.153 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government include a focus on incorporating Indigenous ecological knowledge into federal biodiversity conservation and land management programmes.

The Australian Government **agrees** with this recommendation.

The Australian Government recognises the importance and value that engagement with Indigenous stakeholders can bring to the development of biodiversity conservation and land management programmes. The Indigenous Advisory Committee is a statutory committee established under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) to advise the Minister for the Environment on the operation of the EPBC Act, acknowledging the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge on the management of land and the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The Australian Government is committed to building respectful and collaborative relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to help create sustainable solutions to long-standing problems.

Such engagement is also central to the design and delivery of all current and future Australian Government programmes and services. Indigenous inclusion is a fundamental principle of the National Environmental Science Programme and has been integrated into the programme's design from its inception. Each National Environmental Science Programme Hub has an Indigenous Engagement and Participation Strategy that recognises the interests, rights, and ecological knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Traditional Owners, as well as research co-benefits. The strategies establish pathways for Indigenous inclusion and shared outcomes in hub research activities, identify meaningful engagement and partnership opportunities and participation in governance arrangements. The strategies include mechanisms for raising awareness among all parties, identify Indigenous employment and capacity building opportunities, guide research requirements for ethics and cultural respect, and commit to unique initiatives such developing a Reconciliation Action Plan, mentorship of Indigenous science students and urban Indigenous awareness legacies.

The Australian Government has also allocated more than \$78 million over five years, to 30 June 2018, to Indigenous Protected Areas, \$335 million over five years to the complementary Working on Country

Indigenous ranger programme and \$12.9 million under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy for land and sea management activities. IPAs are voluntarily established by Indigenous groups on Indigenous owned or managed land and sea country and play a vital role in implementing the Australian Government's commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity to protect 17 per cent of land in Australia by 2020. There are currently 72 declared Indigenous Protected Areas, covering over 64 million hectares of Australia, and comprising over 43 per cent of the National Reserve System.

Indigenous Protected Area management plans describe how Indigenous groups 'care for country', with the support of Working on Country rangers using a combination of traditional knowledge and contemporary western science. Importantly for Government, these management plans also promote a sensible balance between conservation and other uses to promote social and economic benefits for local Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 11

5.154 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue funding the Australian Seed Bank Partnership.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government directly funds the National Coordinator position and secretariat services for the Australian Seed Bank Partnership, through the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Programme funds for partnership activities are externally supported through grants and philanthropic efforts and coordinated through The Council of Heads of Australian Botanic Gardens Incorporated.

Recommendation 12

6.52 In recognising the importance that NRM boards operate effectively, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government conduct a review, with particular reference to:

- **funding, including assessing claims that existing application processes result in 'grant fatigue', and can foster competition, rather than cooperation between NRM bodies**
- **measures to improve consistency of standards between NRM bodies nationally**
- **measures which may improve skills management, including sufficient capacity to attract and retain personnel, especially in regional areas.**

The Australian Government **does not agree** with this recommendation.

The Australian Government maintains commitment to supporting and strengthening the effectiveness of regional Natural Resource Management organisations in a number of practical ways.

The Australian Government is continually looking to streamline and improve the delivery of Australian Government Natural Resource Management programmes, guided by the principles of the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines. For regionally delivered Natural Resource Management programmes, ongoing review and improvement is focused on:

- supporting the capacity of regional Natural Resource Management organisations as a key component of regional natural resource governance in Australia;
- benchmarking the performance of regions, including in relation to their roles in regional Natural Resource Management planning, community engagement and partnership formation; and
- delivery of regional priorities through simple, locally-driven processes that promote long-term approaches to Natural Resource Management.

The Australian Government has implemented the National Landcare Programme, under which regional Natural Resource Management organisations (including two newly recognised organisations) have access to multi-year funding for projects that deliver environmental and sustainable production outcomes in their region. To receive funding, regional Natural Resource Management organisations have committed to involving communities and land managers in landscape conservation and sustainable land use within their regions. These ongoing investments will contribute to long-term benefits for the environment and the sustainability of land and marine-based production systems.

Consistent with the Australian Government's commitment to reduce red tape, the National Landcare Programme is underpinned by the principle of 'simple' delivery. Paperwork at the application stage has been dramatically simplified for organisations and monitoring and reporting is increasingly being handled through publically-accessible online reporting systems.

Australian Government investment has contributed to many large-scale projects, which have demanded a high level of project management and stakeholder engagement. Regional organisations have strengthened their capacity in these areas with the support of continuous annual funding assistance, creating a strong foundation for future investments.

The Australian Government agrees that whilst regional Natural Resource Management organisations are generally successful at fulfilling their various roles, achieving sustainable resource use across the country requires continuous improvement and adaptation of approaches to natural resource governance at all levels. Regional NRM organisations are supported to continuously improve their organisational performance under the National Landcare Programme through an annual self assessment process, and rolling performance reviews to be undertaken by the Australian Government. The Australian Government has developed minimum standards of organisational performance that regional Natural Resource Management organisations are expected to be demonstrating or have strategies in place to meet. These standards address financial and organisational governance, regional planning, community engagement and monitoring and reporting. Through the performance review process, regional Natural Resource Management organisations will be supported to continuously improve, share better practice and innovation, and engage in peer learning to improve the overall performance of the sector.

Recommendation 13

6.55 That the Australian Government advise the Committee and stakeholders as to how the research and development needs formerly undertaken by Land and Water Australia are now being met.

The Australian Government **agrees** with this recommendation.

The nature of Land and Water Australia's work continues and is reflected in the Australian Government's rural research and development priorities. These priorities outline natural resource management as a key area for continued investment.

Further advice can be found in the Australian Government's *Rural Research and Development Policy Statement*. All parties to the National Primary Industries Research, Development and Extension Framework have committed to development and implementation of cross-sectoral strategies. Cross-sectoral issues identified in the first tranche of strategies are: water use in agriculture, climate change, biofuels and bioenergy, animal welfare, food and nutrition and animal and plant biosecurity.

The Rural Research and Development Corporations are ideally placed to use their expertise and flexible investment model to work together and bring in other participants, to support the implementation of cross-sectoral strategies. The Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations will provide a forum through which the Rural RDCs can discuss and decide on appropriate implementation arrangements to give effect to particular research priorities, identified through cross-sectoral strategies.

In addition, the Australian Government is currently undertaking a project to provide a nationally consistent evidence-base, structured according to geographic distributions of natural characteristics and threats for

natural resource management programme planning purposes. This project builds on the conceptual principles of work funded through Land and Water Australia on 'Global Ecology and Biogeography'.

The six research hubs established under the National Environmental Science Programme will also undertake applied biodiversity and climate science research, building on work undertaken by Land and Water Australia.

Recommendation 14

7.84 The Committee recommends that the Minister refer an exposure draft of the EPBC Amendment Bill to the Committee for review prior to introduction in the Parliament.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government is committed to delivering a 'one stop shop' for environmental approvals that will accredit state planning systems under national environmental law, creating a single environmental assessment and approval process. The implementation of the 'one stop shop' policy requires amendments to the EPBC Act. Importantly, this will be achieved while maintaining high environmental standards.

The existing provisions of the EPBC Act provide for the Commonwealth to enter into bilateral agreements with the states and territories. The *EPBC Amendment (Bilateral Agreement Implementation) Bill* has been introduced to facilitate the effective and efficient operation of the one stop shop and provide certainty to proponents.

The Bill makes technical amendments to the existing bilateral agreement provisions in Part 5 of the EPBC Act. There is no change to the environmental standards under the EPBC Act. Government Amendments to the Bill introduced in the Senate on 14 September 2015 would have the effect of excluding the water trigger from approval bilateral agreements.

The Australian Government is continuing to work with the Senate to pass the Bill.

Recommendation 15

7.88 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government publish a progress report on developing a single national list of threatened species as part of the changes to the EPBC Act, as well as expected future timelines.

The Australian Government **agrees in principle** with this recommendation.

The Australian Government is committed to work with state and territory governments to better align individual threatened species lists.

Environment Ministers agreed on 15 July 2015 to progress a memorandum of understanding on a Common Assessment Method for listing nationally threatened species and, where agreed to by individual jurisdictions, ecological communities. The memorandum commenced on 27 October 2015. To date, Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, Tasmania and the Commonwealth have signed the memorandum, with other jurisdictions expected to follow.

On 15 December 2015, Environment Ministers endorsed the approach to implementation of the Common Assessment Method and agreed that an inter-governmental working group, including representatives from all jurisdictions, will work together on the listing assessment reform and resolve any implementation challenges as they arise. Ministers also agreed that the Common Assessment Method is about continuous improvement of standards.

The Common Assessment Method will be consistent with best practice standards set by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and will ensure that efforts by all Governments to protect threatened species will be targeted to those with the greatest need for protection.

Further to this, the Threatened Species Commissioner is helping progress threatened species recovery plans and ensuring that effort and investment to protect threatened species are better coordinated, targeted and more effective.

Recommendation 16

7.91 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government review the current co-management arrangements in the Australian Alps with a view to determining whether a different model – such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority model – would improve coordination and priority management of the area’s biodiversity.

The Australian Government **does not agree** with this recommendation.

The Australian Government plays a facilitative role in supporting the cooperative management arrangements for the Australian Alps National Parks. The Australian Government has no land management responsibility or relevant management jurisdiction across the Alps region, and has no basis on which to undertake such a review. Unilateral action by the Australian Government in relation to the nature and conduct of the cooperative management arrangements is neither possible nor consistent with the intent of these arrangements.

Recommendation 17

7.95 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish an expert panel, including representatives of the timber industry and national parks, to inquire into and report on Australia’s future integrated forest management.

The Australian Government **does not agree** with this recommendation.

The National Forest Policy Statement and Regional Forest Agreement process provides an effective basis for managing forests on public and private land. The Australian Government considers that management of Australia’s native forests should achieve a balance between environmental, social and economic outcomes for regional communities. The Government views Regional Forest Agreements as the most effective way of achieving this balance.

National State of the Forest reports are produced on a five-yearly basis to keep the public informed about Australia’s forests, their management, use and conservation and to provide information on how they are changing.

Minority Report: recommendation 1

Given current world wide emissions growth projections climate change adaptation must be given higher priority.

The Australia Government **notes** this recommendation.

Australia is well positioned to meet the challenge of adapting to climate change: we have well-established and effective natural resource management systems, mature financial and regulatory systems, well-governed institutions and internationally-recognised scientific expertise. We are building on our experience managing variability and climate extremes to develop a significant national resilience and adaptation capability. The Australian Government has an important role to play in leading a cohesive, national response to climate change impacts, such as removing barriers to adaptation and building disaster resilience.

On 2 December 2015, the Australian Government released a *National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy*. The Strategy sets out how Australia is managing climate change risks for the benefit of the community, economy and environment. It identifies a set of principles to guide effective adaptation practice

and resilience building and outlines the Government's vision for a climate resilient future. The Strategy also identifies four priorities that will guide national engagement with the research sector, business and the community.

The Australian Government is further developing Australia's adaptation research capability, including through its renewed investment in the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, hosted by Griffith University. The Australian Government has committed \$9 million over three years (2014–2017) for the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility to deliver practical, hands-on tools and information to help governments, businesses and communities manage climate risks, particularly in the coastal zone. The National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility is also maintaining Australia's adaptation research capacity by facilitating four adaptation research networks, including an ecosystems network, hosted by James Cook University. The network brings together researchers and practitioners to communicate and build national capability in ecosystems adaptation research.

In addition, the Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub under the National Environmental Science Programme will further our understanding of Australia's future climate. Research will focus on understanding the processes that drive Australia's climate, improving our ability to model the climate and refining projections of Australia's future climate, including extreme events. The Hub's research will be targeted at addressing major climate challenges and will provide the information needed to support a productive and resilient Australia.

While the Australian Government is committed to playing its part in building national resilience and preparedness; businesses, communities and other levels of government have the most direct role in adapting to a changing climate. The Australian Government will continue to collaborate with others, including with state, territory and local governments.

At the international level, Australia worked constructively with other nations to secure an ambitious, effective and enduring outcome from the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in Paris in December 2015. Australia has committed \$1 billion over five years to international climate change action, including action to enhance adaptation in the Pacific region. Australia will continue to promote a balance between funding for mitigation and adaptation activities in the global climate change response.

Minority Report: recommendation 2

That climate change preparation and adaptation is made a primary objective of the national Natural Resource Management agenda.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government recognises the value that coordinated Natural Resource Management can provide in contributing to climate change mitigation, and recognises the need for communities to adopt adaptation strategies to protect our natural resources from possible impacts of climate change.

The Australian Government has invested in Natural Resource Management organisations to facilitate revision of their regional plans to incorporate climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, using up-to-date climate information, through the Natural Resource Management Planning for Climate Change Fund.

This investment included support for CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology to deliver regional climate change projections for key climate variables in Australia, targeted at the needs of the Natural Resource Management community. The Climate Change in Australia website has provided unprecedented access to climate change projections data alongside user-friendly tools to explore regional climate change and support adaptation planning. Nine research teams from around Australia have also been working closely with Natural Resource Management organisations to deliver climate change information, tools and guidance tailored to their needs, improving access to climate change impact and adaptation information.

Regional Natural Resource Management organisations are undertaking regional stakeholder engagement and developing activities appropriate to their regions' circumstances, such as geo-spatial mapping, use of planning and decision support tools and the application of regionally appropriate climate change research and information about anticipated climate change impacts on regions.

Minority Report: recommendation 3

Include on the COAG agenda the need for the Commonwealth and State Governments to prioritise the containment and/or elimination of invasive species, and that land managers including public entities be required to control identified and targeted invasive species on their lands.

The Australian Government **notes** this recommendation and considers invasive species controls are best progressed by Environment Ministers and Agriculture Ministers, within their respective portfolio responsibilities.

The Australian Government aims to prevent invasive species entering Australia, through established biosecurity controls, to minimise the risk of entry of unwanted species. These controls include import conditions and quarantine measures at the border. A science-based assessment process is used to determine the potential risk of commodities, goods and species proposed for import into Australia. However, historic introductions or incursions have led to a range of invasive species becoming established in Australia, with little to no prospect of eradication across their entire range. Governments and land managers have existing requirements to control declared invasive pest species, under State and Territory legislation.

At the broader level, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity, which came into effect in January 2012, set out a draft framework for a consistent approach to the identification and management of pests and diseases of national significance, for the benefit of the economy and the environment. The National Biosecurity Committee released a paper titled *Modernising Australia's approach to managing established pests and diseases of national significance* for public consultation in June 2015. Key features of the proposed new approach include:

- a move away from traditional heavy reliance on enforcement as a means to manage the effects of established pests and diseases;
- greater emphasis on using other tools and assisting industry and the community to better manage pest species themselves;
- greater collaboration between governments and stakeholders directly affected; and
- government participation in established pest and disease management, where sustained action is led by industry or the community.

Through the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper, the Australian Government will invest a further \$50 million in managing established pest animals and weeds.

In addition, national emergency response agreements are established, including the *National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement* between all Australian governments, the *Emergency Animal Disease Response Arrangement* and the *Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed*. These agreements are established between all governments and key production industry bodies. These agreements provide for the emergency eradication of exotic plant, animal and disease incidents, where technically feasible and cost beneficial to do so. Also through the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper, the Australian Government will invest a further \$50 million for increased emergency eradication and national response capability.