



Conservation Land Trusts Alliance



NATIONAL TRUST

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Climate Change, Environment and the Arts
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AUSTRALIA

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15 August 2011

Dear Committee Secretary,

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts Inquiry into Australia's biodiversity in a changing climate

The Australian Conservation Land Trust Alliance (the Alliance) requests arrangements be made for the House Of Representatives Standing Committee On Climate Change, Environment and the Arts public hearing to include the Alliance in any public hearings it may conduct.

The Alliance is a newly formed national alliance consisting of seven member organisations including The Nature Conservancy, National Trust of Australia (WA), Nature Foundation SA, Nature Conservation Trust of New South Wales, the Tasmanian Land Conservancy and Victorian Trust for Nature. These organisations work with private landowners across Australia to conserve and enhance landscapes, ecosystems and species. Our core business is biodiversity protection. The Australian Government has recently approved funding for the Alliance to establish a Secretariat to assist our organisations to coordinate our private land conservation efforts. Philanthropic support has also been secured to assist with the establishment of the Alliance.

As an Alliance representing private landholders responsible for protecting up to 200,000 hectares across Australia, we wish to address the Standing Committee on the following Inquiry Terms of Reference:

Connectivity between ecosystems and across landscapes that may contribute to biodiversity conservation

The Alliance would like to reinforce the importance of connectivity planning across landscapes to increase ecosystem resilience. This requires integrating and coordinating investment, planning and activity across private land and public land.

We commend to the Standing Committee the recommendations and findings of VEAC's Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation Final Report, March 2011. Relevant points to be found in the report and a pertinent extract are set out in Attachment 1.

The Alliance welcomes the Australian Government's proposed boost of funding for regional natural resource management planning and land care networks announced within the Clean Energy Future Package.

The Alliance considers that a missing link in this announcement is a commitment to investing in capacity building for covenanting bodies as represented by the Alliance, to coordinate our activities on a landscape scale.

Covenanting and permanent protection provides a vital and necessary adjunct to wider landscape connectivity actions. In this regard, it should be noted that Alliance organisations complement the work of regional NRM agencies and land care networks rather than duplicate them.

The Alliance believes efforts to maximise landscape connectivity could be more efficiently achieved by also bolstering the resource capacity of covenanting bodies. We have significant existing infrastructure relied upon by the public (e.g. regional NRM agencies) and private sector for independent engagement of landowners, assessment of habitats, ecological standards verification and registering of interests in relation to private land.

The Alliance welcomes the CFI and the linking of the carbon pricing mechanism to it. In addition, the recently announced funding to support land sector initiatives to assist with the abatement of emissions are very welcome.

The Alliance notes that while the emerging carbon market will create opportunities for our organisations to address some landscape connectivity issues, in the absence of building our organisational capacity further to operate within the new carbon market; integrate carbon farming agreements into our service delivery strategy, it will be more difficult to operate and achieve conservation outcomes across landscapes in a way that complements NRM agencies and Landcare networks so as to maximise our collective efficiency and impact..

The Alliance encourages the Standing Committee to consider recommending national funding arrangements be put in place to support the landscape connectivity functions of private land permanent protection bodies, utilising funding from either the National Reserve System (NRS) program budget or new Biodiversity Fund.

How climate change impacts on biodiversity may flow on to affect human communities and the economy

In the event that the Standing Committee is not aware of the National Ecosystems Assessment released by the UK government in June 2011, the Alliance draws its attention to it. The Ecosystems Assessment analyses the value of the UK's natural environment (at £30 billion per annum) by taking account of the economic, health and social benefits the natural world provides. The Assessment is the first of its kind at a

fully national scale and follows a recommendation arising from of the United Nations Millennium Ecosystems Assessment in 2005 that ecosystems assessments be conducted at national scales.

The UK National Ecosystems Assessment provides an economic rationale for increasing biodiversity and conservation of biodiverse land areas, a critical step in achieving biodiversity and conservation goals.

The Alliance encourages the Standing Committee to consider recommending an independent Ecosystems Assessment be undertaken on a national basis for Australia as a matter of priority given the imperatives to address climate change impacts and the need to promote the sustainable use of natural resources .

Strategies to enhance climate change adaptation, including promoting resilience in ecosystems and human communities

The Alliance draws the Standing Committee's attention to important recent research findings in relation to Alliance member equivalent agencies responsible for protected land areas in Canada and the assessed state of their preparedness for adaptive practices, policies and resources required to respond to climate change: "The State of Climate Change Adaptation in Canada's Protected Areas Sector" published In the Canadian Geographer, 2011. A synopsis of the findings is set out in Attachment 1.

The Alliance encourages the Standing Committee to consider ways in which covenanting bodies represented by it could be supported to prepare for, respond to and support, private landowners with covenants to adapt to climate change variation in natural habitats and ecosystems.

Mechanisms to promote the sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystem services in a changing climate

The network of landowners and significant private landholdings for which Alliance members have current stewardship responsibilities, provides an ideal opportunity to undertake research to maximise the ways in which biodiversity and carbon can be most efficiently managed within existing remnant native vegetation protected by covenant.

The Alliance continues to support and encourage programs designed to protect and encourage the sustainable use of natural resources and eco-systems within the land sector by use of such mechanisms as stewardship payments to maximise the quality of vegetation

An assessment of whether current governance arrangements are well placed to deal with the challenges of conserving biodiversity in a changing climate

The Alliance notes that it is intended that as part of the Australian Government's Climate Change Plan, a Land Sector & Biodiversity Board to be established under the Climate Change Authority Bill. While biodiversity protection on private land is implied in the Board's title, we nevertheless note the need for a committee to be established under its auspice to receive advice about improving the coordination and integration of efforts between those bodies, including NRM and Landcare, upon private land protection.

The Alliance encourages the Standing Committee to consider recommending that the Land Sector & Biodiversity Board give priority attention to improving coordination between organisations focused upon the permanent protection (including via CFI agreements) of private land. Further, that representation from the national Conservation Land Trust Alliance is included within the Land Sector & Biodiversity Board structure.

To further discuss the Alliance request to be heard by the Standing Committee please contact Victoria Marles on _____ or Nathan Males on _____

Sincerely, on behalf of the Alliance

Victoria Marles
Trust for Nature Vic

Nathan Males
Tasmanian Land Conservancy

Attachment 1

2. VEAC's Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation Final Report, March 2011. Relevant points and extracts:

The Standing Committee will note that VEAC recommended building the capacity of local, regional and statewide bodies to undertake coordination and integrated planning required to achieve connectivity across landscapes to address and arrest further biodiversity loss.

VEAC report findings regarding the most efficient form of landscape connectivity protection:

"Preventing habitat loss and improving the condition of native vegetation is, by many orders of magnitude, more cost-effective than revegetation and has significantly better conservation outcomes. Revegetation has an important role but, because of the cost and resources required, revegetation should be strongly targeted to key strategic areas. Recognising the primacy of retaining and enhancing existing native vegetation, VEAC has identified several areas where prudent investment can achieve measurable conservation goals provided adequate resourcing is available" [P.37, VEAC Final Report]

1. "The State of Climate Change Adaptation in Canada's Protected Areas Sector" published In the Canadian Geographer, 2011 - synopsis of the findings.

"Recent suggestions by the World Commission on Protected Areas that conservation actions are likely to fail unless they are adjusted to take account of climate change, emphasize the need for protected areas agencies to begin mainstreaming climate change into policy, planning, and management. This article presents the results of a University of Waterloo and Canadian Council on Ecological Areas survey on the state of climate change adaptation in Canada's protected areas sector, including all federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions. Analysis revealed several important findings. First, three quarters of agencies surveyed reported that climate change impacts were already occurring within their respective protected areas systems. Second, climate change was perceived by 94 percent of respondents to be an issue substantially alter protected areas policy and planning over the 25 years. Third, despite the perceived future importance of climate change, little policy, planning, management, or research response is currently being undertaken by most agencies. Overall, with 91 percent of the agencies conceding that they currently do not have the capacity necessary to respond effectively to climate change, the survey revealed an important gap between the perceived salience of climate change and the capacity of protected areas agencies to adapt. Constraints, such as limited financial resources, limited internal capacity, and lack of understanding of real or anticipated climate change impacts, will need to be overcome if Canada's protected areas agencies are to be able to deliver on their various protected areas- and biodiversity-related mandates, such as the perpetual protection of representative elements of Canada's natural heritage, in an era of rapid climate change"