

Inquiry into the operation of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts

Department of the Senate

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Australia

Dear Committee Members

The **Wielangta Forest** case shows that Regional Forest Agreements will not protect endangered species from logging. The swift parrot feeds in woodlands from Adelaide to Toowoomba each winter. All the effort which has gone into protecting its mainland winter habitat is wasted if its breeding places in Tasmania are logged. Wielangta has the stag beetle and logging threatens the world's largest freshwater crayfish (it grows to more than six kilograms and a metre long) and the Tasmanian devil. The case should be closed! Senator Bob Brown has put his own money in this case, and so have other people, and this is deplorable when the EPBC Act should be doing the job it was designed to do i.e. protect biodiversity and old growth native forests! This area is a safe-guard buffer zone for the benefit of many species, including humans. It should automatically be protected as one of Australia's natural assets, and for future generations.

Wielangta Forest is about to be logged to make paper in Japan. If, in this lucky, wealthy, democratic country, we can't do better than that, what hope is there for the forests of Brazil, Indonesia or the Congo? On one hand we have got Malcolm Turnbull saying he wants to stop illegally logged rainforest in Indonesia, but he wants to continue with the illegal logging of forests in Tasmania. The Wielangta Forest court case has exposed the gaping hole in Australia's environmental law which leaves forests under Regional Forest Agreements unprotected. There is no requirement for an RFA to deliver real protection for endangered species. It just needs to state that a system exists! Tokenism and lame Acts won't protect Australia's biodiversity. We are already famous as one of the greatest wildlife killers in the world! If the intent of the EPBC Act is to protect global biodiversity, it was not good enough to pay "lip-service" to it.

Worldwide, deforestation is the single biggest cause of extinction. There is not a native forest logging area in Tasmania that does not harbour nationally listed species of wildlife. Excluding forests from biodiversity is a contradiction!

With all the poisons used by logging companies to remove "pest" species, including wildlife, it is not really surprising that the **Tasmanian Devil** is under threat! Experts warn the feisty marsupial could be extinct by 2020. They eat carcasses, and the poisons! Devils are able to be bred, disease free, in other states, but not in Tasmania! It doesn't take much to work out the connection between poisons and their facial cancers.

To protect the **koala** from extinction in south-east Queensland, urban expansion in koala habitat and vegetation buffer areas have to be halted. With only 100,000 koalas left in the wild, it is imperative that human expansion be halted where it conflicts with wildlife habitat. We have wildlife massacres and "cullings" when they are perceived to be "over-abundant" but the real over-abundant species is humans! Our so-called "skills" shortages has increased our population, but the implications of extra humans hasn't been addressed with regards to climate change, water shortages and competition with our biodiversity and native animals. Conservation of the koala cannot be achieved if vegetation continues to be cleared. The damage has being done by destruction and fragmentation of koala habitat through incompatible urbanisation. These habitat issues need to be addressed under the EPBC Act, not just under local laws.

The EPBC Act fails even to mention **climate change**, the most important environmental issue of the day. There are many industries, mostly livestock industries, that are extremely resource-use expensive. Much of the products are going to overseas markets, while we in Australia are facing drought and loss of waterways! The dairy industry exports needs to be scaled down as one of our major irrigation water users. The red meat industry is largely exported overseas too! Live export is increasing, and besides the lack of animal welfare in many countries overseas, this industry is also very "expensive" in terms of water, native grass and vegetation losses, and of course pollution greenhouse gas emissions. Our agricultural industries should be for us, not for outside markets! We can't sacrifice our own country and its fragile ecology on the altar of market forces. We are already a wealthy country and we need to invest in a "green" economy, not livestock industries. The Murray-Darling river system has been the source of much economic growth. However, it is suffering from drought and over-use, as is the Murray river. The entire river below Wentworth, including the lower lakes and the Coorong, has been nominated for assessment as a site of national environmental significance under the Environmental Biodiversity and Protection Act, together with associated wetlands, flood plains and groundwater systems. This area needs to be protected and restored before these wetlands and river waters are lost forever. (*The Age*, Garrett may get power to protect Murray, 28th Aug).

How does **increasing our population** by more than a million every three years make our climate change/greenhouse emission problem easier to solve?

How does such rapid population growth make it easier to maintain our rivers, soils and food production? Australians have one of the highest per capita environmental impacts in the world. An increase in the Australian population has a larger global impact than the addition of a person just about anywhere else in the world.

Victoria's Red Gums: Along the Murray and its tributaries are the world's largest stands of river red gum. This merging of forests and wetlands is one of the most unique and highly threatened landscapes in Australia. Victoria's red gum wetlands are home to almost 300 threatened and endangered plants and animals. They should provide continuous wildlife corridors for wetland and native fauna and flora species that are suffering from fragmentation of habitat, logging, feral species and cattle grazing. We need an historic, national solution to the future of the River Red Gum floodplain forests of south-eastern Australia, that:

- Creates a continuous network of new National Parks along the Murray and associated rivers
- Protects internationally significant Ramsar wetlands and the two largest Red Gum forests left in the world
- Includes world's best practice Indigenous protected areas, comprising a number of large Aboriginal-owned National Parks
- Promotes land justice, cultural survival and a firm economic base for Traditional Owners
- Supports a continental scale biological corridor from Kosciuszko to Coorong via a private land conservation network
- Delivers a thriving and diverse regional economy with an emphasis on renewable energy and conservation management projects
- Involves an integrated, cross-border tourism strategy, marketing the region as the 'Kakadu of the South'

(<http://www.saveredgum.org/>)

Senator Milne told reporters regarding the **coal mine project in Queensland**: "We know that coal is the problem. If Australia keeps putting millions of tonnes - and there's four billion tonnes of coal in that basin - if we keep putting that into the world market we are driving climate change... There's no other way of looking at it." (*Sydney Morning Herald*, Greens continue push to stop coal mine, 28 Aug).

Australia is still mining coal and at the same time trying to address climate change? Our government cannot be promoting and selling the driver of ghg emissions (including coal) and addressing the problems at the same time! Either we face the challenges of climate change and prevent its causes, or ignore it! There cannot be two ways - we either comply with Kyoto or we continue ahead and ignore climate change!

Figures published online (*Canberra Times* 28/8/08) by one of the world's top authorities on **greenhouse emissions** (*Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Centre in the United States*), shows Australia's total fossil fuel emissions jumped by 8.3 per cent from 93 million tonnes in 2004 to just

over 100 million tonnes in 2005. Our fossil fuel emissions are growing more than four times faster than figures quoted by the Federal Government, placing Australia's Kyoto target at risk. *Australia has committed to meeting a target of 108 per cent of its 1990 emissions levels about 599 million tonnes annually by 2012. But the centre's figures suggest this cannot be achieved.* If climate change is driven by human populations and their use of carbon-based technology, there is no way of continually increasing our population and continuing our present economy AND complying with Kyoto.

Based on Government figures, wildlife welfare groups fear that **kangaroo densities** which are down to less than 5 kangaroos per square kilometre across most of NSW, South Australia and Queensland - a figure defined by the Federal Government's *Murray Darling Report* as "quasi extinction"- are already in a downward spiral into extinction. However, the killings continue! We have threatened or killed-off about one-third of our native species, needed if we are to have a healthy ecology.

Kangaroos cannot be farmed - they cannot be penned, herded, transported, interfered with in any way. They are highly stressed animals who get diseases and myopathy from stress. The program to farm animals in any way will result in failure, as have emu farms and attempts to farm wildlife. Kangaroo meat is loaded with bacteria and parasites. It is not safe to eat anyway! The cruelty to joeys (estimated between 300,000 to 1,000,000 every year) who die when their mother is killed is shameful. The in-pouch joeys bashed to death or stomped on, the out-of-pouch running off and drying of starvation, hypothermia or predation. This is how we treat wildlife? There is no way of accurately assessing population numbers. Still, quotas are set to "sustainable", and "humane"(?) killing quota of 3.5 million per year!

Australia's reputation is being gravely damaged by the promotion of kangaroo meat internationally. At the rate we are going kangaroos could be extinct in as little as 10 years or less. Kangaroo populations have dropped 50-70% across the nation due to the drought and unrelenting killing. Extra pressure to kill more would accelerate their extinction. Kangaroos are a symbol of everything that is wrong with people's attitude to the natural world; they are seen as a barrier to economic "progress" and are being "managed", that is, hounded, hunted, hated and killed for the small amount of profits they produce! There needs to be a moratorium on the killing of kangaroos! There should be no more skins or meat exported. This shameful industry is compromising our anti-whaling stance. We can't ethically "manage" our own precious wildlife and condemn Japan for "managing" whales!

The Murray-Darling is dying, and the Barrier Reef is almost dead. Our depressingly damaged rainforests and old-growth forests are threatened by grazing, feral species and logging. All the things that make Australia different, and attractive to tourists to this country, are disappearing, including kangaroos and koalas, our flagship species. Why would tourists bother coming here? Just to see more cities and man-made structures? We should promote our natural wealth, in forests, wetlands, mountains, wildlife and rivers for tourists, not exploit them for exports and jobs!

The Commonwealth should take responsibility for threatened species and biodiversity, not leave it to the states, and change the EPBC Act so that it is effective.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my comments to the enquiry.

Kind regards
Ms Vivienne Ortega