

Dissenting Report by Australian Greens

Senator Rachel Siewert

I am unable to support the conclusions and recommendations of the majority report on this inquiry. The report reaches its conclusions and recommendations without having considered the context of the development of the various state and territory legislation, the massive loss of biodiversity and rate of extinction of plant and animals species in Australia, and the impact of land clearing on Australia's carbon emissions.

According to the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts over the last 200 years Australia has suffered the largest documented decline in biodiversity of any continent. Despite efforts to manage threats and pressures to biodiversity in Australia, it is still in decline.

Further Australia's *Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2020 Consultation* draft says:

"We observe and note report after report of the downward trend in our biodiversity."

The *Australia State of the Environment 2006* report found that biodiversity is in serious decline (Beeton et al. 2006) and the second environmental performance review of Australia by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2008), reports that despite improved efforts the downward trend in the conservation status of some species continues.

The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists outlines the impact of clearing native vegetation saying:

"The clearing of native vegetation is one of the primary causes of land and water degradation and loss of biodiversity in Australia. Broadscale land clearing has led to extensive erosion and salinisation of soils. Erosion and the removal of the vegetation in riparian zones has also reduced the quality of water that runs off the landscape and this in turn has damaged the health of our rivers, wetlands and estuaries. The clearing of native vegetation is also a prime cause of the loss of Australia's unique biodiversity."

The cost of repairing our degraded landscape and natural resources is estimated to be \$80 billion.

The majority report has not considered the billions of dollars that have been invested in land repair and natural resource management, nor has there been adequate consideration of the various incentives schemes that have been and are available at the Federal, state and territory level.

This has been a one-sided review which unfortunately was in a sense pre-determined by the limited terms of references for the inquiry. It should be noted that the Greens did not support these limited terms of reference.

While I agree that stewardship programs and market based incentives need more development and funding, I strongly disagree that these should replace regulation of land clearing. Rather, these programs should complement the regulatory process. In fact there is a need for a much higher level of investment in natural resource management and environment programs.

I also agree it would be desirable to facilitate better relationships between landholders and Government agencies, but would point out that this must be a two way process. I note that state agriculture departments used to play an essential role in the extension of agricultural practices and providing assistance with land degradation issues – but that funding and support for these activities has been substantially cut back over the last three decades

I have been engaged in the debate on land clearing for over 25 years. During that time many landholders have recognised the need for regulatory reform and better land management practices. They have developed innovative land management techniques and practices, and engaged with the various natural resource management programs. Unfortunately there are some that refuse to accept the need for change and that unless we do we will not arrest and reverse the major land degradation and biodiversity loss Australia is suffering. If we are going to enhance the sustainability of our regional economies and communities it is essential that we address land degradation and Australia's rate of biodiversity loss.

Senator Rachel Siewert

Australian Greens Senator for Western Australia