

SUBMISSION TO THE EPBC ACT REVIEW

ANON-K57V-XQBK-3

Name

Amy-Beth Seeley

State or Territory

South Australia

Areas of Interest

Threatened species; Environmental Impact Assessments; Great Barrier Reef; Climate change; Compliance and enforcement; Public participation in decision making;

Attachment provided

Yes

Do you give permission for your submission to be published?

Yes - with my name and/or organisation (if included)

SUBMISSION RESPONSES

This submission was provided as an attachment only. The attachment is provided on the following pages of this document.

Amy-Beth Seeley

16/04/20

To the Review Panel,

RE: Australia Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act

At the end of December 2019 I was privileged to be one of the last hikers on the Kangaroo Island wilderness trail before the National Park was evacuated. Over the following days the hiking trail and park were decimated by the bushfires, this was a chilling moment for me.

The black summer bushfires have been a stark reminder than nature is not just a gift to humanity in its beauty, but essential to our health and survival. As the focus and action across Australia grown in relation to our environmental crises and through volunteering with the Australian conservation foundation, so has grown my focus on how individually we can take actions to collectively bring about positive change. It is not just our bushfires that are destroying our environment, it is the negligence of us, as caretakers. This compels to make a submission to your panel in relation to the EPBC Act.

Is the EPBC Act doing what was intended?

The current EPBC Act was last reviewed in 2010. In 2011, Australia agreed to 12 globally set 'Aichi Targets' under the auspices of the Convention of Biological Diversity. The performance in achieving these targets can therefore act as an appropriate outcome measure for the success of the current EPBC Act.

Australia has been labeled globally as a deforestation hotspot, the only developed country to earn this title (1). Aichi Target 5 commits to at least halving and where feasible reducing to zero, the rate of loss of all natural habitats including forests.

Disappointingly we have seen movement in the opposite direction of this target. The Queensland government in 2017-18 reported woody vegetation clearing was at a rate of almost 392,000 hectares per year - over four and a half times what it was in 2009 (2).

In fact, since the EPBC came into operation, 7.7 million hectares of threatened species' habitat has

been destroyed (3). The EPBC Act has failed to facilitate Australia meeting this target which is essential in addressing our current extinction crisis.

Aichi Target 11 addresses the protection of terrestrial and inland waters in addition to coast and marine areas. It places particular importance on biodiversity and ecosystem services;

ensuring they are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative.

The Great barrier reef being home to 25% of all know marine species globally and a UNESCO World heritage falls into this category. Again, we have continued to see increased destruction of the reef with the 2019 Great Barrier Reef Outlook reporting (4) reliance in reef condition since 2014. The report identified the biggest four impacts being climate change, run off from the land, costal development and some forms of fishing - particularly illegal fishing.

The EBPC Act has the ability to influence these four greatest threats to our reefs and the outlook report highlights that there is holes in its current ability to do so effectively.

Following the bushfires, we saw global attention and appreciation for Australian native wildlife. Our Koalas and Kangaroos are an international face of Australia, and 86% of our mammals cannot be found anywhere else in the world. Our EPBC Act has failed to protect our unique wildlife despite the commitment to Aichi Target 12:

‘By 2020 the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has been improved and sustained.’

In contrast, during the last decade our endangered species have continued to decline in population and at least three species have been allowed to go extinct (5). Australia leads the world on mammal extinction (6). In the past decade, populations of the Koala on the east coast have declined at a rate of 21% (1).

We have failed to meet numerous Aichi targets and these outcomes highlight the ineffectiveness of the current EPBC Act. Change is necessary to ensure Australia’s environment is able to not only sustain itself but thrive into the future.

What Changes are needed to the EPBC Act? Why?

Investigations into the extinction crisis have highlighted the urgent need for legislative reforms (7, 8). The value of protecting our environment has never been more evident as the World Health Organisation has announced climate change to be the biggest threat to human health, causing an estimated additional 250,000 deaths annually by 2030. It is up to decision makers at every level to commit to the right choices to enable humanity and nature to thrive.

Firmer laws are required to financially implicate businesses making poor environmental choices and reward those employing environmentally conscious practices. For example mandating incentives for land managers who are willing to protect and restore natural habitats on their properties. Such laws will help establish responsibility across the nation by all parties.

The natural habitats of our endangered species need guaranteed identification and protection from

Independent review of
the **EPBC Act**

destruction. Furthermore, plans for wildlife recovery and threat abatement must be implemented to reverse the damages done through the past decade and beyond.

Current environmental governance lacks transparency, evident from the inability to challenge decisions on a merits basis. The health of our environment implicates every individual, validating the right of the community to have a voice in any decision making process. Legislation needs to ensure disclosure of all decision making information with guaranteed accessibility and transparency must be met with the allowance of merits based reviews.

I appreciate the work you are undertaking to ensure the health and protection of Australians

Environment and taking the time to consider my concerns.

We have a valuable opportunity here to enact positive change that will safeguard the ecosystems we have been made responsible for.

I look forward to hearing the outcomes of your review.

Sincerely,

Amy-Beth Seeley

References:

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3. Australian Conversation Foundation; Fast tracking extinction report. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/6451/attachments/original/1536271571/08-2018_16pp_ACF_Fast-Tracking_Extinction_report_final_WEB.PDF?1536271571
4. Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2019 <http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-work/outlook-report-2019>
5. Woinarski, J. C. Z., Garnett, S. T., Legge, S. M., & Lindenmayer, D. B. (2017). The contribution of policy, law, management, research, and advocacy failings to the recent extinctions of three Australian vertebrate species. *Conservation Biology*, **31**, 13–23.
6. Australia's Faunal Extinction Crisis Inquiry Interim Report https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ITIX62hfOOEp1kZVibVPHg7_axJoZuzt7GR7M1IUxbl/edit

7. Walsh, J. C., Watson, J. E. M., Bottrill, M. C., Joseph, L. N., & Possingham, H. P. (2013). Trends and biases in the listing and recovery planning for threatened species: An Australian case study. *Oryx*, **47**, 134–143.
8. Kearney, S. G., Josie, C., Reside, A. E., Fisher, D. O., Martine, M., Doherty, T., ... Watson, J. E. M. (2018). The threats to Australia's imperilled species and implications for a national conservation response. *Pacific Conservation Biology*, **25**, 331–344.