

SUBMISSION TO THE EPBC ACT REVIEW

ANON-K57V-XQXG-N

Name

Alysha Thrishcutt

State or Territory

Tasmania

Areas of Interest

Threatened species; Climate change; Compliance and enforcement; Biodiversity; Conservation; Wildlife trade; Commonwealth national parks;

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.

Dear Independent Review Panel of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999,

My name is Dr Alysha Thriscutt and I am a 29-year-old veterinarian, conservationist and concerned citizen, based in Hobart, Tasmania. I have taken the time to write this formal submission because of the deep grief I feel about the current state of our environment and the frustration I have at the weakness of current environmental protection laws.

I have spent time up at the Adani blockade camp, Tarkine blockade camps here in Tasmania's north west and written countless letters, protests signs and banners. I have a great deal of personal experience treating wildlife that gets brought into my veterinary clinic, usually after being hit by a car or truck. Outside of work I spend a lot of my personal time bushwalking, camping and appreciating wildlife in the places they should be rather than in a hessian sack at my clinic.

Is the EPBC Act delivering what it was intended in an efficient and effective manner?

According to the website, the EPBC act aims to protect and conserve Australia's environment, biodiversity and heritage, and promote ecologically sustainable development through the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

I would argue that it has failed at this on multiple levels, but will specifically address the situation regarding ongoing logging and deforestation that is happening here in Tasmania.

In February 2019 I attended the Senate Inquiry into Australia's Faunal Extinction Crisis in Hobart. I listened to scientists and conservationists discuss our failing environmental protection laws and their frustration at the loopholes and exemptions that are made for industries and politicians to approve environmentally destructive practices.

For example, in Tasmania, any forestry activity that is undertaken under a Regional Forest Agreement (which is all forestry in Tasmania) is currently exempt from the EPBC act. How is

it possible that the industry responsible for the widespread loss of key conservation habitat is exempt under the current system?

I will always remember the words from one researcher, who had spent over 20 years studying a critically endangered Tasmanian bird and was calling for an end to the ongoing logging of their habitat. He said that the forests we're now fighting over are the scraps of what was. All of the best, highest conservation value forest had already been logged. It was heart breaking to hear, along with the admission that he had all but given up on the survival of the species he'd devoted his career to researching due to their low numbers, fragmented habitat and ongoing destruction of the small parts that still remained.

I have spent a lot of time up in the Tarkine region of Tasmania and seen first-hand the damage that is being done by Forestry Tasmania (now Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT)). There is nothing sustainable about their activities and as further evidence of this, they failed to get Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for the second time in late 2019 (<https://www.wilderness.org.au/news-events/stt-second-failure-to-secure-fsc-certification-risks-market-access>).

STT is a government run business and is running at a multimillion-dollar loss (in 2019 they lost 15 million) and is being subsidised by the Tasmanian tax payers (<https://www.sttas.com.au/about-us/corporate-overview/annual-reports/2018-19-annual-report>). They claim to not be logging old growth forests but have been found on multiple occasions to be doing just that. These forests are home to multiple threatened and endangered species including the Tasmanian devil, wedge tailed eagle and spotted tail quoll. I have personally seen some of these species within coups that are marked for logging in the next 3 years and was shocked to find out that the sighting of an endangered species within a coup, has no impact on their ability to clear-fell and burn that area.

On the 8th of April 2020, an additional 356,000ha of previously protected forest will become available for logging in Tasmania as the Forest Agreement Act ends. This bringing the total area of available land for logging in Tasmania up to 1,400,000ha.

Given the current extinction rates in Australia and the latest climate change data, how it is

possible that logging and burning of old growth, high conservation forest is still legally allowed? Research in 2014 showed that young trees such as those in plantations, burn hotter and usually burn completely whereas old growth trees over 40 years old, almost never do (<https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/conl.12122>). Given our horrific summer of bushfires, stronger laws are needed to stop logging of old trees and reduce bushfire risk.

On a national level, since Australia's environmental protection laws were passed, 7.7 million hectares of threatened species habitat has been destroyed ([ACF Fast-tracking Extinction Report](#)) and much of this was not even submitted for assessment, despite this being a requirement under current laws.

It's because of the points outlined above, that I strongly believe the current EPBC Act is failing to deliver on its mission, namely conserving the Australian environment and biodiversity. In relation to Tasmania's logging industry, it is certainly not protecting forests from ecologically unsustainable development and extraction of natural resources.

I believe a complete overhaul of the Act is needed rather than just making amendments. We need much stronger environmental laws without loop holes and exceptions for industry as well as transparency about government decision making and vested interests.

We need a coordinated national approach to manage Australia's environment and a clear and binding legal framework that the states must comply with. We also need a well-funded, independent Environmental Protection Authority to hold the government to account as well as a National Environmental Commission to monitor trends in environmental health. We cannot respond to issues that we do not yet know exist. Independent surveying and monitoring of our environmental impact is essential.

It baffles me that these laws only come up for review once every 10 years. Given the speed at which we are destroying our environment, more frequent reassessment is essential. The time, however, is now, and I would urge you to please overhaul the act and fund an

independent authority and environmental commission. The thought of what our environment will be like in 10 years if these laws are not tightened is awful.

I will finish on a personal note. At 29 I have thought long and hard about whether to bring a child into this world. Given all of the environmental issues we currently face, is it a responsible thing to do? What kind of a world would I be bringing a child into and leaving them to inherit once I'm gone? You're in an extremely privileged position in the history of Australian conservation to actually make a tangible and positive change. I urge you to please do so.

Warm regards,

Dr Alysha Thiscutt.