

# SUBMISSION TO THE EPBC ACT REVIEW

ANON-K57V-XYNJ-P

## **Name**

Amy Vos

## **State or Territory**

New South Wales

## **Areas of Interest**

Threatened species; Environmental Impact Assessments; Great Barrier Reef; Climate change; Compliance and enforcement; Decision making; Biodiversity; Conservation;

## **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,

My name is Amy Vos; I am a teacher living in the small town of Austinmer in NSW's Illawarra region. I feel very lucky to have stunning beaches and beautiful littoral rainforest on my doorstep, and I want to ensure that these incredible resources (with all the value they have to offer in terms of ecosystem services, mental health, physical exercise, aesthetic amenity and intrinsic value) continue to be protected and valued for future generations. As a trained environmental scientist (B. Sustainability, M., Sci. Natural Resource Management), and in the current role of educating young Australians, I have serious concerns about the ability of the EPBC Act to sufficiently protect our natural environment, which is crucial to our survival and wellbeing.

Australia is one of the wealthiest, best educated countries in the world. We are blessed with many natural resources that can be benefitted from sustainably and can continue to serve us over time, but our current environmental protection laws are insufficient to protect our natural environment, as we can see by our very poor environmental track record across almost all indicators (<http://wald.anu.edu.au/australias-environment/>).

The EPBC Act aims to provide for the protection of the environment, especially matters of national environmental significance, and to conserve Australia's biodiversity. We are currently experiencing rapid rates of habitat loss, forest loss, threatened species loss, bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef, and the collapse of river systems. All these catastrophes have both social and economic impacts, as well as ecological ones. We are the only developed nation to be classified as a global deforestation hotspot (<https://www.wwf.org.au/knowledge-centre/living-planet-report#gs.ershy7>), and our rate of mammal extinctions is the highest in the world, with three species lost since just 2009, the year I began university ([https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment\\_and\\_Communications/Faunalextingtion/Interim\\_report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Faunalextingtion/Interim_report)). Since the EPBC Act came into operation, 7.7 million hectares of threatened species' habitat has been destroyed ([https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/6451/attachments/original/1536271571/08-2018\\_16pp\\_ACF\\_Fast-Tracking\\_Extinction\\_report\\_final\\_WEB.PDF?1536271571](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/6451/attachments/original/1536271571/08-2018_16pp_ACF_Fast-Tracking_Extinction_report_final_WEB.PDF?1536271571)). In addition, the impacts of the catastrophic bushfires of the summer of 2019/2020 wiped out billions of plants and animals across the country. On a personal note, growing up in the Bega Valley, it has been absolutely devastating to see all the special natural places I love charred to the ground, with little hope of real recovery- some things cannot be rebuilt or replaced. While the landscapes are still reeling, under its exemption provisions the EPBC Act permits native forest logging, which has resumed in remaining forests despite no comprehensive assessment of the impact of the fires on biodiversity. This is not a prudent and precautionary treatment of our native ecosystems; and does not meet the Act's stated goal of conserving Australia's biodiversity. Regional Forest Agreements are currently exempt from the EPBC Act, and this needs to change immediately- in fact many environmental matters that are currently governed by the states need to fall under the Act, and be subject to appropriate scrutiny and approval. In this biodiversity and climate crisis, the EPBC Act needs to be protecting our fauna and flora, and with current exemptions in place this cannot occur effectively. The federal government must expand national oversight to implement controls on deforestation and mandate incentives for land managers who are willing to protect and restore natural ecosystems on their properties, and guarantee the identification

and protection of critical habitats for threatened species and the mandatory implementation of wildlife recovery plans and threat abatement plans.

As signatories to the Paris Agreement, Australia needs to undertake significant action to mitigate against climate change and keep temperature rise below 2 degrees c. In fact, Australia's emissions continue to rise and we are not on track to meet our Paris targets

([https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/16381/attachments/original/1567126998/300819\\_Media\\_Brief\\_-\\_Quarterly\\_emissions\\_result\\_-\\_March\\_2019.pdf?1567126998](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/16381/attachments/original/1567126998/300819_Media_Brief_-_Quarterly_emissions_result_-_March_2019.pdf?1567126998)).

Our environment is already feeling the consequences: The Great Barrier Reef, a world heritage site and site of national significance, is currently undergoing the worst ever bleaching event on record

(<https://climatefeedback.org/claimreview/scientists-observe-most-widespread-bleaching-event-ever-recorded-at-the-great-barrier-reef/>).

Prior to approval of projects (for example, Adani's Carmichael Mine), the Environmental Impact Assessment process should be explicitly required to consider the climate change implications of any approval. Furthermore, climate change should be specifically referred to in the Principles of Ecological Development in section 3A of the EPBC Act.

The EPBC Act is designed to protect and conserve Australia's natural environment and biodiversity. In its current state, there are too many exemptions, its scope is not far-reaching enough, and it does not sufficiently penalise breaches of the Act. The EPBC Act is prone to political interference, eroding public trust in its ability to do what is in the best interests of the environment and its people. There is a clear and essential need for national environment laws that ensure the federal government leads on the protection and recovery of our environment and cultural heritage. In Australia it is unclear who is ultimately responsible for ensuring our environment is managed well. The current system distributes responsibility across the federation, but no one jurisdiction is charged with coordinating efforts to protect our environment. A new National Environment Act should provide the federal government with all the powers it needs to actively protect and manage Australia's environment, including ensuring the federal government retains primary regulatory responsibility for an expanded list of matters of national environmental significance, and giving the federal government power to set binding national standards and objectives that all states must comply with.

Thank you for receiving my submission and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Amy Vos, 

