

SUBMISSION TO THE EPBC ACT REVIEW

ANON-K57V-XYUW-A

Name

Amy Ashman

State or Territory

New South Wales

Areas of Interest

Matters of National Environmental Significance; Climate change; Biodiversity;

Attachment provided

Yes

Do you give permission for your submission to be published?

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

SUBMISSION RESPONSES

QUESTION 1: Some have argued that past changes to the EPBC Act to add new matters of national environmental significance did not go far enough. Others have argued it has extended the regulatory reach of the Commonwealth too far. What do you think?

Past changes to the EPBC Act were not sufficient. Australia is a global deforestation hotspot, and 7.7 million hectares of threatened species habitat have been decimated in the 20 years since the EPBC Act came into operation (source: Ward, M., Simmonds, J., Reside, A., Watson, J, Rhodes, J., Possingham, H., Trezise, J., File, L., Fletcher, R., Taylor, M. (2019). Lots of loss with little scrutiny: the attrition of habitat critical for threatened species in Australia. Conservation Science and Practice, doi:10.1111/csp2.117).

We need a rapid shift in thought and action towards the law and policies that protect our natural environment. Specifically, the Act must place significant land-clearing activities and significant greenhouse gas emissions as new matters of environmental significance. The EPBC Act must acknowledge the indisputable scientific evidence that anthropogenic climate change is threatening biodiversity and human health and existence. Australia must reduce its greenhouse gas emissions as a matter of utmost importance, and the EPBC Act should include greenhouse gas emissions as a trigger to ensure that development is in line with Australia's responsibility towards reducing emissions.

QUESTION 4: Should the matters of national environmental significance within the EPBC Act be changed? How?

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QUESTION 6: What high level concerns should the review focus on? For example, should there be greater focus on better guidance on the EPBC Act, including clear environmental standards? How effective has the EPBC Act been in achieving its statutory objectives to protect the environment and promote ecologically sustainable development and biodiversity conservation? What have been the economic costs associated with the operation and administration of the EPBC Act?

Given the absolute urgency required to mitigate the effects of climate change and reduce Australia's contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, the EPBC Act should include significant greenhouse gas emissions and land-clearing activities as matters of national environmental significance.

QUESTION 7: What additional future trends or supporting evidence should be drawn on to inform the review?

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2018 'Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C' needs to be considered as high-level evidence supporting changes to the Act.

QUESTION 20: How should community involvement in decision-making under the EPBC Act be improved? For example, should community representation in environmental advisory and decision making bodies be increased?

Accessible and open community consultation and participation processes needs to occur in every stage of decision-making under the Act. Information about the Act and decisions that it covers need to be disclosed, readily accessible to the public and reported in plain English and in a timely manner. An independent National Environment Commission should be established, as recommended by the Wilderness Society.

ATTACHMENT

Additional information was provided as an attachment to this submission. The attachment is provided on the following pages of this document.

Dear Professor Samuel and the Independent Review Panel,

My name is Amy Ashman and I am a resident of Armidale, NSW, where I live with my husband and young son. I am writing this submission because I believe that the EPBC Act could and should be strengthened to protect Australia's biodiversity, forests, rivers and reefs; to guard against pollution; and to regulate against developments that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and subsequent climate breakdown.

I love Australia's abundantly beautiful natural environment. I was deeply disturbed, as we all were, to witness the devastation that last summer's drought and bushfire brought to this country. Here in Armidale the usually green landscape turned to dust, dams dried up, and the air was choked with smoke. I packed an emergency bag, kept my child indoors and my eye on the Fires Near Me app, and checked the air quality readings multiple times a day. Too many times the air quality outside was hazardous, and the smoke outdoors set off the fire alarm inside. Our family were safe where many were not, but I won't soon forget the anxiety that rippled through me when I thought of the potential damage to my prematurely-born son's lungs, or of the long-term implications for him of living in a world where climate-change fuelled disasters will become more and more prevalent. I believe it is both evident and indisputable that now is the time for Australia to join the global movement towards urgent action on climate breakdown.

Global warming, and the consequential changes to our climate, pose an unprecedented threat to the safety of our children's future. We have a very short window of time (the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2018 special report suggests only one more decade) in which to take **urgent action** to avoid climate chaos. The effects of human-induced climate change are already being felt worldwide: human lives are being lost, together with collapsing ecosystems and declining biodiversity.

To quote the IPCC 2018 special report, "limiting global warming to 1.5 °C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society." Now is the time for these changes, and I urge the review panel to put the considerations of climate change at the forefront of every decision that the EPBC Act covers.

I have briefly written responses to some of the key questions posed in the EPBC Act discussion paper, below. I do not have a background in environmental science or law; I am a concerned community member. I appreciate the consideration of community submissions in the panel's review of the Act.

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An independent National Environment Commission should be established, as recommended by the Wilderness Society.

Australia is not my country of birth, but it is the country where I live by choice. I want Australia to be the best it can be, and I believe it has the ability to be a real global leader when it comes to taking a strong stance and urgent action on the pressing environmental issues of our times; including biodiversity loss, land clearing, and climate breakdown.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Amy Ashman, PhD

Armidale, NSW 2350

