

SUBMISSION TO THE EPBC ACT REVIEW

ANON-K57V-XZK9-3

Name

Alan Hill

State or Territory

New South Wales

Areas of Interest

The objects of the Act; Threatened species; International obligations; Indigenous Australians; Heritage; Environmental Impact Assessments; Great Barrier Reef; Cumulative impacts; Climate change; Compliance and enforcement; Decision making; Public participation in decision making; Biodiversity; Conservation; Water;

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.

Submission for the review of the EPBC Act

Dear Professor Samuel and the Independent review panel

15 April 2020

I am 71 years old. I grew up in the fringes of Sydney in an area which was being carved out from tall eucalypt forests. My early years we spent exploring those forests and gaining an intimate understanding of the wonder of nature. Around me were a vast array of birds and animals such as Diamond Sparrows, Double Bar finches, Glossy Black Cockatoos, Lyre Birds, Geckos, snakes and a myriad of insects and spiders. Sadly, now most of that forest is gone. Along with it went the amazing diversity of plants and animals which, in my youthful naivety, I believed would be there forever to stimulate and entice future generations to be enthralled by nature.

I still remember going to pet shops in my area and seeing Orange-bellied parrots, Scarlet-chested Parrots, Gouldian Finches and many more of the species which are now listed as rare, endangered or threatened- all being readily available for anyone to put into a box and take home.

Typically, when I raised my concerns with the adults around me about the destruction of the forests around us, I was given the simplistic response that “you can’t stop progress – Australia is a big place and there is plenty of nature out there -somewhere.”

As I grew older, I moved on from “childish things” and into the world of adults and work. As most of us know, getting established and making your way in a complex world leaves little time to contemplate the natural world around us and how it is incrementally changing. Certainly, I could see some of the big issues such as Landscape clearing for agriculture, country being eaten out by rabbits, Wedge-tailed eagles strung out along barbed wire fences, die-back of our rural tree cover, a diminishing in the number and diversity of the wildlife visiting our backyards. It was disquieting, but nowhere was it quantified.

Later in my life I was able to draw back from work thus allowing me the time to rekindle my interest in nature. The more I read, studied and researched the more alarmed I became at what had happened to the world I knew as a child. Our native forests, and the habitat they provided were being logged at an unsustainable rate. Our rivers were in a dire state often running dry with massive fish kills and water over extracted for unsustainable farming practices. I discovered that Australia has the dubious distinction of being the extinction

capital of the world. Powerful vested interests seemed to hold sway over decision makers such that the environmental concerns were always trumped by economic opportunism. The great Barrier reef, which I was fortunate enough to see in the 80s and 90s, is now bleached and facing a disaster - clearly bought about by human induced climate change.

My response to these looming disasters is to be an active member of several landcare groups and support organisations which are active in environmental repair and advocacy. When I am out volunteering I meet hundreds of like-minded people trying to turn back the tide of environmental destruction that we seem to be facing on almost every natural resource front.

The environment never wins. It seems the best we can hope for is to allow it to survive a little longer in the face of almost constant threats in the name of “jobs-money-progress”. We have weak environmental laws. I have spent literally thousands of hours trying to stop destructive developments in wetlands, forests and vulnerable coastal areas – usually we lose, occasionally we can delay, very seldom does nature win.

We are wealthy country and have a relatively small population. So how can it be, in a country as vast as Australia, that we are losing so many precious habitats, animals and forests?

Indigenous Australians managed to live sustainably on this continent for over 60,000 years. Why are we not including them in our discussions and using their wealth of knowledge about this place we all call home? I suspect that prior to 1788 there were never such devastating fires on this continent as we experienced in 2019-20.

Where is the oversight and stewardship we expect from government?

We have had the EPBC Act in place now for twenty years. Clearly it has failed in its task to protect our unique and amazing biodiversity. Why? The obvious answer is that we need strong enforceable over-arching legislation which will identify what we have, what are the threats to what we have and set up a legislative frame-work which identifies, protects and enhances the resilience of our natural heritage.

What I am asking of this review is to:

Set up an independent commission to have oversight over environmental protection across Australia with a strong legal framework and enforceable powers. The commission should be adequately resourced, pro-active instead of reactive and independent of political influence.

Increase the matters of national environmental significance under a new act to include triggers such as:

1. Ecosystems of National Importance (including High Conservation Value Vegetation, Key Biodiversity Areas and wetlands of national importance);
2. the National Reserve System (terrestrial and marine protected areas);
3. vulnerable ecological communities (alongside other threatened species and ecological communities);
4. significant land-clearing activities;
5. significant greenhouse gas emissions; and
6. significant water resources (expanded beyond coal and gas impacts).

Establish a statutory body which enshrines public participation as a key element in their decision making.

Establish an indigenous advisory body to provide their input into the management of this land we share.

The activities of the commission should be transparent and available to the public. It should regularly report to parliament and the public on Australia's environmental health, gains and losses.

And - ALWAYS use the Precautionary Principle.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to make a submission.

I wish you all the success in the world – in trying to save ours.

Alan Hill