

SUBMISSION TO THE EPBC ACT REVIEW

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Name

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State or Territory

Victoria

Areas of Interest

Threatened species; Great Barrier Reef; Climate change; Compliance and enforcement; Biodiversity; Conservation; Wildlife trade; Water;

Attachment provided

No

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?

I believe that the 2010 amendments to the EPBC did not go far enough and contained too many loopholes. It prioritises economic growth over environmental protection, even though it is the protection of our home that will allow us to have an economy. It is the lack of a scientifically-informed, thorough, preemptive and just EPBC that has lead us to the dangerous position we are in today in 2020. In just the past three years, Australia has witnessed bushfires, droughts, coral bleaching, food shortages, and wildlife extinction and deforestation unlike never before. This is unacceptable. The effects on our society, healthcare, education and economy are also unacceptable. We have gone from having 30 years in 1970 to less than 10 years in 2020 and the solutions cannot be drastic enough. Our EPBC must consider and implement the recommendations from reputable organisations such as the CSIRO, the IPCC and Project Drawdown in order to avert the complete disaster we are facing.

To put it simply, I think it is utterly ridiculous that any meaningful environmental advocacy and protection achieved in the past 10 years was done by independent organizations such as the Australia Conservation Society and Greenpeace. It is the Environment Minister that approved the Adani mine, despite clear and strong evidence. It is obvious that much is needed to be improved.

QUESTION 2: How could the principle of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) be better reflected in the EPBC Act? For example, could the consideration of environmental, social and

economic factors, which are core components of ESD, be achieved through greater inclusion of cost benefit analysis in decision making?

I believe "Donut Economics" by Kate Raworth is an excellent and realistic solution to the crux we are facing. Also see the Green New Deal proposed by Senator Alexandria Ocasio Cortez. Climate change is ultimately the most prevalent example of how our current system of endless growth and capitalism is failing. In fact, I would say that it is a failure. We cannot continue to live beyond the means of our planet. I believe that it is essential to work with policymakers, economics, the Australian people and our planet in order to implement a circular economy and circular systems. For example, the EPBC should include a plan to transition 100% of our economy over to renewable energy by 2025, 2030 at the most. This would enable us to support sustainable businesses that use clean energy. The EPBC should include a carbon tax, which would not only fund afforestation schemes, better National Park support (through consulting the rangers themselves), scientific and climate science research, not to mention the CSIRO, but also support businesses as they move away from pollution and fossil fuels to sustainability. The EPBC should include mandatory regenerative agricultural practices, with government funded support that is easily accessible. I do not claim to be an expert but I have witnessed and heard of the devastating impacts our current way of business has upon the environment, and therefore on Australians. We have gone from having 30 years in 1970 to having less than 10, at best, in 2020. Drastic measures are needed, but if we can succeed, the positive impacts upon our economy, on the health of Australians, and on the beauty and longevity of Australia and our planet will be untold. I'm 20 - I'm trusting you!

QUESTION 3: Should the objects of the EPBC Act be more specific?

I believe that the EPBC Act should assist us in meeting our Paris agreements and based upon the recommendations of the IPCC, Project Drawdown and the CSIRO. It should aim to emulate a Green New Deal. If the Act is not specific to these needs, then it is not working for the benefit of Australia and its people. To be honest, I believe that it could be more specific, but at the moment, I am more concerned with its scope.

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

Absolutely. Especially in light of not only the droughts and fires that Australia has already faced, but the exacerbated ones we are predicted to face, the EPBC should forbid the investment, development and subsidy of any fossil fuel projects beyond 2023. This amendment must also include the heavily regulation of any current business to ensure that production is not ramped up and cause an even greater environmental and health cost.

Furthermore, I believe the EPBC should include new matters such as "Supporting our CSIRO", and "Adapting to Climate Change", as well as a matter to support national parks, and facilitate afforestation, which would work with the conservation and biodiversity matter.

It was shown in the 2019-2020 bushfires that national parks are undersourced and under supported. Rangers reported that this created significant difficulties in the implantation of their fire management plans. The updated EPBC should include a plan to support our national parks and that works for the staff there. Furthermore, it is essential that we extend this financial support to the CSIRO. They are Australia's leading and official scientific institution and yet they have been

continuously gutted throughout the past 10 years. They are an essential resource if we are to make informed decisions about our environmental policy, and adapt to climate change. Because our understanding is constantly updating and changing, it is integral that the policy allows us to update our environmental laws to meet the stressors and solutions of climate change. We are on the verge of a great environmental change and it is essential that we stay flexible on a day-to-day basis. This legislation would only be allowed on the basis of addressing climate change and must also be approved by the CSIRO or another trusted independent scientific organisation, preferably specialising in climate science. It must assist us in meeting our Paris agreements.

QUESTION 5: Which elements of the EPBC Act should be priorities for reform? For example, should future reforms focus on assessment and approval processes or on biodiversity conservation? Should the Act have proactive mechanisms to enable landholders to protect matters of national environmental significance and biodiversity, removing the need for regulation in the right circumstances?

I believe everything addressed previously is a point for reform. However, the protection of Aboriginals and Torre Strait Islanders right to their Traditional Lands, especially upon uncleared or 'preserved' (for lack of a better word) environments, should be a priority. They are an essential element in protecting and restoring the Australian environment, with thousands of years' worth of knowledge on their correct land management practices. I also believe that these untouched Traditional Lands should be considered for National Park status, or even World Heritage Status due to the significant cultural and historical value these sites hold for Aboriginals and for humanity.

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?

The review should especially focus on how the Environmental Department has failed to protect Australia's environment from deforestation and pollution or mitigate the impacts and exacerbation of climate change. I believe it should focus on not only implementing the suggested recommendations above, but also creating an independent audit organisation, probably sourced from the CSIRO, and a joint watchdog that will ensure the laws are being enforced.

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

As I have stated previously, the models and peer-reviewed research from reputable Universities, the CSIRO, the IPCC and Project Drawdown, as well as other trusted and peer-reviewed sources and scientists should be sourced to inform the decision.

QUESTION 8: Should the EPBC Act regulate environmental and heritage outcomes instead of managing prescriptive processes?

The EPBC should regulate and protect the environment and heritage outcomes. It should stipulate what we, the Australian people and its environment, will be in 10 years time, and into the future. It should include pathways from all relevant areas - such as (climate and environmental) scientific research, biodiversity and habitat management and afforestation, national park management, and

protecting the land rights of Aboriginal communities, as well as sustainable practices in all areas of society. I believe by stipulating the vision and the relevant sub-objectives, and through correct support, education and ultimately cultural changes, businesses and individuals will be empowered to make sustainable and ethical choices. I believe it is also relevant for all businesses to provide an Environmental Impact Assessment, which will vary on the scope of the business, to be approved by an authorised organisation, either independent or government. Larger businesses (more than 200) will be required to have an Environmental Officer. These will create more work opportunities and ensure that everyone is staying on track, and allow for new research or policies to be implemented smoothly. If the Department can stipulate and guide the vision, and empower people through education and resources/financial support, I believe it will provide a better system for all.

QUESTION 11: How can environmental protection and environmental restoration be best achieved together?

Australia's landscape and biosphere is incredibly diverse. Restoration and protection would need to be executed on a case-by-case basis to ensure the best outcomes, but I believe that Indigenous land management practices should most definitely be considered, on a collaboration basis. Restoration and protection practices must be dynamic and adaptable, especially in light of the evolving climate crisis. Due to these reasons, and based off the most reputable scientific recommendations and research, proactive environmental protection should certainly be a priority. Finally, the EPBC Act, in accordance with the recommendations from the IPCC and Project Drawdown, should include a comprehensive plan for thorough afforestation and restoration, not just from a government angle, but also for any lawbreakers or polluters, who would be responsible for cleaning their mess. I believe the department should especially focus on abandoned farmland, and working towards restoring the cleared land we have - we have enough for our demand. An essential component of this would be assisting farmers in developing regenerative agriculture practices. Beyond this, the need for comprehensive and clear education about sustainable practices, and the importance of the environment and the health of our planet, is crucial. We cannot achieve anything if we are not on the same page. I believe the regulation of the media against false news (such as Murdoch media, which is well known for climate change misinformation), is a priority.

It is essential that we set clear goals to measure our success against. We should aim to have so many schools or education institutions teaching a mandatory environmental studies program, so many farmers and businesses practicing sustainably, our species averted from being endangered and so many million hectares protected and restored.

QUESTION 19: How should the EPBC Act support the engagement of Indigenous Australians in environment and heritage management?

- **How can we best engage with Indigenous Australians to best understand their needs and potential contributions?**
- **What mechanisms should be added to the Act to support the role of Indigenous Australians?**

Like Australia, the cultural, societal and environmental needs of Australia's Indigenous communities is diverse and specific. I believe that the crucial element at hand is to first understand how our Indigenous communities feel towards the government now in order to inform facilitating a positive relationship. Trust is essential in this process. I dare say that the Wangan and Jagalingou people,

who are at the heart of the Adani mine issue, feel very betrayed and forgotten by the Australian government. It would be essential to implement stronger and more thorough Traditional land rights legislation, and establish a state-by-state Indigenous committee for Indigenous Australians to collaborate and middle-man. It would be able to communicate with all levels of government, and I dare say see it expanding to involve all elements of Indigenous life.

The environmental practices of Indigenous Australians were so perfect that James Cook described Australia as 'terra nullius.' I believe it best if existing Indigenous communities (at least, those on their Traditional lands) should be given complete autonomy over their lands. Any issues with other peoples, or contributions can be handled by the Indigenous committee, before being brought to the Department if necessary. Communities who have lost their lands should be encouraged to engage and contribute to assist in planning and development in a way that is respectful, just and sustainable.

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?

I believe that each community, or at least each state, should have the opportunity to input on their environmental priorities every 6 months (either from a selection of options, or to submit their own), which could be done through an "EPA" phone application. I believe publishing the "environmental scoreboard" of Australia and each capital city, alongside each category's target, would also make the message clearer and more accessible for Australians. (Categories include our weekly carbon emissions, energy or water usage, total meat consumption, etc.) By doing this, communities will be better informed about where we are lacking and thereby give more relevant and meaningful feedback. Plus, State of Origin could be done in a whole new way! ("Sydney in the lead with a 20000kg offset just this morning, Brisbane trying to make up for it in supercharged biogas production.")

QUESTION 21: What is the priority for reform to governance arrangements? The decision-making structures or the transparency of decisions? Should the decision makers under the EPBC Act be supported by different governance arrangements?

Complete transparency is crucial. If we are to have an authentic democracy, the public should be able to see where their taxes are going and how we are facilitating a sustainable and proactive society. These resources should be publicly announced and easily accessible.

The environment is really at the heart of every activity or system on earth. We build our economy on it. We stand on it and live on it. So of course, it would be essential to be able to involve other departments in order to achieve results and make more informed decisions. For example, if you are looking to reduce vehicle pollution in Sydney, then it may be necessary to consult with the Department of Infrastructure about the possibility of renewable-powered trains.

QUESTION 22: What innovative approaches could the review consider that could efficiently and effectively deliver the intended outcomes of the EPBC Act? What safeguards would be needed?

I believe many of the suggestions I have made are quite innovative, not just in environmentalism, but in their power to change our cultural attitudes and bring our communities together. Other

excellent and hopeful sources of information or ideas are summarized in the book "2040" by Damon Gameau, which itself references a variety of reputable and trustworthy sources. Kate Raworth would also have many innovative suggestions for a different and brighter 2030. As I have said before, I believe that it is important to create a Department watchdog. Focusing on restoring abandoned farmland/degraded land and widening the reach of National Parks would have great benefits. Strengthening Aboriginal land rights would be important as well. I believe that it would also be essential to place a total ban on logging our remaining forests and shift logging towards sustainable forestry on land that is already cleared. I believe it would also be hugely beneficial - and, working with marine biologists - to implement seaweed platforms, like the one near Tasmania. They have already been shown to have an incredible impact on reversing ocean warming and reducing bleaching, alkalising the ocean and providing a habitat for marine life. This would be a crucial strategy to protecting the Great Barrier Reef and the fragile life that is at risk.