

RESPONSE TO THE INTERIM REPORT SURVEY

Note: Responses were automatically limited to 255 characters unless otherwise indicated

Name

Veterinarians for Climate Action

Do you give permission for your submission to be published?

Yes - with my name and organisation

NATIONAL LEVEL PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND ICONIC PLACES

Legally enforceable National Environmental Standards should be the foundation for effective regulation. The Standards should focus on outcomes for matters of national environmental significance, and the fundamentally important processes for sound and efficient decision-making. Standards will provide certainty—in terms of the environmental outcomes the community can expect from the law, and the legal obligations of proponents.

Strongly agree

The goal of the EPBC Act should be to deliver ecologically sustainable development. The Act should require that National Environmental Standards are set and decisions are made in a way that ensures it is achieved. The Act should support a focus on protecting (avoiding impact), conserving (minimising impact) and restoring the environment.

Strongly agree

A greater focus on adaptive planning is required to deliver environmental outcomes. Regional plans should be developed that support the management of cumulative threats and set clear rules to manage competing land uses at the right scale.

Strongly agree

Strategic national plans should be developed for big-ticket, nationally pervasive issues such as the management of feral animals or adaptation of the environment to climate change. These plans should guide the national response and enable action and investment by all parties to be effectively targeted and efficient.

Agree

"Environmental" adaptation to climate change is not realistic, mitigation is required. Also, the term "big-ticket" suggests monetary profitability and there is a concern this could open the door to federal undermining of local or regional protections.

INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The National Environmental Standards should include specific requirements relating to best practice Indigenous engagement, to enable Indigenous views and knowledge to be incorporated into regulatory processes.

Strongly agree

Although the area of Indigenous culture and heritage is outside our organisational area of expertise as Veterinarians for Climate Action, I am responding to this section of questions as simply giving my personal opinion.

The national level settings for Indigenous cultural heritage protection need comprehensive review. This should explicitly consider the role of the EPBC Act in providing protections. It should also consider how comprehensive national level protections are given effect, including how they interact with the development assessment and approval process of the Act.

Strongly agree

Indigenous knowledge and western science should be considered on an equal footing in the provision of formal advice to the Environment Minister. The proposed Science and Information Committee should be responsible for ensuring advice incorporates the culturally appropriate use of Indigenous knowledge.

Strongly agree

Where aligned with their aspirations, transition to Traditional Owners having more responsibility for decision-making in jointly managed parks. For this to be successful in the long term there is a need to build capacity and capability, so that joint-boards can make decisions that effectively manage risks and discharge responsibilities.

Strongly agree

Improved outcomes for Indigenous Australians will be achieved by enabling co-design and policy implementation.

Strongly agree

The role of the Indigenous Advisory Committee should be substantially recast as the Indigenous Knowledge and Engagement Committee, whose role is to provide leadership in the co-design of reforms and advise the Environment Minister on the development and application of the National Environmental Standard for Indigenous engagement.

Strongly agree

LEGISLATIVE COMPLEXITY

In the short-term, legislative amendments to the EPBC Act are required to address known inconsistencies, gaps, and conflicts in the Act.

Strongly agree

In the longer-term, a comprehensive redrafting of the Act (or related Acts) is required. This should be done following the development of the key reforms proposed by this Review. This sequencing

will ensure that legislation is developed in a way that supports the desired approach, rather than inadvertently hindering it.

Strongly agree

Redrafting could include consideration of dividing the Act—such as creating separate pieces of legislation for its key functional areas.

Agree

This is somewhat more complex; as, while dividing it could provide better clarity and simplicity in some areas, it may also risk diminishing the overall authority of the Act.

EFFICIENCY - REMOVING DUPLICATION

Devolve decisions to other jurisdictions, where they demonstrate National Environmental Standards can be met.

Agree

It is important that local and regional decision-making is still held to the highest possible environmental standards.

To base devolution on sound accreditation, quality assurance and compliance, escalation (including step-in capability) and regular review.

Strongly agree

Assessment pathways should be rationalised and implemented with clear guidance, modern systems and appropriate cost recovery. Small investments can dramatically reduce cost and uncertainty and improve decision-making.

Agree

These, and other reform directions proposed (National Environmental Standards, regional plans, information and data, modern regulatory systems) create opportunities for significant streamlining and efficiency, including where low risk actions will not require approval.

Agree

However, "streamlining" must NEVER become code for cronyism, back-channel approvals, or any other form of undermining of the ultimate goal of the (reformed) Act - ensuring development is sustainable.

Streamline provisions for permitting of wildlife trade and interactions with other environmental frameworks.

Disagree

If provisions can be streamlined without losing "strength" then this MAY be acceptable. However veterinarians are advocates for animal health and welfare; and "streamlining" regulation of animal trade risks negatively impacting animal health and welfare.

TRUST IN THE EPBC ACT

Improve community participation in decision-making processes, and the transparency of both the information used and the reasons for decisions.

Strongly agree

Provide confidence that decision-makers have access to the best available environmental, cultural, social and economic information.

Strongly agree

Amend the settings for legal review. While retaining extended standing, provide for limited merits review for development approvals. Legal challenges should be limited to matters of outcome, not process, to reduce litigation that does not have a material impact on the outcome.

Agree

DATA, INFORMATION AND SYSTEMS

A national 'supply chain' of information is required so that the right information is delivered at the right time to those who need it. This supply chain should be an easily accessible 'single source of truth' on which the public, proponents and governments can rely.

Strongly agree

And this must be independent from political influence of the government of the day.

To deliver an efficient supply chain, a clear strategy is needed so that each investment made contributes to building and improving the system over time.

Strongly agree

A custodian for the national environmental information supply chain is needed. The Commonwealth should clearly assign responsibility for national level leadership and coordination. Adequate resources should be provided to develop the systems and capability that is needed to deliver the evidence base for Australia's national system of environmental management.

Strongly agree

A National Environmental Standard for information and data should set clear requirements for the provision of data and information in a way that facilitates transparency and sharing. The standard should apply to all sources of data and information, including information collected by proponents.

Strongly agree

To apply granular standards to decision-making, Government needs the capability to model the environment, including the probability of outcomes from proposals. To do this well, investment is required to improve knowledge of how ecosystems operate and develop the capability to model them. This requires a complete overhaul of existing systems to enable improved information to be captured and incorporated into decision-making.

Strongly agree

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REPORTING

A coherent framework to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the EPBC Act in achieving its outcomes and the efficiency of its implementation should be developed. The framework must be backed by a commitment to its implementation.

Strongly agree

A revamp of national SoE reporting should incorporate trend analysis and address future outlooks to provide the foundation for national leadership on the environment.

Strongly agree

National environmental economic accounts will be a useful tool for tracking Australia's progress to achieve ecologically sustainable development (ESD). Efforts to finalise the development of these accounts should be accelerated, so they can be a core input to SoE reporting.

Agree

RESTORATION

The EPBC Act should require offsets to be considered only when options to avoid and then mitigate impacts have been actively considered, and demonstrably exhausted.

Strongly agree

"Offsets" are often inappropriate to the impact on the original ecosystem and can amount to "death by a thousand cuts" of threatened ecosystems and species. Separate proposals each allowed to destroy a small area can add up to significant loss overall.

The EPBC Act should require offsets, where they are applied, to deliver protection and restoration that genuinely offsets the impacts of the development, avoiding a net loss of habitat.

Strongly agree

Also, even when the quality and OVERALL area of offsets is genuinely appropriate, if their use results in FRAGMENTATION of habitat, this in itself can damage populations. If natural disaster (e.g. bushfires) is overlaid it can be catastrophic to species.

The EPBC Act should incentivise investment in restoration, by requiring decision-makers to accept robust restoration offsets, and create the market mechanisms to underpin the supply of restoration offsets.

Strongly agree

There are opportunities for government to explore policy mechanisms to accelerate environmental restoration including those to leverage the carbon market, which already delivers restoration, to deliver improved biodiversity in suitable habitat types.

Strongly agree

There are opportunities for government to explore policy mechanisms to accelerate environmental restoration including those to co-invest with the philanthropic and private sectors,

including funding innovation to bring down the cost of environmental restoration, growing the habitat available to support healthy systems.

Strongly agree

COMPLIANCE, ENFORCEMENT AND ASSURANCE

Establish a modern, independent regulator responsible for monitoring, compliance, enforcement and assurance to be a strong cop on the beat.

Strongly agree

Increase the transparency of activities.

Strongly agree

Effectively draw on Standards, simplified law, and better systems to increase compliance and simplify enforcement and assurance.

Strongly agree

Shift focus toward assurance of devolved decision-making and monitoring, compliance and enforcement of national strategic plans, regional plans, offsets and regeneration.

Agree

Provide the regulator with a full suite of modern regulatory monitoring, compliance, enforcement and assurance tools and adequate funding.

Strongly agree

PROPOSED REFORM PATHWAY

Do you broadly agree with the phased approach proposed by the Review?

Disagree

Phasing is OK but we disagree with the order of steps. As accelerating environmental degradation, loss of species, and climate change are occurring urgently, we would argue for STRENGTHENING the Act as an IMMEDIATE step, rather than an "eventual" step.

BROADER VIEWS (no character limit)

What has been missed?

How could the proposed reform directions be improved?

Again, as advocates for animal health and welfare as well as public (human) health, we would urge the strongest possible protection for environment, ecosystems and biodiversity as a matter of highest possible priority.

Are there fundamental shortcomings that would require the Reviewer to rethink?

