SUBMISSION TO SENATE COMMITTEE
The effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection **in Australia**

Australia has an appalling record of retaining its indigenous wildlife and native vegetation. More than half the world's species driven to extinction in the past 200 years have been Australian.

Fifty two percent of Victoria's tree cover has disappeared since the arrival of Europeans. This has placed added pressure on the survival of bird, animal and plant communities.

As the human population continues to expand in numbers and in consumption of natural resources, we humans continue to disregard the needs of other Australian creatures. It is an indictment on our luxurious life styles and apathy that the once ubiquitous koala has become endangered in parts of NSW and Queensland. This is due mainly to loss of suitable habitat through land clearing.

It is the role of governments to ensure that an appropriate survival balance is established for the benefit of all living things. In spite of legislated conservation measures, species continue to decline because the strategies have no teeth and consequently are not enforced. The recent withdrawal of Professor David Lindenmayer from the Leadbeater's possum Recovery Team is a prime example of the frustration resulting from lack of government action.

Lindenmayer's scientific research now spans 30 continuous years. Leadbeater's possum is one of the most intensely studied mammals in the world. The data is in. It is clear what is urgently required for the survival of this endemic Victorian possum and state emblem. The government just procrastinates when decisive action is now imperative.

Leadbeater's possum numbers continue to reduce at an alarming rate. The 2009 bushfires decimated both possum communities and habitat. In spite of this, clearfell logging continues unmodified in potentially prime Leadbeater habitat. The isolated Yellingbo strand is in dire need of improved habitat. In fact Lindenmayer has predicted the demise of the Leadbeater species within our lifetime unless governments act. On a broader threatened species perspective the picture is similarly desperate. Orange bellied parrots for instance continue their downward spiral towards extinction with further human inroads into their precious, dwindling coastal environment.

The process for listing a threatened species is protracted and haphazard. The Christmas Island stick insect is a prime example of the demise of a species because of belated listing, and other species will suffer a similar fate unless a more effective listing process is immediately implemented. There are endangered species, like the alpine dingo, that are not officially listed as such and therefore are unable to access the appropriate protection and support.

Listings must be supported by meaningful Action Statements that are as the name implies, action orientated and not merely glorified documents that look good. Again, a Recovery Plan must be more than a "look good document". It must have the financial backing to be implemented effectively. It must be regularly reviewed and updated.

At present no one appears to be responsible for instigating Action Statements. Similarly no one seems to be accountable for the failure of Recovery Plans.

The work of Zoos Victoria in relation to threatened species is to be applauded. There is a conscious policy to educate the public in both the plight of our native wildlife and strategies that people can adopt to assist. However the captive breeding programs at the Sanctuary represent bandaid solutions only, as precious wildlife habitat continues to be consumed by avaricious humans and sanctioned by government policies and inaction.

Peta Whitford

12 December 2012