Wildlife Preservation Society of Qld

wildlife.org.au

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To Whom It May Concern:

RE: The effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia

I have been directed by the State Council of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (Wildlife Queensland) to forward a brief submission for consideration with regard to the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities, protection in Australia.

Wildlife Queensland is one of the most respected wildlife-focused conservation groups in Queensland. With over 5000 supporters spread across numerous branches throughout Queensland, Wildlife Queensland is a strong voice for our wildlife and its habitat.

Wildlife Queensland is apolitical. Our aims include;

- **Preserve** the flora and fauna of Australia by all lawful means
- **Educate** the community in an understanding of the principles of conservation and preservation of the natural environment
- **Discourage** by all legal means, the possible destruction, exploitation and unnecessary development of any part of the natural environment.
- **Encourage** rational land use and proper land planning of existing and future development, and the use of the natural environment and its management.

Wildlife Queensland welcomes the opportunity to make comment. Wildlife Queensland appreciates the necessity to achieve a balance between conservation and preservation of our biodiversity and provision for ecological sustainable industries and recreational opportunities. However it is well recognised that this balance is not being achieved and it is well established that our biodiversity is in decline. In 2002 the Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment highlighted the problem then and although certain steps have been taken such as introduction of legislation to reduce inappropriate vegetation clearing, attempts to reduce fragmentation of habitat and vegetation strategies to address changed hydrology as well as feral animal and invasive plant control the decline continues.

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General comment

Wildlife Queensland is aware of the Terms of Reference for the Committee. However Wildlife Queensland will consciously step outside those terms as it is our opinion that matters peripheral to the topic must be considered as the current approach is not working.

National parks and protected areas are the corner stone of biodiversity protection and conservation. However protected area estate alone will not halt the current trend of ecosystem loss and our wildlife.

The complexity of wildlife habitat requirements is shown by the life cycles of highly mobile species. Migratory birds need wetlands to be conserved all along their migrations routes, which may extend for thousands of kilometres, or their survival will be threatened. Fruit bats, feeding on eucalypt blossom, regularly move for hundreds of kilometres up and down the east coast of Australia and need access to large areas of eucalypt forest throughout this range. Conservation of such species requires planning for habitat protection over very large areas and between different jurisdictions and provision for free movement between areas of habitat.

Concerns over global warming have also led to a realisation that existing reserve design is often highly inadequate. Climate is a major determinant of habitat suitability for many species. When climate changes, existing habitat may become unfavourable and it is believed that many species must migrate to more suitable areas if they are to survive. Reserve design must permit such movement. This requires establishing very large reserves, establishing reserves with diverse habitats, and providing connectivity of habitat between reserves to permit wildlife movement between them. In addition, species living in off-reserve habitat also require suitable habitat connectivity across the landscape if they are to be able to migrate under the impact of changing climate. Climate change may also lead to the onset of virtually intractable problems such as the degradation of the Great Barrier Reef and associated wildlife.

Therefore, conservation strategies based mainly on the provision of large reserves in key locations are likely to be inadequate for wildlife conservation in the face of rapid climate change. Models are required for the design of wildlife conservation systems on a continental scale across millions of hectares. Such mechanisms should not only address the CAR factors (comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness), but also include connectivity and resilience to facilitate continuation of ecological processes and adaptation to climate change. Managing biodiversity should become an integral part of all major developments and similar activities.

There are several basic components of a successful biodiversity conservation strategy.

- First, establish large core areas of protected estate. Protected areas must be very large, or have large effective areas (by means of connecting habitat) for effective conservation and for natural ecological functions to continue.
- Second, develop connecting areas between protected estate to permit movement of species and support adaptation to climate change over the long-term. Land uses in connecting areas must be compatible with their nature conservation functions.
- Third, develop a strategy for identifying and conserving species, ecosystems or other elements of biodiversity not selected under the CAR approach, particularly rare and threatened species, as broad scale reserve selection procedures often fail to detect these species and include them in protected

areas.

- Fourth, restore and rehabilitate degraded areas.
- And finally, undertake appropriate ongoing management, including aspects such as biodiversity monitoring, fire management, predator control, visitor management and management of wild harvests and other commercial use of wildlife.

Broadly speaking regional ecosystems of Australia, Queensland in particular, are relatively well known. Of course knowledge gaps do exist but these pale into insignificance when compared with our knowledge about fauna. As a result vegetation is frequently used as a surrogate for biodiversity. This should not be the case and the knowledge of our fauna and its distribution must be enhanced. Furthermore with the limited funds available it is necessary to determine where those funds are best focussed to achieve the best outcome. While the loss of one species is one too many, is it better to stop a number of species from becoming endangered or at risk than spend large sums of money on recovery plans that have limited chance of success. There is a general trend to focus on a broader range of species. Wildlife Queensland supports that strategy. Allocating limited resources to threatened species conservation that will have the best effect and most likely a sound outcome must be one of the major criteria for fund allocation.

As Governments at all levels are finding it challenging to adequate fund the necessary actions to at least halt the decline consideration must be given to assisting the private sector in the ever increasing activity of biodiversity conservation. The private sector can in many instances through volunteers, public donations and minimal government assistance deliver a positive outcome for the environment and its biodiversity more cost effectively.

The broader community needs to strongly support any program to ensure there is political will for it to occur. The protection and conservation of our biodiversity is no exception. I There is a need to implement capacity building in the broader community in biodiversity conservation and educate the broader community about the values and benefits of biodiversity conservation. Long-term incentives should be provided to the broader community to increase their participation in nature conservation. This requires indentifying common goals among community groups in order to facilitate further action in addressing conservation problems. There is a need to consult the local community and relevant indigenous peoples, and include them in the decision-making process. Furthermore it is desirable to encourage interaction between neighbouring regions and communities so they may support each other and learn from each other.

Finally there is a need to develop expertise in addressing problems arising from climate change. Research into the impact of climate change on Protected Area Estate and biodiversity should be funded. Development of strategies and plans for the conservation of biodiversity under probable climate change outcomes should be funded.

Recommendations

Obviously the solution to the crisis is not simple or readily indentified. The funding expended to date has not addressed the problem adequately. Species at risk and ecological community loss continue to escalate. A planned approach is required to define targets that are shared by all Governments and a way forward agreed. Wildlife Queensland offers the following recommendations for consideration.

- Establish a shared vision of all Governments
- Develop and implement a strategy that directs funding to achieve the most effective outcome for biodiversity conservation
- Give priority to establishing a National Reserve System acquiring priority ecosystems in priority bioregions
- Consider funding systematic fauna surveys to address knowledge gaps
- Allocate limited funding on preventing large number of species from becoming at risk rather than large sums of funds on single species.
- Ensure that private sector driven conservation is an essential component of the biodiversity conservation strategy with some financial assistance if and when required
- Implement capacity building and educate the broader community about the values and benefits of biodiversity conservation.
- Develop expertise in addressing problems arising from climate change
- Feral animal and invasive plant control programs must be maintained. High standards of biosecurity must be maintained.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Wildlife Queensland knows the current approach is simply not working. Business as usual is not the way to go. Funding has to be not only directed at research on flora and fauna and acquisition of land but to programs what may appear marginal to the objective. Such programs include education and capacity building, incentives for private sector biodiversity conservation as well as biosecurity.

Des Boyland, Policies and Campaigns Manager

14th December 2012.