

10th September

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



By email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Australian Land Conservation Alliance submission to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's Faunal Extinction Crisis

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's faunal extinction crisis.

ALCA brings together the Australian State-level Land Trusts and other major organisations working in land conservation (including The Nature Conservancy, Bush Heritage Australia, Greening Australia, South Endeavour Trust and others) who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of local, national and international biodiversity conservation goals on private land. With private land playing an increasingly important role in the achievement of nature conservation in Australia, ALCA has a significant stake in, and can significantly contribute to, the delivery of conservation outcomes for Australians on private land.

ALCA makes its comments from the perspective of organisations engaged in on-ground land conservation actions.

We note the terms of reference of this Inquiry are "an inquiry into Australia's faunal extinction crisis including the wider ecological impact of faunal extinction, the adequacy of Commonwealth environmental laws, the adequacy of existing monitoring practices, assessment process and compliance mechanisms for enforcing Commonwealth environmental law, and a range of other matters."

ALCA will limit its submission to the key threats facing the diversity of Australia's fauna and recommendations to address two of those key threats.

Key threats

The Commonwealth of Australia's State of the Environment Report 2016 indicates:

"The main pressures facing the Australian environment today are the same as in 2011: climate change, land-use change, habitat fragmentation and degradation, and invasive species. In addition, the interactions between these and other pressures are resulting in cumulative impacts, amplifying the threats faced by the Australian environment."¹

Specifically, in relation to the state and trends in biodiversity, the State of the Environment Report 2016 goes on to discuss what has changed since the 2011 State of the Environment Report including:

The list of nationally threatened species and ecological communities has increased, with the addition of 30 new ecological communities, and 44 animal and 5 plant species.²

¹ SOE 2016 <https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/overview>

² SOE 2016 <https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/overview/biodiversity/topic/overview-state-and-trends-biodiversity>

The 2016 Report states in relation to threatened species and threatened communities:

“Based on the information available about vegetation extent and condition, and the small number of species for which there is some understanding of trends in distribution and abundance, the status of biodiversity in Australia is generally considered poor and deteriorating.

...

Mammal declines in northern Australia have continued. In southern and eastern Australia, the number of mammal species of conservation concern has increased.

Birds show variable trends, but some groups, such as woodland-dependent species in the mallee and carnivore species in the arid zone, are in significant decline. Trend analyses for eastern Australian inland waterbirds and some migratory shorebirds indicate that populations are currently well below long-term averages.

Very limited information is available to assess the state and trends of reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates, except for a few high-profile species.”³

And, the 2016 Report notes that, as at December 2015, the numbers of threatened fauna species listed under the EPBC Act was “480 species, including 55 listed as extinct or extinct in the wild, an increase of 44 species since 2011. The number of nationally listed threatened animal species has increased for all taxa except amphibians”.⁴

In the terrestrial environment, the two key threats of land use change (land clearing) and habitat degradation and fragmentation are highlighted in the 2016 Report. For example, it states: *“Habitat loss and fragmentation are identified as major threats that are responsible for the extinction of 11 Australian mammal species, and place significant pressure on a further 19 threatened species and 15 near-threatened species according to the action plan for Australian mammals 2012 (Woinarski et al. 2014a)”*.⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

A key tool in Australia’s effort to maintain biodiversity through the retention of native habitat and improvement of land degradation and fragmentation has been support for the National Reserve System (NRS). Australia is almost halfway to achieving an ecologically representative protected area system by 2020 – a commitment made in Aichi Target 11 to the United Nations *Convention on Biological Diversity* in 2010. While the total land area protected has reached 19 per cent, this reflects the addition of large Indigenous Protected Areas in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Threatened ecosystems in the agricultural and coastal bioregions are not yet adequately represented in the system of protection and Queensland has less than 8% of its land in protected areas.

Some 1691 Australian ecosystems and 121 species of national significance have no representation in protected areas, while 36 of 85 Australian bioregions have reached the 2020 commitment of 17 per cent of their total area protected. Eighteen per cent of fauna Species of National Environmental Significance (SNES) listed under the Australian Government’s EPBC Act occur in habitats with no formal protection.⁶

It has been estimated that an additional 53 million hectares would need to be protected to reach minimum standard of ecosystem representativeness.⁷

³ SOE 2016 <https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/overview/biodiversity/topic/overview-state-and-trends-biodiversity>

⁴ SOE 2016 <https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/overview/biodiversity/topic/overview-state-and-trends-biodiversity>

⁵ SOE 2016 <https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/overview/biodiversity/topic/overview-state-and-trends-biodiversity>

⁶ Taylor, MFJ (2017) *Building Nature’s Safety Net 2016: State of Australian terrestrial protected areas 2010-2016*. WWF-Australia, Sydney.

⁷ Taylor, MFJ (2017) *Building Nature’s Safety Net 2016: State of Australian terrestrial protected areas 2010-2016*. WWF-Australia, Sydney.

Therefore, an important opportunity exists to concentrate further effort on areas of little or no protection.

ALCA submits that a vital part of protecting the future of our native fauna lies in support to expand and maintain the NRS to be comprehensive, adequate and representative. In 2006 an independent report indicated that the NRS program was a 'flagship in biodiversity conservation', improving protection of biodiversity in 50 of Australia's 85 bioregions.⁸ And, the investment in the NRS is cost effective. Between 1996 and 2007, 30 million hectares were added to the reserve system, with more than two-thirds of the land registered as Indigenous Protected Areas.⁹ The cost to the tax payer was estimated in 2006 to be \$10.61 per hectare and generated more than dollar for dollar leveraged investment from state and territory governments and the private sector.¹⁰

While continued investment in public and Indigenous protected areas is important, ALCA contends there is also significant scope for significant national investment in private land conservation.

A future priority for government could be the establishment of a national fund to:

- Prioritise investment in building core reserves and connectivity corridors to meet the Aichi Target 11 by 2020 through new and existing mechanisms, such as strategic acquisitions, conservation covenants and large-scale re-vegetation projects.
- Support private landholders to manage land for biodiversity conservation.
- Enable the growth of existing and new private land conservation collaborations with and between a variety of landholders, including farmers.

ALCA members are well positioned with a scalable range of programs and delivery mechanisms to support national investment in private land conservation across Australia for our native fauna to survive and thrive.

ALCA would be happy to discuss further how such a national fund could be constructed and managed to further progress private land conservation in Australia.

Yours sincerely

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Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA)

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⁸ Gilligan B. 2006. *The National Reserve System Programme: 2006 Evaluation by Brian Gilligan*

⁹ Gilligan B. 2006. *The National Reserve System Programme: 2006 Evaluation by Brian Gilligan*.

¹⁰ Gilligan B. 2006. *The National Reserve System Programme: 2006 Evaluation by Brian Gilligan*