



29 March 2018

The Secretary, Committee Secretariat  
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100, Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
[fadt.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:fadt.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Secretary,

This submission is from LEAN, the Labor Environment Action Network – a grassroots network of Australian Labor Party Members and supporters who are concerned about the future health of the planet, with a particular interest in climate change and the integrity of our systems.

The submission concerns: “United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)” as they relate to the Senate [reference](#) of 4 December 2017 to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for inquiry.

This submission is designed to give the committee a high-level overview of LEAN’s thinking on sustainable development and how the tenets of the goals might be integrated into government decision making for the betterment of society in Australia and beyond with particular reference to ecologically sustainable development.

At the outset, it should be noted that in the [National Platform](#) of the Australian Labor Party, we state:

- Labor is committed to the goal of sustainable development. (p26)
- Calls on the Australian Government to work with other countries in support of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) process as the framework for the post-2015 development agenda, recognising that the SDGs will require more effort, not less. (p196)

Further, the objectives contained in [Labor’s Constitution](#) recognise much of the SDG:

- the use, conservation and enhancement of Australia’s natural resources and environment so that the community’s total quality of life, both now and into the future, is maintained and improved; (p5)
- recognition of the need to work towards achieving ecologically sustainable development; (p5)

We urge the committee to monitor future development of Labor's National Platform and Constitution following the party's national conference in Adelaide in mid-2018.

Our submission to this Senate Committee is not dissimilar to our submission to the highly flawed "Strategy for Nature Draft" of the Department of the Environment and Energy of December 2017. LEAN's key recommendation was that this draft strategy be scrapped. Our commentary in relation to this submission (Appendix 2) should be considered by the Senate Committee in the context of the SDG as there is much cross-over.

As a general statement, we would like to see the realisation of the SDG in Australia and beyond placed at the centre of economic, social and environmental policy. We believe:

- The tenets of the goals should integrate with all policy areas of government and be material considerations in all Cabinet and other government decision making processes;
- Australia needs new environmental laws supporting SDG;
- Australia needs a science-fueled and politically empowered independent environment agency that delivers two functions: (1) an independent watchdog; empowered to be tough with the ability to issue sanctions that ensure compliance and change attitudes toward protecting natural assets and (2) the lead agency in developing plans to implement national environmental goals and cutting edge policy development, providing advice to the Minister to help Australia work towards sustainable environment, enabling Australia to realise several SDG;
- Accountability for SDG implementation and compliance should be with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet;
- Government should undertake a comprehensive review of Australia's progress toward achieving the SDG and then report on sustainability indicators for Australia every two years.

LEAN recommends the Senate Committee review the work of the now defunct National Sustainability Council. This council was established by the Gillard Labor Government in October 2012 as an independent, expert body to provide advice on sustainability issues. Although it never fulfilled its potential, much of its promise could be realised through the establishment of new independent agencies as proposed by LEAN and other independent expert bodies such as the Australian Panel of Experts in Environmental Law (APEEL) ([apeel.org.au](http://apeel.org.au)). The National Sustainability Council reported to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Members of the council were appointed due to their expertise across one or more of the social, economic or environmental dimensions of sustainability and understanding of issues impacting Australia's sustainability more broadly. The expertise of the council helped ensure that the reports are relevant, useful and accessible to communities, business and industry, and governments. The council also provided interim, targeted advice on sustainability issues at the request of the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, and advice on potential improvements to the sustainability indicators over time as new data and methodologies become available. The council's key role was to deliver a public report against the sustainability indicators for Australia every two years. Only one report was done before the Council was abolished by the Abbott Government in November 2013. The report (Full Report and Summary Report) highlight key trends and emerging issues and was designed as a tool for policy and decision makers at a range of scales. (Source: [NCSDS](#))

The report covered many of the issues contained in the Terms of Reference in the Senate Committee's work:

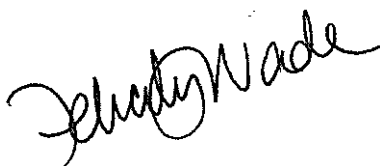
- Trends and drivers; Past and Future: Snapshots
- Education; Innovation and engagement
- Planning for an ageing population
- Sustainable cities
- Regional Australia
- Climate change
- Growth and the environment
- Food and Agriculture
- Inequality and disadvantage
- Sustainability Indicators – Social, Environmental, Economic and Contextual

The Abbott/Turnbull Government has let Australia down on sustainable development. It is disappointing that the "Global Network of National Councils for Sustainable Development and similar bodies" has had no cause to update Australia's entry in its database since November 2013 when the Abbott Government axed this Council. Since then, there has been no single entity in government with carriage of sustainable development policy, the goals or advice. The SDG bounce between the Department of Environment and Energy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Given their importance and the need for an all of government approach, responsibility for delivery and evaluation should sit with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

LEAN's proposal for full scale environmental legal and institutional reform would provide capacity to build a robust approach to environmental management and sustainable development. The SDG impacts and dashboard report ranked Australia 26<sup>th</sup> out of 157 nations on performance against the SDG. While that is generally good, it is, however, a significant fall of the year before (2016) when Australia was ranked 20<sup>th</sup> (out of 149 nations). The country analysis section indicates that Australia falls short in many areas across the Sustainable Development Goals.

Australia under the Abbott/Turnbull Government is good at signing up to the big international agreements – like the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. However, when it comes to policy delivery domestically and through foreign policy, it falls way short. We need to return to the philosophy of the Gillard and Rudd Governments that sustainable development must be an underlying principle of all government policy – for the sake of the country, its people and the planet.

Yours,



**Felicity Wade,**

National Co-convenor, LEAN

[felicity@lean.net.au](mailto:felicity@lean.net.au)

## Appendix One – Online resources

ALP, Labor National Platform

[https://www.alp.org.au/national\\_platform](https://www.alp.org.au/national_platform)

DOEE, Draft Strategy for Nature

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/conservation/strategy/draft-revision>

LEAN, Submission to Draft Strategy for Nature

<http://www.lean.net.au/submissions>

Global network of National Councils for Sustainable Development and similar bodies

<http://ncsds.org/index.php/sustainable-development-councils/country-profiles/86-country-profiles/profiles/82-australia>

Minister for the Environment, Establishment of National Sustainability Council (October 2012)

<http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/archive/burke/2012/mr20121023.html>

Minister for the Environment, Government welcomes first Sustainable Australia Report (May 2013)

<http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/archive/burke/2013/mr20130509.html>

National Sustainability Council

Full report: <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/sustainable-australia-report-2013.pdf>

Highlights Report: <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/sustainable-australia-report-2013-summary.pdf>

Parliament of Australia, Senate Committees, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign\\_Affairs\\_Defence\\_and\\_Trade/SDGs](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/SDGs)

SDG impacts and dashboard

<http://www.sdgindex.org>

2017 Report: <http://www.sdgindex.org/assets/files/2017/2017-SDG-Index-and-Dashboards-Report--compact.pdf>

Australia analysis:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/yvgzn5o4t19xigc/AACaTIUCxuwAe46z7Mj7iGg8a?dl=0&preview=Australia-country-profile.pdf>

2016 Report: [https://issuu.com/unsdsn/docs/sdg\\_index\\_dashboard\\_full](https://issuu.com/unsdsn/docs/sdg_index_dashboard_full)

## Appendix 2 – LEAN Submission to the ‘Australia’s strategy for nature’ draft.



14 March 2018

National Biodiversity Strategy Secretariat  
Department of the Environment and Energy  
GPO Box 787 CANBERRA ACT 2601

[NBSecretariat@environment.gov.au](mailto:NBSecretariat@environment.gov.au)

Dear Secretary,

This submission is from LEAN, the Labor Environment Action Network – a grassroots network of Australian Labor Party Members and supporters who are concerned about the future health of the planet, with a particular interest in climate change and the integrity of our systems.

The submission concerns: “Australia’s strategy for nature 2018–2030. Australia’s Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Inventory DRAFT.”

We join with other leading organisations in environmental protection, conservation, enhancement, preservation, research and use in condemning this piece of work from the once great Australian Department of the Environment (and Energy) (DOEE).

We call on DOEE to deliver a thorough, robust, real-world and credible strategy, similar to the 2010 to 2030 strategy released by the Gillard Labor Government in October 2010 and subject to review in 2015 (of which little from this review appears to have been taken into account).

This new 17-page document containing a wish list of feel-good statements is not a strategy. Any strategy must have deliverables, deadlines, dates, measures and structures for delivery as a starting point. It must identify issues, name those accountable, assign priority and allocate funding.

Further, how can any government release a document titled “Strategy for Nature” without mentioning by name the issue of “climate change”? This simply begs belief. Climate change is the biggest medium to long-term issue facing this country, indeed the world, and will change economic, social and environmental aspects of life like no other issue.

We agree with others, such as the Places You Love Alliance, that the strategy:

- Fails to address Australia's crisis of dying wildlife and environmental destruction.
- Doesn't recognise that only one of the previous ten targets has been met.
- Contains no new funding, policies or significant commitments.
- Falls short on honouring Australia's international commitments.
- Undermines Australia's reputation for environmental leadership.

In short, LEAN's key recommendation is that this draft strategy be scrapped.

DOEE should start again. There's no argument with the sentiment of what has been tabled. But it is nothing more than that – sentiment. You can't argue against "Connecting all Australians with nature", "Care for nature in all its diversity" and "Build and share knowledge". This is simply 'core business' or given in any nature strategy. The supporting principles on page 16 would be a good starting point for new work by DOEE – take these and develop policy with targets, timetables, resources and accountability.

LEAN believes the vision of the strategy needs expansion, reflecting the broader policy framework that nature must be included in. Any strategy must recognise that climate change is the greatest economic, social and environmental threat facing Australia and the world. While there is some mention of the economic contribution of nature, any strategy must recognise the role of business in helping to deliver better nature for Australia. It should also be said that better nature has the potential to make an even greater contribution to nation's wealth through regenerative/restorative works, more sustainable farming, land use for solar and wind and carbon farming/sinks – all benefitting nature. And for every dollar spent now on conservation, preservation and restoration, many more dollars are saved in the future. Prevention is better than the cure.

As such, Australia would benefit from the establishment of National Environmental Accounts as decisions taken in areas such as water use and conservation; energy production and use; and control of emissions of greenhouse gases all impact on the environment and the socio-economy (ABS).

A key point missing in what was drafted was the lack of recognition that nature must have in all decision-making processes of business and government. DOEE seems to have ignored the recent commentary by the Reserve Bank and Australian Prudential Regulation Authority of the need for business, government and civil society to account for climate risk and improved natural resource outcomes as they reduce such risks. Any strategy needs to integrate with climate change, energy, economic, health, educational, industry, planning, population, and indigenous policies, amongst many others. And the Federal Government needs to come together as one on environment policy, an issue report after report from government recommends but this fundamental hasn't in recent years been taken up.

As stated, nature policy can't be seen in isolation - it must link with economic, social and other environmental policy. Management of nature needs to be an economic priority for this country. As such, we would like to see a new first goal in any strategy and with far more detail than what is contained in the current draft.

## Goal

- Place the management of nature at the centre of economic and social policy.

## Objectives:

- Integrate with all other policy areas of government.
- Establish national environmental accounts.
- Incorporate action on climate change, nature management and Sustainable Development Goals into all Cabinet and other government decision making processes.
- Undertake comprehensive review of environmental laws in Australia.
- Have nature management made a standing item for COAG.

Any strategy should also recognise the dire state of the environment at this time. The strategy should be honest, accurate and recognise how many species are now extinct and threatened, what the decline in fauna numbers are and how many square kilometres of vegetation has been cleared. It needs measures to address these issues, again with targets, deadlines, deliverables and accountabilities.

Two of the biggest initiatives in recent years on environmental protection, the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals get little attention in this strategy. Surely honouring Australia's relevant commitments in these should at least rate a mention in any strategy (not to mention myriad other international commitments signed by various Australian Governments).

LEAN urges DOEE to consider its work within Labor on strengthening Australia's environmental laws. There are three key design priorities for improving the laws.

1. Federal leadership and responsibility for pro-active environment protection. We need to set up plans and approaches to managing each of our natural assets. States will work with the Commonwealth to deliver these.
2. Clear and robust terms for Federal development approvals – to give business certainty and speed up the process.
3. Principles of democratic accountability and protection of rights for community involvement in environmental matters.

We need new strong institutions that are independent, well-resourced and empowered to deliver this bold new approach. An environment agency that is science-fuelled and politically empowered, could be tasked with ensuring the ambition of pro-active protection. It would be like the Reserve Bank for Environmental Management – highly skilled, well-resourced and independent. It would be a body the Australian public could trust. It would also act as a tough, independent watchdog, ensuring compliance with the laws. Too often our laws are ignored as the chance of being called to account is small.

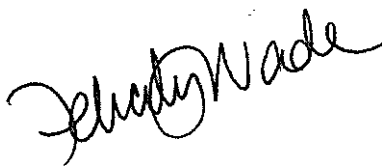
We also urge DOEE to consider the work of APEEL – the Australian Panel of Experts of Environmental Law. APEEL has developed a blueprint for the next generation of Australian environmental laws with the aim of ensuring a healthy, functioning and resilient environment for generations to come.

LEAN urges DOEE to review Labor's National Platform and positions on relevant matters and consider them for inclusion in this strategy. It should be noted that Labor has a National Conference planned for July 2018 and Labor's Platform will be updated following this conference. While many in politics and government quite rightly see Labor's policy and platform in a political context, it must be remembered that the platform stems from grass-roots Labor branches across Australia that engage and consult with local communities on environmental and other matters.

Above all, this strategy and the work of DOEE must recognise that times have changed, and time is running out. Time is running out when it comes to climate change. Time is running out when it comes to the preservation of flora and fauna species. Time is running out for robust policy for government, business and society from the Australian Government.

The draft presented only further delays the process. It should be scrapped and robust policy that takes a broad view and contains detailed measures, deadlines, targets, accountabilities, dependencies, resources and a true reflection of the state of things as they stand should be the focus of the DOEE.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Felicity Wade". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Felicity Wade  
National Co-convenor, LEAN



## **Appendix 2 – Online Resources**

Labor National Platform

[https://www.alp.org.au/national\\_platform](https://www.alp.org.au/national_platform)

LEAN Environment Laws Campaign

[http://www.lean.net.au/environment\\_laws\\_for\\_the\\_21st\\_century](http://www.lean.net.au/environment_laws_for_the_21st_century)

Australian Panel of Experts on Environmental Law (APEEL)

<http://apeel.org.au>

DOEE Australia's strategy for nature 2018–2030: Australia's biodiversity conservation strategy and action inventory

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/conservation/strategy/draft-revision>

Australian Environmental-Economic Accounts, 2017

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4655.0>

Wentworth Group – Environmental National Accounts

<http://wentworthgroup.org/programs/environmental-accounts/>

## Appendix three - Environment Laws

Currently our environment laws are not up to the task of protecting our country. Business dislikes them too – development approvals are slow and expectations are unclear.

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) was written 20 years ago by the Howard Government. It was considered weak and inadequate at the time of adoption, with Julia Gillard describing it as a “hastily cobbled together legislative nightmare.”

The environmental health of Australia has continued on a downward trend since this Act was introduced – extinctions continue, plastic swamps our waterways, health is undermined by air pollution and clearing of bush occurs at rates that rival Brazil and Indonesia. Most alarming of all is that the Act doesn't even mention climate change.

Federal environment laws do two things:

1. Create the processes for assessment and approval of development proposals - everything from urban developments to mines to tourism infrastructure.
2. Set goals and processes for the proactive management of the health of the Australian environment – looking after our rivers, our bushland, our oceans.

Within the current Federal environment regime, most of the focus is on the first of these. Most of the environmental decline occurs because of the failure of the second.

Our current laws do not provide a framework for accountable, active environmental protection and management. The focus is on conditions for project approval or refusal. Our current laws are too species-focused which neither protects nor sustains our natural systems. We need an approach that considers the whole landscape. They are not ready for the natural heritage challenges that climate change will bring. They are often too complex, slow and costly. This locks out local communities and innovative businesses, instead favouring those with deep pockets.

No level of Government has clear responsibility for halting Australia's environmental decline. The Federal Government must be given this task and the resources for delivering it.

There are three key design priorities for improving the laws.

1. Federal leadership and responsibility for pro-active environment protection. We need to set up plans and approaches to manage each of our amazing natural assets. States will work with the Commonwealth to deliver these.
2. Clear and robust terms for Federal development approvals – to give business certainty and speed up the process.
3. Principles of democratic accountability and protection of rights for community involvement in environmental matters.

The most perfect laws in the world mean nothing without the ability to deliver them. We need new strong institutions that are independent, well-resourced and empowered to deliver this bold new approach. An environment agency that is science-fuelled and politically empowered, could be tasked

with ensuring the ambition of pro-active protection. It would be like the Reserve Bank for Environmental Management – highly skilled, well-resourced and independent. It would be a body the Australian public could trust. It would also act as a tough, independent watchdog, ensuring compliance with the laws. Too often our laws are ignored as the chance of being called to account is small.