



4 September 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Emailed to: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Submission: Australia's faunal extinction crisis

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Senate inquiry into Australia's faunal extinction crisis. This submission is made on behalf of the Queensland Conservation Council Inc. (QCC). QCC was established in 1969 and is the peak environment conservation organisation in Queensland, with some 50-member groups including ten regional councils, as well as thousands of supporters.

Australia has gone without a plan and adequate resources directed to the protection of wildlife for too long. Many QCC members work on the front lines to protect and conserve threatened species and ecosystems and see first-hand the need for an urgent response to Australia's extinction crisis. The number of threatened and extinct animals continues to rise, with nearly 200 species at risk of being lost in Queensland alone. With Australia as a global leader in mammal extinction rates, it is apparent that current Commonwealth environmental laws, monitoring, assessment and compliance practices are inadequate, and change is needed. Business as usual cannot continue if we are to prevent further biodiversity and ecosystem loss. Adequate funding to identify, monitor and protect threatened species throughout Australia would give a more accurate representation of the magnitude of loss and threatened loss, on the ground.

QCC believes that existing measures, such as plans for the management and recovery of threatened species and communities listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), are inadequate. For instance, many plans are poorly researched and never implemented, and time and again environmental protections fail to be prioritised against competing development interests. In addition, the EPBC Act's Biodiversity Offsets Policy claims the legal fiction that biodiversity loss can be offset as part of an environmental impact assessment. Yet in reality, biodiversity offsets facilitate a downward trend in biodiversity, with continual tradeoffs of biodiversity for development.

A current example of the failure of Commonwealth environmental law, including the proper application of the EPBC Act in Queensland, is the threat to Toondah Harbour from residential

development. Toondah Harbour is a Ramsar listed wetland of international significance for migratory shorebirds who rely on the integrity of this ecosystem for their survival. Even so, development in this area is being considered.

Another example is Far North Queensland's threatened dugong populations. Dugongs are on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and recognised by the Queensland Government as a vulnerable species. Yet there are clear failures to adequately consider impacts on ecosystems supporting dugongs, such as developments in seagrass meadows as we are seeing with the proposed Clump Point Boating Facility upgrade. This particular proposal impacts on areas of state, national and international matters of environmental significance. The Clump point example highlights that current environmental regulations do not accurately account for cumulative and consequential environmental impacts on World Heritage values, which is why the Australian Government should implement 'next generation' national environment laws.

Biodiversity and thriving ecosystems contribute to our resilience to climate change in ways that science is only beginning to uncover. While this submission focusses on current systems for affected flora and fauna species, it is imperative that the interconnectedness of these systems is adequately recognised, understood and valued. In order to mitigate the threat to faunal species, an ecosystems approach to data collection, monitoring and management is essential for effective protection. QCC urges the federal government to meet its international and domestic obligations to protect the natural commons and conserve threatened fauna for present and future generations.

QCC would like to see stronger national environmental laws and increased resources dedicated to stopping further degradation and loss of habitat, and enforcement of the law to protect threatened species and nature. Stronger environmental laws are needed to build on existing protections and reflect our international obligations. Environmental law should drive continuous improvement in the environment across all levels of government, such as by supporting the recovery of threatened species including the koala and the spectacled flying fox. Too much of the responsibility to protect and conserve the ecosystems that support us has been left to under-resourced non-government organisations and volunteers. To adequately respond to this crisis, greater support and resources are needed to provide for practical conservation actions alongside prioritisation of the retention of critical habitat and high conservation value areas over competing interests.

QCC recognises that addressing climate change is at the heart of efforts to protect and conserve Queensland's unique biodiversity and ecosystems. Already climate change impacts are driving plants and animals towards the poles, to higher altitudes (e.g. the White Lemuroid Possum) and greater ocean depths in search of cooler temperatures. In Queensland, sea level rise flooded the last remaining habitat of the bramble cay melomys and record ocean temperatures have caused consecutive mass coral bleaching events, from which the Great Barrier Reef may never recover. If greenhouse gas emissions continue, the world risks losing half of all species before the end of the century.

QCC believes Australia's current environmental legislative protections fail to adequately identify, monitor and protect species and ecosystems that face unprecedented threats due to climate change and a status quo that privileges economic development over strong and healthy ecosystems rich in biodiversity.

QCC would like to see an independent audit conducted of past Federal funding allocations towards the protection of threatened species as part of this enquiry. We expect the findings will show inadequate resources allocated to monitoring, reporting and verification to demonstrate impacts and impacts. We call on the Federal Government to take significant steps to redress these failures and to develop permanent and credible protections for Australia's wildlife and ecosystems.

With the right Federal framework and adequate resources directed to biodiversity and ecosystem protection and conservation measures, QCC sees a future where nature is protected for its own sake, and biodiversity, ecosystems, communities and the economy all prosper.

We look forward to seeing the Senate Committee's report in December and ask that QCC is informed of any developments and further consultation. Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission or contact us, please phone _____ or email _____

Yours Sincerely

Interim Coordinator
Queensland Conservation Council