



# Bird Observation & Conservation Australia

Incorporating Bird Observers Club of Australia

*Helping today's birds survive tomorrow*

Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council  
National Biodiversity Response  
PO Box 1715  
Tamworth NSW 2340

28 May 2009

## **Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2020 Consultation Draft**

Dear Councillors

Bird Observation & Conservation Australia (BOCA) is a national non-government organisation with more **than 3,000 members throughout Australia**. **BOCA's objectives may** be summarised as appreciation, education and conservation relating to Australian birds and their habitat.

BOCA commends the Australian Government on developing a revised Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (the Strategy) for Australia. The draft Strategy clearly identifies the need for urgent **action to halt the decline in Australia's biodiversity, outlines the priorities for change and** highlights the importance of long-term monitoring and evaluation in assessing the effectiveness of the Strategy. BOCA offers the following comments as they relate to the draft **Strategy's vision, identified threats and priorities for change**.

### **Strategy's vision**

BOCA is in broad agreement with the stated principles underlying the development and implementation of the Strategy and believes that successful implementation of the Strategy will be reliant on explicit recognition of, and adherence to, these principles by major stakeholders. In particular, it is imperative that the intrinsic value of biodiversity is recognised and protected by government and non-government organizations, industry and the community.

### **Identified threats**

The Strategy correctly identifies the main threats to biodiversity, however it does not make the link between these threats and human population growth and resource consumption. Three of the major threats: climate change; loss, fragmentation and degradation of habitat; and unsustainable use of resources, are primarily driven by over consumption of resources by increasing numbers of people. It is paramount that the Strategy makes this connection explicit and outlines actions to reduce unsustainable resource consumption.

183 – 185 Springvale Road PO Box 185, Nunawading 3131, Victoria Australia

**ABN:** 24 005 068 842 **Phone:** +61 3 9877 5342 **Fax:** +61 3 9894 4046 **Email:** [information@birdobservers.org.au](mailto:information@birdobservers.org.au) **Web:** [www.birdobservers.org.au](http://www.birdobservers.org.au)

Branches: Ballarat, Bellarine Peninsula, Bundaberg, Cairns, East Gippsland, Echuca, Hamilton, Horsham, Mackay, Melbourne, Melbourne Bayside, Murray-Goulburn, Mornington Peninsula, Nhill, Ovens-Murray, South Eastern Queensland, South Western Victoria, Sunraysia, Townsville, Western Port, Yarra Valley

## Priorities for change

BOCA broadly agrees with the six major priorities for change. However major progress in these areas can only be achieved with a significant increase in government funding for both short- and long-term priority actions.

### *Table 1.1 Priority actions for the first two years of the strategy*

A two year timeline seems unrealistic for the majority of the actions included in this table. If each action is examined in isolation, there are clearly many intermediate actions that in themselves will require considerable time and resources. **For example, action 1.1.3, 'establish conservation linkages that provide connectivity across bioregions, including at a continental scale', requires significant coordination and a huge commitment of resources at all levels of government, along with considerable input from industry, private landowners and the community. To achieve action 2.1.1, 'teach all primary school children about biodiversity and its benefits to their wellbeing and the world at large', teachers in all schools would need to have an understanding of the importance of biodiversity, associated curriculum documents and support from education departments.**

### **The Strategy must be based on realistic, achievable targets for programs that are well planned, resourced and monitored for their effectiveness in protecting biodiversity.**

#### *Priority for change 1: Building ecosystem resilience*

BOCA broadly agrees with the objectives and actions required to build ecosystem resilience. However the Strategy must further define ecological resilience and its relationship to underlying ecological processes and susceptibility to the impacts of threatening processes.

The establishment of effective conservation linkages across the continent is essential for biodiversity conservation, particularly in the context of climate change. This will require the establishment of both public and private conservation reserves that are actively managed, and therefore adequately funded, to promote and maintain biodiversity within functional ecosystems.

BOCA agrees that the most effective conservation initiatives will be those that focus on maintaining the viability and resilience of whole ecosystems or communities. However, these initiatives must work alongside, rather than instead of, programs to conserve individual threatened species, preferably *in situ*.

While the Strategy clearly defines the major threats to biodiversity, it fails to adequately outline strategies and resources required to manage these threats. This is a major departure from previous strategies - the *National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity 1996* and the 2001 review document – which emphasised the crucial role of managing and minimising threats in order to protect and conserve **Australia's biodiversity**. The final Strategy must place greater emphasis on objectives, actions and resources required to manage and minimise threats and outline key indicators against which the success of threat abatement strategies may be measured.

#### *Priority for change 2: Mainstreaming biodiversity*

While it is essential that primary school children and the broader community develop an understanding of the importance and value of biodiversity, it is far more critical and urgent that governments and businesses have this understanding. These are the major decision makers in society who therefore require a solid understanding of the intrinsic value of biodiversity, its relationship to human wellbeing and processes that lead to loss of biodiversity (eg cumulative impacts). An education program that promotes the value of biodiversity and the need to exercise the precautionary principle aimed specifically at governments (including ministers) and businesses must be included under the priority actions for the first two years of the strategy.

#### *Priority for change 3: Knowledge for all*

It is clear that there are significant knowledge gaps in our understanding of biodiversity. There is an urgent need to improve our knowledge at all levels of conservation science - from individual species and communities through to whole ecosystem function and ecological processes - in order

to restore and manage fragmented and degraded habitats. BOCA supports actions 3.1.1-1.4, however the Strategy places an emphasis on actions that improve and increase the flow of **'knowledge' from scientists to** land managers and the community (action 3.1.4). While conservation management must be based on good science, it is equally important that scientists have a thorough understanding of land manager perspectives and the context in which the results of their research will be applied. Successful science-based solutions must be practical and take social and economic factors into account because actions will be implemented and managed by people and communities. The Strategy must include actions to improve communication between scientists and all conservation practitioners, including farmers incorporating biodiversity conservation into their management objectives.

*Priority for change 4: Getting results*

Action 4.3.2, **'review and reform legislation to improve biodiversity conservation outcomes across all sectors'**, is clearly necessary. However, reformation of legislation will only be effective if it is supported by the political will to apply and enforce legislation. One of the major failings of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* is the apparent reluctance of the Australian Government to apply the precautionary principle to projects, particularly where there are significant economic gains to be made or where projects have the endorsement of State, Territory and/or local governments.

*Priority for change 5: Involving Indigenous peoples*

BOCA recognises the unique and important role of Indigenous peoples' knowledge and perspectives in biodiversity conservation. Engagement and involvement of, and provision of resources to, Indigenous communities will be critical to the development of a comprehensive, adequate and representative network of protected areas. To achieve this, action 5.1.1 **'Support and resource Indigenous engagement in preparing and implementing plans for biodiversity conservation at all levels'** should be added to the list of short-term priority actions (Table 1.1) to be implemented and resourced under the Strategy.

*Priority for change 6: Measuring success*

The success of the Strategy in protecting and restoring biodiversity will be reliant on the establishment of quantifiable targets and clear delineation of funding responsibilities for programs. Programs must have specific time frames for action and be audited against these using a national monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework.

BOCA is highly supportive of the development of accessible and comprehensive baseline datasets. While these are inherently valuable they may also be used to derive composite indices that reflect changes in environmental condition and biodiversity values.

The Australian Government must commit significant resources to the development and maintenance of baseline datasets. At present, **Australia's most comprehensive dataset on the distribution and abundance of Australia's birds** is reliant on voluntary, ad hoc data collection and submission to Birddata<sup>1</sup>. This dataset (and others) would benefit from ongoing government support that would facilitate the development of a more structured and systematic process of data collection to augment the observations of volunteers.

BOCA would like to thank the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council for the opportunity to comment on the Strategy.

Sincerely,



Richard Hunter  
Chief Executive Officer

---

<sup>1</sup> Birddata is a database operated by Birds Australia, an environmental non-government organisation