

Petrina van Reyk - Gecko - Gold Coast & Hinterland Environment Council

1. Do you consider the main biodiversity threats identified in the Consultation Draft (see below) to be the most important in reversing the decline in Australia's biodiversity?

- climate change
strongly agree
- invasive species
strongly agree
- loss and fragmentation of habitats
strongly agree
- degradation of habitats
strongly agree
- unsustainable use of natural resources
strongly agree
- changes to the aquatic environment and water flows
strongly agree
- inappropriate fire regimes
strongly agree

Are there any other threats you think should be addressed?

Maximum 90 words

Weak environmental legislation at State and Federal levels; lack of political will to enforce regulations
Urban Planning laws, directives and perspectives that are incompatible with environmental protection.
Lack of integration of conservation perspectives and legislation with Urban Planning regimes, resulting in conservation/climate change concerns being on 'another page' when it comes to planning and development decisions.

2. Do you think that the proposed 'priorities for change' (outlined in the 'Making Enduring Changes' section) will be effective at delivering the Strategy's vision to ensure Australia's biodiversity 'is healthy, resilient to climate change and valued for its essential contribution to our existence'?

Maximum 90 words

Theoretically, these six priorities represent a sound assessment of strategies required to bring about biodiversity conservation.
In practice, since the Strategy lacks legislative authority, and since the largely philosophical recommendations of the Strategy are already present in many documents in place in different departments and levels of government, the generalised wording of the Priorities will do little to bring about meaningful change to government and private sector actions.
Notably, it is under similarly non-specific expressions of priorities throughout the regulatory framework of this country that serious biodiversity decline has occurred.

Do you think the six 'priorities for change' identified are the most important ones? If not what others would you suggest?

Maximum 90 words

A primary focus on calling for meaningful Federal and State level legislative changes, which make biodiversity conservation (of all native species, not solely threatened and endangered) the highest and most immediate priority.

Recognition of national/international climate change avoidance (rather than adaptation) as a discrete priority.

Recognition of the need for massive, joint level funding.

Clear and urgent timeframes.

Statement of 'deep ecologism' philosophy (natural environment integrity in its own right rather than in service to human needs).

Do you have any comments on the vision?

Maximum 90 words

Mostly, sound; however, the phrase, 'for ...our existence' demonstrates a philosophy of 'shallow ecologism' (nature has value in relation to how it serves humanity), thus perpetuating the type of conservation mindset which has proved dangerous to the actualisation of true conservation principles.

It is imperative that the Vision promote the standpoint that all native species have equal integrity and priority for survival and balanced existence, ie: 'deep ecologism'.

Not until Australians have assimilated this vital, fundamental principle will behaviours that promote biodiversity conservation permeate every level of our society.

3. Do you consider that the Consultation Draft:

- promotes a good balance between conservation on private and public lands?
strongly disagree
- will facilitate a good mix of regulation and incentives?
strongly disagree
- provides a good balance between marine and terrestrial issues?
somewhat agree
- provides the necessary national framework to produce innovative conservation action?
somewhat disagree
- has a sufficient focus on institutional arrangements and change?
strongly disagree
- provides sufficient emphasis on improving community awareness of biodiversity?
strongly disagree
- addresses the need to implement conservation action at the appropriate scale(s)?
strongly disagree
- is applicable to urban and rural environments
strongly agree

- provides a clear framework for balancing conservation, social and economic issues?
strongly disagree

- adequately deals with the issue of climate change?
strongly disagree

Do you have any other comments on these issues?

Maximum 180 words

The fundamental ecological, climate change and economic philosophies of the document are flawed (please see comments in other Sections of this Questionnaire), which impacts upon the standpoints presented in various sections of the document.

Also, since legislative powers are not available to the Strategy, and funding levels are not specified, it is both possible and probable that any recommendations for improvement may remain recommendations only.

It is clear that this initiative is an attempt to arrest biodiversity loss; however, while it remains representative of existing, now out-moded and demonstrably unsustainable principles, the Strategy risks inefficacy.

4. Do you think the Consultation Draft adequately covers the roles of Indigenous peoples in biodiversity management?

Maximum 270 words

Laudable, long overdue goals are expressed herein, which will go some way to addressing past wrongs. Lacking Federal or State legislation to enforce the authority of Traditional Owners and Indigenous advisors, however, these gains may too easily be lost to the economic priorities habitually granted to business interests within the power-holding culture.

Also, it cannot be assumed that Traditional Owners themselves will not choose to allow development of lands for material gain, as is their right in ownership, and as part of modern Australia.

For this reason as well, a statement of deep ecology in this document would firmly establish biodiversity health as the overriding priority. Also, establishing a climate change avoidance (rather than adaptation/resilience) Priority, would ensure that many adverse, modern practices, as well as Indigenous practices which may potentially have also become detrimental to biodiversity health in conjunction with the spread of Western society, are halted or at least reviewed.

5. Do you consider that the proposed arrangements for reporting on implementation will be effective in the monitoring and evaluation of the expected outcomes (results) of the Consultation Draft?

somewhat agree

Do you have any suggestions for alternative reporting arrangements?

Maximum 270 words

Some positive arrangements: recommendations for monitoring, reviewing and reporting; remaining 'adaptive' and 'flexible'. It is noted that interim reviews will be conducted ANNUALLY in acknowledgement of ineffectiveness of five yearly reviews in achieving primary goals, particularly in consideration of climate change impacts, and climate change avoidance recommendations by scientists.

Wording of first sentence leaves the Strategy open to mischievous, totally contrary interpretation: that changes be implemented when biodiversity conservation approaches prove 'ineffective' by stalling development! It is thus suggested that this sentence read, 'For the strategy....ineffective to biodiversity conservation'.

It is important that FAILURE as well as success be identified through the ongoing monitoring and review processes. Currently, the Strategy presents contradictory messages, declaring massive continent-wide biodiversity loss, yet illustrating only achievement through the Case Studies and via politically self-congratulatory statements sprinkled through the document. Existing discourse perpetuates the deeply held communal notion that modern civilisation is already managing or is at least capable of balancing human practices with conservation needs, when the present biodiversity crisis is stark proof that this notion is fallacious. It is imperative that all

Australians confront the terrible truth of our mismanagement and destructiveness in order to bring about genuine change.

Items 3 & 4: 'Interim independent reviews' panels should include individuals and community groups concerned about biodiversity conservation in their local area, state or continent. Further, these same interests should be invested with power to call for independent reviews at any time in the ongoing implementation of the Strategy, and to make recommendations on outcomes.

Item 4: Recommend insertion of key phrase in first sentence, to read, 'Consolidated annual reports OF EACH SHIRE'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND FAILURES will be published...'

6. To what extent is the Consultation Draft an appropriate national framework to achieve biodiversity conservation benefits, considering the different responsibilities, legislation and funding arrangements between governments.

Maximum 270 words

The C.D. is appropriate to a significant extent, in its brave and overdue acknowledgement of Australia's biodiversity crisis. However, it is not comprehensive and not certain of achieving its goals.

While it is generally important for government documents to avoid sounding alarmist, and politically expedient for elected representatives at all levels of government to present positive achievements to the community, situations of truly extreme urgency in fact require expressions of urgency and acknowledgement of failures. The present biodiversity crisis throughout Australia is such a situation.

The Strategy must call for:

1. The establishment of a deep ecologism philosophy in this document as well as among all jurisdictions as the governing principle of all decisions affecting the natural environment.
2. Federal legislation that overarches and directs all other legislation by requiring meaningful biodiversity conservation
3. Prioritising climate change avoidance.
4. Involving and granting authority to individuals and community groups concerned about biodiversity conservation in the monitoring and implementation of this Strategy.
5. Massive funding at all levels of jurisdiction for a raft of measures of parallel importance for the immediate identification and protection of Australian biodiversity.
6. The use of unequivocal, unambiguous, specific language to define the crisis and make recommendations for improvement.
7. The rapid compilation and implementation of specific, targeted policies and incentives which make biodiversity conservation financially lucrative.

7. Is the Consultation Draft likely to encourage a good mix of public and private investment in biodiversity conservation?

strongly disagree

If not how can the Consultation Draft improve in this area?

Maximum 270 words

Without better, stronger legislation, a philosophical approach that values biodiversity in its own right rather than in its service to humans, a radical commitment to the diverse range of positive climate change avoidance strategies throughout government departments including those not directly associated with environmental concerns, a shift of economic philosophical perspective from the now outmoded 'growth is good' mentality, genuine commitment to

and meaningful funding of novel approaches, and the application of these important principles to every phase of communal existence, improvements to biodiversity conservation resulting from this Strategy will at best be cosmetic.

True commitment to national biodiversity conservation runs concomitantly with authentic commitment to climate change avoidance. In fact, biodiversity conservation can be made highly financially attractive, largely through climate change avoidance measures.

If this approach were genuinely adopted by governing authorities who then took a responsible leadership role to educate the community and private sector, and rally support for radical, fundamental changes, the perils and sorrow of both climate change and biodiversity loss could and would be avoided.

Public and private investment cannot increase without radical and genuine shifts in economic and environmental philosophy permeating through the community from genuine commitment at high level.

8. Is the Consultation Draft sufficiently clear about its role and how it will be implemented?

Maximum 270 words

The C.D. makes it clear that it has an advisory role only for all levels of government and little if any genuine authority to bring about meaningful change.

It is not clear what funding the Strategy will be given in relation to implementation, nor are the Strategy's powers to influence jurisdictions' actions overtly stated.

9. Does the Consultation Draft reflect the best practice on biodiversity conservation?

Maximum 270 words

In parts, no. The Strategy repeatedly expresses a shallow ecogism philosophy, referring to the value of biodiversity to human existence rather than consistently promoting the value of biodiversity in its own right as a moral standpoint for modern and future Australians. It is imperative that this Strategy be the voice in this country for deep ecogism since no other Department or authority bears such a responsibility or role in the national psyche.

The language of the Strategy vacillates between strong and equivocal expression of the nature of the biodiversity crisis.

The Strategy does not make clear what priority the Federal Government will grant to its recommendations, either in the amendment of legislation or the supply of meaningful funding.

The Strategy does represent an important acknowledgement of the state of biodiversity in this country and the irresponsibility of supposed human custodianship. As the context of the document stands, however, this acknowledgement is of merely historical importance rather than as a powerfully effective tool for immediate and ongoing biodiversity conservation.

10. Will the Consultation Draft effectively engage private sector interests in long-term biodiversity conservation?

Maximum 270 words

Possibly. However, radical shifts in ecological and environmental perspectives must first be made by elected leaders, thus encouraging total community awareness and support, largely through education, in order to create a 'market' for biodiversity conservation.

Constraints to these radical shifts have been outlined above, particularly in Section 7.

Do you have any other comments you wish to make on the Consultation Draft?

Maximum 360 words

Language:

1. does not adequately reflect urgency of addressing decline; wording could be strengthened; for example, through more specific or even emotive adjectives, or inclusion of persuasive phrases
2. Present Tense in Results column of Priorities is misleading; could be interpreted as current rather than desired status of actions; replace with Future and/or Conditional Tenses

Missing pieces:

1. Significance of piecemeal loss- "death by a thousand cuts"
2. Recognition that Australia has reached point of no further expansion, necessitating the rescinding and regeneration of spaces
3. Recognition of arresting population growth/expansion as biodiversity protection strategy
4. Climate change avoidance principles including importance of deforestation avoidance,
5. True cost of environmental integrity

Measuring success:

1. Should be framed around quantifiable outcomes and include failure
2. Timeframes, deadlines required

Knowledge for all:

1. Apparent primary school focus only rather than throughout public domain
2. Identify funding targets