



Mr David Harris MP
Chairperson
Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change)
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000

Managing climate change impacts on biodiversity

On behalf of the Natural Resources Advisory Council I am pleased to provide the following submission to the current inquiry by the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change) on managing climate change impacts on biodiversity.

The Natural Resources Advisory Council was established by the NSW Government as a single high level forum for stakeholder advice on natural resource management and land use policy. The Council reports to the Government through the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt, Deputy Premier, Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, and Minister for Commerce. The Council's members represent a diverse range of primary producers, community interest groups and local, regional and state authorities. As far as possible the advice prepared by the Council reflects common ground identified jointly. It does not replace advice provided by members' organisations individually.

The Council supports efforts by governments to respond wisely to the climate change challenge and welcomes the inquiry by the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change). The Council notes that the purpose of the inquiry is to consider and report on the adequacy of management strategies to address the impacts of climate change on biodiversity in NSW ecosystems and any options for improving these strategies in order to ensure that these ecosystems are resilient to the likely impacts of climate change.

Over the past three years the Council has carefully considered the likely impacts of climate change on ecosystem health and biodiversity and the implications arising for natural resource management policy and practice in NSW. The interactions of climate science and natural resource management knowledge are complex and policy responses involve equally complex economic and social considerations. Consequently the Council's recommendations for the management of likely climate change impacts on biodiversity acknowledge the need for practical and beneficial action by governments in the face of a great deal of uncertainty.

The Council considers that NSW Government policies and programs for sustaining ecosystem health and biodiversity are worthwhile and necessary but need to be improved in order to sustain resilient ecosystems facing the likely impacts of climate change. Institutional, financial and knowledge building systems need to be strengthened and more innovative.

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The following recommendations have been developed by the Council over the past three years. They are proposed here, in no special order, as a guide to aspects that should be considered in devising and developing the new approaches needed to keep our ecosystems as resilient as possible to the likely impacts of climate change.

General Recommendations

- Envision the future economy of NSW as one that works with nature: sustaining natural, cultural and production values of the landscape.
- Identify and promote biodiversity values, goals and strategies and re-affirm them in all relevant management plans and reports.
- Ensure that government actions to sustain ecosystem health and biodiversity are well coordinated by improving the integration of policy direction and accountability for land use planning; environmental regulation; primary industry services and natural resource management investment strategies.
- Establish and strengthen natural resource management partnerships that enable cross program coordination and integrated assessment, monitoring and accountability for local and regional biodiversity conservation outcomes.
- Respect Aboriginal heritage in caring for country and actively seek to establish natural resource management agreements with Aboriginal peoples.
- Facilitate a transparent and centralised natural resource accounting system.
- Recognise that there are costs of inaction that should be explicitly acknowledged and accounted for.
- Involve everyone (individuals, community groups, businesses and local and regional authorities) in targeting and delivering agreed ecosystem health and biodiversity conservation outcomes.

NRM Information and Accounting Systems

- Implement long term monitoring, evaluation and feedback for adaptive management of biodiversity (lessen the guesswork).
- Ensure that biodiversity is systematically monitored, valued and assessed across all land tenures.
- Monitor, evaluate, and provide feedback on biodiversity assessments at appropriate scales.
- Where biodiversity assessment is intractable, ensure that ecosystem health is systematically monitored, valued and accounted for across all land tenures.
- Create overlying checks that cross-reference relevant scientific, landholder and local observations, so that monitoring is accurate.
- Value local knowledge, enable feedback and support community involvement in knowledge sharing, research, policy and practice.
- Improve community access to integrated natural resource management information systems, maps and datasets.

Community Capacity Building

- Biodiversity conservation depends on aware, motivated and empowered individuals, businesses and communities.
- Enable regional communities and businesses to apply science strategies to sustain ecosystem health and manage water for the environment wisely.

- Increase Aboriginal traditional land ownership and enable effective participation in natural resource management by Aboriginal peoples.
- Support landowners who are conserving their wetlands by ensuring that environmental flows are well timed and adequate.
- Ensure that landowners understand and correctly value ecosystem health and biodiversity and recognise landowners that act to restore and conserve it.
- Establish targeted capacity building programs for key stakeholder sectors (eg. farmers, landowners, community, government, industry) to develop biodiversity knowledge and adaptive natural resource management skills.
- Implement conservation programs in a social context that will promote cultural diversity, equity and respect for people and the environment.

Biodiversity Conservation

- Systematically eliminate all policy and pricing disincentives for biodiversity restoration and conservation on private land and provide targeted incentives where possible, particularly in coastal catchments where small-scale holdings and diverse land tenure complicates biodiversity conservation.
- Develop practical and publicly accessible systems for assessing and monitoring threats to ecosystem health and biodiversity and increase everyone's awareness of identified threatening processes in their areas.
- Promote policies that help to prevent the introduction of new weeds and pests; sustain research and understanding of known weeds and pests; and, ensure rapid responses to new or emerging weed and pest threats.
- Preserve key biodiversity 'hot spots' not as specific locations but as categories, for example, estuaries, rainforests and wetlands.
- Reduce threats to aquatic biodiversity through the Native Fish Strategy.

Future Investment

- Past public investment in natural resource management and biodiversity conservation has not been sufficiently well targeted or long term to prevent declining ecosystem resilience and continuing biodiversity loss.
- New revenue and investment strategies are needed for ongoing programs to restore ecosystem health, build resilience and minimise biodiversity loss.
- Public funds should be spent on agreed priorities for controlling threats, restoring key biodiversity assets and raising community capacity to correctly value, conserve and maintain ecosystem health and biodiversity values.

The Council thanks the Committee for the opportunity to submit comments to the Inquiry.

Yours faithfully



Phyllis Miller OAM
Convenor
Tuesday, 28 April 2009