



Macarthur Regional Organisation of Councils
Camden, Campbelltown, Wollondilly

24 April 2009

Mr David Harris
Chair
Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change)
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Attention: Mrs Carolyn Littlefair

Dear Mr Harris

Submission to the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change) Inquiry into Managing Climate Impacts on Biodiversity

The Macarthur Regional Organisation of Councils (MACROC) makes this submission in response to the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change) Inquiry into Managing Climate Impacts on Biodiversity.

The Macarthur Region, in the South West of Sydney, covers an area of 3,067 square kilometres, and MACROC, on behalf of its member councils Camden, Campbelltown and Wollondilly, works on a regional level to facilitate and promote economic and social development, as well as environmental conservation.

MACROC recognises the urgent need for councils to work together on a regional basis to establish and implement measures that will limit the factors that influence on climate change.

MACROC councils are also committed to implementing measures to limit the impact of climate change within their own individual local government areas, as well as across the Macarthur Region as a whole.

In relation to the Standing Committee's Terms of Reference, MACROC would like to make the following comments on suggested management strategies to address the impact of climate change on biodiversity in a Local Government context.

The Impact of Climate Change at a Local Level

MACROC believes that it is important to note that the impacts of climate change on biodiversity at a local level are not necessarily consistent with impacts experienced across a larger region. Therefore it is crucial that local adaptation programs are developed to address those specific issues experienced at a local level. Existing work done by the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change on Threatened Species Priorities Action Statements follows such a model. A similar approach could be applied to climate change impacts on biodiversity.

MACROC would suggest that most of the scenarios put forward on the impact of climate change on biodiversity are described at an "overall" landscape level, well beyond what is applicable at a local government level. This particularly applies to climate change impacts on species distribution, ecosystem composition, and species' life cycle events. These scenarios are developed at a National or State level, and as a result, an array of adaptation actions and programs are also developed at that level to counteract climate change on biodiversity. Most of these actions or adaptation programs are usually applicable at the "overall" landscape level (an example is the proposed development of the large habitat corridor along the Great Dividing Range).

For the success of any strategy it is important to define specific actions that can be targeted at Local Government level. These relevant local and regional strategies need to be acknowledged and support the larger scale strategy. Conversely, the larger "overall landscape" strategy must be informed by the underlying local and regional level strategies. In other words these strategies should all be used in the preparation of a State or National Management Strategy to address the impacts of climate change on biodiversity. Examples of regional and local strategies include the habitat corridors that have been identified as part of the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change Recovery Plans for Endangered Ecological Communities and Camden Council's Natural Asset Policy designating habitat corridors.

Local Government has been active in the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, where climate change adaptation programs have been developed for reducing greenhouse gases, energy and water efficiency. Climate change adaptation programs focusing on of biodiversity and natural ecosystems should be developed within the same or a similar framework.

There would be substantial benefit to the development of co-operative and integrated programs such as regional working groups, where councils affected by a particular climate change induced biodiversity issue can be actively involved in the development of the adaptation strategy and recommended actions.

If an important issue was identified then local government could nominate representative councils to be involved. This has happened in the management of the Australian White Ibis. The NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change, Bankstown Council and Camden Council have set up a Task Force to prepare a Regional (Sydney Basin) Management Plan for the Australian White Ibis. Regional “task forces” such as this can provide model policies and best practice examples on climate change adaptation programs for biodiversity, relevant at the local level.

Other Impacts on Biodiversity

MACROC believes that it is also important to note that impacts on biodiversity may be only in part a direct result of climate change. Impacts on biodiversity are also influenced by certain activities such as unsustainable agriculture, large scale irrigation, land use planning, depletion of inland wetlands, introduction of feral animals and exotic species, among others.

The impacts on biodiversity need to be managed at a broader level and climate change needs to be seen as a crucial influencing factor. Strategies to target the impacts of climate change need to complement a suite of actions and initiatives that address the management of other threats to biodiversity.

Successful management strategies to deal with the impact of climate change and other associated actions or processes on biodiversity need to identify the degree of and nature of influences across the short and longer term. Specific climate change impacts need to be identified, qualified and understood in appropriate detail rather than being looked at and treated in a generic way.

In seeing climate change as merely one factor among many that threaten biodiversity there are a number of alternative suggestions that MACROC would like to make. For instance, it is important that emphasis be placed on the use of the precautionary principle when future land use decisions are being made or appropriate policies are being developed, to address the impacts of climate change on biodiversity.

It is also considered that the most effective non-abatement action to address the impacts of climate change on biodiversity is to reduce the impact of other key threatening processes. The clearing of native vegetation is clearly the most significant threatening process in this regard. By conserving native vegetation, we conserve biological diversity, remove a contributing factor to climate change (ie. the removal of native vegetation), and provide a carbon sink to help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Policy Integration and Areas of Research

MACROC believes it is essential that the link between climate change policies and future biodiversity policies needs to be reflected in any strategy.

The impact of climate change should be further integrated into land use planning systems and processes such as the NSW Standard Instrument Principal Local Environmental Plan Template which regulate land use and development and hence the removal of native vegetation. Landscape connectivity also needs to be better integrated into existing land use planning systems.

In the area of biobanking it is considered that seed provenance/collection guidelines (i.e. Florabank Guidelines) may need to be reviewed in light of climate change. Whilst the NSW State Government Biobanking Scheme and existing conservation incentives will help address biodiversity conservation on private land, it is considered other methods/policies will need to be developed as existing measures rely heavily on voluntary participation. This is considered to be an important issue as an estimated 85% of vegetation in the highest conservation bracket is located on private land and hence outside of existing reserve systems.

Ecosystem monitoring should be undertaken within identified priority/sensitive ecosystems (i.e. those ecosystems which are least likely to effectively adapt to climate change such as alpine ecosystems). Monitoring should focus on those species that are predicted from physiological studies to have low resilience to change, and should also include surveillance for invasive pests and diseases.

The community's current lack of understanding about what drives species and community persistence makes it difficult to predict the impact of climate change on biodiversity. One of the key issues in modeling or predicting impacts is the relative importance of a species' ability to move in response to a changing climate versus its ability to persist in their local area. It is considered that further research is required.

Modeling systems need to be redefined to predict and analyse the nature and extent of change.

The Role of Key Stakeholders and the Importance of Adequate Long Term Funding

MACROC would encourage the Committee to clearly define and illustrate the roles and responsibilities of all the key stakeholders. In particular there needs to be improved clarity around the role of Local Government in dealing particularly with the issues associated with climate change and sustainability measures. Similarly, the role and functions of the State Government need to be clearly articulated.

MACROC maintains that there needs to be a comprehensive and coordinated approach to biodiversity management across all tiers of government. This is critically important to achieving continuity and effective outcomes. Most councils rely on ad-hoc grants which address specifically identified needs and short-term solutions only. This level of resourcing is not effective and can sometimes add little to the achievement of important goals as far as sustainability is concerned.

One of the key issues for local government relates to funding mechanisms for the retainment, protection, embellishment and management of riparian corridors. For instance, the recent proposed amendments to Section 94, may work against environmental outcomes that the community and government are trying to achieve.

MACROC would therefore encourage the Committee to explore funding sources available to Local Government to ensure that there are adequate and long-term funds available to sustain projects that are aimed at addressing sustainability and climate changes issues. Funding needs to be available for all aspects of projects including promotion, establishment, and implementation and monitoring.

MACROC, on behalf of its Member Councils, welcomes the Inquiry and looks forward to the recommendations made.

Yours sincerely

Cr Anoulack Chanthivong
President