

**Submission
No 65**

INQUIRY INTO CLIMATE CHANGE (NET ZERO FUTURE) BILL 2023

Organisation: Australian Land Conservation Alliance

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Inquiry into the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023
Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment
Parliament of New South Wales
Via email: portfoliocommittee7@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Level 3 329 Collins Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000

info@alca.org.au

ABN 80 637 680 310

27 October 2023

Dear Planning and Environment Committee,

RE: Inquiry into the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee's Inquiry into the *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023*. ALCA is Australia's peak national body for private land conservation. We represent organisations that conserve, manage, and restore nature on land, either as direct stewards or in partnership with other landholders.

Please note that ALCA is happy for this submission to be published in full.

Context: the nature crisis

Whilst Australia's nature crisis is less well-known than the parallel, interconnected, climate crisis, it is just as serious for our society and economy. According to the World Economic Forum:

"Humanity has already wiped out 83% of wild mammals and half of all plants and severely altered three-quarters of ice-free land and two-thirds of marine environments. One million species are at risk of extinction in the coming decades – a rate tens to hundreds of times higher than the average over the past 10 million years...."

*Human societies and economies rely on biodiversity in fundamental ways. ...over half the world's total GDP – is moderately or highly dependent on nature and its services."*¹

Using the same methodology, approximately half of Australia's GDP has also been demonstrated as having a moderate to very high dependence on nature².

¹ See: World Economic Forum, *Nature Risk Rising: Why the Crisis Engulfing Nature Matters for Business and the Economy*, January 2020; <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-risks-report-2020>

² See: Australian Conservation Foundation, *The nature-based economy: How Australia's prosperity depends on nature*, September 2022; <https://www.acf.org.au/how-australias-prosperity-depends-on-nature>

The scale and devastation that the unfolding nature crisis will have upon our collective wellbeing will dwarf all but the very biggest issues facing our nation and will rival them in importance. As per the British Government's Dasgupta Review:

*"We are facing a global crisis. We are totally dependent upon the natural world. It supplies us with every oxygen-laden breath we take and every mouthful of food we eat. But we are currently damaging it so profoundly that many of its natural systems are now on the verge of breakdown."*³

The 2021 State of the Environment Report (released in July 2022) further confirmed that climate change was one of several key pressures causing the accelerating decline of our environment:

"Overall, the state and trend of the environment of Australia are poor and deteriorating as a result of increasing pressures from climate change, habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and resource extraction. Changing environmental conditions mean that many species and ecosystems are increasingly threatened. Multiple pressures create cumulative impacts that amplify threats to our environment, and abrupt changes in ecological systems have been recorded in the past 5 years..."

*Our inability to adequately manage pressures will continue to result in species extinctions and deteriorating ecosystem condition, which are reducing the environmental capital on which current and future economies depend. Social, environmental and economic impacts are already apparent."*⁴

Indeed, in 2021, scientists confirmed Australia's trajectory towards the collapse of ecosystems⁵; of all the continents in the world, Australia has seen the largest documented decline of biodiversity⁶.

In 2017, research led by The Nature Conservancy and 15 other institutions⁷, demonstrated that nature-based solutions can provide up to one-third of the emission reductions needed by 2030 to keep global temperature increases under 2°C – 30 percent more than previously estimated.

In conclusion – the nature crisis is a serious systemic and intergenerational risk to Australian wellbeing requiring elevated attention. Urgent and meaningful action on climate change is deeply necessary – albeit not sufficient by itself – to reverse the accelerating decline of biodiversity.

³ See: p1, Dasgupta, P. *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review*, HM Treasury, Government of the United Kingdom; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review>

⁴ See: <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/overview/key-findings>

⁵ See: Bergstrom et. al, 'Combating ecosystem collapse from the tropics to the Antarctic', *Global Change Biology*, 2021; <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.15539>

⁶ See: DCCEEW; <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/conservation>

⁷ See: <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1710465114>

Recommendations

1. Ecologically sustainable development is no longer fit for purpose as a guiding principle and needs strengthening [section 8(6)]

As noted in ACLA's submission to the Independent Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act – which also adopts an 'ecologically sustainable development' approach to environmental management:

“The overarching objective of the Act is not fit for purpose; in particular, biodiversity conservation should not be subset of ‘ecologically sustainable development’, but rather this relationship should be inverted, such that development should only occur where an overarching principle dedicated to the protection, enhancement and restoration of biodiversity can be achieved.”

In his foreword to the Independent Review of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 report, former Treasury Secretary and Independent Review Chair Dr Ken Henry AC outlines this issue further (**ALCA's highlight**):

“Of more concern, the objects of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 are already obsolete. The crafting of the Act was, understandably, guided by principles of sustainable development [as also found in the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023]. Those principles are no longer fit for purpose.

As has been recognised in many global forums over the past few years, the natural environment is now so damaged that we must commit to ‘nature positive’ if we are to have any confidence that future generations will have the opportunity to be as well off as we are.

*The Review Panel appreciates that this implies a major reset in public policy thinking, which many will find challenging. Even though sustainability concepts have been central to policy development for more than a generation, many in the community, and even within government circles, still struggle with the notion that policies to promote human progress should recognise any constraints, social or environmental. Yet the fact of humanity's dependence upon the quality of the biosphere, in both social and economic dimensions, is as immutable as the laws of physics. **The case for giving primacy to environmental repair is inescapable. Our future depends upon it.***

The nature crisis is a serious systemic and intergenerational risk to Australian wellbeing. The *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023* offers a key opportunity for New South Wales to **elevate and incorporate our understanding and seriousness of the nature crisis into amendments to the Act, including reframing economic activity as dependent upon the health of our environment rather than the other way round.**

On this basis, the reference to principles of ecologically sustainable development within section 8(6) should be revised and substantially strengthened.

2. The targets for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions should be strengthened [Section 9]

ALCA supports the following climate change targets:

- at minimum, a 50% reduction in CO₂-equivalent emissions by 2030 below 2005 levels; and
- at minimum, net zero CO₂-equivalent emissions by 2040.

We therefore broadly support section 9(1)(a) – although would still like to see stronger action – and a target that sees net zero being achieved by at least 2040 under section 9(1)(b).

3. Deploy nature-based solutions

The protection, management and restoration of our natural environment are climate mitigation tools already at our fingertips and are ready to be scaled. ‘Nature-based solutions’ address societal challenges through the protection, sustainable management, and restoration of ecosystems, benefiting both biodiversity and human well-being. They target major challenges like climate change, disaster risk reduction, food and water security, biodiversity loss and human health, and are critical to sustainable economic development.⁸

Nature-based solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change are recognised by the Commonwealth Government as providing multiple benefits, including:

- *protecting biodiversity and threatened species,*
- *contributing to climate mitigation through carbon sequestration,*
- *making communities more resilient to climate change,*
- *contributing to food security, and*
- *supporting businesses reliant on healthy ecosystems such as fishing, tourism and agriculture.”⁹*

Furthermore, biodiversity conservation and restoration have great potential to help drive business investment and philanthropic funding that also delivers significant emissions reduction outcomes.

In amending the Bill and then implementing any Act, we urge the Government to deploy nature-based solutions as a critical opportunity to address the twin crises of climate and biodiversity together.

⁸ See: <https://www.iucn.org/our-work/nature-based-solutions>

⁹ See: <https://www.awe.gov.au/science-research/climate-change/nature-based-solutions-for-climate>

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission to the parliamentary Inquiry into the *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023*. ALCA and its members look forward to ongoing engagement with the Parliament and NSW Government to help address the twin, interrelated crises of climate change and nature.

If you have questions regarding the submission, please do not hesitate to contact ALCA via michael@alca.org.au (Mr Michael Cornish, Policy Lead).



Dr Jody Gunn

Chief Executive Officer

Australian Land Conservation Alliance

About the Australian Land Conservation Alliance

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance is the peak national body representing organisations that work to conserve, manage, and restore nature on privately managed land. We represent our members and supporters to grow the impact, capacity, and influence of private land conservation to achieve a healthy and resilient Australia. Our seventeen members are:

- Arid Recovery
- Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- Biodiversity Conservation Trust NSW
- Bush Heritage Australia
- EcoGipps
- GreenCollar
- Greening Australia
- Landcare Australia
- Nature Foundation
- NRM Regions Australia
- Odonata
- Queensland Trust for Nature
- South Endeavour Trust
- Tasmanian Land Conservancy
- The Nature Conservancy Australia
- Trust for Nature (Victoria)
- World Wildlife Fund - Australia

ALCA member land conservation efforts have influenced over 3 million square kilometres with more than 4,000 landholders. We have over 70,000 supporters and our combined annual turnover exceeds \$325 million. Together ALCA and its members address some of the most pressing conservation issues across the country, including restoring endangered ecosystems, building the protected area estate, tackling invasive species, expanding private conservation finance, and funding and using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change.

Through their active land management, ALCA member organisations are deeply embedded in rural communities and economies, providing jobs, securing significant regional investment, and safeguarding remaining native habitat, with its many positive spill-over effects for community, wellbeing, and food security. We seek to demonstrate the role and value of private land conservation as a cornerstone of the Australian economy.

Some ALCA members are statutory entities; the views expressed in this submission do not necessarily represent the views of the Government administering those statutory entities.

You can learn more about ALCA online at: www.alca.org.au.