

**Submission  
No 186**

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING SYSTEM AND THE IMPACTS  
OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND  
COMMUNITIES**

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## **Points drawn out from the State of the Environment Report, EPA, NSW, 2021**

*There have been continued declines in the amount and condition of our natural capital – native vegetation, soil, wetlands, reefs, rivers and biodiversity. Such resources benefit Australians by providing food, clean water, cultural connections and more.*

*The number of plant and animal species listed as threatened in June 2021 was 1,918, up from 1,774 in 2016. Gang-gang cockatoos and the Woorrentinta (northern hopping-mouse) are among those recently listed as endangered.*

*Clearing native vegetation is a major cause of habitat loss and fragmentation, and has been implicated in the national listing of most Australia's threatened species.*

*Australia's investment is not proportional to the grave environmental challenge. The area of land and sea under some form of conservation protection has increased, but the overall level of protection is declining within reserves.*

*We're reducing the quantity and quality of native habitat outside protected areas through, for instance, urban expansion on land and over-harvesting in the sea.*

*Australia is also increasingly relying on costly ways to conserve biodiversity. This includes restoration of habitat, reintroducing threatened species, translocation (moving a species from a threatened habitat to a safer one), and ex situ conservation (protecting species in a zoo, botanical garden or by preserving genetic material).*

*Environmental destruction also costs our economy billions of dollars, with [climate change](#) and [biodiversity loss](#) representing both national and global financial risks.*

*We also need more [collaboration across governments and non-government sectors](#), [underpinned by greater national leadership](#). This includes [listening and co-developing solutions with Indigenous and local communities](#), [building on and learning from Indigenous and Western scientific knowledge](#). (emphasis added)*

**Comments by** [Emma Johnston](#), Professor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), [University of Sydney](#); [Ian Cresswell](#), Adjunct professor, [UNSW Sydney](#), and [Terri Janke](#), Honorary Associate Professor, [UNSW Sydney](#). Source: [The Conversation](#)

### **Personal comments.**

Searching *The Conversation* for other articles related to planning matters brings up scores of references, presented in simple terms for general public understanding but written by professionals and academics with appropriate skills and knowledge. The topics include every aspect of human activity; extending across, above and below every continent and ocean, most often describing the effects (predominantly damaging) that human activities have upon the world we cohabit, and suggesting how these activities could (should), be managed. Effective management occurs when actions and resources are directed to work towards a clear objective. Which is a simple definition of a plan. The comments about the EPA report above are indicative of a lack of both an embracing plan, and of cohesion between policies at every level of government.

An implicit thread connecting many of these topics is the influence of pervasive and dominant European philosophy and beliefs which accords absolute primacy to human interests, expressed most often as proprietorial rights giving exclusive possession of territory and land and all resources found within. Such proprietorial entities, both individual and corporate, regard the natural physical world as territory to be occupied, a source of materials to be commercially exploited and consumed, and as a common sump into which

wastes can be freely discarded. Complex legal and policy structures have developed to protect these practices, but can easily become an effective constraint on any changes necessary to meet evolving needs.

That pursuit of this *plan* has global physical limits, which if breached will bring new and novel threats to our human activities has long been a subject of discussion by specialists, but has only recently become a focus of consideration by our whole population as uncomfortable and destructive natural phenomena become more frequent and widely experienced. Already, the everyday lived experience of people just across our small region, NSW, includes damage and destruction of homes, businesses and infrastructure from urban flash flooding and riverine and broad floodplain inundation: from coastal erosion by tidal and storm action: from bush fire at the urban/rural/woodland interface: from aquifer depletion and reduced natural habitat accentuating and enhancing the devastation of drought.

There is a high and increasing level of confidence in our understanding of and acceptance of a causal link to these events - in part at least - from the activities of extractive industry, forestry and agriculture: the industrial and consumer processes they supply: the pollution of the air, sea, fresh-water and soil resulting from discharge of wastes into the environment. Recognition that urgent and informed actions to move towards a condition where human activity fits within the boundaries set by the equilibrium of the natural world is only now beginning to become accepted as a necessary, indeed essential, alternative *plan* for our human ambitions.

*“Australia is at a pivotal point. There is a tidal wave of disruption on the way, and it is critical we take steps now to get ahead of it”*

Dr Larry Marshall Chief Executive, CSIRO, from CSIRO report, Our Future World: Global Megatrends 2022

How we are to deal with and survive such disruption as this report identifies without further, possibly fatal trespass beyond the balance of the natural world, is the paramount question of our time. It seems we are already in a hole: we must stop digging.

I suggest that the preservation and enhancement of all remaining biodiversity become the **number one** goal. Planning policies and associated strategies should be elevated *above all else* and directed to this end. By so doing, other problems such as global warming and species extinctions are reduced to second order issues: even normative questions such as intergenerational equity and sustainability become included issues.

By quietly considering the implications of this for just a moment brings some comprehension of the enormity of the changes that would be entailed at every level of human activity.

The immediate action of the moment is to begin the discussion, and this Committee is to be applauded for initiating this inquiry.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Jones,

Member, Tuross Lakes Preservation Group Inc, Tuross Coastal Landcare, Friends of Coila Inc.

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Turning attention to the Terms of Reference (ToR), and noting also that it is beyond my competence to make expert detailed comments.

However, I suggest that a toolkit, comprising an integrated network of regulations, taxation, compulsory bonds, compulsory insurance, exemptions, public works infrastructure would give agency to planning policy. Implementation will require constant and effective liaison between appropriate Departments and Ministries.

For example:-

(ToR) (a) - (1) (2) (3) - refuse all proposed developments: legislate a sunset clause on all approved developments, with exemptions where voluntary compliance with current legislated requirements is adopted.

(ToR) (b) - (1) (2) (3) (4) - require compulsory bonds, compulsory insurance as appropriate to the identified risks and entities at risk. Indemnify entities where necessary.

(ToR) (c) - identify and explain the necessary reforms, gain approvals, implement the measures required.

(ToR) (d) - require and approve necessary changes to infrastructure to allow increased residential densities.

(ToR) (e) - evaluate, review and adapt.

***In summary - we need to be solving problems quicker than we are causing them. I can find no evidence at all that this is happening.***