



ABN: 59 315 206 816

Return Address

PO Box 1784
Mandurah WA 6210

Email:

peelpreservation@westnet.com.au

Website:

www.peelpreservation.org.au

Find us on Facebook:

<http://bit.ly/2dwavat>



PPG is a non-profit organisation devoted to the conservation of the natural environment in the Peel Region of Western Australia

Peel Preservation Group Inc.

National Biodiversity Strategy Secretariat
Department of the Environment and Energy
GPO Box 787
CANBERRA ACT 2601

To: NBSsecretariat@environment.gov.au

Re: AUSTRALIA'S BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Date: 15 March 2018

I am writing this submission on behalf of the Peel Preservation Group Inc. a voluntary organisation based in Mandurah, Western Australia. Since its inception in the late 1970's our group has been dedicated to the conservation and appropriate management of our local bushlands, waterways and wetlands.

The value of our work has recently been acknowledged by a \$10,000 grant from the Western Australian State Government.

The biodiversity strategy document articulates some sensible, rational and reasonably comprehensive goals and strategies, such as encouraging people to get out in nature, raising awareness, empowering people to care for nature and including a key role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. But overall it comes across as rather banal, warm and fuzzy and fails to mention that Australia is facing a biodiversity crisis.

What is missing from the document are terms like "unprecedented loss of biodiversity", requiring an "urgent response" to avert a biodiversity "catastrophe". Overall, Australia should hang its head in shame. Our track record since European settlement is nothing short of appalling. According to a recent Australian Conservation Foundation report, 29 mammals have become extinct in Australia since colonisation, compared with one in the USA. Australia also has more than 1700 threatened species and ecological communities spread across the country. Instead of using terms such as "how to protect nature", the strategy document should be framed in terms of "how to prevent a crisis from turning in to an irreversible disaster"!

Another oversight in the document is that no reference is made to the emerging threat of climate change, which has the potential to change the face of the landscape and surrounding oceans. Current climate science is both comprehensive and compelling. It's no longer a case of "if" but more a case of "when" in regard to the likely dramatic consequences of our own anthropomorphic proclivity to dump waste in to our own atmosphere, (our atmosphere also being one of those domains of nature that, apparently, we are trying to protect).

Also missing from the strategy is any reference to population policy, which is absolutely crucial when planning to protect and maintain our current biodiversity. In our history, since colonisation, it has been human population pressure, along with introduced alien and horrendously noxious species (e.g. cats and foxes which have no place in Australia, domesticated or otherwise) which have more than decimated our natural biodiversity, and greatly contributes to today's status of environmental "crisis". How are we going to respond to our burgeoning population, especially in regard to urban sprawl? In my own part of Australia, the City of Mandurah, 77 kms south of Perth it has been urban sprawl and the rampant destruction of bushland and wetlands that by far has had the biggest impact on loss of biodiversity.

So, how do we manage the ongoing, and sometimes exponential, population growth? The strategy document doesn't address this. We need some thought and vision on this extremely important factor to have any sensible approach to protecting biodiversity. In this regard there are currently two schools of thought: moving towards decentralisation or a very well-considered and sustainable centralisation of population in large cities, which necessarily may need to go vertical. Some of the world's centres of excellence for cutting edge ideas and forward vision in regard to environmental sustainability, such as the University of Stockholm are moving towards the idea that the best way to protect nature and hence biodiversity is to have a very centralised population in large cities, with no urban sprawl, but with a "green" and environmentally friendly ecosystem. High-rise cities such as Singapore do work very well, and interestingly the residents of Singapore, compared to international peers, rate in the top echelons in measures of physical and mental health. Unfortunately, the strategy document has nothing meaningful to say about population policy.

Though mentioned in passing and also by implication in several sections of the document, the role of volunteer community groups dedicated to environmental protection and recreation are vital to any comprehensive biodiversity strategy. Outside of government departments and agencies, who may carry out any number of field studies, there is nothing more valuable than local knowledge.

The importance of local community groups cannot be understated. It was not a government agency but a local community group that first noticed and subsequently reported the negative effects of farmland fertiliser run-off causing never-seen-before algae blooms in the Peel-Harvey Estuary system in Western Australia. Similarly, it was not a state government initiative, but an inexorable push from several local environmental groups that resulted in the Ramsar-listed Creery wetlands being partially saved from the pressures of canal development. Local groups had to fight very hard against a pro-development State government at the time. Also in Western Australia, environmentalists have had some long and protracted battles with the State Government to save our old growth (Karri and Jarrah) forests in our south-west.

These several examples serve to illustrate why some serious environmentalists are often cynical about State and Federal government "strategy policies" in regard to protecting biodiversity. Too often we have seen Government at all levels having a bet both ways, with some token statements about protecting biodiversity while at the same time allowing some nonsensical, destructive developments and projects that are the very antithesis of "sustainable development" (a term that was also missing from the Biodiversity Strategy).

In summary, the Biodiversity Strategy is somewhat banal and glib, and overlooks not one, but several "elephants in the room". The ecosystem in which we live and breathe, and at times from which we draw much joy and meaning as co-inhabitants of nature ourselves, deserves a better strategy document than what has been put forward.

Yours sincerely
Melvyn J. Tuckey
Committee Member
Peel Preservation Group (Inc.)