

## Submission by the Southern Highlands Greens

The aims of the review are commendable:

- facilitate the conservation of biological diversity
- support sustainable development
- reduce red-tape.

However, whether the aims are achieved will depend on the detail of the new legislative framework. This in turn will depend on the political input. With the present make up of the State Government this is a cause for concern.

The public is reliant, therefore, on the objectivity and environmental awareness of the review panel in making their report and recommendations, to ensure that environmental concerns are paramount.

The third aim, to “reduce red tape” should not be used as a pretext for weakening the environmental protections in place. In other words, if there appears to be a conflict in any of the aims, the priority should be in the order presently given to the aims.

We are particularly concerned with further weakening of the Native Vegetation Act, or of any other legislation intended to protect habitat and biodiversity. This is particularly so with regard to habitat of endangered species.

We believe that more resources should be devoted to effecting cultural change so that the general public, particularly in rural areas, is not only willing to comply with protective legislation, but actively engages in enforcement through reporting breaches.

Climate change is becoming more evident to the general population and farmers in particular and also corporations now routinely incorporate contingencies into their business plans that reflect the changing climate. Legislation which does not recognize this rising tide of awareness will be revised in the future. This is both a waste of resources and a lost opportunity to counter the effects of climate change on biodiversity. We urge the review panel to take into account this wider picture, and not simply respond to those vested interests who are pressuring for a weakening of the controls.

As to present legislative initiatives, we are concerned at the proposal to bring in a number of self assessable codes under the Native Vegetation Act, particularly with regard to monitoring their implementation. Self regulation in the context of economic benefits does not work and is open to abuse. This can be seen from the recent spate of tree removals to improve views under the guise of new bushfire prevention measures.

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Dated: 4 September 2014