



Submission on NSW Biodiversity Legislation Review 2014.

5th September, 2014.

The Wolli Creek Preservation Society was established in 1983 to ensure the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Wolli Creek valley in southwest Sydney.

We call on the NSW Government to strengthen and maintain existing legislation to protect the biological diversity of our State. We believe the unique natural heritage of NSW is a precious and diminishing resource belonging to the whole community. Our distinctive natural heritage forms landscapes of aesthetic beauty and provides essential ecological services. Unchecked vegetation clearing threatens the stability of our landscapes opening them up to soil erosion, riverbank degradation and stream sedimentation. Unchecked vegetation clearing reduces tree carbon storage. Unchecked vegetation clearing disrupts interactions between species affecting processes such as pollination and nutrient cycling. Most critically vegetation clearing reduces natural habitat for native biota.

We are opposed to any changes in the NSW Native Vegetation Act (2003) and the Threatened Species Conservation Act (1995) to allow land clearing because clearing of any area of native vegetation can have significant impacts upon biological diversity and threatened species.

We need legislation to protect native vegetation in rural areas. Native vegetation protects topsoil, provides shelter for crops and stock, provides habitat for native species and creates opportunities for tourism and recreation.

We need legislation to ensure natural areas are protected in our expanding urban zones. Sydney is unique among international cities because of its stunning natural heritage. The value of urban bushland to the amenity of our city should not be underestimated. There is also growing worldwide recognition that the wellbeing of children is enhanced when they spend time outdoors. We need to protect our natural areas where children can explore and learn.

Biodiversity is only retained when we retain natural areas in diverse natural landscapes. The biological diversity of NSW is unique and has suffered a steady decline since European settlement primarily through vegetation clearing and loss of habitat. Land clearing is a key threatening process implicated in many species, populations and ecological communities becoming threatened in NSW.

NSW biodiversity legislation must retain the principles of ecologically sustainable development. The objects to conserve our natural heritage must retain priority. The NSW Native Vegetation Act (2003) has served to slow down broadscale clearing in rural landscapes and must not be weakened. The NSW community does not want to continue paying for costly remediation of lands degraded through erosion and salinisation which can largely be prevented by maintaining native vegetation on farms and along watercourses. There is sufficient land already cleared in NSW to produce food and fibre for our needs.

The Threatened Species Conservation Act (1995) has effectively served to identify species at risk of extinction in NSW and plan for their recovery. The recognition of Key Threatening Processes such as land clearing which impact upon multiple threatened species enables us to address the causes of species endangerment at a higher policy level. The independent Scientific Committee must be retained to ensure independent and scientific assessment of the status of threatened species, populations and ecological communities. Professional independent scientific advice must remain the basis for determination of endangered species in NSW.

Our planning legislation under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (1979) is currently too weak because there is no provision to stop proposed developments even when they will impact upon a threatened species, population or ecological community. The current requirement is only for a decision-making authority to consider the acceptability of impacts upon threatened species. We need stronger protections for threatened species and we need a policy of no net loss of habitats critical for the survival of threatened species. In particular the 'like for like' principles of offsetting must be retained to prevent the gradual and irreversible loss of endangered ecological communities when impacts cannot be avoided or mitigated. The conservation status of offset areas must be guaranteed in perpetuity. The case of the Warkworth Mine expansion and the potential loss of the last large remaining stand of the Warkworth Sands ecological community demonstrates the weakness of current legislation to protect unique and threatened ecological communities.

The Wollie Creek Valley is the only bushland of substantial size left in the urban inner south west of Sydney. It has 50 ha of bushland within a heavily developed residential and industrial region. There are heathland, woodland, rainforest, wetland and saltmarsh habitats along the creek harbouring many wildlife species. The valley is of immense value to the residents of the surrounding suburbs. However, the valley is under a continual threat for the expansion of transport corridors. We are passionately attached to our local biodiversity and will continue to protect it against threats and degradation. The Wollie Creek Preservation Society opposes legislative changes which threaten conservation protections for our remaining natural heritage.

Yours sincerely,



(Vice President)