

Submission on behalf of 'The Australian Plant Society, Northern Beaches'.

Our Society has a history of over 50 years and was established as the Society for Growing Australian Plants to promote Australian native plants. This is done by protection and propagation of our native flora and the need for the wider ecosystem protection is easily demonstrated by the various and often still unknown pollinators. The need for fungi and specific microbes within the soil and nutrient content or better deficiency are further determining factors for the health and survival of our native flora, which are more and more acknowledged. Wherever native plants and in particular rare or threatened plants are destroyed all measures for their survival must be taken. Options for seed collection and soil translocation are always present and to not take full advantage of these is nothing less than brutal environmental vandalism.

Our local Northern Beaches branch undertakes regular outings since decades and degradation and loss of flora have regularly been observed. Whilst our propagation efforts have improved, a huge number of local native plants are still resisting all our efforts and further survival of transplanted or planted species is often not as successful as their equivalents in nature.

We believe that an overall objective for conservation is necessary and should amount to an overall zero loss of native vegetation. Not only do we need to stop diminishing ecosystem functions but we need to increase these functions again, as we have depleted several systems to unacceptable levels. To absorb carbon vegetation is a perfect solution, and nothing comes near indigenous old growth native vegetation, if a prolonged timespan is measured. We need to include all remnant indigenous vegetation rather than just concentrate on threatened species. Core habitat maintenance and enhancement is required just as much the jewels of biodiversity. As we witnessed so much of our precious bushland disappear in front of our eyes and with the blessing of the Land and Environment Court, we judge existing laws as insufficient and request that much tighter regulation be put in place.

Conservation is far too often ignored and community constantly needs to fight for it. This is deplorable and we expect that our government strengthens its arm and regulates this rather than people having to exhaust themselves over and over again for this basic asset of ours that are of benefit to the whole community. Any planning needs to be done with a holistic overview and for large developments environmental issues need to be addressed just as transport and access issues need to have veto rights. This needs to happen right at the start not after detailed planning has taken place and the only applicable 'solution' is to buy bio diversity offsets.

The breaking of conservation agreements especially of agreements where land was set aside as an offset for development ( mining) of some other lands leaves the community with zero trust regarding those laws.

The evaluation of a bio banking site with more points given to some lands that require enhancement rather than those that maintain themselves promotes destruction of our most valuable bushland parcels and is not conservation but destruction legislation.

Further destruction has resulted from the requirement of a certain number of points that are not available in the immediate area and are therefore sought and bought far away. The requirement should be to protect equal with equal.( This has resulted in the non protection of last niches of an endangered ecological community ( Duffys Forest Ecological Community at Frenchs Forest).)

Benefits for conservation either via tax or rate relief and help with restoration of bushland should be given more weight and financial assistance.

Development should simply have boundaries that are not constantly extended into bushland.

Threatened bushland must be protected and the ability for a minister to declare something state significant and sweep all legislative requirements away is obscene.

In certain areas development should be pulled back as to regenerate larger core bushland - and habitat parcels and allow natural processes eg flooding.

Wildlife management should be done with a view to have natural systems in place that do not require human interference. Wildlife corridors must be as important as our own corridors are and their restoration and protection should be paramount.

The fact that species that are newly detected are not automatically protected until proven that they are abundant is also testament to our poor ethical standard. I refer to a case where evidence of a newly detected insect of astonishing size was dismissed in the court, as a full species description requires several independent descriptions before it could be declared threatened and protected.

Conny Harris  
President Australian Plant Society, Northern Beaches