

In discussing the review of the Biodiversity Conservation legislation, I would like to say that foremost, existing biodiversity and conservation legislation, including the provisions of the Native Vegetation (NV) Act 2003 and Threatened Species Conservation (TSC) Act 1995, must be maintained and strengthened. Removing or weakening the protections provided by these Acts will accelerate biodiversity loss in NSW.

I wish to point out the major benefits that have occurred as a result of the TSC Act 1995, and the NV Act 2003, and conversely, the damaging consequences of extensive landclearing in the past.

- In the protection of native vegetation, land clearing laws have also helped in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Prior to 1995 massive landclearing resulted in over 90% of our forests being cleared for development and agriculture. The loss of native vegetation has decreased considerably since then, whilst the TSC Act 1995 has been invaluable in identifying and addressing these threats to biodiversity.
- There are many benefits that accrue from a diverse and healthy ecological community. Native vegetation helps with erosion control, salinity and maintains our freshwater; it provides shelter for stock and crops from strong winds and weather; it provides pollination and pest control; rainfall patterns are affected by loss of tree cover; and we have ourselves experienced the peace, recreation and the amenity benefits that the Australian Bush provides.
- Routine Agricultural Management Activities (RAMAs) were expanded recently to include clearing of invasive native species, the thinning of native vegetation, and the removal of paddock trees.
- This extension will result in a large increase in the amount of clearing that is exempt from assessment under the Native Vegetation Act 2003, which in turn will open the door to broad-scale land clearing and lead to significant loss of native habitat. This will place further stress on fragile soils, rivers and catchments.
- Routine Agricultural Management Activities (RAMAs) should be restricted to genuinely low impact activities.
- The Australian community does not need the side-effects that the reduction in biodiversity and native vegetation will bring us. Enough land has been cleared already to satisfy our needs to produce food and fibre, and to make our farms productive. Loss of topsoil, less rainfall, more erosion and salinity, we are paying now for previous generations of broadscale landclearing.

- Please legislate to end broad-scale land clearing across NSW. The NSW government should commit to ‘no net loss’ of native vegetation reflecting its diversity and value, as I have noted above.
- All development (including mining, forestry, urban development and agriculture) must commit and adhere to the course of action of “improving or maintaining” environmental outcomes.
- The role of the Independent Scientific Committee under the TSC Act should be retained and listing must continue to be based on the professional advice of the Scientific Committee.
- Decisions must be based on objective science-based decision making criteria (e.g. Environment Outcomes Assessment Methodology under the NV Act), and discretionary decision making should be very limited.
- The government should ensure the legislation is enforced and use extensive education resources to communicate its importance and provisions.

Yours sincerely
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