

11<sup>th</sup> September 2015

National Biodiversity Strategy Secretariat  
Biodiversity Policy Section  
Department of the Environment  
GPO Box 787  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Australia

**Re: Review of Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030**

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on the five-year review of *Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy* (the Strategy).

The Society for Conservation Biology (Oceania) (SCBO) has more than 300 members, including conservation scientists, policy-makers and managers. Our role is to provide scientific information for management and policy decisions about the long term sustainability and future of ecosystems and their dependent organisms, recognizing the importance of ecosystem services for humanity and based on the best available science.

In this submission, we provide comments on the progress to date of the Strategy, and make suggestions for its improvement.

Yours sincerely,



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## 1. Progress to date

SCBO's key concern with the Strategy is that it appears to have made limited progress in meeting its 10 targets (Appendix 1), and is unlikely to have made a discernible impact on reversing trends of biodiversity loss in Australia.

The Strategy's targets are generally poorly specified, meaning that it is unlikely that progress can be adequately evaluated. Current targets could be expanded to include a measure of the scale and increase in known threats to biodiversity (e.g. habitat loss) as an indirect impact. Further, there is opportunity to record major restoration initiatives to address habitat loss.

We note that there was no commitment in the original Strategy to resource its implementation.

### **Recommendations:**

For the Strategy to provide a meaningful guide to addressing biodiversity loss in Australia there should be:

- Clearly specified hard, SMART<sup>1</sup> targets, which:
  - Outline specific actions which will be used to meet those targets;
  - Identify the roles and responsibilities of government agencies and other organisations in the implementation of those actions;
  - Outline how progress towards meeting targets will be monitored and evaluated, and who is responsible for this;
- Quantification of progress against each of the 10 targets at Commonwealth and State and Territory Government levels;
- Resourcing of the Strategy at Commonwealth and State and Territory Government levels, for:
  - The implementation of management actions;
  - Monitoring of trends in biodiversity and threats;
  - compilation and storage of monitoring data;
  - Program evaluation, and
  - Reporting of evaluation results.

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<sup>1</sup> Simple (easily interpreted and monitored); Measurable (statistically verifiable, reproducible and showing trends) Accessible (regularly monitored, cost-effective and consistent); Relevant (directly addressing issues or agreed objectives); Timely (providing early warning of potential problems)

## **2. Alignment with National and International policies**

The Strategy is an overarching document which is meant to act as an 'umbrella' for other national frameworks:

- National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation (NRMMC 1999)
- The Australian Weeds Strategy (NRMMC 2007a)
- Australian Pest Animal Strategy (NRMMC 2007b)
- Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030 (National Reserve System Task Group 2009).

It is not clear how the Strategy is links specifically to more recent Australian Government policies, including the Threatened Species Strategy's 20 mammals by 2020, 20 birds by 2020, Leadbeater's Possum Action Plans, and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The current lack of alignment of the Strategy's targets with the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets has been highlighted in Australia's Fifth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity (2014).

### **Recommendations:**

- Update and clearly link the Strategy with recently introduced National policy documents
- Revised Strategy targets (Recommendation 1) such that they incorporate or complement targets identified in recent Commonwealth policy documents, as well as International targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- Clear quantified reporting of how State and Territory programs contribute to a national progress on each of the Aichi Biodiversity targets
- Specific identification of relevant biodiversity related international agreements (e.g. shorebirds, Ramsar Convention, World Heritage, Biodiversity Convention, Climate)
- Acknowledgement of potential positive and negative effects of international economic agreements on biodiversity outcomes (e.g. free trade agreements, fishing agreements)

### 3. Commitment to address biodiversity loss

The Australian Government has recently made clear commitments to prevent the extinction of key threatened species in the short term<sup>2</sup>. This commitment to accountability should be commended, and extended to key conservation priorities identified in the Strategy, including:

- The health of World Heritage Areas, such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Kakadu National Park;
- The effectiveness of the National Reserve System;
- The extent and quality of native vegetation;
- Management of fisheries resources
- Effective management of wetlands, including Ramsar wetlands

This could be achieved with a dedicated commitment with requisite resourcing and infrastructure for monitoring and evaluation, as well as clearly identifying which Australian Government agencies will be accountable for the delivery of outcomes. This can deliver transparency for effectiveness of expenditure in halting biodiversity loss in Australia.

We wish to emphasise that there is a clear and crucial role for the Australian Government in halting biodiversity loss nationally - particularly for Matters of National Environmental Significance, but also to harmonise and coordinate State and Territory level efforts to conserve biodiversity. Leadership and responsibility at the Federal level is critical if biodiversity loss is to be effectively addressed in Australia.

#### Recommendations:

- Inclusion of other key Australian Government initiatives in the Biodiversity Strategy
- Sufficient funding to track changes to biodiversity so that the effectiveness of measures can be demonstrated.
- Ensure transparency of reporting at the level of detail required to ensure that there is progress on improving the state of biodiversity
- Identification of all key monitoring and reporting systems focusing on the value of long-term biodiversity data, outcomes of programs (e.g. protected areas) and reporting of known threats to biodiversity (e.g. climate change, land clearing, water resource development), overexploitation, pollution, invasive species.
- Reaffirm the crucial role of the Australian Government in halting and reversing biodiversity loss, which is in addition to State and Territory level responsibilities.

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<sup>2</sup> The Hon. Greg Hunt MP, Minister for the Environment. Major new targets set at Threatened Species Summit <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/hunt/2015/mr20150716.html>

## Appendix 1

### The 10 national targets are as follows:

1. By 2015, achieve a 25% increase in the number of Australians and public and private organisations who participate in biodiversity conservation activities.
2. By 2015, achieve a 25% increase in employment and participation of Indigenous peoples in biodiversity conservation.
3. By 2015, achieve a doubling of the value of complementary markets for ecosystem services.
4. By 2015, achieve a national increase of 600,000 km<sup>2</sup> of native habitat managed primarily for biodiversity conservation across terrestrial, aquatic and marine environments.
5. By 2015, 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> of fragmented landscapes and aquatic systems are being restored to improve ecological connectivity.
6. By 2015, four collaborative continental-scale linkages are established and managed to improve ecological connectivity.
7. By 2015, reduce by at least 10% the impacts of invasive species on threatened species and ecological communities in terrestrial, aquatic and marine environments.
8. By 2015, nationally agreed science and knowledge priorities for biodiversity conservation are guiding research activities.
9. By 2015, all jurisdictions will review relevant legislation, policies and programs to maximise alignment with Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.
10. By 2015, establish a national long-term biodiversity monitoring and reporting system.