

Comments on Draft Biodiversity Bill for South Australia

I strongly support the creation of a Biodiversity Act for SA, including the Principles under Part 2 Section 8 of the Draft Biodiversity Bill. Biodiversity continues to crash in Australia and in South Australia, due largely to continued habitat clearance. This is often 'death by a thousand cuts'. Individually small but cumulatively crucial remnant areas of vegetation which support diverse species are cleared for new tracks, fencing realignments and new buildings destroying corridors and segmenting the ever-decreasing extent of habitat, especially understorey.

Montreal 30 x 30 agreement

The Federal Government is a signatory to the important Montreal '30 x 30' agreement. I can find no inclusion of this goal for habitat retention and restoration in this Draft Act. It should be a key aspect of the approach to decision making re land use and land use changes. We know that 30% native vegetation in a region is the minimum required to arrest the on-going decline of our biodiversity. Instead, substantial sections of the Bill are concerned with conditions and mechanisms for permitting further clearing. Our challenge is not to lessen the ecological impact of further development, but rather to actively and gradually restore our landscapes to a state of ecological sustainability where their biodiversity is no longer in long-term decline.

Ecological scientists as the leading members of the committee to oversee the Biodiversity Act's implementation

An independent scientific committee, adequately resourced is certainly a good way to manage the application of the Bill. The composition of the Board is important – it needs to be well-informed and neutral/objective - not subject to vested interests who have development agendas incompatible with fostering Biodiversity.

Inclusion of algae and fungi – what about invertebrates

I am relieved and pleased that algae and fungi have been duly recognised for their vital role in ecological balance. Invertebrates are similarly crucial but are only recognised in this Draft Bill if 'threatened', whereas there could be a more general acknowledgement of their integral, essential role in eg soil formation, feeding other species, and pollination.

'A shift towards a culture that seeks to avoid, rather than offset'.

This a welcome shift. Too often offsets are poorly designed and managed, and have been demonstrated to be subject to fraud. Many deliver no net conservation benefit at all, as the review by Macintosh et al. (2023, ANU) revealed. I reject the concept of offsets altogether, as they are not designed to deliver a net benefit, just convenience for development. It is good that the Draft Bill seems to be seeking to minimise offsets.

Heritage Agreements

The small amounts of funding available in the past for those landowners with Heritage Agreements have been helpful. However, orders of magnitude more support will be needed, especially in the most over-cleared districts, to encourage landholders over time to return portions of their properties to ecosystem function, or to sell them to buyers for that purpose.

Bees

Livestock operations including apiaries introduced into public conservation lands for individual profit should not to be permitted in reserves, and their introduction should be subject to all the other considerations for biodiversity promotion and protection. There is good science which shows that honey bees out-compete native bees and birds for nectar.

