Carol & Ray Bailey, [redacted]

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The Minister for Environment,

Dr. Susan Close MP and Biodiversity Coordination Unit, DEW

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Dear Minister and Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and provide feedback on the Discussion Paper proposing a Biodiversity Act for South Australia.

At the outset I would argue that a national act would have far greater hope of achieving genuine progress in conserving and protecting our flora and fauna, since it is clear that many species and populations within species are (or have been) moving in response to changing climate conditions for some time. Not only that many species, in particular avian and marine species, are migratory and need protection nation rather than State wide. This said, however, I would welcome a State Biodiversity Act if it takes precedence over other legislation, in particular the State Planning Code and Infrastructure legislation which at the present time is destroying valuable species habitat and State heritage every day. We have all observed the failure of State legislation to deliver the best outcomes to ensure healthy rivers in the Murray Darling Basin; how would State Biodiversity Acts work any better? It is clear that wildlife and landcape management is, like our rivers – beyond the capacity of individual States to achieve the best outcomes without collaboration and integration of policies nation wide. However a State Biodiversity Act could help to slow biodiversity loss and set a course for a national Act/Plan.

I have 12 years experience serving on Mount Barker District Council and more than 7 years service on different Development Assessment Panels (2010-2022), and a lifetime in agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry. Any Act which aims to protect other species must have as its primary goal the protection and enhancement of habitat for those species, not merely the every shrinking remnant patches which fail to support viable breeding populations and need to be linked via dedicated wildlife corridors which are declared in legislation to ensure they remain in perpetuity. One calls to mind the great parks of the world and in particular the National Parks and National Monument Parks of the U.S.A. These were instigated due to the loss of entire species as well as native American tribes people themselves, living in traditional lands upon which rapid European settlement and exploitation of natural resources was encroaching without cease. The history and success of the vast network of U.S. national parks and the National Parks Service is well documented but may be useful in looking at the conservation of specific ecosystems within biomes to ensure survival of all, rather than a mere selection of species. All of nature is a vast web of life, with everything inter-connected, so that the removal of any one species will impact right across that eco-system. The trophic cascade impacts of removal of key species or top level predators is well documented (e.g. https://earthjustice.org>feature>infographic>wolves-keep-Yellowstone-in-the-balance) and the removal of the dingo in northern NSW changed vegetation grazing which could be clearly observed from space. After a hiatus of more than half a century in both examples the No. 1 predator was returned with very positive and beneficial results for the local environment and farmers.

What greatly concerns me is that the Federal Australian Government is considering changes to the EPBC Act, yet has so far failed to act on the 38 Recommendations made in 2020 with regard to threats and on-going decline of the natural environment. With these points in mind I then applaud the incentive of a new Biodiversity Act (being mindful of the above) and make the following brief comments:

**Topic 1 Biodiversity and South Australia's First Nations People**

The clock cannot be wound back and few First Nations People would wish to return to a purely tribal/clan hunter-gatherer existence – but what we must learn is what they have in common with all 'First Nations Peoples' – the concept of 'belonging to the land' and caring for it rather than 'land ownership' and slices it into ever smaller pieces for personal and collective gain.

**Topic 2 Avoiding Impacts**

Keeping in mind all the foregoing the only way to retain representative breeding populations of what species remain in this State is to set aside areas exclusively (and some shared) with sufficient resources for their continuing survival. This brings about some sticky questions, since the European settlers have never hesitated to set 'stocking rates' for domestic species and wildlife, but has so far refused to responsibly manage its own population growth. This discussion is long overdue! Perpetual growth in a finite world is an oxymoron and it is about time governments faced up to the fact that *population growth is the problem*, not the panacea.

Under our current planning system any built development (and particularly high value development) is prioritized over environment and heritage – this can be seen at any DAP/CAP meeting any day of the week. Thousands of venerable native trees have been lost in the last year or so under the Planning Code – trees of which we will not see the like again due to climate change and ever diminishing rainfall. This is fast turning the State into an even bigger desert region – since the way to create a desert is to remove trees and shrubland (e.g. the Sahara Desert)!

*Offsets simply do not work* - removing trees/vegetation and having 'substitute' reveg. planted somewhere else is of no value to the disenfranchised wildlife which has nowhere to go and is thus forever lost.

*Species Loss* is a major and growing list in every SOE Report – yet where is the action to halt that loss? What happened to former Premier Mike Rann's *No Species Loss* State agenda? Why is more good money thrown after bad and still nothing of consequence achieved?

**Topic 3 - Transparent Decision Making**

Some good points made in the discussion paper but the recent changes put forward for management of South Australia's Crown Lands and northern open rangelands showed a lack of integrity and genuine intention in ensuring that these fragile lands are managed well to support both native biodiversity and a low stocking rate of well managed livestock. Conservation SA called for closer attention to ensuring that these vast but very fragile areas are better managed.

Many trees have been cut down in my local area (1,000 trees between Wistow and Strathalbyn), yet proper investigation would have found that most vehicle accidents were head-on collisions, with no trees involved – and a better resolution should have been found. The trees are gone – the road is no longer a beautiful scenic drive (though indeed distant views abound) and drivers

are already travelling at higher speeds due to the increased visibility. It remains to be seen whether there will be any less accidents with the addition of a passing lane each way.

Under this Topic the question needs to asked about how a local Biodiversity Act will be integrated with a National EPBC Act and whether we are not attempting to merely create a lot of jobs which duplicate and replicate what should be a national priority?

**Topic 4 – Threats to Biodiversity**

**Population growth** is undoubtedly the biggest threat to biodiversity and its loss world wide can be directly attributed to rapid and relentless human population growth, moderated only in those inhospitable regions where 'First Nations tribespeople' still maintain a shifting pattern of grazing or hunting and gathering. Wherever coastal cities, river cities and towns or major industry and employment exists the urban sprawl into the hinterland is unceasing worldwide. Why do governments shrink from admitting this, let alone acting on it with policies which encourage slower and lower population growth? Our government continues to advocate for more and higher growth – pure insanity!

**Topic 5 – Assessing the Risk of Extinction**

**Population growth** is the greatest threat to extinction of all other species, and ultimately our own since our survival is indeed dependent on a multitude of other species and their supporting networks. To think otherwise is to ignore the facts. When I was a child in primary school we were educated about the impacts of high population growth and low education in developing nations – yet now we are actually emulating them..... with education standards falling, living conditions declining and population growth higher than ever before. Our natural birth rate is actually higher than most Third World countries today. And Australian governments have continued to import growth via the immigration schemes which are supported by a number of 'feeder industries' which depend on unmitigated growth. Where is the wisdom of this?

The SOE reports show a steady and increasing decline in the 'state of environment' yet where is the positive action to halt this decline? Why do we have government departments full of people recording horrific statistics of environmental decline and permanent loss without any actions?

**Topic 6 – Biodiversity Planning and Reporting**

This has been ongoing for decades via the SOE – but where is the action to mitigate these findings? Any future Act will need to be over-arching, all powerful and well integrated with any federal Acts (e.g. any new EPBC Act) in order to make a positive difference and not just add to the piles of paper ending up in bins at the end of each term of government. The lack of action is so depressing that it is small wonder that mental health of the whole nation is in decline because people just cannot see things improving - not in their own street, town, city or anywhere they travel in our nation.

The entire nation (and a good part of the world) has watched with interest as the Murray Darling Basin Plan struggles to put enough environmental water into the rivers to maintain their flow to the sea. The whole problem is 'over-allocation' – the answer clearly is to cease handing out new

water permits and to buy back in any way possible those resulting in 'over extraction'. Yet the government placed its faith in 'The Market' - a non living entity without conscience which is happy to supply overseas investors with water holding permits to hold us all to ransom. Is this not insanity in the extreme? Why would any sane individual or group separate water from the land through which it flows? Not only the First Nations People have been deprived of their water rights – but those who actually live along the rivers in the MDB. I sincerely hope we are not going to treat 'biodiversity' in this way - though with the Federal Government heading towards changes to the EPBC Act one can but wonder.

**Topic 7 – The Benefits of Information**

I believe we would all have benefited from knowledge that the Federal Albanese Government is intending to change/upgrade the EPBC Act – yet there was no mention of this in the Discussion Papers. I can only emphasise again that it is vital we view our environment at the landscape scale – not piecemeal as we have done to our rivers. Chopping things up into little pieces to manage can only result in more and greater biodiversity loss. It is noteworthy that it has taken half a century for researchers to learn that many of our native fish need to get to the ocean to complete their life cycle – not only eels and lampreys. Yet our Rivers, in particular the slow moving River Murray, are blocked with weirs for human convenience and not all creatures can navigate the inadequate 'fish ladders'. How might those work in the Snowy Scheme one might ask? Already the Snowy Mountains Scheme is listed as the biggest environmental disaster in Australia in Environmental Management 101 at University level, yet how does our Government respond? With "Snowy 2" of course!

**Topic 8 – Achieving 30 by 30**

While this sounds wonderful, how can it be achieved in practice unless and until population growth is moderated? We now face problems which were only faced 50 years ago in 'Developing Nations' who (presumably) didn't know any better. Now development sprawls everywhere without regard to conservation of particular unique eco-systems or species.

How any Biodiversity Act will work in tandem with the current Planning Code is difficult to contemplate - unless the former takes clear precedence over the latter. There will be opposition by all those with vested interest in growth and more growth. Yet it is not the people or communities which gain from this growth – they are all diminished by it. Please consider.

**Topic 9 – Biodiversity: A Shared Responsibility**

Can only agree! However this means making developers, mining magnates and those with big vested interests in population growth and de-forestation, mining and major projects equally responsible for conserving and protecting our natural environment and all the species which depend on it. Even the work 'resources' can be brought into question here – since by definition it calls for *exploitation of that resource*.

**Topic 10 – Consequences of Doing the Wrong Thing**

The punishment needs to fit the crime and for too long there has been no real cost. Please align future penalties with those in Qld and NSW and 'balance the books' by empowering the ordinary people to speak up against the economic 'giants' of this nation. Australia, and in particular South Australia, is a vast continent with very little arable land – now all fully occupied and most overly so. All our fisheries are either fully fished or over-fished – our agricultural practices becoming more and more intensive and sheep and cattle being 'finished' standing in often shadeless, unhealthy feedlots for the last 100 days of their lives – a wretched end to any animal's existence. We have taken a lot of wrong turns and some dedicated and genuine action in protecting biodiversity and our environment could well create a paradigm shift in thinking and our national well being. I take no pride in being a world leader in extinction of our native species and applaud the government's move towards halting biodiversity loss.

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