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Dear Committee

I would like to submit the following brief comment for your consideration in finalising the shape of the Act.

Planetary health – the health of human civilisation and the state of the natural systems on which it depends – is currently threatened by two leading environmental emergencies: climate change and biodiversity loss. There is now strong and irrefutable evidence that climate change has direct, serious, and wide-ranging adverse effects on human health. There is also strong and growing evidence that loss of biodiversity has both direct and indirect negative effects on human health, through the loss of ecosystem services provided by healthy, biodiverse ecosystems. In addition to a climate emergency and a biodiversity emergency, ***the planet is also facing an associated human health emergency***. I would ask, therefore, if part of the emergency services levy or similar funding could not be spent on better understanding and monitoring the drivers of these emergencies, and whether the section on monitoring needs in the draft Act could be strengthened to include allowances for such possibilities.

In Public Health, we teach our students that it is better to invest in fences at the tops of cliffs to stop people falling off, than it is to purchase ambulances to retrieve them at the bottom. By analogy, investment of emergency services monies in better surveillance systems and environmental data could for example reduce the number of hospital admissions for mosquito-borne and bat-borne diseases – as exemplified by the recent Japanese Encephalitis virus and Covid-19 emergencies in Australia. Investing in the avoidance of emergencies is at least as important as dealing with them, and biodiversity plays a critical role in understanding and managing many health emergencies.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Professor Philip Weinstein

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