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Protecting, promoting and enhancing the economic, cultural, social and environmental well-being of the residents of North Canberra

The North Canberra Community Council receives funding and support from the ACT Government



17 April 2020

**North Canberra Community Council Submission on the
Review of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act
1999* (the EPBC Act)**

- (1) We note that to date, the EPBC Act, with all its good intentions, has failed to arrest or reverse the continuing decline of biodiversity in Australia. A much more drastic, radical, proactive and effective way needs to be found to address this fundamental crisis. We suggest that the review seriously consider the need for placing all areas relevant to matters of national significance within legislated reserves or national parks to prevent encroachment, inappropriate use, development, logging, mining and deterioration and to put in place buffer zones and adequate resources for their long-term management.

- (2) We believe that retaining federal responsibility for matters of national significance is of greatest importance. It is the only mechanism that counteracts state and territory whole-of-government conflicts of interest that lead to economic considerations trumping environmental considerations. The ACT government, for instance, is continuing to reduce, degrade and destroy, critically endangered ecological communities, such as native grass lands and grassy woodlands, by chronically under-resourcing their management and by proceeding with housing and road developments. Environmental off-set programs that have been established in the hope to compensate for this loss, are fundamentally flawed.

For instance, to off-set the destruction of an area of grassy woodland for a housing development in North Watson, ACT, an area was declared an off-set (Justice Robert Hope Park) that the community about 20 years earlier had fought hard for it to be protected for conservation. Since then, conservation volunteers had worked to improve the conservation value of that reserve. The ACT government's justification for declaring it subsequently an off-set area was that it had 'allowed' volunteers to

work there. Another example is the EPBC ACT REFERRAL 2014/7372 Blocks 4 and 5 Section 38 (30 Limestone Avenue) Campbell. The decision was to 'off set' the destruction of a quite complex and important remnant area in Campbell ACT, including golden sun moth habitat and other protected matters, by basically making it an archival object with \$100.000 thrown in for research.

Without federal responsibility for matters of national significance, state and territory whole-of-government conflicts of interest will continue to degrade Australia's unique biodiversity. Moreover, it is important that there are strong reporting and accountability mechanisms built into the legislation so that the public can easily see what decisions are being made by different levels of government and can challenge them.

- (3) The current Covid19 pandemic is also a reminder of the crucial need for the protection of matters of national significance in a world of significant climate disruption. To cite from Rosol, Renn, Schlögl: Climate change mitigation means protection of public health. 10/04/2020, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Germany: *"Biologists ... see the most effective prophylactic action against pandemics, such as we currently experience globally with Covid 19, in a consistently implemented and effective protection of biodiversity and the maintenance of spatial barriers between host animals and humans. The continued existence of species-rich and therefore resilient natural spaces for animals and plants, the stabilising of regional ecosystems and finally also the prevention of global climate disruption, are not 'only' necessary for the maintenance of long-term survival in a post-Covid 19 world, but are also a crucially important and a comparatively cheap way of preventing disastrous pandemics."* (Translation by JZ)

17 April 2020



Jochen Zeil

Chair, North Canberra Community Council (NCCC)