



Sutherland Shire Environment Centre

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To whom it may concern

**Re: Proposed Changes to Biodiversity Conservation Bill 2016 and
Local Land Services Amendment Bill 2016**

Sutherland Shire Environment Centre (SSEC) wishes to express its very strong opposition to key elements of the *Draft Biodiversity Conservation Bill 2016* and the *Draft Local Land Services Amendment Bill 2016*.

In particular, we are concerned at the following:

- The lack of any strong rationale for abolishing the *Native Vegetation Act 2003*.
- Evidence that the biodiversity offsetting approach proposed in the Bills is flawed. The off-set approach puts at enormous risk the removal of some of our most precious ecological communities.
- The grossly inadequate compliance checks. Without strong legislation and stringent monitoring, unfettered land clearing may take place.
- Removal of the requirement to 'maintain or improve biodiversity values'. This will lead inevitably to a decline in environmental outcomes, soil health, and water quality; it will also lead to increased salinity.
- Limiting important safeguards, such as 'red flag' areas for environmentally sensitive areas.
- The self-assessable codes which mean no land is off the table for clearing. With little justification and no compliance checks, large areas of native vegetation can be cleared on private land. Experience already shows this.

We also believe that the axing of the *Native Vegetation Act 2003* will seriously weaken the protection of the important buffer zones around National Parks. An example is Royal National Park where it is very important to protect the buffer zone in the Upper Hacking River catchment against the clearing of remnant bushland.

Our bushland and wildlife require stronger protection, not less. We are concerned that the proposed changes will increase land clearing and carbon pollution, push wildlife closer to the brink of extinction and undermine the sustainability of our farmland.

In the past non-indigenous settlers and the plant and animal species and pests that accompanied them were guilty of the greatest extinction of mammals on Earth. Whole landscapes had native vegetation trashed and eradicated. Entire ecosystems were destroyed. Today, our cities and towns continue to spread and remove species in the process.

The proposed *Biodiversity Conservation Bill 2016* and *Local Land Services Amendment Bill 2016* plus changes to the *Environmental Planning and*

Assessment Act 1979 will deliberately hasten the process. These pieces of legislation have little regard for conservation and replace key legislation with deliberately weakened laws.

The Government's failure to adequately protect the natural environment, indeed the breadth and scale of the current Government's efforts to effectively eradicate adequate protection for the country's indigenous biodiversity, have been clearly pointed out in the submission of the National Trust ⁽¹⁾, the letter of concern from the Wentworth Group of Eminent Scientists ⁽²⁾ and general issues and specific issues raised in the Fact Sheets 1 to 5 by the Nature Conservation Council on the website "Stand Up for Nature" ⁽³⁾.

Significantly the new legislation in no way addresses the greatest threat confronting civilisation - that of climate change. Research has proven that land clearing reduces rainfall, increases temperatures, increases the duration of droughts and exacerbates El Niño events.

SSEC would recommend the State Government redraft the law with net benefits to the environment and build upon and strengthen the *Native Vegetation Act 2003*. In doing so, the Government would be acting responsibly to conserve the remaining biodiversity of NSW for all time and to redress the wrongs and pressures wrought upon natural ecosystems across NSW by the modern civilised society.

We would welcome legislation that strengthened protection for the environment and provided sufficient funds to maintain the integrity of conservations areas.

Sutherland Shire Environment Centre calls on the government to hold a public forum that allows all sides of this debate to be heard. Our community deserves to hear the arguments laid out with opinion and evidence. Evidence matters. SSEC wants to support the government in building biodiversity legislation that is founded on strong evidence and that ensures conservation is not threatened by the short-term expediencies of increasing primary production.

Yours sincerely



Jenni Gormley,
Chairperson

References

1. National Trust Submission, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/National-Trust-Submission.pdf>
2. Statement from the Wentworth Group of Scientists, <http://www.smh.com.au/cqstatic/gphc0c/wentworthbio.pdf>
3. Stand Up for Nature Website, <http://www.standupfornature.org.au/resources>