

17th July 2019

The Hon Sussan Ley MP
Minister for the Environment
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Healthy planet, healthy people

Dear Minister

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) was pleased to see your early action in adding more plants and animals to Australia's national list of threatened species, including woodlands that have been eligible for protection for many years. We are particularly pleased to see the inclusion of threatened ecological communities as this provides greater assurance of protection for individual species, in addition to species that are less publicly popular and those that have not yet been identified scientifically.

We are a voluntary organisation of medical doctors in all states and territories. Our vision is for a 'healthy planet, healthy people'. DEA understands that human health and wellbeing are absolutely dependent upon an ecologically rich and biodiverse planet. DEA has a distinguished board of advisors with high levels of expertise in medical and public health issues, combined with a diverse national membership of doctors and medical students from all facets of the profession.

DEA is focussed on highlighting the complex interaction between human health and the natural environment. It is therefore concerned at continuing ecosystem and biodiversity losses and the continuing impact this is having on human health, wellbeing and social stability. A global environment that supports biodiversity is better able to support human health through diverse ecosystem services and provisioning, including clean air, water and fertile soils. Further, with over half of all medicines in use today having derived from nature, and with novel bioactive molecules continuing to be discovered within Australia's unique ecosystems, protecting biodiversity is a preventative health measure. This is a topic of utmost urgency, and of great political and cultural importance, hence our support for your additions to protected species and communities' lists. We note the comment from Humane Society International, that you are "bucking the trend set by her predecessors" by acting promptly on recommendations made by the independent threatened species scientific committee.

However, in supporting this action we also would like to draw your attention to the biodiversity crisis as a consequence of the planet's sixth mass extinction event. Australia already has a world-leading rate of mammalian extinctions [28 species since colonisation] and scientists are concerned that ongoing land clearing in New South Wales may see the iconic koala become extinct within decades. Indeed, alarmingly, the 2018 State of the Environment Report noted that 54 species were added to the official list of Australia's threatened species, which now stands at 1,775. That is 47% more than 18 years ago and puts Australia among the world's worst performers in biodiversity protection.

Strong action protecting biodiversity will not only support human health, it will also help food production by providing habitat for pollinators. As you would be aware, insect numbers have collapsed globally due to climate change impacts, habitat loss to agriculture and urbanisation as well as the widespread use of pesticides. Insects provide the basis of the food chain, nutrient recycling and crop pollination. Without them life as we know it is at risk. We further point to the need to fund and act on promises to protect species, consistent with legislative requirements for the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and the 2020 protected areas targets committed to under the *Convention on Biological Diversity*.

DEA also sees the urgent need for action on climate change, which is a major contributor to species decline and extinction. Without reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, our actions to protect species and ecosystems will be meaningless.

For further explanation on the relationship between health and biodiversity please see our Fact Sheets at: <https://www.dea.org.au/why-we-need-forests-and-native-vegetation-for-our-health-fact-sheet/>

As Australia is one of the five countries responsible for most of the world's remaining wilderness, your role and actions are critical for making a 'healthy planet, healthy people'.

We look forward to a productive partnership with you as Minister for the Environment.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Dimity Williams
MBBS(Hons) FRACGP
Biodiversity Convenor
Doctors for the Environment Australia

DEA Scientific Committee

Prof Colin Butler
Prof David de Kretser AC
Prof Robyn McDermott
Prof Emeritus Sir Gustav Nossal AC
Prof Fiona Stanley AC

Prof Stephen Boyden AM
Prof Peter Doherty AC
Prof Stephen Leeder AO
Prof Lidia Morawska
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Prof Ian Lowe AO
Prof Peter Newman AO
Prof Lawrie Powell AC
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