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Media Release

Conservation groups withdraw from Mike Baird's predetermined biodiversity reforms

The Baird government's biodiversity law reform agenda has suffered a major setback today with the state's peak conservation groups withdrawing from top-level stakeholder consultations with the Office of Environment and Heritage, who are drafting the new laws.

The groups are now seeking direct talks with the Ministers for Environment, Planning and Primary Industries.

The groups have issued this joint statement about the withdrawal:

"We have provided detailed analysis and constructive feedback to help develop a conservation law that addresses the increasing threats to wildlife, soils and climate, but it is now clear that the government is on a course to pursue development at high environmental cost.

"It has become clear that the broad outcomes of this process are being predetermined by a minority of rural interests, and the proposed *Biodiversity Conservation Act* will fail to secure adequate protections for our wildlife, water and soils. It will also increase climate change risks by permitting the resumption of broadscale land clearing.

"We therefore refuse to legitimise a wind-back of protections for nature by participating in the current stakeholder consultations any further."

The Baird government plans to repeal the *Native Vegetation Act* and the *Threatened Species Conservation Act* and introduce a new conservation law this year. The groups' analysis of the government's proposals has concluded they would:

- add extinction pressures to the state's 1000 threatened species;
- threaten clean, reliable water supplies and degrade fertile farmlands through erosion and salinity;
- put landmark trees and bushland in towns and suburbs at greater risk;
- reduce tree coverage and undermine Australia's efforts to cut carbon pollution;
- expand a flawed offsets scheme to try to recreate bushland cleared under the new laws in order to legitimize inappropriate development.

“Premier Mike Baird is putting our water, soils and climate at risk, and pushing our native animals to extinction with laws that will fast-track bushland destruction across NSW,” **NSW Nature Conservation Council CEO Kate Smolski** said. “Before the election, Premier Baird committed to ‘enhancing the state’s biodiversity to benefit current and future generations’. [1] Now he is buckling to the demands of big agribusiness and developers who want weaker nature protection laws to accelerate habitat destruction, the number one cause of wildlife extinctions. This legislation does not protect nature, it facilitates development.”

Total Environment Centre Director Jeff Angel said: “We are walking away from this process because it has become clear the government is focused on delivering a predetermined outcome for radicals in the National Party. We have no faith that the new system the government has been developing will protect our bushland and wildlife. We are calling on the Ministers for Environment, Planning and Primary Industries to intervene to get the reform process back on track. We are holding well attended community meetings across Sydney and along the coast and there is growing anger about the war on trees. Without buy-in from the conservation movement, the government’s claim that its reforms will enhance environmental protection will lack all credibility.”

NSW National Parks Association CEO Kevin Evans said: “Nature in NSW is under extreme pressure, with almost 1000 species listed as threatened and bushland rapidly disappearing across the state. Without urgent action, koalas and many of our other iconic native animals will become extinct in our lifetime. This government has abandoned the building of the National Parks network, and now they are weakening biodiversity legislation across the state. They either don’t understand the crisis facing our wildlife and ecosystems or they simply don’t care. Either way, they’re out of touch. Thousands of farmers across the state are actively trying to restore habitat for native species, and these laws undermine all their good work.”

The Wilderness Society National Director Lyndon Schneiders said: “The government will take conservation in NSW backwards 20 years if it implements its new conservation regime in its current form. People are fed up with the loss of precious bushland and wildlife and they are looking to Premier Baird to show leadership on this issue. He needs to stand up to radicals in his government who are driving these damaging changes.”

WWF-Australia National Manager Science, Policy and Government Partnerships Paul Toni said: “The government’s proposed new *Biodiversity Conservation* law takes a Disneyland view of the world. Well we are not in Disneyland. Lots of people don’t do the right thing. These new laws will allow people who don’t do the right thing to destroy our trees and bush, wildlife, water and topsoil. And pretty soon there won’t be much bush or wildlife left. If the government wants to improve the environment, which [we](#) think it does, it needs to start operating in the real world by passing legislation that stops and then reverses the destruction of bush.”

Humane Society International’s Australian Director Michael Kennedy said: “There is undeniable irony in proposed ‘biodiversity’ reforms that are set to result in weakened protections for threatened wildlife and their habitats across NSW. We engaged in the process from the outset with hopes of positive outcomes for species and ecosystems under increasing threat, however it has become apparent that the government is unwilling to negotiate on a range of elements with unacceptable consequences.”

While the groups will no longer participate in the government’s “targeted stakeholder consultation” on the reforms, they will make submissions, and support members in making submissions, to the public consultation process when that occurs.

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REFERENCES

[1] *Before the 2015 NSW election, the Baird Coalition Government committed that:*

"Our [biodiversity] reforms will ... deliver an enhanced overall environmental outcome. ... end[ing] the site by site incremental erosion of biodiversity overseen by Labor and apply consistently to all landholders ... The reforms offer a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve landscape health, ecosystem function, land-use productivity and conservation outcomes across NSW."

NSW Government response to biodiversity review, 26 March 2015.

http://www.nswnationals.org.au/nsw_government_response_to_biodiversity_review

STAND UP FOR NATURE ALLIANCE



The groups have formed an alliance called Stand Up For Nature (*#standup4nature*) that will campaign for stronger environmental protections. The alliance is calling on Premier Baird to ensure his *Biodiversity Conservation Bill* and associated measures:

- Protect and enhance the health and variety of our wildlife, protect water supplies and ensure healthy soils and productive farmlands
- Ensure no return to broadscale land clearing by retaining clearing controls
- Pay "cash for conservation" to support farmers who protect wildlife, healthy soils and pure water supplies in return for maintaining strong vegetation laws
- Identify and rule out clearing bushland that is critical as habitat for threatened wildlife
- Rule out offset schemes that allow developers to destroy wildlife habitat in exchange for cash or dissimilar types of habitat
- Use tree-clearing controls to maximize the amount of carbon pollution captured and retained by native bushland, and
- Require comprehensive and accurate mapping of the state's 1500 vegetation communities so we know exactly where they are and can protect them properly.

Member groups include the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Total Environment Centre, National Parks Association of NSW, The Wilderness Society, WWF-Australia, Humane Society International, WIRES , and Colong Foundation for Wilderness.

WEBSITE

The alliance campaign website is at www.standupfornature.org.au