



The Grail

21 June, 2016

We are writing to make a submission on the Government's *Draft Biodiversity Conservation Bill 2016* and *Draft Local Land Services Amendment Bill 2016*.

Who we are

We are the NSW members of The Grail, an international faith-based women's movement.

We are committed to caring for our common home. When ecological consciousness was beginning to have a voice in the public sphere, the now renowned cosmologist and cultural historian, Thomas Berry, analysed the problem as this: "In our present attitude the natural world remains a commodity to be bought and sold, not a sacred reality to be venerated." As many ecologists have since noted, humanity has become alienated from the reality of our dependence on our earth mother and lost that sense of the earth as a sacred reality belonging to us all.

We believe that the way forward for a flourishing humanity is to re-appropriate that ancient wisdom about our place on earth and to learn to live with reverence and responsibility. Life on this planet has evolved as an integral ecology in which everything is interdependent, so that humanity can only thrive in the context of a thriving natural world. So much damage has already been done. Now is the time to repair.

Like many informed groups and individuals in the wider community who speak out in defence of the earth, we raise our voices on behalf of the countless plant and animal species that cannot contribute to this submission. Not only do these species have the right to exist and flourish, it is on them that our lives and livelihood depend. In fact, we have so greatly overlooked the rights of other creatures in our exploitation of the earth that we are in the midst of a deeply disturbing mass extinction crisis. In the words of Pope Francis, "care for our common home" is the only way to ensure an equitable and flourishing future for all, human and non-human alike.

Our members engage actively at national and local levels on issues of social and ecological justice. For this reason, we are compelled to express our deep concern about the possible consequences of proceeding with these Bills.

Our concerns with the Bills

- The Baird government's pre-election commitment promised,
“biodiversity reforms which would deliver enhanced overall environmental outcomes....a once- in-a-generation opportunity to improve landscape health...land-use productivity and conservation outcomes across NSW.”

We see that the current draft Bill which addresses “improved land-use productivity”, gives this matter precedence over other environmental concerns. Such a move, which prioritises land clearing, as well as allowing this on the basis of self-regulatory practices, will thwart the natural capacity of the land and species to regenerate.

- The Bills pay insufficient attention to the climate-change impacts of facilitating more large-scale land clearing. These Bills, if enacted, will counter efforts called for by the Federal Government to reduce carbon pollution. What sort of global citizens are we who put the clearing of trees, general deforestation and consequent increased pollution before Australia's commitment to the 2015 Paris agreement?
- The likely extinction pressures that will be placed on the state's species are very worrying, as is the fact that the proposed BAM and offset scheme cannot guarantee like-for-like replacement of species and cannot properly be called an offset scheme at all. Further, there is insufficient rigour in the assessment and offset process to protect species long-term.
- We are alarmed at the likely degradation of fertile farm lands, increased salinity and soil erosion and the likelihood of more deforestation.
- There is no doubt that further large scale land clearing in NSW will continue to destroy biodiversity as well as undermine the state's long-held environmental protections.
- We really appeal to the NSW Liberal Government to listen to concerned residents of this State rather than the voices of agribusiness and developers, who appear to be pushing for changes that will weaken the existing conservation laws. Existing laws (2003 and 2005) though not perfect, include helpful safeguards and environmental oversight to prevent private interests from overtaking long-term public interests. Why can't the government build on these laws rather than repealing them?

Our recommendations

1. Establish a NSW Environment Commission or a Biodiversity Commission with wide community representation to provide advice and oversight. It is essential that such a body includes an equal number of voices from respected Environmental groups who speak for the Earth. Industry and developers are already well spoken for -- a balance is needed to moderate the actions of any one group and allow time for reflection on long-term consequences of any proposed legislation that will affect the environment for many years to come.
2. Biodiversity laws to be effective should be designed to prevent extinction of plants and animals as well as promote sustainable growth of bushland.
3. As stewards of the land, we should first and foremost commit to regenerative land practices, not ones likely to denude and denature. To this end, our laws should promote restraint in development and the take-up of regenerative practices.
4. Encouraging of 'private' conservation of bush and areas of biodiversity needs to be given priority over further 'development' for profits whether in urban or rural areas.

As a movement with members who live and work in African countries, we know firsthand of the devastation to communities that results from climate events and large-scale clearing. As a first-world country with rich resources, an educated populace and stable government, **we plead with you to consider the long-term consequences of not taking sufficient precautions to balance the voice of progress with the many voices of the earth.** With these proposed Bills, the government is in a historic position to determine the long-term viability and productivity of the land in this state and therefore all that it yields.

We appeal to Premier Baird and reasonable men and women in his government to withdraw this flawed Bill and develop a system of conservation laws that will ensure our wildlife, bushland, soils, water supplies and climate are restored to health and can meet the physical, cultural and spiritual needs of future generations.

Yours sincerely

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