

ASSOCIATION FOR TROPICAL BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF STRONGER LAWS FOR CLIMATE-CHANGE MITIGATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN AUSTRALIA

Australia has many trees, amphibians, and reptiles that are unique, being found nowhere else on Earth. Northern Australia contains a disproportionate amount of this biodiversity which occurs in little developed areas, parks and reserves, indigenous titled lands, and community-managed lands.

Whilst Australia's achievements in protecting some of its remaining native forests, wildlife and wilderness are applauded, some 6 million hectares of forest have been lost since 2000. Existing forest protection will be undermined by weak climate change legislation, and poorly regulated agricultural and urban development.

The Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC), the world's largest organization dedicated to the study and conservation of tropical ecosystems, is concerned about recent changes in Australia's environmental regulations, reduced funding for scientific and environmental research, and support for governmental and civil society organizations concerned with the environment.

Securing Australia's environmental heritage for its future citizens and the global community will be undermined without strong environmental legislation and leadership that empowers government agencies, communities and local environmental organizations to protect rainforests. This requires sufficient funding for research that can advise the management of these sensitive areas, environmental progress in Australia will be hampered, and the inheritance of its future citizens compromised.

At this 2014 annual meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation, in Cairns, Australia, we, the association representing 589 scientists and conservationists from 55 nations including Australia DECLARE:

Whereas, the industrialised Commonwealth of Australia has one of the world's highest per capita greenhouse-gas emission rates in the world, and relies primarily on fossil fuels for its electricity generation, it still is a major contributor to global climate disruption.

Whereas, human-caused climate disruption (global warming) is now one of the greatest threats to species and ecosystems worldwide, and will increasingly exacerbate the current extinction crisis arising from human endeavour.

Whereas, Australia has experienced severe fragmentation of biologically unique habitats as a result of human development, in part resulting in the world's highest mammal extinction rate, and a major loss of other plant and animal species.

Whereas Australia has recently weakened or overturned decades of legislation designed to protect its sensitive natural ecosystems and species, as well as altered demonstrably effective climate-change mitigation strategies such as elimination of the carbon-pricing scheme.

Therefore, be it resolved that the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation:

- Urges the Commonwealth Government to reconsider its stance on a financial penalty system to limit its greenhouse gas emissions, and that it implement a mandatory emissions-trading scheme in light of its recent decision to overturn the existing carbon-pricing scheme. The Commonwealth Government's 'Direct Action' plan to reduce its emissions will be ineffective for reducing emissions.
- Implores the Commonwealth Government to retain its Renewable Energy Target to maximise renewable energy penetration in its electricity-generation sector.
- Commends the Commonwealth Government's recent announcement to appoint Australia's first Threatened Species Commissioner and a Ministerial Council on the Environment to advise the Commissioner, but encourages the Government to instate some legislative power to the position as it currently lacks decision-making power to effect real change to threatened-species policies.
- Implores the Commonwealth Government not to devolve national oversight of industrial and urban development potentially exacerbating the status of Australia's threatened species. The Government should not allow individual Australian states to weaken or overturn national legislation such as the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* given the recent trends for state governments to relax laws for vegetation clearing and to allow industrial activities such as logging, grazing, fishing and mining in 'national' parks and other protected areas.
- Urges the government to reinstate a major funding scheme to the only independent legal entity available to limit environmentally destructive human development – the Environmental Defenders Office. Without funding to continue this essential legal representation for environmental-related cases, rampant and demonstrably damaging development will go unchecked.
- Implores the Commonwealth Government to abandon its attempt to remove the tax-deductible status of environmental groups and non-government organisations that work to protect Australia's unique and threatened ecosystems and natural capital.
- Encourages the Commonwealth Government to commit to enforcing the *Illegal Logging Prohibition Act 2012* that criminalises the importation into Australia of illegally logged timber and any product made from illegally logged timber, and the *Illegal Logging Prohibition Amendment Regulation 2013* that regulates compliance of the *Act*. Any delay in enforcement of the *Act* and the *Regulation* will result in even greater deforestation of tropical and other forests and continued loss of species from these mega-diverse habitats in the Asia – Pacific region.