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Q1

First name

Kerry

Q2

Last name

Walker

Q3

Email

[REDACTED]

Q4 Yes
Can we contact you about your submission (if needed)?

Q5 Yes
Can we add your email to our mailing list for occasional updates on this topic?

Q6 I am representing an NGO or community group.
What best describes you?

Q7 Hunter
What best describes your main regional interest?

Q8

I agree to have my submission published with my name.

Your submission may be published. If you do not want your personal details or responses published, please tell us here.

Q9

What do you consider is the most significant action(s) we can undertake to protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystem function on private lands?

As a priority, the NSW Government needs to remove the code-base land clearing allowances under the Land Management (Native Vegetation) Code 2018, that are empowered by the Local Land Services Act 2013. These laws rely on land-owners self-assessing whether they can clear their land or not, which enables careless and rampant land clearing. After these laws came into force in 2017, land clearing rates on private property have tripled. Over the past five years an average of 84,000 hectares of bush have been cleared on private properties. This is an unsustainable and unacceptable level of clearing. Instead, the NSW Government needs to introduce a clear and meaningful approval pathway that aims to protect habitat and reduce land clearing. The approval system needs to have Government oversight and transparent reporting. Under current rules in NSW, land cleared before 1990 is exempt from regulation. This is outdated, excludes a major resource for wildlife and needs to be changed. Such lands may now contain native regrowth nearly 35 years old. New research has shown regrown forests and woodlands can provide valuable habitat and food for threatened species after an average of 15 years. For example, some species like the koala use regrowth as young as nine years old. I note some species, like greater gliders need much older mature forests so it is important to have policies that retain both young and old forests, and to sustain the old forests of the future.

Q10

How can we further improve soil, water and vegetation management to protect and restore biodiversity while delivering sustainable economic outcomes?

The culture of landscape destruction needs to one where landowners value native vegetation on their land and are incentivised to protect it.

First and foremost, we need a strong regulatory system that encourages landholders to protect native vegetation. This system, needs to be supported by strong education and engagement so that landowners are aware of the laws, how to follow them and are inspired by the benefits to people, economies, biodiversity and the ongoing productivity of the land.

The regulatory system should be bolstered by economic incentives to landowners. In NSW, over 300,000 hectares of habitat is currently protected forever by voluntary conservation agreements. This program is delivered by the Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT). Funding and staffing for the BCT should be increased, to scale-up the number of private properties entering conservation agreements.

We also need to revisit how we protect regrowth vegetation. Protecting native regrowth is more cost-effective and efficient than planting new trees.

Q11

What do you consider is the most effective way to further support and enable landholders to deliver sustainable land management and production outcomes?

Policies and reforms must be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and their implementation accompanied by a clear communications and engagement plan.

Previous research undertaken by the Local Land Services revealed that a majority of landholders DO NOT know about the rules and resources available. There needs to be a one-stop platform that landholders can use to make decisions, including a finalised and enforceable native vegetation regulatory map so that people understand what biodiversity values are on their land.

We need more permanent staff working in the Biodiversity Conservation Trust and Local Land Services. Increased staffing is necessary to roll-out and scale-up conservation initiatives with landholders.

Q12

Is there any other information about this topic you would like to share with us?

I urge the Government to make these changes this year. There is a high degree of urgency, as NSW does not have much nature left. There are many concurrent threats including development in renewable energy and housing.

Protecting and regenerating what remains is critical for biodiversity, human health, climate resilience & future generations.
