



Submission to the review of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed changes to the Flora and Fauna Guarantee (FFG) Act. This submission is made on behalf of the Wildlife of the Central Highlands (WOTCH) Inc. We are a grassroots community based citizen science group dedicated to the protection of the biodiversity throughout Central Highlands of Victoria. We are interested in the review as we are involved in citizen science surveying for threatened species listed under the Act and have a number of key concerns about how the Act can be improved. There are several areas of the proposed changes to the FFG Act that we are supportive of in principle. However we also feel there are some major shortcomings and proposed changes that we strongly do not support.

Proposed changes of the review we do not support:

- **Section 4.1 pg. 36**

Abandonment of the guarantee

The loss of the guarantee indicated a downgrading of the government's commitment to ensuring Victoria's biodiversity survives in the wild. We believe a proposal to abandon the guarantee and downgrade commitments is unnecessary and represents a lack of will to fully tackle the challenges associated with halting the decline and extinction of our flora and fauna

- **Section 4.3 pg. 47 and 49**

Drop the requirement for action statements for all listed threatened species

We strongly oppose this proposed change as action statements are the only binding action that the government must take to protect threatened species. Action statements for individual species also encourage community groups such as us to protect our local places that are critical to their survival

- **Section 4.4 pg. 58 and 61**

Remove the current requirement for permits for destruction of protected flora in many cases where currently required, such as road and rail construction

Proposed changes of the review we do support in principle:

- **Section 4.3 pg. 52-53**

Adoption of common assessment methodology – based on IUCN criteria – for listing and obligation to maintain a single comprehensive list of threatened, species, communities and threatening processes

- **Section 4.4, p 57**

Introduction of new criteria to broaden the concept of critical habitat in Regulations

- **Section 4.4 pg. 63**

Illegal removal of native vegetation to be prosecuted under the FFG Act

This would enable a breach of the native vegetation clearing regulations to be enforced under the FFG Act however would only be successful if an independent body is established to enforce this

Recommendations to strengthen the Act:

- **An enhanced chance for survival of threatened species** by removing exemptions and special treatments for government departments and some industries
- **An independent body appropriately funded to implement, and more strongly enforce the Act: This body will enable:**
 - A clear suite of stronger accountability tools, including monitoring and evaluation based on the ***adoption of a common assessment methodology using IUCN*** (International Union for Conservation of Nature) ***criteria***
 - Stronger enforcement, real penalties and better tools for accountability, that would also enable community groups to initiate action when breaches of the Act have taken place
 - **Clear targets and timelines** to direct investment and programs for threatened species protection and recovery, across the whole state

- A mandatory requirement for the Minister to intervene when important species or habitats are under threat
- **Giving communities the power to act**, including capacity to determine regional plans and ability to initiate legal action to protect threatened species

Conclusion:

Whilst we support some of the proposed changes in principle, overall we see the proposed changes to the Act as a downgrading of the governments commitment to protect threatened species. We strongly urge DELWP not to implemented the proposed changes to Act that we do not support, as detailed in this submission.