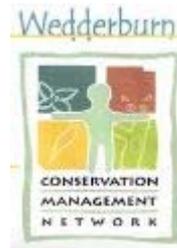


Secretary, Wedderburn Conservation Management Network  
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How do you think we should improve the FFG act?

**1. Public consultation** – You need to allow sufficient time for people to become truly familiar with the act itself. You are proposing significant changes to the regulatory frameworks and the context within which the Act operates and then expect an understanding of the review itself.

This review has had a team of legal personal working on the changes, by my understanding since the state government made its pledge at the last election. The release date of the review, late January 2017 and then your department mandates that lay people are given until the 28<sup>th</sup> March to make a submission (graciously extended by 2 weeks). This is disproportionate and insufficient amount of time compared to the amount of time and expertise that your department has expended on this.

For the most part, people who make submissions are lay people, who don't have the training to fully comprehend the changes and the terminology with regards to Act, framework and context. They also do not have the funds to engage legal interpretation or representation.

We are the people who are the **volunteers** of local community, environment and NRM industry groups, but whom are on the ground, out in the field, at the forefront of biodiversity protection, we are the people writing grants, running engagement activities, doing project management whilst balancing employment and family life. We are committed to natural resource management, we volunteer most of our time to on ground works, but we are time and resource poor.

I think you need to extend the time frame for public consultation, and negotiate to have meetings in rural towns and cities, to gage the public perception of the changes and to invite verbal comment.

**2. Removing exemptions** and special treatments for Government Departments and Industries. It is imperative that Government Departments, Agencies and Industry **adhere** to the same regulations and offsets as everyone else. Governments and Industry must act for the public good, representing and protecting the society that funds them, therefore they need to be as accountable for any environmental damage that is done carrying out that service.

The act should ensure that government departments should consider action statements in the decision making process.

I reside and protect one of the few remaining stands of box -Ironbark in Victoria, 13% remains predominately in isolated pockets and along roadside corridors. If Vic Roads were to expand the Calder Freeway as per the western bypass at Beaufort. The offset offered by Vic Roads for works carried out wouldn't and couldn't counter the loss of biodiversity, loss of some of the few remaining bio-linking corridors and the loss of the old habitat trees.

At present, we have a new pipeline being developed in the area, which is a boon for the local economy, infrastructure and is truly needed in this part of the state. GMW are also being ecologically responsible with their technique, but still there is a loss of biodiversity and a further loss

of a threatened species, such as the local providence Spiny Rice flower along some of these roadsides. This species has limited success when transplanted.

Another factor that should be included would be the timing of the activities. Action statements can advise on nesting/breeding/foraging times and to delay works within the ecological cycle rather than the funding cycle would be of benefit to both communities (ecological and human).

**3. More field representation.** We require more on ground presence in the form of rangers (like we used to have) in our national parks and reserves to enforce the FFG act and can impose real penalties.

A reserve close to my residence is well known to have a good supply of rare and threatened reptile species, these animals are captured and then sold (without licence). When these species are recovered and arrests/penalties fines implemented, the captured animals are generally never returned to the wild as they may have contracted diseases whilst in captivity and could pose a danger to other animals in their habitat. A suitable quarantine and release program could be implemented. In some cases the sale value of the species to the poacher outstrips the penalties imposed.

Unregistered and off-road motorbikes and at times shooters utilise the reserve. Together with people using this natural asset to dump rubbish and feral cats.

Rangers would not-only serve to protect the park from intruders, but also educate the general populace on the many benefits. It would also provide the opportunity to control weeds and undertake other maintenance duties, like they used too.

It will be more cost effective to pay someone to manage this, than pay for the removal of rubbish, feral predator control, weed control, etc.

**4. Strengthening the FFG Act.** The FFG act requires stronger **stop and protect** powers, with clear requirements for the Minister to intervene when important species or habitats are under threat. It should be the overarching act which is adhered to, it should not be conceded to by the Native Vegetation Clearing regulations, or the national parks act 1975 or the Victorian Conservation Trusts Act 1972. At present the regulatory controls are not clear, causing duplication of the decision-making process. The act is to ensure that critical habitat and native vegetation is protected and held in public trust for future generations.

**5. Clear targets and timelines** to direct investment and programs for threatened species protection and recovery, across the whole state.

It is imperative that these have **realistic** timelines and targets for funding programmes that are directed at threatened species, threatened communities, climate change mitigation and bio-linking recovery.

Ensure funding is available to enable long-term on ground monitoring and research. We need to ensure that we doing the right thing. Often budgetary cycles and timeframes are in line with the fiscal economy rather than natural cycle, have no relationship to the natural seasons, are geographically limited, single issue focussed and funds are released to meet a ministers political agenda.

**6. Empowering Communities.** Giving communities' power to act, including capacity to determine regional plans, and the ability to initiate legal action to protect threatened species and threatened ecosystems. Again, due to budgetary constraints, small NRM and environmental groups can't afford

to go against big business of timber production and mining interests, who have immense access to legal, financial and political resources. The members of the many Friends groups, Landcare groups, CMN's, etc., often devote many hours (in many cases years and all voluntary) managing these natural resources, and we see first-hand the value of these precious and unfortunately dwindling ecosystems. It is demeaning and disingenuous that the government agencies whom have relied so heavily on community support to carry out many of their NRM duties, from weeding, rubbish removal, erosion control, planting days, public relations, etc., yet we are treated as some kind of radical fringe group when we speak up to protect these natural resources for humanities future.