



WATCHING BRIEF 23-1: BIODIVERSITY CONVENTION

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government, we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

January 2023

This Brief reports on the recent United Nations Biodiversity Conference held in Montreal Canada, the outcomes, and the implications for Australia. It also highlights non-governmental initiatives like the Biodiversity Council, and the work of Quakers.

Background

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity was created 30 years ago, at the time of the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, 1992). Its goal is to develop national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. It covers all genetic resources, species and ecosystems, and encourages equitable and fair sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. There are 196 parties, except USA and the Vatican. 175 parties have ratified the Convention. Progress in implementing the Convention has been slow.

Conference of Parties 2022

The meeting held in Montreal, Canada, over two weeks in December 2022, was attended by Tanya Plibersek, federal minister for environment and water, and Australia was an active participant pressing for a stronger set of policies globally. The gathering made a breakthrough and led to the Kunming-Montreal agreement, with 23 targets aimed at protecting roughly a third of nature by 2030. A detailed analysis of the outcomes by six Australian academics* (*The Conversation*, 20 December 2022) showed the following positive achievements of the meeting:

- 30% of land, freshwater and oceans protected by 2030.
- Urgent management to halt human-induced species extinction.
- Targets to restore degraded lands.
- Stronger regulation of plastics and plastic pollution.
- Requirement for companies to disclose how they impact and depend on biodiversity.
- Targets to protect against extreme events and climate change.
- A greater emphasis on recycling and reusing materials.

The conference website is www.unep.org/un-biodiversity-conference-cop-15

Implications for Australia

The same academics identified several aspects of particular relevance to Australia:

- Protected areas will need strong investment and active conservation management. This will be a challenge because of threats from deer, rabbits, goats, foxes, and feral cats.
- Degraded inland water and coastal and marine ecosystems will need urgent attention for effective restoration by 2030.
- Indigenous experience in conservation will be essential for effective strategies, and this will require adequate financing.
- Australia is ahead of others in having a commitment to prevent human-caused extinctions by 2030, but funding must increase for this to be met.
- There is a major challenge as to how the 70% of land outside global protected areas is to be managed.
- Governments, businesses and communities must figure out how to put the ambitious agreement into practice, now that biodiversity has become higher on the global agenda.

*The academics are – Sarah Bekessy, Brendan Wintle, Jack Pascoe, James Fitzsimons, Rachel Morgain, and Rebecca Spindler.

Review of Australia's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act

The Review (by Professor Graeme Samuel AC) was not released publicly before the election in May, but the new government has responded to the 38 recommendations. An article by Brendan Wintle, Martine Maron and Sarah Bekessy (*The Conversation*, 8 December 2022) highlighted the main points of the government response as follows:

- To establish a new independent federal environmental protection agency.
- To prepare and implement conservation plans for each nationally threatened species and ecological community.
- To deliver on national environmental standards to prevent further population decline of threatened species.
- To enable regional planning to identify sensitive areas of new development.
- To achieve a more effective policy of environmental offsets, properly enforced.

The response will require significant financial investment to make it successful. The full Samuels review is at www.epbcactreview.environment.gov.au

The Australian Government's response to the review (December 2022) foreshadows major legislative reforms to national environmental law which are aimed at addressing environmental decline and focusing on 'nature-positive outcomes'. These reforms will have significant implications for project proponents across various sectors. The centrepiece will be the establishment of a federal Environment Protection Agency (EPA) that will have responsibility for assessing actions and granting approvals under the EPBC Act. The EPA will also be responsible for enforcing compliance with the EPBC Act, and the Sea Dumping, Ozone and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management, Hazardous Waste, Product Emissions Standards, Recycling and Waste Reduction, and Underwater Cultural Heritage Acts. The EPA will be an independent agency with its own budget. The Minister will be able to issue the EPA with a Statement of Expectations but will not be able to direct the EPA in the exercise of its functions.

For further information: <https://www.allens.com.au/insights-news/insights/2022/12/government-announces-major-reforms-to-epbc-act/>

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The Biodiversity Council

Leading experts including Indigenous knowledge holders have united with philanthropists and 11 universities to form a new independent council “to bring forward the key issues facing our biodiversity and the solutions needed to halt its decline”. The vision of the council is that “Australia’s biodiversity is recognized and valued nationally and globally as a priceless heritage, a foundation for our life and a defining feature of our country and its future is recovered and secured”. It is based within the Science Faculty of Melbourne University, with Rachel Morgain as acting executive director. See www.biodiversitycouncil.org.au You can subscribe to the newsletter to keep up to date on its activities and make contributions to the stories.

Quaker Action

The Climate Emergency and Species Extinction Working Group (CESE) has been working actively to support Friends in giving priority to these and other earthcare concerns. A major statement was issued by Yearly Meeting 2022. It called for action in all areas of human activity to transform root causes of environmental destruction and climate change to create a fairer, healthier and more equal society. The full statement can be found at www.quakersaustralia.info/news-events/public-statements-and-letters-concern

Friends are invited to a 90-minute online meeting on Sunday, January 29, 2023, at 4pm AEDT with the Climate Emergency and Species Extinction Working Group of Australia Yearly Meeting. In that time together, you'll hear a brief report on the recent activities of the working group, then have opportunities in breakout rooms to share how you and Friends in your meeting are responding to the climate emergency. Let's learn from one another and offer mutual support across Australia.

To register and receive the zoom link for this meeting, please fill out this short form: <https://forms.gle/sf9B1APQWesaBNWeA>

Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW) is a network of Friends (Quakers) in North America and other like-minded people who are taking spirit-led action to address the ecological and social crises of the world, emphasizing Quaker process and testimonies. While QEW supports reforms in laws, technology, education, and institutions, its primary calling is to facilitate transformation of humans' attitudes, values, identity, and worldview that underlie much of the environmental destruction going on in the world today.

You can be part of QEW's work by giving of your time, talents, and financial support, becoming a QEW contact for your Meeting, starting an Earthcare group in your meeting, reading and sharing BeFriending Creation and other QEW literature, and leading Earthcare activities in your Meeting. QEW webpage is at: <https://quakerearthcare.org>

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