



The Leeuwin Group

Media Statement

The Leeuwin Group identifies more science is needed in Biodiversity Conservation Bill

The newly formed Leeuwin Group of eminent research scientists is deeply concerned that the Biodiversity Conservation Bill will not properly protect WA's biodiversity. This biodiversity is globally renowned, especially plants, with 8,000 native species in the south west alone, 49% of which are endemic. This is five times more species than are known from the United Kingdom.

As well the State has many animal species that occur nowhere else. Land clearing, pests and weeds, and climate change threaten this biodiversity. Southwest WA has been declared one of only 35 global biodiversity hotspots based on both the high number of species and these threats. Strong science-based legislation is essential to protect our biodiversity assets.

Professor Stephen Hopper, Leeuwin Group convenor said that "The Leeuwin Group of Concerned Scientists is committed to providing independent scientific advice and commentary on environmental matters to the Government, industry, environmental organisations and managers".

"The Leeuwin Group's expertise includes plant and animal ecophysiology, plant evolutionary biology, coral reefs, conservation biology, ecosystem restoration and land management, environmental protection, nature-based tourism, and atmospheric science" he said.

While commending the Government for developing the Biodiversity Conservation Bill to replace legislation enacted in 1950, *Professor John Bailey*, Leeuwin Group member with expertise in environmental policy, said that the Group is particularly concerned that the new Bill must be amended to mandate the preparation and regular review of a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for the State binding on all arms of Government.

"The lack of a framework for regularly reporting on the trends in biodiversity and the effectiveness of management is needed for science-based management to occur" Prof Bailey said.

He stressed that the provision in the Bill that allows the Minister to approve "taking" a threatened species even if it becomes extinct or to allow a threatened ecological community to be destroyed must be removed.

He said that "it is essential that these endangered elements of the State's biodiversity have the highest level of protection".

“Also of great concern to the Leeuwin Group is the lack of a means to include the latest independent scientific thinking in decision-making about threatened species and communities, and threatening processes”, Prof. Bailey said.

“To this end, it is essential that the Bill include an independent science-based advisory committee to advise the Minister on threatened species, communities and threatening processes. The statutory advisory committee approach is effective in other states and at the Commonwealth Government level. Its adoption in WA would bring us into current best practice”.

The Leeuwin Group believes that protection of the State’s unique biodiversity must be underpinned by good science. Only by addressing these concerns will such an outcome become possible.

Detailed comments by the Leeuwin Group on the Biodiversity Conservation Bill can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/The.Leeuwin.Group/>

Membership of the Leeuwin Group and short bios can also be found there.

Media contacts

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