

Gerroa Environment Protection Society (GEPS) Media release

The Gerroa Environment Protection Society will host an *Environmental Defenders Office* workshop to inform residents about retrograde state government biodiversity and land clearing legislation on Monday June 20 at 6PM at the Gerroa Neighborhood Hall. This EDO workshop will inform people about what this legislation will mean for our area and provide material to help make submissions by the closing date of June 28.

The State Government has proposed legislation to scrap the Threatened Species Conservation and Land Clearing Acts and replace them with a watered down Biodiversity Conservation and amended Local Land Services Acts.

GEPS secretary Howard Jones said the following words, "We need policies that proactively promote biodiversity rather than water down protection in the name of biodiversity conservation as this legislation does."

"This bill seeks to loosen regulation to make it easier to clear native vegetation in most rurally zoned lands, including those in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. Farmers or developers who want to clear particularly sensitive vegetation will have easier access to compensatory offsets or they can simply pay a 'bio tax' into a *Biodiversity Conservation Fund*, its as easy as that. In some cases they will be able self-assess the environmental impacts of their clearing themselves with minimal regulation."

All the peak environment groups walked out of the government's consultation on this legislation recently because they recognised that this legislation would lead to extensive land clearing, loss of biodiversity and increased atmospheric CO2".

It's quite astonishing that the NSW Government has not only failed to plan for climate related threats to biodiversity in this bill but they have embedded mechanisms to increase global warming by making it easier to clear native forests and increase CO2 emissions. According to the Bureau of Meteorology global warming will continue to heat and dry our state and there is evidence this is already affecting vegetation communities like the great river red gums and species like vulnerable koalas, so climate adaption has to be part of biodiversity protection and it's missing from this bill.

This is in stark contrast to the government's more visionary new *Coastal Management Policy*, which recognises the need to adapt to climate change. These two policies appear to be a driven by conflicting objectives and principles and we all need to ask why?

This legislation will also enable the biological values of lands protected under existing privately owned *Voluntary Conservation Agreements* to be traded as offsets against the clearing of land with similar values under a system of proposed 'Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements'.

These already conserved VCA lands will therefore become tools to offset the destruction of vegetation elsewhere, leading to net biodiversity losses which is contrary to the conservation intention of most VCA holders.

When these VCA properties are eventually sold speculators rather than conservationists will have an incentive to purchase them to sell the offset credits and profit from the provisions of this legislation.

As a Voluntary Conservation Agreement holder myself I find this extremely distressing as it confounds and undermines my efforts to conserve biodiversity."

"These National Party driven changes will turn the clock back on the heritage of biodiversity protection built up in NSW over the last 30 years and contribute to climate change so I hope that people will come along to our workshop next Monday and learn how they can take a stand and have a say on this retrograde legislation."

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