

AMENDING THE INTEGRATED PLANNING ACT 1997 TO MITIGATE THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

A submission to the 2006 review of the Integrated Planning Act 1997
from the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland.

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Summary

The onset of climate change has made it imperative that all native vegetation in Queensland be protected, and that can only be achieved by amending the Integrated Planning Act 1997 and its subordinate legislation. This paper presents a strong case for making those necessary amendments as a mitigation strategy for climate change.

Climate change temperature rise predictions are invariably presented as a range, because the rise predicted by a climate model is dependent upon which scenario is chosen for the model. Each scenario represents a different planetary greenhouse gas emission pattern for the 21st century. The temperature range of the various predictions therefore roughly corresponds to the quantity and pattern of greenhouse gas emissions this century. The higher end of the range can be thought of as the do-nothing scenario – and since there has been negligible progress on reducing planetary greenhouse gas emissions since the scenarios were constructed, then it is the higher end of any predicted range that is most likely.

Normal year-to-year variation of the planet's average temperature is normally only a few tenths of a degree, and the rise since the last ice age 20,000 years ago is only around 5°C. CSIRO tell us that Queensland can expect temperature increases between 0.3 °C and 2 °C by 2030 and between 0.4 °C and 6 °C by 2070, with inland areas affected more than coastal areas. Putting this all together, we get...

Within the lifetime of our grandchildren, and, for some of us, our own children, the temperature rise in Queensland is very likely to exceed the global temperature rise since the last ice age 20,000 years ago!

Rainfall is expected to decrease by up to 13% by 2030 and up to 40% by 2070. All vegetation has a temperature and aridity tolerance range, with some species having a wider range than others. Individual flora can't migrate, and as a species, can migrate only very slowly. Predicted climate changes this century will result in the temperature and aridity tolerance of a lot of our vegetation being exceeded - and it will die.

Fauna are genetically adapted to a specific climate. As the climate changes, they must migrate to somewhere with climate and conditions matching those to which they are genetically adapted, or die. Not all fauna can migrate, and lack of suitable destinations and migration routes also inhibits migration for those species that can. Climate change is happening far too rapidly for genetic adaptation. Within the present century, rising temperatures and aridity will therefore inevitably lead to large scale fauna death and species extinctions.

Is there anything that can be done to help preserve our State's wildlife and biodiversity? Yes there is. There is a lot that can be done. But most of the strategies for assisting them are beyond the scope of this paper. This paper focuses on one specific strategy for assisting our wildlife to survive climate change: the preservation of all existing bushland in Queensland. Because the more bushland there is, the more flora and fauna that will survive climate change.

The case for the protection of native vegetation in Queensland is already well established, and so well established that it convinced the government to introduce the Vegetation Management Act 1999 and to strengthen it in 2004. But the Vegetation Management Act 1999 is severely constrained by the Integrated Planning Act 1997 and the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005-2026. Those constraints are now the primary causes of the ongoing loss of native vegetation in this State. Removing those constraints is the simplest, cheapest, and most beneficial change that the State Government can make to improve the survival chances of our State's wildlife in the face of climate change. And the native vegetation that is denied protection by the Integrated Planning Act and its subordinate legislation is the same vegetation that is most easily protected from the impacts of climate change, because it is the vegetation closest to the human and equipment resources that are necessary to help it survive climate change.

This paper proposes specific amendments to the Integrated Planning Act 1997 and its subordinate legislation, and presents a strong case for making those changes. The benefits and costs of implementing the recommendations are identified. Benefits are numerous but costs are negligible - because all recommendations are legislative amendments. Economic impact is likely to be positive since the proposed recommendations will only relocate development, not reduce it, and implementation of the recommendations will generate employment. Implementing the recommendations will not make either the State or the Councils vulnerable to additional compensation claims. In fact, it will reduce them.

And, finally, a timeframe is put on the issue, to underline the urgency of action. Because the sooner we act, the greater the benefits to be had. And the longer action is delayed, the less point there is in acting at all.

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