

BOOK REVIEW

Threatened species legislation: is it just an Act?

Proceedings of the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales Forum 2003

Edited by Pat Hutchings, Daniel Lunney and Chris Dickman

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THIS volume contains the proceedings of a forum held by the Royal Zoological Society of NSW in October 2003 on the topic of threatened species legislation, with particular reference to the New South Wales *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*. The papers are divided into the three general areas of "The wider context", "NSW legislation", and "Implementation issues: consequences, difficulties, opportunities", and there is also an edited transcript of the plenary session held at the forum.

The first section of the book, on the wider context, includes papers on the history of biodiversity legislation in New South Wales, assessing the certainty of the experts involved in the threatened species listing process, the relationship between threatened species legislation and regulations applying to private land, and the use of the precautionary principle in threatened species legislation. The papers in the section on New South Wales legislation discuss the importance of definitions, the role of the Scientific Committee in listing threatened species, and the specific relevance of the legislation to endangered populations, invertebrates, endangered ecological communities and threat abatement plans. The third section, on implementation issues, discusses several case studies (invertebrates and fish), the links between threatened species legislation and threatened species recovery, the limitations of the legislation with regards to non-threatened species, and the impacts of the legislation on various affected parties, including government agencies, local governments, consultants and community groups. The transcript of the plenary session is particularly valuable for its uninhibited views and suggestions.

The authors of the papers included in this volume are nearly all biologists, with a definite zoological bias (to be expected given the source), the majority of whom are affiliated with universities and government agencies. The threatened species legislation is thus discussed mainly from a zoological point of view, rather than legislative, legal, regulatory, or community. All of these perspectives are discussed to some degree, but mainly with regard to their impact on the biological and ecological issues involved. The book is thus a thorough and valuable discussion of threatened species legislation from the perspective of biologists, but cannot be considered to cover views from outside the scientific community.

A wide range of opinions are evident in these papers, ranging from the orthodox to the controversial, and the pros and cons (and successes and failures) of current threatened species legislation are discussed from a number of angles. This book provides a good overview of the New South Wales *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* in its processes, consequences and impacts, and as such would be a valuable resource for all interested parties in the legislation, from biologists, ecologists and researchers, through government regulators and decision-makers, to consultants, development proponents, community groups and students. Some chapters are more technical than others, but the detailed understanding of the legislation provided by such a variety of topics and opinions is well worth the effort. Its relevance is not limited to New South Wales, however, as many of the papers discuss ideas which may be applicable to any threatened species legislation and of assistance in assessing other legislation in a similar manner.

The book is well presented, in a high quality paperback with a readily readable format and clear, well-labelled pictures. The low cost is an additional benefit.

The greatest drawback to this book is that, like any discussion of such an ever-changing topic as legislation, it will date rapidly. As the legislation is amended, the direct relevance of the book will be lost, and some parts are already out of date (given the amendments to the *Act* which have been passed since the forum was held). However, it can also be seen as a documentation of the state and history of the legislation, from its enactment to the time of the forum, and many of the comments and opinions presented will still be relevant in the future.

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