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Government of South Australia

Department of Environment,
Water and Natural Resources

DEWNR

Wilderness Advisory Committee

Date: 24 October 2014

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Hon. Ian Hunter MLC
Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation
GPO Box 1047
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Dear Minister,

The Wilderness Advisory Committee acknowledges the need for some reform of Boards and Committees in South Australia and have provided constructive comment during the preliminary period of high level consultation. We are concerned, however, at the tight time line for consultation and the lack of opportunity for detailed analysis of the consequences of our merger with three other bodies to form a new body, the Parks and Wilderness Council.

It is highly probable the merger will be present significant challenges for the new Council and will have a substantial impact on the current Wilderness Committee's wilderness assessment program which forms the bulk of the Committee's work. This program comprises the following functions assigned by the *Wilderness Protection Act 1992* which requires us:-

- (a) to assess all land in the State to identify those parts of the State that meet the wilderness criteria to a sufficient extent to justify protection under the Act or that warrant restoration to a condition that justifies such protection; and
- (b) at the request of a member of the public to assess the extent to which land specified in the request meets the wilderness criteria; and
- (c) to report to the Minister on results of its assessment under paragraphs (a) and (b) and to make recommendations to the Minister as to what land in the State should be constituted as wilderness protection areas or wilderness protection zones;

These are technical functions which need to establish facts with integrity and political impartiality. They are best carried out by a small group with relevant expertise and experience and the capacity to undertake remote field work to gather data that enable a robust assessment. It is not appropriate or efficient for these functions to be done by a larger body with diverse and disparate functions.

Furthermore, the impacts of climate change makes the mandate for wilderness assessment increasingly urgent, as the protection of intact habitat will give species the best change to adapt to changing conditions.

The other functions of the Committee are:-

- (d) to make recommendations to the Minister in relation to the management of wilderness protection areas and zones generally or in relation to a particular wilderness protection area or zone; and
- (e) to commission research into the effect mining, grazing and other forms of primary production and tourism on wilderness and wildlife and to advise the Minister of the findings of the research; and
- (f) to increase understanding in the community of the significance of wilderness; and
- (g) to assist the Minister in relation to the preparation of the annual report under Division 1; and
- (h) functions assigned to the Committee by other provisions of the Act

Some of these could be undertaken by a larger Council, as a number overlapping functions can be identified. By way of example:

- ▲ Management plans for Wilderness Protection Areas are often published at the same time as management plans for adjacent reserves to simplify public consultation, with both consultative processes managed by the same DEWNR regional staff.
- ▲ Commissioning of the research required under function (e) could be accommodated in the new Council's more general research program.
- ▲ The public awareness of work under function (f) could be similarly moved into the new Council's sphere of responsibility.

In view of the above, the Wilderness Advisory Committee requests that serious consideration be given to establishing a separate technical sub-committee or working group within the proposed Parks and Wilderness Council, to enable that body to address all requirements of the *Wilderness Protection Act*, in particular the wilderness assessment program to be carried out in the most efficient manner.

The Committee is concerned that the abolition of the Wilderness Advisory Committee and the creation of a new merged Council neither unnecessarily delays the strategic program the Committee has established for wilderness assessment nor hampers the development of other important projects under the *Wilderness Protection Act*. The Committee will, therefore, work constructively with Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources to facilitate a smooth transition to the new structural arrangements.

Yours sincerely



Eric Bills
PRESIDING MEMBER
 WILDERNESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE