

Loose laws threaten Australia's wildlife

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From: [Liz Kimbrough, MONGABAY.COM](#), [More from this Affiliate](#)

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Kookaburras, koalas and kangaroos—Australia is well known for its charismatic animals and vast, seemingly untamable, wild spaces. But throughout the country, the national parks and reserves that protect these unique animals and ecosystems have come under increasing threat. New rules and relaxed regulations, which bolster immediate economic growth, are putting pressure on Australia's already-threatened biodiversity.

Legislation allowing recreational shooting has been introduced in New South Wales. In Victoria, developers will be allowed to build hotels in national parks. New laws have been passed by the Queensland government to allow the feeding of livestock in national parks during droughts, and a scientific trial of grazing in several national parks and reserves has been re-instated after previous unsuccessful attempts. According to some, these examples point to a disturbing trend towards ecological irresponsibility within state legislature.

A group of 21 concerned scientists from across Australia collaborated to address the threats to their natural heritage. The resulting paper, "Relaxed laws imperil Australian wildlife," was published June, 2013 in *Nature*.

Australia has one of the world's worst conservation records over the past few centuries, having lost a large number of endemic mammals. Being unconnected to other landmasses, Australia suffers from extinction rates similar to islands. In addition, as in much of the world, Australian biodiversity has suffered from impacts of habitat loss and modification, climate change, inappropriate fire regimes and invasive species (most notably cats and red foxes).

"It is difficult to find any ecosystem that is not at serious risk because many threats such as climate change and invasive species span large areas and both public and private land," lead author, Euan Ritchie, told [mongabay.com](#). "In terms of priorities, what is urgently needed is better resourcing of the nature reserves that already exist, not further weakening of them by adding new pressures such as logging and livestock grazing."

"Further compromising our best protection against extinctions (nature reserves) by allowing inappropriate uses of these areas seems very reckless and unjustifiable."

The Tasmanian devil, leadbeater's possum, spot-tailed quoll, and northern hairy-nosed wombat are just a few of the mammals listed as Endangered on the IUNC Red List. Hundreds of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects, marine animals and fish are listed as threatened in Australia; and without adequate habitat protection, many of Australia's surviving species remain at high risk of extinction.

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