

Natural Resources and Law

Landowners hit with hefty \$681,000 fine for illegal activity on their property: 'We welcome this outcome'

Australia has made it clear it won't tolerate illegal land clearing, slapping landowners with a \$681,000 fine after finding they destroyed native vegetation.

As detailed by Mirage News, the Land and Environment Court of New South Wales convicted the landowners of failing to obtain the proper approvals before removing native vegetation on more than 1,100 acres of their property. Specifically, they violated Section 12 of the Native Vegetation Act 2003 on five separate occasions between February and August 2017.

Habitat loss and degradation are primary factors endangering biodiversity in Australia, as the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment, and Water explains, with more than 19 million acres of land cleared between 2000 and 2017 — more than 90% without approval.

In this case, the landowners destroyed the habitats of endangered and vulnerable creatures, including the yellow-bellied sheath-tailed bat, creeping tick-trefoil, grey-crowned babbler, and pied honeyeater — contributing to a growing threat to human health and economic prosperity.

Alarmingly, according to the World Wildlife Fund, a sixth mass extinction is already underway, and human activities are the driving factor, with unsustainable land use, water and energy consumption, and warming global temperatures pushing the planet to the brink.

However, strong regulatory enforcement and restoration initiatives can help turn things around. For instance, land protection efforts in Brazil have reduced deforestation in the Amazon rainforest by as much as 83%. And in Indonesia, an innovative six-legged contraption is aiding the rapid recovery of coral reefs, which support commercially beneficial fish species and help protect coastal communities against storm surges.

Sarah Carr, director north west of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment, and Water, told Mirage News that the court's ruling was a step in the right direction.

"We welcome this outcome, particularly given one of the landholders has prior convictions for similar offenses," said Carr. She added that the LLS Act and the Land Management Code offer guidance to manage property while minimizing environmental harm.