DIALOGUES @SCHOOL

De-Extinction: The Risks and Benefits of attempting to Re-Wild Ecosystems[1]

There is a global extinction crisis which Australia is notably impacted by. "Biodiversity loss and ecosystems collapse is ranked by the World Economic Forum as the second most significant global risk over the next decade, with 50 per cent of the global economy dependent on nature.[2] This is a growing risk because of climate change, bushfires and habitat destruction.

De-extinction- the process of genetically modifying an existing species to include DNA from an extinct species- is a highly debated and costly measure to combat extinction. The global extinction crisis is worsened because some species are non-recoverable. Some species are considered "priority species" for conservation in Australia.[3]

De-extinction could help conservation efforts by restoring ecosystems impacted by the loss of key species. However, it needs massive funding which could be used for conservation of currently threatened species- making it a potential diversion from existing conservation needs. Further, the technology to bring back variations of these extinct animals is not fully developed, making the sustenance of genetically modified animals in the wild risky. Moreover, the question of which endangered animals should be genetically modified, and which cannot or need not be revived like this is a complex, subjective judgment- an ethical quandary without a "correct" answer.

Questions

1. Should animals be genetically modified?
2. How should we decide which animals to modify?

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[1] The Economist Foundation, Topical Talk. De-extinction: Good v bad. https://talk.economistfoundation.org/resources/deextinction-good-v-bad/

[2] https://wwf.org.au/news/2025/the-cost-of-preventing-extinction-of-australias-priority-species/

[3] Ward, M. et al. (2025). The estimated cost of preventing extinction and progressing recovery for Australia's priority threatened species. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2414985122