

SUBMISSION TO Senate Inquiry - Australia's environment - The Abbott Government's attacks on Australia's environment, and their effects on our natural heritage and future prosperity.

On the 18 June 2014 the Senate referred the following matter for inquiry and report by the third sitting day in 2015: Terms of reference include:

- (a) attacks on carbon pricing, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency and the renewable energy target, the Climate Change Authority and the Climate Commission;*
- (b) attacks on federal environmental protection through handing approval powers over to state governments, which have poor track records and recent environment staff cuts;*
- (c) attacks on funding for community environment organisations and the Environmental Defenders Offices, abolition of the Biodiversity Fund, and cuts to programs including, Landcare and Caring for our Country;*
- (d) undermining Australia's compliance with the World Heritage Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Ramsar Convention, in particular by attacking the Great Barrier Reef and the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Areas; and*
- (e) any other related matters.*

The closing date for submissions to the Inquiry is 1 September 2014. The details are through this site:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Ausenviro

Submission from Dr Mary MacGibbon (Lecturer in Science at UTS and University of Sydney),
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Abbott government is trashing our environment for the sake of a dying industry

Since Australia's conservative government took office almost six months ago, Prime Minister Tony Abbott has declared the country open for business.

But in his zeal, critics say, Mr. Abbott has exposed parts of Australia's fragile environment to danger. And he has even created unease among some of his constituents in the business community.¹

So says the New York Times newspaper in March this year. Worldwide, newspapers are reporting the trashing of Australia's environmental protections by the Abbott government² which is making a mockery of Australia's attitude to our national environment and our part in the international efforts to minimise global climate change.

The Abbott government has systematically undone the environmental protection reforms instituted by a series of former governments of both political parties, and in so doing has jeopardised the viability of emerging future valuable industries including in renewable energy technology development, tourism, organic agricultural production, ski industry, and carbon trading.

All of these emerging and previously flourishing industries are reliant upon the environment, the environmental research, institutions and protections that were in place when the Abbott government took office.

Instead the Abbott government promotes the interests of old industry which has finite potential future, given that the minerals and fossil fuels are becoming depleted or unwanted internationally. It appears that favours owed to political donors are taking priority over the long term interests of Australians and their environment. The Abbott government's rush to remove obstacles to allow the Liberal Party donors to maximise the profits from what is left of their old industries is putting Australia out of the running for the development of the industries of the future.

This short sighted focus is trashing of the potential value of the environment and its associated industries.

For instance, at present our renewable energy technology sector is competitive, if not ahead, of the sector internationally. Before the Abbott government this led to vast international investment in Australia's renewable energy sector, despite the shrill destabilisation of the industry waged by the Abbott Liberal Party when in opposition. This advantage could lead to long term benefits for the Australian community. However the dismantling of the carbon tax incentives and the threatened abandonment of the renewable energy target and associated institutions is handicapping our

¹Eg *How Australia's winking Tony Abbott became one of the world's most unpopular prime ministers* The Washington Post 22 May 2014 at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/05/22/how-australias-winking-tony-abbott-became-one-of-the-worlds-most-unpopular-prime-ministers/>
Australia Puts Green Credibility to the Test By MICHELLE INNIS, New York Times March 4, 2014
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/05/world/asia/australia-puts-green-credibility-to-the-test.html?_r=0

² eg *Australia sacrifice the environment to boost its economy* Le Monde October 15, 2013 at http://translate.google.com.au/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=http://www.lemonde.fr/sujet/9988/tony-abbott.html&prev=/search%3Fq%3DTony%2BAbbott%2BLe%2BMonde%26rlz%3D1C1ASRM_enAU560AU560%26espv%3D2%26biw%3D1536%26bih%3D752; ;

renewable energy technology sector at the time when there is increasingly widespread uptake of the technology internationally. Now is the time for our renewable energy industry to blossom.

However Mr McFarlane, long time apparatchik of the Liberal Party and now Minister for Industry in the Abbott government, is determined to develop the coal and unconventional gas industry throughout Australia. He berates the NSW and Victorian governments for responding to the alarm by those states' residents about the potential environmental carnage these industries will reap upon the environment, our agricultural land and that vital resource, our water.

The Abbott government's rush into the international gas market is clearly due to a desire to capitalise on the gas before the price of gas falls due to market saturation, regardless of the long term costs to the Australian environment.

In relation to coal seam and unconventional gas mining, there are significant dangers to our environment:

- There is little understanding of the science of groundwater.
- Toxic spills and accidents have already been characteristic of this industry.
- The regulatory framework and compliance measures for environmental damage are in their infancy throughout Australia. In 2003 it was estimated that each of NSW and Victoria had at least 30,000 sites of industrial contamination³, however by 2014 in NSW only 1087 notifications had been received from owners or occupiers of sites by the Environmental Protection Agency⁴.

In NSW despite there being as yet very little coal seam gas production there have already been significant environmental breaches including the Eastern Star Pilliga incident in 2010, the Camden AGL air monitoring reporting breaches over the period 2009 to 2012 and Metgasco's illegal disposal of excess produced water into the Casino sewage treatment plant. These breaches were not reported by the operators.

The NSW government placed a moratorium on csg mining in water catchment areas until the NSW Government Chief Scientist could report on the issues raised. Her final report is expected in the next few months, however in 2013 she issued an interim report. However following a meeting between Mr McFarlane and Premier Baird in the last few days it appears that the caution of the NSW government is being thrown out the window, with media reports this morning that the water catchment and agricultural protections that were in place in relation to csg mining are about to be thrown out without waiting for the Chief Scientist's final report.

The Chief Scientist's initial report stated: "...a full picture of all incidents has not, to date, been made clear."

Therefore not only is the science relating to the environmental damage and water impacts unknown but the regulatory and compliance measures in place are rudimentary, inadequate and ineffective and are ignored by the companies already operating in NSW, despite the industry being of a small size that should be able to be easily be monitored. To allow this industry to grow when even the small existent NSW industry is not adequately monitored and is not compliant will lead to widespread destruction of the environment.

³ Restoration of industrial sites under Australian environmental laws Craig, Donna
2003 <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.14/29272>

⁴ (as of 6 August 2014) List of NSW contaminated sites notified to EPA, EPA website.
<http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/clm/publiclist.htm> The list only contains contaminated sites of which the EPA is aware with regard to its regulatory role under the CLM Act. The EPA relies upon responsible parties to notify contaminated sites.



CSG Wells and their connecting pipelines in prime agricultural land on the Darling Downs at Chinchilla Queensland



Csg pipeline from ground view

In July 2013 the NSW Chief Scientist released her initial report on Coal Seam Gas extraction in NSW and her final report is due in the next few months. In her introduction she wrote:

...challenges relating to long-term and cumulative environmental impacts are less obvious and require a commitment to significant and ongoing research, as well as a consequent evolution of engineering practice...

and she calls for

“...further research on the unanswered questions around the science of CSG...A commitment to sound policy implementation based on highly developed data and further research to fill the knowledge gaps will be essential...”

...there are still significant studies in progress examining the impacts of unconventional gas extraction on health and the environment...”

The Abbott government seeks to justify the reckless rush to expand the coal seam gas industry by claiming that the domestic market will not have sufficient gas and will therefore have to pay high prices for gas and gas fuelled energy. However there is sufficient gas to more than supply the Australian domestic needs from the existing wells⁵, but the Abbott government has failed to make provision for local producers to provide for the domestic market ahead of selling our gas abroad.

⁵ *In the early 1970s Woodside discovered immense gas resources off the Western Australian coast, which could not only meet the state's domestic needs but also supply Asian markets. Export production began in the late 1980s. The North West Shelf now has five trains (processing plants) with a total annual capacity of 16.3 million tonnes. In 2006 Australia's second LNG plant commenced exporting from Darwin. **(in 2009:) With these developments, Australia's annual LNG capacity has risen to 19.5 million tonnes (nearly 1100 petajoules (PJ) a year—close to Australia's total domestic demand for natural gas).... It soon became apparent that while***



500 to 700 coal seam gas wells are needed to produce the same quantity of gas that six to eight conventional gas wells produce

It is apparent that without the current high international prices (ie if the gas was kept only for the domestic market) it would not be economically viable to mine gas, and renewables would take their rightful place as the energy source that should be adopted and developed now as the primary energy source. It makes a nonsense of the gas industry's claim that gas needs to fill an interim role between fossil fuel reliance and the full scale development of renewable energy technology while renewable energy is too expensive. In fact gas is actually too expensive economically and environmentally, while the cost of renewables is now, for domestic markets, cheaper than gas.

Unlike conventional gas, one of the major bi-products of the coal seam industry is vast quantities of salty water for which no management solutions have been developed⁶. Once soil is contaminated by salt it cannot be remediated. The salt cannot be removed and it does not break down. Salt in soil prevents growth of any crops or plants, leading to failure of surrounding ecosystems and agricultural production.

In relation to numbers of wells, to produce the same quantity of gas that six to eight conventional gas wells produce there would need to be 500 to 700 coal seam gas wells drilled.⁷ Each csg well is

Queensland had more CSG than could be absorbed by the east coast domestic gas market—or commercialised at low Australian gas prices—the burgeoning global LNG market had potential, as with the North West Shelf discoveries three decades earlier. This created interest among international LNG companies who wanted gas reserves in the Asia Pacific region and were familiar with the growth of unconventional gas in the United States. As a result, several international companies have taken a stake in Queensland CSG for LNG projects. The east coast gas market now appears set to follow Western Australia in becoming more closely integrated with the rest of the world through LNG....**Australia produces almost as much gas for LNG as for domestic use**....Western Australia has substantial gas resources available for LNG (over 100 000 petajoules) but a shortage of gas for domestic use. In 2007 this led to gas prices for new long term domestic contracts increasing ...Strong global demand significantly raised international energy prices, making LNG exports an attractive alternative to domestic sales. AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL GAS MARKETS: CONNECTING WITH THE WORLD STATE OF THE ENERGY MARKET 2009 A report by EnergyQuest at <https://www.aer.gov.au/sites/default/files/EnergyQuest%20essay%C3%A2%E2%82%AC%E2%80%9DAustralia's%20natural%20gas%20markets.pdf>

⁶ In 2007 Queensland CSG fields produced 12.5 billion litres of water. The quality of the water can vary from drinkable to highly saline. Water production is now around 22 billion litres and could grow to 250–480 billion litres per year if LNG development reaches annual production of 40 million tonnes. AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL GAS MARKETS: CONNECTING WITH THE WORLD STATE OF THE ENERGY MARKET 2009 A report by EnergyQuest at <https://www.aer.gov.au/sites/default/files/EnergyQuest%20essay%C3%A2%E2%82%AC%E2%80%9DAustralia's%20natural%20gas%20markets.pdf>

⁷ P.36 AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL GAS MARKETS: CONNECTING WITH THE WORLD STATE OF THE ENERGY MARKET 2009 A report by EnergyQuest at <https://www.aer.gov.au/sites/default/files/EnergyQuest%20essay%C3%A2%E2%82%AC%E2%80%9DAustralia's%20natural%20gas%20markets.pdf>

EnergyQuest is an advisory firm focused on energy analysis and strategy.

connected to pipelines, each of which require 20 meters of clearance of all vegetation on both sides of the pipeline for the entire length of the pipeline.

Therefore the Abbott government is dismantling an industry which may already, or in the very near future, be able to provide energy at a lower cost than other means of production, ie the renewable energy industry. Instead the Abbott government is selling off our gas supply to the highest bidder abroad and forcing Australia to give up its prime agricultural land for a product which seems likely to permanently damage our water resources and environment for the future.

This is gas and coal that belongs to present and future Australians but it is being sold to others with little benefit to Australia and a lot of harm to our environment. Of very serious concern is the coal terminals that are being built into our precious reefs both in Western Australia and in Queensland.

The health of the Great Barrier Reef continues to decline yet The Federal Minister for the Environment Greg Hunt has approved the dumping of dredge spoil in reef waters within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. December 2013.

Dredge spoil will smother benthic organisms and fines can remain in suspension for years.

The Minister is also handing development approval powers back to the Queensland Government as this Government is changing legislation in ways that will reduce protection of the reef. 2014

In Queensland, where by 2013 there were 4,500 csg wells, there have been myriad environmental disasters associated with the csg industry including dangerous chemicals were found in underground water supplies of the prime agricultural land of the Darling Downs, a groundwater contamination which resulted in Cougar's operations being closed down at Kingaroy, suspension of Carbon Energy's pilot near Dalby after an unauthorised discharge of processed water. During the first six months of 2011 alone there were 23 spills of waste water, four uncontrolled releases of waste water and three breaches of waste water storage during floods, according to Queensland's Department of Environment and Resource Management⁸.

In 2010, two incidents relating to water contamination from BTEX chemicals were reported in Australia, even though in both cases the companies involved said they did not use BTEX chemicals in fracking fluids.

Once ground water is contaminated it cannot be restored.

Western Australia has had a domestic gas shortage however it continues to export greater quantities of liquefied gas than its domestic market needs.

Yet the Abbott government insists that the exports must increase and despite the failures to protect the environment and lack of scientific understanding of the impacts, and is insisting that large scale csg expand into states of Australia which are resisting the onslaught. The expansion is unashamedly touted as being to feed the export demand, and is accompanied by threats that there will be no domestic gas available for those states that resist

The 2014 outlook for csg includes:

...East coast domestic gas demand is set to fall due to lower electricity demand, higher gas prices, a low carbon price, mandated renewables and the cessation of the Queensland Gas Scheme.....Overall the outlook is for the east coast market to be extremely tight for the

⁸ Factbox: CSG in Australia, 3 SEP 2013 SBS News at
<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2013/03/12/factbox-csg-australia>

*foreseeable future, with gas prices of up to \$12/GJ in the medium term and \$8-10/GJ over the longer term.*⁹

The International Energy Agency projected continued global growth in the longer term use of natural gas under carbon abatement scenarios but if the greenhouse gases are stabilised at 450 parts per million then gas demand would grow at half the rate of growth under business-as-usual conditions¹⁰.

As China and other markets of our gas turn to renewables in the near future in attempts to reduce their smog and greenhouse gases our markets will shrivel. The federal government cannot justify the construction of huge gas pipelines at this time. Economist Ross Garnaut has said that “...it is crucial that Australia and other countries respond to the developments in China with ambitious extensions of their own to cut emissions”

Instead the Abbott government is negating our few remaining environmental protections both through expunging domestic legislation and institutions which protect the environment and by binding us to the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), under which the nostrum of free trade and powerful corporate interests will impose conditions and override domestic laws, bypassing the normal legislative process.

The Abbott government's legacy to Australia will be that our prime agricultural land will be trashed: contaminated and perhaps unusable due also to the saline water spills as no solution has been found for the salt water holding ponds, resultant food insecurity, huge expenses to try to meet international demands that we reduce our per capita greenhouse gas emissions, a process that would be cheaper to start now, and no modern competitive industries or tourism to fund our future needs and population. Our environment will be largely unliveable.

The gas and mineral extraction industries are trashing our environment and we are subsidising foreign corporations to take away those resources with diesel and other subsidies. The Abbott government intends to abolish the mining tax just as the mining industry is entering the profitable and mechanised export phase in which there is very little employment for Australians, having finished the construction phase. We will be left with royalties of sometimes as little as 2.5%¹¹, very little employment in the sector, and a trashed environment. And now the Abbott government tells us we cannot afford our standard of living, health care and education at the same time as they take the mining tax out of the budget equation! What can we do then for income as our emerging industries are being trashed along with the environment upon which they depend? How will we afford to import food to feed ourselves after our water and agricultural land is contaminated?

Attacking the environment by ditching the Carbon Tax, renewables and science

A systemic lack of keeping in step with what is considered best practice by the rest of the developed world is indicated in various stated intentions and resolutions of the current government, and this is manifested in decisions impacting on energy.

Tony Abbott once said that ‘political pragmatism came before purity of policy’. This is not a stance peculiar to members of the Liberal party. However since taking the reins Mr Abbott has gone

⁹ Australia's Coal Seam Gas 2013: All aboard the LNG train EnergyQuest at

file:///C:/Users/Owner/Documents/Environment/CSG/csg_report_2013_flyer_20130512_final_www.pdf

¹⁰ AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL GAS MARKETS: CONNECTING WITH THE WORLD STATE OF THE ENERGY MARKET

2009 A report by EnergyQuest at

<https://www.aer.gov.au/sites/default/files/EnergyQuest%20essay%C3%A2%E2%82%AC%E2%80%9DAustralia's%20natural%20gas%20markets.pdf>.

¹¹ Sandfire royalties under scrutiny by Tess Ingram P 20 Financial Times 25/8/2014

to such jaw-dropping extremes, the behaviour appears to reflect the extreme myopia of indoctrination rather than clear thinking.

Some mandate is indicated by winning an election, but a monosyllabic, out-of-touch interpretation of these polls is resulting in widespread problems in some areas, including the decimation of a relevant rich scientific research community of Australia and the associated revenue opportunities.

1 Regarding multiple renewable energy issues

Investment in renewable energy grinds to a standstill. In Australia, in the first six months of this year, 40 million dollars was reported to be invested in large-scale renewable energy, compared with 2.691 billion dollars in 2013. This is occurring as the other countries are massively investing in 'clean energy'. The plummeting of such investment in Australia is considered to be the result of uncertainty fuelled by the government-appointed panel chaired by climate-change sceptic Dick Warburton and reviewing the RET (renewable energy target).¹²

Maybe the government thinks there is a mutual exclusivity between renewables and selling coal? Australia ceasing research in this area is not going to have a major effect on rate of global adoption of renewable energy versus coal. **We have the brains and expertise for exploring renewable technology, and did have investment for it, all of which are about to drain to other countries.**

Surely the intelligent approach is to keep a balanced approach, and keep engaged with developed countries in terms of doing something to address not only climate change concerns but pollution which most renewable technology does.

Also this month, **while addressing the loss of a major viral disease research facility, Professor Doherty, jointly-awarded the 1996 Nobel Prize for physiology or medicine** and former Australian of the Year noted that if Prime Minister Tony Abbott wanted to make his name as the infrastructure prime minister then, scientifically speaking, that included staffing federally funded outfits such as CSIRO.

Professor Doherty said given science was a global discipline, **Australia's "scientifically illiterate government" risked losing talent to other countries, such as Singapore, which were investing in research. If or when conditions in the sector improved, they may not be willing or able to return to Australia.**

2 Regarding other carbon-reduction schemes

The carbon pricing scheme was working! and the inflation of electricity prices was largely due to electricity supply companies boosting their prices as was widely known. **Now it appears we are left with a scheme which even Tony Abbott considers dodgy** but Nick Xenophon is thinking of supporting (25 September – both on Radio National and SMH).

Prior to the Senate passing dropping of the carbon pricing scheme (or carbon tax) the following letter was written to our representative Malcolm Turnbull regarding this. An edited version of this letter, and his reply (unedited) below that.

¹² SMH 17 July, 2014:

It is so obvious that these, along with other schemes, *(some of which eg carbon trading schemes Labor has supported of course)*, enable major polluters in rich countries to keep doing so while poorer countries become less able to compete, quite apart from whether or not they are effective in reducing emissions overall. *(Not that some trading may be rational - if overt and keeping to certain rules perhaps, such as limiting this inequity.)*

As a previous Lib leader John Hewson said at the time "The science indicated the world's climate was "pretty close to a tipping point", he said, and therefore substantial policy action had to be taken, and now, to avoid the dangerous effects of climate change.

This is one of the most important parliamentary debates and parliamentary processes since federation. We can't afford, as a nation, to get this wrong. It's one of those things that should be fully debated, not just in the parliament, but beyond,"

This is also relevant in the context of the pressure for G20 to have climate on the economic agenda as a future major issue, while Abbott et al did not want it there, extraordinarily given the anticipated effects of climate change on water availability and climate-related refugees when small island nations are flooded.

On the same day - Radio Nat breakfast and in SMH (printed version fuller) re Abbott's extreme disparagement of international carbon reduction permits, given massive pressure esp from Bernie Fraser (Chair of the fraught Climate Change Authority) to use them. This quote below "... " including Abbott's stance, in bold, more full in the print version.

"The Climate Change Authority has told the government it would be significantly cheaper to meet obligations to cut carbon emissions by purchasing international permits.

The Abbott government is under increasing pressure from business groups to use international carbon reduction permits to boost Australia's chances of meeting an emissions reduction target of 5 per cent on 2000 levels by 2020.

The Climate Change Authority says meeting the target with only domestic action - as proposed by the Direct Action policy - is too expensive while there is a flood of cheap international permits.

The report urges the government to reduce costs to the taxpayer and be more competitive by combining domestic emissions reduction policies with the purchase of international credits. It finds the government could spend a fifth of its planned \$2.5 billion Direct Action policy and buy enough international permits to reach an emissions reduction target of 19 per cent by 2020.

Prime Minister **Tony Abbott has been a key opponent of international credits, which he described in 2011 as "money that shouldn't be going offshore into dodgy carbon farms".**

But Fairfax Media understands both the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Industry Group wrote to Environment Minister Greg Hunt and Mr Abbott urging them to reconsider.

[Malcolm's reply - unedited](#)

Dear Mary

Thank you for getting in touch. Your concerns are well noted.

The Government will spend \$2.55 billion over ten years to establish the Emissions Reduction Fund from 1 July 2014. This extends the total commitment of \$1.55 billion that was initially included in the Emissions Reduction Fund Green Paper. The Budget figures reflect when money is spent under emissions reduction contracts, not when commitments are made to those contracts.

This Budget provides funding for the Government to reduce emissions as part of its Direct Action Plan.

Measures in this Budget that are part of the Direct Action Plan include the Emissions Reduction Fund, Solar Towns and 20 Million Trees. The Emissions Reduction Fund is the centrepiece of the Government's Direct Action Plan.

The Government is committed to reducing Australia's emissions to meet its target of five per cent below 2000 levels by 2020. The Emissions Reduction Fund aims to reduce emissions at lowest cost to 2020, and make a contribution towards Australia's emissions reduction target.

The Clean Energy regulator will be responsible for administering the Emissions Reduction Fund and applying its rules. The Clean Energy Regulator is well-established and has the required expertise to perform this function, as it currently administers the Carbon Farming Initiative and the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Scheme - both of which are the building blocks for the Emissions Reduction Fund.

The Coalition also went to the election with the repeal of the carbon tax as a core promise, undoubtedly its most prominent. Now whether you approve of that approach or not, there can be no doubt that we are duty bound to proceed with that repeal and we intend to do so. Anything else would be a betrayal of the electorate's decision in September last year.

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm Turnbull
July 16

So – what is left? Are decisions to be based on the Libs not losing face by reversing the cutting of the carbon tax or on the lobbying by Business and Industry groups with short term economic interests for their most powerful members?

As far as we can see **the public are hanging out for transparent intelligent representation where Australia's wide interests are addressed, not addressing vested interests of lobbyists and not political game plays.**

Retaining renewable energy investment (1) and setting up a credible other carbon-reduction scheme (2) would help the public in terms of the arguments stated under (1) – economically, environmentally and in terms of Australia engaging with the rest of the developed and developing world and regarding (2) essentially the same benefits would accrue.

[As was said in the letter in July to Malcolm:](#)

“I can see how Mr Tony Abbott may still believe he has a mandate to drop the carbon price. However a greater mandate is surely to be able to modify ones stance if international and local advice irrefutably shows that keeping to the old is to the detriment of both our international credibility and the future of Australia, economically as well as in many other parameters. Changing would take great courage but true leadership.”

The essence of this holds true with renewables.

The divestment of responsibility for administration of the EPBC Act

The Department of Environment under the Abbott regime has divested itself of responsibility for the administration of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act:

On 14 May 2014, Minister Hunt introduced a bill into Parliament that would allow the Minister to accredit state and territory approval decisions on large coal mining and coal seam gas developments that are likely to have a significant impact on a water resource (commonly known as the 'water trigger').

The legislation also makes technical amendments to the EPBC Act to facilitate the One-Stop Shop policy and the operation of bilateral agreements¹³.

As outlined above the states have demonstrated that they are incapable of monitoring or administering potentially toxic industries. In 2013 in NSW less than 2000 contaminated sites were registered, yet in 2003 there were at least 30,000 contaminated sites in NSW¹⁴. There is a current inquiry into the NSW EPA's apparent inaction and failure to operate effectively. The NSW state is currently rocked by corruption findings against 8 members of the currently incumbent state government, mostly in relation to coal and csg industry related matters. And there is evidence of coal terminal owners treating pollution limits as "optional" because the Liberal Party regards economic considerations to come before environmental considerations¹⁵.

The Abbott government has been allowing mining and coal industry infrastructure development in unique and environmentally sensitive areas. However the states will be even worse. Apart from the demonstrated ineptitude and inability of the state institutions to administer this environmental approval, compliance and monitoring roles, it is clear that given the corruption there is not the political will to protect the environment.

This cynical divestment by the Abbott government is in full knowledge that Australia has the worst and fastest species extinction rate of any country on the planet, including 3rd world developing countries.

International: Crimes against the environment

Crime against the environment is an issue being considered by the UN at present. It is time for the UN to start prosecuting Crimes against the Environment by people in responsible positions of government. These are now international crimes, given the serious world environmental problems ahead and the information that is now available. Members of the Abbott government may in the future be nominated for indictment based on the actions they are taking to dismantle environmental protections and approvals made in full knowledge of the environmental consequences.

¹³ *One-Stop Shop for environmental approvals* <http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/about-us/legislation/environment-protection-and-biodiversity-conservation-act-1999/one-stop>

¹⁴ *Restoration of industrial sites under Australian environmental laws* Craig, Donna 2003 <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.14/29272>

¹⁵ *'Coal terminal owner accused of treating pollution limits as 'optional'* Peter Hannam's SMH 26/8/2014

Defunding of the Environmental Defenders Office

It is appalling that the Abbott government allowed the mining industry lobby to persuade it to cut funding to the Environmental Defenders Office. The EDO is the only legal service dedicated to ensuring that decisions relating to the environment are lawful and fair, and to assist the community in understanding their legal obligations towards the environment and in abiding by planning regulatory frameworks. The role of the EDO in making submissions relating to proposed legislation is invaluable as they have a years of experience, scientific and legal knowledge. That knowledge is unique and of enormous assistance to the governments of the day in their legislative role.

In cutting funding for the EDO the Abbott government has shown great naivety and cynicism and frankly, has displayed a clear disdain for people who will live longer than, or after, them. They are a government of aging men who demonstrably care nothing about the planet, its humanity or its creatures. They are opportunists for themselves personally and their corporate cohorts. They have mounted an unending attack upon the environment from every available angle.

Abbott government has cut limits on land clearing while claiming their emissions reduction scheme is based on planting more trees

Do they really think that anyone is fooled? We only have to do the maths! This at a time when we are losing vast swathes of our biodiversity and have increasing problems with drought.

Trees assist soil biodiversity and as a consequence its moisture and fertility. In addition, studies in Western Australia in the 1990s showed that where large areas of trees have been cleared, the rain clouds which formerly watered the areas henceforth are blown across the cleared areas as the wind patterns are changed and do not have the interruption of the trees, leading to the aridification of those cleared areas.

Clouds, including rain clouds, linger over the trees due to the wind patterns associated with trees, as though they are temporarily tethered to them, eventually leading to rain. See for instance the photo below.



Allowing further extensive land clearing will lead to further degradation of our agriculture and biodiversity.

The Abbott government must take a serious look at the cumulative effect of its policies on the environment and must start to listen to scientists.

Mark Latham has pointed out that politics is becoming a career for those who want to reach the political top. We have people that have worked their way through the political structures and have thus had little or no experience or knowledge outside the world of politics. Their focus of learning is narrow, and while they may be excellent political strategists, they have learnt none of the general environmental and other knowledge that the rest of the community takes for granted. The Abbott government is dangerous in that it is a clique of professional politicians and worse, they do not listen to experts in their field, and in particular, scientists. I have heard politicians say, after their time in office, that they regret that they made a mistake in office but their decisions were taken on the best advice available...however that is not the case for the Abbott government. The advice that the Abbott government is heeding is only political strategists' advice at the cost to the environment and our future.

It is time that the Abbott government stop trying to destroy the capacity of experts to give advice and to advocate for the environment and to actually listen. We are at a global turning point and yet the Abbott government is as obtuse as a fundamentalist Salafist government in relation to the global effort to save a liveable environment for humanity.