



AUSTRALIAN FORESTS AND CLIMATE ALLIANCE

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## PLEASE KEEP KEY ENVIRONMENTAL POWERS WITH THE COMMONWEALTH

The Australian Forests and Climate Alliance represents 28 groups around the country that work to protect Australia's forests and to communicate the connection between forests and climate.

We are extremely concerned that the Commonwealth Government, responding to pressure by the Business Council of Australia (BCA), intends to wind back the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and implement the transfer of federal approval powers to State governments, as part of a move to reduce 'green tape'.

Protecting our wild places and native animals is not 'green tape'. The most recent national *State of the Environment* report shows the country is going backwards in biodiversity conservation. As climate change worsens, and puts further stresses on Australia's natural resources it will provide additional challenges that require a national response.

The Commonwealth relinquished environmental responsibilities for forests to the States over 10 years ago in Regional Forest Agreement areas, exempting them from the application of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. This is the model for further transfers of environmental responsibility. Under the RFA regime State forestry agencies have over-logged and operated at financial losses. Industrial scale logging has damaged forest ecosystems, soils and water supplies, and continued even in areas where endangered animals, like the Leadbeater's Possum, are on the brink of extinction. In NSW third party rights to challenge breaches of regulations have been removed.

The logging industry is now calling for return of National Park areas to the industry, and State Governments are winding back on their own environmental responsibilities. This is no time for the Commonwealth to be devolving more responsibilities to the States.

The major environmental protections of past decades have largely been won by the Federal Governments overturning bad development decisions by state governments. ***Without Commonwealth interventions, the Franklin River would be dammed, the Great Barrier Reef would have oil rigs and Fraser Island would still be a sand mine.***

The group 'Economists at Large' have reported that the BCA discussion paper has overstated costs, fails to provide reliable figures and fails to consider the benefits of the EPBC Act to business and the community, or the costs involved in streamlining it.

A report issued by the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists recommends a number of ways of reducing the regulatory burden on business and delivering better outcomes without handing crucial Commonwealth approval powers to the states. They state that "there is no justification for handing the Commonwealth's approval powers under the *Environment*

*Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* to the states.” They propose an alternative suite of reforms to help deliver COAG’s dual goals to “reduce regulatory burden and duplication for business” and at the same time “deliver better environmental outcomes” for Australia.

Polls consistently show that the overwhelming majority of Australians want their natural environment protected, and Australians expect that the Commonwealth government will take the lead in matters of national environmental importance.

Now more than ever we need the federal government to uphold and strengthen environmental laws to safeguard Australia’s natural heritage.

Yours sincerely,

Lorraine Bower

For the Australian Forests and Climate Alliance