



Birds Queensland
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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

On behalf of the members of Birds Queensland I would like to express our strongest support for the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012.

Of all Australian states and territories, Queensland has the greatest number of bird species, primarily due to its inclusion of the World Heritage Wet Tropics. We also have the distinction of being the former home of the only bird species (the Paradise Parrot) that has become extinct on mainland Australia in the last century. Two bird species in Queensland are critically endangered and twelve are endangered. Habitat clearing is the major threat to survival of these species – habitats like the great Brigalow Belt, 90% of which was cleared by pastoralists before 1991, when laws were finally passed to protect threatened bushland on leasehold land.

Yet the State Government of Queensland is eroding, rather than enhancing, the protection of biodiversity in this state. Habitat clearance continues unabated, whether by large mining companies, especially those in the coal and CSG industries, port authorities or urban and resort developers. With more proposals for land clearing by these groups it is more important than ever to protect the critical habitats and ecosystems that sustain our birds and other wildlife. Indeed far from looking after our Protected Areas, the Queensland government wants to allow mining in National Parks as well as in Nature Refuges.

Already we have witnessed a blatant disregard for many projects previously funded by the tax payers of Australia as they become unimportant to the incumbent administration in our State Government, which promotes an ethos of development at the cost of the health of the environment.

Current and past practice suggests that in Queensland, Federal intervention remains a necessity since commercial interests are typically placed before those of environmental health. EIS standards in Queensland are shambolic, as even Federal Minister Tony Burke has acknowledged. Our State government's view that they are giving people 'what they want' is disingenuous and patronising. It should be very obvious many communities do not desire what is being forced upon them and feel

disenfranchised from local decision making and from their involvement in the protection of the landscape in which they live. Federal approval adds an essential layer of protection to the environment as these industries sweep across Queensland.

Australia has obligations under international treaties and conventions to protect its **threatened species, migratory species, World Heritage Areas** (of which Queensland has five out of Australia's 19) **and wetlands** of significance (e.g. RAMSAR, JAMBA). Adherence to these commitments should remain both a Federal responsibility and urgent priority.

At a time when we are witnessing declines in many species, rather than ceding responsibility to the States, the Federal government really needs to plan for proactive long term management of our nation's biodiversity and natural environments. Failing to implement environmental management now will result in a higher repair bill in the future. According to the latest scientific evidence, however, managers of private reserves achieve better outcomes for biodiversity than government-owned reserves – a sad indictment of governments throughout Australia.

National environmental issues need national leadership. Only the Federal government has the independence to consider national or cross-border issues and therefore make decisions in the national interest. It is vital that the Federal Government retains control of environmental approval decisions on projects that impact upon matters of national significance. For these reasons, we believe it is essential that the Federal government retains powers over the States in matters of the environment.

Yours sincerely

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