

18 January 2013

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

**ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AMENDMENT
(RETAINING FEDERAL APPROVAL POWERS) BILL 2012**

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF), Australia's largest state farmer organisation and only recognised consistent voice on issues affecting rural Victoria, welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012.

The VFF strongly opposes the Bill in its entirety. The VFF considers there are significant advantages to retaining the ability to delegate to state governments the approval of referred actions under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act). Furthermore, bilateral agreements for this delegation will not change the EPBC Act, but rather take a more practical approach to its administration.

Regulation for the protection of native species runs through all layers of government: federal, state, and local, creating major overlaps. The majority of EPBC Act referrals also require permits under state based native vegetation regulation, resulting in an unnecessary dual approval process. Having one referral agency in each state to assess and approve proposed actions would remove this duplication and simplify approval processes.

State governments are in a stronger position than the Commonwealth to administer the EPBC Act because:

- they have greater experience with administering environmental regulation
- there is a higher level of recognition for state based regulation
- they are closer geographically to the proponents of referred actions.

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill should be abandoned. To remove the ability to delegate approvals will perpetuate a confusing and duplicative system of environmental regulation.

Once the Bill is abandoned negotiations to establish bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and state governments should resume.

Yours Sincerely

Peter Tuohey
President