

Submission to the Federal Senate Inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999).

I am an Australian citizen and a current resident in Gympie, Queensland. Given the Traveston Crossing dam debacle in the area in which I live, as proposed by the former Qld state government, I believe that there is a critical need for independent assessment of projects that could impact our Matters of National Environmental Significance and it is essential that the Federal Government is required to hold those powers.

Here are four reasons why this is important:

1. If more environmental assessment power is given to the States, and a project proponent is a wholly-owned State corporation, or a private/public partnership set up for a specific project by the State Government then there is a conflict of interest. How can there be any independent environmental assessment? This need for independent assessment was clearly demonstrated with the federal assessment of the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam.
2. There have been major changes that have taken place in Queensland own planning and assessment laws and procedures over the past few years with in particular “fast-tracking’ of major state-owned projects. The concern about these changes is the reduction in the amount of assessment, reduced or eliminated opportunity for public comment and removal of most of the legal avenues for review of decisions. Queensland’s political system is unique in having no upper house to review decisions made in the lower house and by making extensive use of its powerful State Development Act. This Act is administered by the unelected government position of Coordinator-General (unique to Queensland), a position which has a history of direct political appointments and whose decisions have no judicial review.
3. There have been previous failures of the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act (SDPWO) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIS) process eg approval of Paradise Dam and the assessment of the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam. There are no offence provisions in the SDPWO Act which prohibit false or misleading statements at any stage of the EIS process. The SDPWO Act has no pro-environment objects or deliberative obligations, so it allows the Coordinator General’s EIS assessment reports to preference creating employment and development the State over protecting the environment. Most importantly, declaration as a significant project prevents state government agencies (including the Environmental Protection Agency) from requiring the project to be refused or imposing conditions inconsistent with those required by the Coordinator General.
4. Project environmental approval conditions need to be independently monitored and enforced if necessary. How can this be if there is a conflict of interest and the project is built, conditioned and monitored only by the state?

As an active community member and conscientious voter, I vote for representatives of government who will act to protect our valuable environmental heritage from destruction from large companies who align themselves heavily financially with state governments in this

country. It is essential that the Federal Government retain its powers to conduct independent assessment of state projects that endanger our environmental heritage.

Heather A Coombs

Gympie, QLD 4570

17th January 2013