

Parliamentary Submission for the Senate Committee Inquiry of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012

Committee Members, I wish to give my full support to the above Amendment Bill.

It is my belief that handing over the last say in environmental laws to the states would weaken and threaten our environment and our future way of life. It would also greatly impact on the green wedge of votes that helped Labour to victory in the last election, virtually ensuring defeat in next November's election. State governments must remain accountable to Federal Government.

There are a number of reasons the federal government should hold on to the ability to make the final decision when it comes to environmental policies. Firstly, history has shown state governments often create environmental policies based on short term investment and economic opportunities. Australia would be a very different place if we left the states in charge, with super trawlers decimating Australian fish stocks, cattle grazing in fragile National Parks and off shore oil rigs dotted throughout the our national icon the Great Barrier Reef.

Secondly, since our environment does not stop and start at state boundaries, I don't see how a decision to let environmental policy, decided by state lines, be a better option than looking at the environment as one nation. This kind of policy making would create a situation where completely different environmental agendas are divided by an imaginary line. Protecting the habitat of Koalas in one state is not of much benefit if there is widespread clearing of koala habitat in the next. Or creating policy that helps stop the spread of fungus in Victoria bush land that straddles NSW seems pointless if the policy is not taken up by the NSW state government.

Thirdly, this is a huge reversal of opinion by Julia Gillard. 13 years ago Ms Gillard was lamenting loudly about how the Howard government was delegating environmental responsibilities to the states and what a disaster it would be. Yet here we are with the current government under her leadership trying to do the exact same thing. Why has her opinions changed, is it not more important today that the environment be protected against big business' greed? Protected from climate denying states governments that are shredding environmental protection laws, gutting environmental agencies and carving up the states resources with little regard for the long term environmental effects.

The Labour government was elected into power in part because of support by the Greens and its decision to ratify the Kyoto agreement. To hand over powers to the states would be a huge blow to a large portion of voters which may see a Labour defeat in the next election. Labour has to decide which side of the fence it is on, for the environment or against it. Because our environment is too precious to lose.

regards

Justin Smyrk