



17 January 2013

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

By email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

I write on behalf of the members of BirdLife South East Queensland and the joint membership of Protect the Bush Alliance (PTBA) regarding the Committee's investigation in to the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012 (the Bill).

BirdLife Australia is Australia's oldest research-based conservation organisation with a membership base of 10,000. PTBA is a joint working group of many conservation organisations working for the well being of our ecosystems throughout Queensland.

It is essential for animals, birds and their habitats that the quality of our environment in Queensland be protected and viewed as a functioning whole which requires strong consistent management of regional landscapes across Australia. Consistent management and policy approaches are only possible at a federal level. The State Government in Queensland continues to take steps towards eroding environmental protection. There can be no other more important commitment for our government to make since we all depend on the health of environment, clean water and safe food production.

Already we witness a blatant disregard for many projects previously funded by the tax payers of Australia (eg Bimblebox Nature Refuge) as they become unimportant to the incumbent administration in our State Government here in Queensland, which promotes an ethos of development at the cost of the health of the environment.

It is vital that the Federal Government retain control of environmental approvals decisions on projects that impact upon matters of national significance. Essentially the following are of concern:

- National environmental issues need national leadership. Only the Federal government has the independence to appropriately consider national or cross-border issues and therefore make decision in the national interest.
- Across the environmental sector a lack of geographically standardised approaches to conservation results in vast differences from state to state, and region to region. This lack of standardisation results in a patchwork across Australia with geographically distinct winners and losers in terms of conservation, with often costly and ineffective duplication across geographic scales.
- Australia has obligations that have arisen from the signing of international treaties and conventions to protect threatened species, migratory species, world heritage areas and wetlands of significance. Adherence to these commitments should remain both a Federal responsibility and urgent priority.
- Current and past practice suggests here in Queensland, Federal intervention remains a necessity since commercial interests are predominantly placed before those of environmental health, despite assertions to the contrary. Business is left to self regulate as our State Government fails to provide for cost effective monitoring.
For instance, by-product water from drilling in the CSG industry is described as brine with a few minerals. Many of these minerals are chemicals which are highly toxic. What will be their cumulative effect on our environment? To portray them as 'minerals', dismisses their potential harm to environment. The saline content alone renders soil impoverished.
- Federal Minister Tony Bourke described EIS standards in Queensland as shambolic; we see no reason to suggest the situation will improve. 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 preservation and conservation of the greater landscape in which they live.
- There is an inherent conflict of interest at both State and Federal level when we witness the extent of land clearing associated with mining and development in general, but particularly in the coal and CSG industries. The so-called 'reforms' of vegetation management policies and actions seek to promote further land clearing. The need for Federal approval adds an essential layer of protection to the environment in these industries sweeping alarmingly across Queensland.
- Is it indeed the case here in Queensland that far from protecting the status of Nature Refuges, a down grading of national parks status may occur to allow mining in the parks as well as in Nature Refuges?
- We are feeling the effects of global warming but the Queensland government no longer funds a department of climate change.
- It is ironic today that we see clear evidence of superior improved outcomes for bio-diversity achieved by managers of private reserves throughout Australia. At a time when we are witnessing a dramatic decline in all species; it is self evident the Federal government rather than ceding responsibility to the States, really needs to plan for aggressive and long term funding and management of our nation's biodiversity and health of environment.

- A failure to implement such management is in effect tacit consent for continued mismanagement and will reflect badly on all levels of government as we witness the continuing degradation of our countryside.

For these reasons, we believe it is essential the Federal government retains powers over the States in matters of the environment.

We support the EPBC Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012 in the expectation that our Federal Department of Environment and Heritage Protection will commit to protecting not only our special places but our entire living environment. The 'less special places' are not without their role in the system of things.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Hoyle | Convenor

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