



Re: "Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment
(Streamlining Environmental Approvals) Bill 2020"

Senate Environment Committee
Parliament of Australia

Dear sir or miss:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill - however, the obvious 'bulldozing' of this bill through parliament and the extremely short turnaround time the committee has to work with the bill demonstrates a lack of due process and the willingness of public officials to allow an open debate about the pros and cons of the bill.

The EPBC Act was taken seriously and fully implemented during the previous Labor government. The Act, when properly enacted, does meet the bill's intent. There are flaws which can be corrected but basically the bill 'worked'. However, as soon as the sitting government came to power, it immediately undermined the Act and then started making major staff cuts to the EPBC unit. For example, three different staff at the EPBC unit have told me that they were given a directive (during Tony Abbott's tenure) that ALL referrals must be approved. If it was a 'bad' project, conditions could be added. I tried to FOI this directive and was informed it was done by phone.

While the EPBC Act has been undermined and under-resourced, it remains one of the few hurdles that developers must go through if they intend to destroy habitats and further threaten biodiversity. This 'hurdle' also provides for the input and scrutiny of the public and stakeholders. This amendment bill 2020 provides yet another tool to further undermine the Act by simply sidestepping it. If this amendment is passed, it creates a situation where there is much less (or no) oversight by the public and even less enforcement. It becomes merely one more way the government can be less accountable for what is happening to our essential environment and for really destructive projects to be approved with no discussion or debate.

I also note that Senator Zali Steggall introduced a worthy amendment to this bill that would have introduced a system of National Environmental Standards to this bill that would apply to any bilateral agreements. Not only was her amendment not voted on in parliament, there was not even any discussion allowed. This demonstrates bullying and a lack of respect for the process of making laws and debating their expected functionality and impact. This is simply shameful and not how democracies work.

We hope that the committee will recommend that this bill not be passed. If representative Steggall's amendment had been voted on and applied, then there might be some scope to consider the bill as it would at least introduce a standard. No consideration should be given to this bill in its present form.

Thank you for reading.

Sincerely,

Deborah Pergolotti
Founding President