

November 10, 2014.

**Submission on: The Abbott Government's attacks on Australia's environment, and their effects on our natural heritage and future prosperity.**

I think the fact that the Senate is even considering such an inquiry is unprecedented. That the Abbott Federal Government's views on the environment coalesce with the views of some state governments, notably in my case, Queensland, and with the views of many local governments has provided a perfect storm for environmental destruction not seen in recent times. I imagine there will be deluge of submissions on the current Federal Government's deficiencies in protecting our environment and also in preparing for the future economic development of Australia.

**The Points to be Made in this Submission are Tabulated Below:**

- 1. A Minister for Science not appointed.**
- 2. Demonisation of a Carbon Price, Elimination of Carbon Tax without the Development of an Emissions Trading Scheme.**
- 3. Abolition of the Climate Commission**
- 4. Recalculating the Renewable Energy Target.**
- 5. Adoption of Direct Action without proof of effectiveness.**
- 6. Endangering the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park with Coal Port Expansion**
- 7. Attempt to delist World Heritage areas in Tasmania**
- 8. Altering Management Plans for Marine Parks to allow fishing.**
- 9. Abolition of National Water Commission**
- 10. Not capping bores in the Great Artesian Basin.**
- 11. Stopping funding of environmental bodies such as the Environmental Defenders Office and the Queensland Conservation Council**
- 12. Determination to hand over EPBC responsibility to the state governments.**
- 13. Cutting funding for landcare type programs**
- 14. Fast-tracking of development in Northern Australia despite having the example of the Ord River scheme as a historical example.**
- 15. Twenty million trees program whilst not moving to save existing trees.**

1. The first move by the Abbott Government, which is completely incomprehensible was to not appoint a Minister for Science. It is well known that every dollar spent on research is more than doubled in economic output – sound investment for a government interested in the economy one would have thought. Funding to the CSIRO was also reduced. Lack of investment in science will see Australia falling behind our competitors in agriculture, manufacturing, and new technology. An attack on science is certainly cutting off your nose to spite your face.
2. The continual referral by the Abbott opposition to the carbon price as a “Big New Tax” has created an inaccurate picture in the mind of the Australian tax payer. It may have been an effective way to degrade the then government and to gain power but it has not been in the

best interests of the Australian economy or the Australian environment. The carbon price, which was due to transition to an emissions trading scheme, provided a markets based system with price incentives and penalties to encourage transition to a low carbon economy. Australian householders themselves are transitioning to a low carbon economy by installing solar power, solar hot water heating and purchasing energy efficient appliances.

Australia now lacks a credible carbon reduction strategy. Ironically the section of the economy which will be most severely impacted by climate change (and is even now seriously suffering) – agriculture - remains strongly opposed to a price on carbon. Regional towns such as Bundaberg, which are suffering unprecedented flood events creating a massive financial burden for themselves and higher levels of government, do not accept climate change. I would venture to say this is totally due to lack of intelligent, educated and forward thinking by the Abbott Government on climate change and the appropriate actions to engage in.

3. Abolition of the Climate Commission: The commission was set up to provide unbiased factual information on climate change and its impact on Australia. Perversely, the chairman, Prof. Tim Flannery, was selected to be Australian of the Year under the Howard Government! The government has deprived itself of a valuable tool to inform the public and to monitor the impact of climate change on Australia. This knowledge is needed to plan for industries of the future.
4. Recalculating the Renewable Energy Target to a lower absolute value due to changes in Australia's power use is a sad ploy. It is also a brake on industries who were capitalising on the RET and financial incentives to develop renewable energy. Investment in renewable energy projects is down 70%. My husband's niece's husband was part of a group planning to spend millions on a renewable energy project. They have now scrapped it. Is it any wonder that unemployment is rising in Queensland? Why does a government which is supposed to be the friend of business and supposed to be growing the economy so intent on destroying the renewable energy industry?
5. Direct Action Policy: I have seen no figures calculating the extent of emissions reduction to be achieved by direct action. What is clear is that it is a huge impost on the Australian tax payer – far greater than the impact of the carbon tax!! Has any reputable economist provided evidence that investing taxpayer dollars in this manner represents a wise investment?
6. Endangering the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park by expanding the Abbott Point coal port has attracted strong opposition from all conservation and tourism organisations. We already know that crown of thorns starfish and bleaching events caused by warmer seas have damaged the GBR. To better survive the threat of global warming and ocean acidification, reefs need to be provided with a high quality marine environment as free from silt and pollutants as possible. The Queensland Government is educating and assisting farmers to improve land management to improve water quality. The dredging proposed at Abbott Point would have had a massive impact with released toxins and sediment. The negative effect of dredging at Gladstone on fish and the incomes of the local fishing industry should serve as an object lesson. Even if the dredge is dumped on land, the site will have to be far enough inland to give some protection from future floods and cyclones. Overseas tourists do not visit Australia for our wonderful culture. They come to see our natural attractions – the chief one of these is the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.
7. Abbott's feeble attempt to delist 74,000 hectares of World Heritage forest in Tasmania shows definite contempt for the environment. The peace deal in Tasmania between the forestry

industry and conservation interests took years to negotiate. As far as I have been told (personal communication), foresters and conservationists had accepted that the agreement was a sustainable way forward for the state.

8. Marine Parks: The government has undermined the legislated network of marine parks by changing the management plans for these protected areas so that fishing is allowed! It is appealing to recreational fishers but all the conservation zones are more than 5 km offshore and more than 50 km from major population centres. The government has eliminated fishing exclusion zones for waters home to endangered species. Research has shown that unprotected areas of the sea are repopulated by offspring from fish that live in protected areas. The fish density and size is greater in protected areas and the variety of fish is greater. Marine reserves operate on the same principal as a farm: the reserves protect the breeding stock which then populate adjacent waters which can be fished. The move is short sighted populism with recreational fishers who will get little benefit.
9. Abolition of National Water Commission: The NWC was an independent statutory body set up by the Howard government to provide advice on water policy. We live in a country where meeting demand for water is a continual challenge. We are now entering an era where groundwater is threatened by such things as coal seam gas mining and coal mining. We are also entering a time of uncertainty with climate change predicted to bring longer deeper droughts and more intense flood events. This is when a water authority is even more important to provide advice on the management of our mining, agriculture and environment.
10. The Great Artesian Basin: The plans to cap outlets to the GAB expired at the end of June 2014. The Abbott Government should have re-instigated plans to cap wells from the Great Artesian Basin. As we know, the water in the basin is millions of years old. It is far too valuable to be wasted in uncapped bores.
11. Cutting funding of environmental bodies such as the Environmental Defenders Office and the Queensland Conservation Council. One of the tenets of democracy is that all sections of society should contribute to informed debate not just the wealthy. IF it is necessary to provide some sections with funds to allow employment of advisors and researchers, it is a small price to pay for effective civil society.
12. The attempt and continuing efforts to hand over Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation to the states. We are still fresh from the Traveston Dam battle here in Queensland. We have a river containing numerous threatened species, two of which are endemic to the river and the Queensland Government was willing to install a dam which would have affected their environment and have led to a decrease in population size. Federal intervention was required to stop the dam. Likewise Federal intervention saved Fraser Island. Being one step further removed from local economic pressures allows the Federal government to make more dispassionate assessments. Even so, very seldom does the EPBC hold up development. So it is not easy to understand the imperative Minister Hunt feels to devolve this responsibility.
13. Reduction in funds available to conservation groups for nature protection programs. Caring for Country and Landcare have been replaced by a narrower – tree planting approach in the National Landcare Program.
14. Development of Northern Australia: It appears that the development of northern Australia will proceed along the lines utilised in the past. Dams. Uncontrolled land clearing. Where is the science? Where is the innovative thinking? Where are the public forums involving all

sections of the public on the future of the north? Surely if the development of northern Australia is to be done, with the Government's philosophy in mind, it should be done by private industry with private money – not given tax free havens, fuel subsidies, whatever. Such things lead to plans without solid financial future and a long lead in stage such as the Ord River Dam which has had such a troubled history.

15. Twenty millions trees: Excuse my cynicism but volunteers are expected to plant twenty million baby trees whilst farmers, developers and miners are allowed to clear mature trees. I feel sure this government has effectively pulled the wool over the eyes of the majority of the conservation community with this initiative. Saving mature trees would be the most sensible and economically correct path to take but this would require regulations that might impact negatively on the "friends and supporters" of the Coalition Government.

A policy to control feral cats is a good one. Minister Hunt has allocated \$90 million to help control feral cats. Why does that Minister advocate this move? Because killing cats does not involve stopping clearing, stopping building dams, reducing mining, has some benefits to agriculture, does not affect port building, does not call for a reduction in population growth, does not demand action on climate change and does not affect live exports of sheep and cattle. In other words, the Abbott Government will only carry out an environmental beneficial action which if it has no impact on their support base.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Carolyn Bussey