

Chapter 1

Introduction

Conduct of the Inquiry

1.1 The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 (the bill) was introduced and read a first time in the House of Representatives on 13 March 2013. The bill as introduced was amended by the House on 14 March on motions moved by the government and by the Member for New England. Also on 14 March, on the recommendation of the Selection of Bills Committee, the Senate referred the provisions of the bill to the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee for inquiry and report by 14 May 2013.

1.2 The Selection of Bills Committee's report stated that the reason for the referral was to give close scrutiny to this major change to the *Environment Protection and Biosecurity Conservation Act 1999* (the EPBC Act).¹

1.3 In accordance with its usual practice, the committee advertised the inquiry on its website and in *The Australian* newspaper of 27 March 2013. The committee also contacted a number of organisations and individuals and invited them to make submissions. Some 235 submissions were received, as shown in Appendix 1. The committee also received a number of letters from interested individuals. The names of those individuals are listed in the appendix. Details of additional information received during the course of the inquiry are also contained in the appendix.

1.4 The committee held public hearings in Sydney on 17 April 2013 and in Canberra on 18 April. A list of witnesses who appeared at the hearings may be found at Appendix 2. A copy of the proof Hansard transcript of the hearing was posted to the committee's website. The references to the pages of the Hansard transcript in this report are to the proof Hansard, which may be different from those in the official transcript.

Purpose of the bill

1.5 The purpose of the bill is to amend the EPBC Act to provide for the establishment of a new matter of national environmental significance in relation to significant impacts of coal seam gas (CSG) development and large scale coal mining development on a water resource.²

1 Senate Selection of Bills Committee, *Report No. 3 of 2013*, Appendix 3.

2 Explanatory Memorandum, Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013, p. 2.

Scope of the inquiry

1.6 In this inquiry the committee has concentrated on the provisions of the bill and has not sought to revisit the many technical and other issues surrounding the mining of CSG and coal mining.

Structure of the report

1.7 In the following chapters of this report the committee:

- provides some background to the bill, a summary of the current regulatory environment, and summaries of relevant recent Senate Committee reports (Chapter 2); and
- discusses key issues raised during the inquiry (Chapter 3)

Acknowledgements

1.8 The committee thanks those individuals and organisations who made submissions in the limited time available, and those who gave oral evidence. Their input greatly assisted the work of the committee.