

Labor Senators' additional comments

1.1 Labor Senators welcome the Committee decision to focus this interim report on the effectiveness of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) as a legislative framework for managing Australia's environment and protecting threatened species.

1.2 Labor Senators thank all organisations and individuals that made submissions to this inquiry, gave evidence at hearings and facilitated site visits, as well as the Secretariat for their ongoing research and administrative support.

1.3 Labor believes the Australian Government has an enduring responsibility to protect Australia's environment and natural resources. Australia needs new frameworks for truly national protection and management of Australia's natural resources to enshrine federal leadership in proactive and systemic protection of our environment. We must confront threats such as climate change and deliver on our international obligations including Sustainable Development, to protect biodiversity, to protect heritage, restore landscapes, control plastic pollution and improve air quality and water quality to protect human health and productivity.

1.4 Labor Senators acknowledge the current EPBC Act is now 20 years old and has never been significantly reformed. It is time to bring it into the 21st century.

1.5 Labor Senators note that the Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Minister for the Environment announced on 16 December 2018 that, if elected, Labor will establish an Australian Environment Act in our first term. It will be an Act which protects our environment but also supports job-creating development by streamlining and harmonising processes. The new legal framework will compel the Australian government to actively protect our unique natural environment and demonstrate national leadership.

1.6 Labor will establish a high powered working group of experts including scientists, environmental lawyers and public policy thinkers to refine the clear concepts that underpin this reform. We will also ensure all stakeholders including states and territories, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, impacted industries and business groups, trade unions and civil society have a seat at the table.

1.7 Labor considers the new Environment Act should include a land clearing trigger, and the water trigger should be expanded to cover shale or tight formation gas developments. Consultation on the new legislation should also consider a National Parks trigger to protect our system of National Parks.

1.8 Labor Senators note the Leader and Shadow Minister also announced that, if elected, Labor will establish a new agency, a Federal Environment Protection Agency (EPA) to manage matters of national environmental significance. Labor's plan is for a strong, well resourced, science-based EPA that ensures compliance with environmental law, conducts public inquiries on important environmental matters, and

provides transparent and timely advice to the Minister within a clear decision-making framework.

1.9 Labor Senators support the Committee's recommendations for the Commonwealth to develop new environmental legislation and establish an independent EPA.

Senator Anne Urquhart
Senator for Tasmania

Senator Anthony Chisholm
Senator for Queensland