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Submission: Inquiry into the operation of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to make a late submission to the Inquiry into the operation of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The Planning Institute welcomes the opportunity to provide some brief comments.

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) is the national peak body for people and organisations involved in spatial planning practice in Australia. The Institute represents and supports almost 5000 planning professionals, Australia-wide and overseas. The Institute brings together professionals and organisations with a shared interest in 'the community, and the education, research and practices relating to the planned use of land, its associated systems, and of the natural and built environmental, social and economic impacts and implications of the use of land'.

Climate Change

We note that the Terms of Reference have been prepared within the context of the continuing decline and extinction of a significant proportion of Australia's unique plants and animals, and the likelihood that accelerating climate change will exacerbate challenges faced by Australian species. In this regard, PIA had recently released a

Policy on Climate Change. This document highlights the unique role of the planning profession to assist the community to understand and adapt to the expected consequences of climate change. Planners are also in the position to actively work on mitigation issues and guide changes to environmental behaviour, including climate change information in environmental assessments. The EP&BC Act certainly should include this specific requirement given the impact that climate change is expected to have on habitat and species. Ideally a Climate Risk Management Program would be a requirement before any approval was granted under the **Act**. As planners are often responsible for, or have, a significant input to preparation of Environmental Impact Assessments, we advocate planners adopt a precautionary approach in relation to climate change and we acknowledge that planners have an important role in identification and implementation of adaptation options.

Specifically we believe that regional and local assessments of climate change trends, vulnerabilities and adaptation options should be prepared and that these findings should be accessible and relevant to affected stakeholders. This type of information will also be of critical importance to developers in considering options prior to submission of proposals to government for approval under relevant legislation.

Risk management

Our policy statement supports action that will enable planners to implement adaptation and greenhouse abatement strategies including the consolidation of relevant, reliable and consistent information. This information could then be used as an input to the assessment processes under the **Act**. Risk management also needs to be incorporated into a range of state and local land use and development policies as a means of contributing to greenhouse abatement. Land use plans and policies will usually provide the framework for development applications, and which depending on their impact, can trigger the EP&BC Act. It is therefore vital that planners work in close partnership with researchers to ensure that planning policies reflect evidence based research. PIA had been a key contributor to a series of online information resources providing the building and development sectors with good examples and information on sustainable development. This should strengthen the quality of development proposals and facilitate assessment under the **Act**.

As urban development can be a threat to Australia's endangered species and ecological communities, the planners' role in managing urban growth is critical. PIA's Policy Paper on Urban Growth Management (UGM) argues the case for the Federal Government's recognition of the importance of cities to economic and community well-being including through providing greater leadership and support for UGM. The Paper also proposes the adoption by all jurisdictions of a coordinated approach to UGM and its underpinning through the use of planning tools with a series of integrated principles. These include minimising the environmental footprint of urban areas through careful site selection, minimising land area and the environmental impact of development within the urban area. The adoption of such principles could assist in reducing the impact of urban development on our endangered species and ecological communities and hence the need to trigger the **Act**.

Professional input from planners

Planners play a critical role in preparing strategic plans, setting parameters for growth and delivering effective, functional and sustainable cities, towns, neighbourhoods and regions. It is essential that there is a well-resourced and skilled professional workforce to do this. The 2004 PIA National Inquiry into Planning Education and Employment found serious labour market deficiencies, concerns that planners were not receiving appropriate education and training, and acknowledgment that planners experience unacceptable stress in the workplace. PIA proposed a range of actions to address these concerns and although some initiatives have been taken to address the problems, there still remains a shortage of qualified and experienced planners. This also impacts on both the quality of development applications as well as the development assessment processes and can directly lead to an impact on processes relating to assessment and approvals under the EP&BC Act. PIA suggests that the Inquiry consider recommendations that could lead to an increase in qualified planners and hence a more robust submission and assessment process in order to safeguard matters of national environmental significance.

We recognise that the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry are very specific and although we have not addressed them sequentially in this submission, we hope that you find the observations by Planning Institute of Australia relevant to your deliberations. If you have any questions about the matters raised or wish to pursue other issues, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely


Di Jay
Chief Executive Officer

24 October 2008