

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Wide Bay Burnett Environment Council Inc (WBBEC) thanks you for this opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Regional Forest Agreements) Bill 2020.

WBBEC's submission is as follows:

1. WBBEC is deeply concerned about Australia's appalling & worsening extinction record and ongoing threats to globally significant natural places such as the K'gari, Tasmanian, Ningaloo and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage sites;
2. WBBEC opposes the Morrison Government's plans to make forest areas subject to Regional Forest Agreements exempt from the provisions of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, even though the Federal Court has found that the Act does apply to these areas;
3. WBBEC notes that the final report from the Independent Review of the EPBC Act 1999 found that "Australia's natural environment and iconic places are in an overall state of decline and are under increasing threat" and that the EPBC Act 1999 "is not fit to address current or future environmental challenges";
4. WBBEC does not consider the Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Regional Forest Agreements) Bill 2020 to be part of a meaningful response to the Independent Review and is concerned that it was brought before Parliament before the Final Report from the Review was publicly available;
5. WBBEC asks the Committee to consider the views of the 30,000 Australians who put submissions into the Independent Review calling for a full legislative reform package for the EPBC Act 1999, including:
  - an independent regulator,
  - strong national environment standards,
  - a comprehensive assurance framework to ensure our laws are implemented transparently and fully, and
  - guaranteed rights for communities to ensure they can participate meaningfully in government decision-making and can access to key legal rights like merits and judicial review.
6. The proposed Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Regional Forest Agreements) Bill 2020 represents a significant change to existing environmental regulation, in that it attempts to circumvent the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, despite a Court ruling that the Act does in fact apply to forest areas subject to Regional Forest Agreements. WBBEC is concerned that this Amendment is premature, especially as the Act is to be subject to major amendment as a result of the Independent Review, and asks that the Committee recommends that the Amendment not be passed.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Yours sincerely,

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Mike Moller  
Regional Engagement Co-ordinator  
Wide Bay Burnett Environment Council Inc (WBBEC)