



14th January 2013

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

I write on behalf of the Birdlife Echuca District with regard to the Committee's investigation into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012 (the Bill). We support the Bill as we feel strongly that it is important for the Federal government to retain control of environmental approvals decisions on projects that impact upon matters of national or international significance.

Birdlife Echuca is a cross-border branch of Birdlife Australia. Birdlife Echuca serves over 130 members who reside in southern NSW (Murray Shire, Deniliquin, Shire of Conargo, Barham and surrounding areas) and northern Victoria (Campaspe Shire, Loddon Shire, City of Greater Bendigo, Gannawarra Shire and surrounding districts).

We are a diverse group who are all committed to promoting and conserving the values of the natural environment in our district. Many of us have been directly involved in environmental regulation processes in our respective areas and as such are very aware of the competing interest groups inevitably involved when any environmental impact statement is produced.

We believe that national environmental issues need national leadership. Our natural habitats and threatened species do not sit neatly within State borders and in many cases cross over a number of State and Territory boundaries. Only the Federal government has the ability to properly consider national or cross-border issues and make decisions in the national interest.

History tells us that States do not always act in the national interest, partly due to their single-State focus and also because they lack the mandate and resources to consider consequences beyond their state. The past history of management of water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin is a good example of this. The environmental gains recently made in management of the Murray-Darling Basin would have been much harder to achieve if decisions were left up to the states.

It is not only water management that benefits from Commonwealth intervention. Habitat destruction and its effects on declining and threatened species, of which there are many examples in our district,



deserves a national approach. Again, plants and animals do not live within state boundaries, and nor should we make decisions at a state level.

Another example of where a State government acted in its own interest in contradiction to the environmental science is the to and fro over grazing in the Alpine National Parks of Victoria. Local state related politics produced a decision contrary to national standards in environmental management.

Further, States often directly benefit from the proposals they are assessing resulting in conflicts of interest arising. In general the Commonwealth is a step removed from the development and therefore able to make a more reasoned and measured decision in the public interest.

It appears to us, rightly or wrongly, that only Commonwealth involvement can raise the States up to a higher standard of environmental decision making.

Whilst we recognize the need for an efficient and quick process for assessing environmental impacts, until it can be shown that the States will fully assess the national interest, we support the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012 for retaining Federal approval powers, which are currently the strongest laws in place to protect our environment, an environment which is under continuing attack and degradation.

Yours Faithfully

Simon Starr,

Conservation Officer

Birdlife Echuca District.