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Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012

Dear Sir,

I wish to comment on the proposed Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment. I believe it is absolutely essential that the Federal Government retains the power of independent assessment of projects that could impact our Matters of National Environmental Significance.

Recent history in Queensland has demonstrated that with no checks or balances in place the risk of permanent devastating damage to our environment is very high. The debacle surrounding massive development in close proximity to the Barrier Reef is but one very obvious example. Queensland's political system is unfortunate in that it has in place no upper house to review the decisions made by the lower house. The State Development Act is being used to fast track projects without appropriate environmental controls, opportunity for adequate public comment or legal redress for review of decisions. Simply by declaring Significant Public Status the Coordinator General (an unelected position with a history of direct political appointments) can ensure the project is not refused, and can go ahead even without recommended restrictions.

The Queensland government is continuing to amend environmental laws across the state, reducing the responsibilities for damage caused to the environment by mines and business that have not foreseen and taken steps to avoid adverse impacts of their activities in this changing climate.

This is totally unacceptable.

In a situation where there is no independent environmental assessment, where there is a real conflict of interest between short term economics and environmental protection and where the moderating role of even state government agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency has been decimated the Federal Government must retain the ultimate power to protect the environment and hence the people.

Dr Geralyn McCarron

17 January 2013