

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 [Provisions]

To the Committee,

I welcome the bill to strengthen the EBPC act to include water impacts as matters of National Environmental Significance. Clearly the need for this protection has been proven time and time again by unacceptable impacts on water tables and surface water quality in the Bowen Basin (to name just one region) from mining. I very much hope that senators from all sides of politics support this bill.

Given the scale of coal and CSG projects currently in the pipeline and the long term risks posed by them to our water resources it is imperative that the act is 'water tight' so to speak. Exemptions allowing key projects to slip through this extra assessment undermine the value of the act. While I could name a number of examples the one closest to my heart is the Kevin's Corner mine in the Galilee Basin.

Advice for Kevin's Corner has already been sought by the government from the IESC and thus, I understand this project will be exempt from the new law.

I have grave concerns regarding the potential impact of the mines in the Galilee Basin on water resources in the region and read, with concern, the advice given to the Government by the *Interim* IESC on the Alpha Mine – which neighbours the Kevin's Corner Proposal. It states:

“Given the pending development scenarios, the committee advises that the cumulative surface and groundwater impacts in the region have not been assessed. Based on the limited information presented, in particular, on cumulative impacts, the committee has considerable concerns relating to the scale and extent of impacts associated with the project.

“As specific risks cannot be assessed without an adequate water balance, surface water cumulative impact assessment or solute balance, it is difficult to assess the adequacy of mitigation measures to reduce impacts to an acceptable level including acid water drainage which may impact on the quality of the Burdekin catchment.”¹

It is bad enough that the minister was not able to act on the advice of the IIESC in the case of the Alpha mine, but the Federal government has an important opportunity to properly scrutinize the impacts of development of the Galilee Basin mines before irreversible damage is done to the Desert Uplands region, the Burdekin catchment and potentially also the Great Artesian Basin. No approval has been given for Kevin's Corner and **I implore the committee to take out the exemption that would stop the minister taking impacts on water into consideration in his decision on Kevin's Corner**

Incidentally, landholders in the Galilee Basin have had to take up where governments have failed and are objecting to the Alpha Mining Lease and Environmental Authority in the QLD land court to protect their ground and surface water.

There are other areas of the Bill which I hope will, over time be strengthened and improved including:

- Strengthening of the role of the IESC in relation to the water trigger in the EPBC
- Requiring bioregional assessments of water impacts prior to approval
- Amending the Bill to cover all unconventional gas mining, including shale gas and tight gas, and unconventional coal mining and smaller coal projects where unacceptable water impacts are possible

Thankyou for the opportunity to submit to this senate inquiry.

Kind Regards,

Eleanor Smith

¹ Full advice from the Interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Developments on the Alpha Project can be found here:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/coal-seam-gas-mining/interim-committee/pubs/iiesc-advice-alpha.pdf>