



Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
23 March 2011

Senate inquiry on Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Bioregional Plans) Bill 2011

Dear Sir/Madam

We write on behalf of the Pew Environment Group to express concern about the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Bioregional Plans) Bill 2011. We believe the Bill is unnecessary, will result in significant costs and will politicize rather than improve a process that is already robust and working well.

The Bill proposes to make bioregional plans disallowable instruments in Parliament. Due to the extensive public consultation processes associated with bioregional plans, we believe this additional step is unnecessary. The Act already provides for 60 days of public consultation for bioregional plans. In addition, the government has already publicly committed to an additional one month public consultation for the four marine bioregional plans that are currently being developed, making three months in total. Once stakeholders and the community have had their say through this formal consultation period and through the usual representations to local members and Ministers, it is reasonable to expect that the final plan will be implemented rather than disallowed in Parliament. After significant community effort, it is not clear what parliamentary oversight or scrutiny would add to the process.

Passage of this Bill would also create uncertainty for industry, coastal communities, conservation groups and the public. This uncertainty would come at a financial cost. Passage of the Bill would result in cost increases to the marine bioregional planning program. Since the late 1990s when it was established by the Howard government, the program has cost \$8 million per annum. Further delays would mean the maintenance of that level of funding or more into the foreseeable future. We therefore disagree with the statement in the explanatory memorandum that there are no financial impacts of the proposed Bill.

Marine reserves are very popular with the public. Repeated polling shows the Australian people want and expect their government to conserve and protect marine wildlife and their habitats through marine parks. This Bill potentially hinders delivery of a program that produces outcomes strongly supported by the clear majority of Australians.

Yours sincerely

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