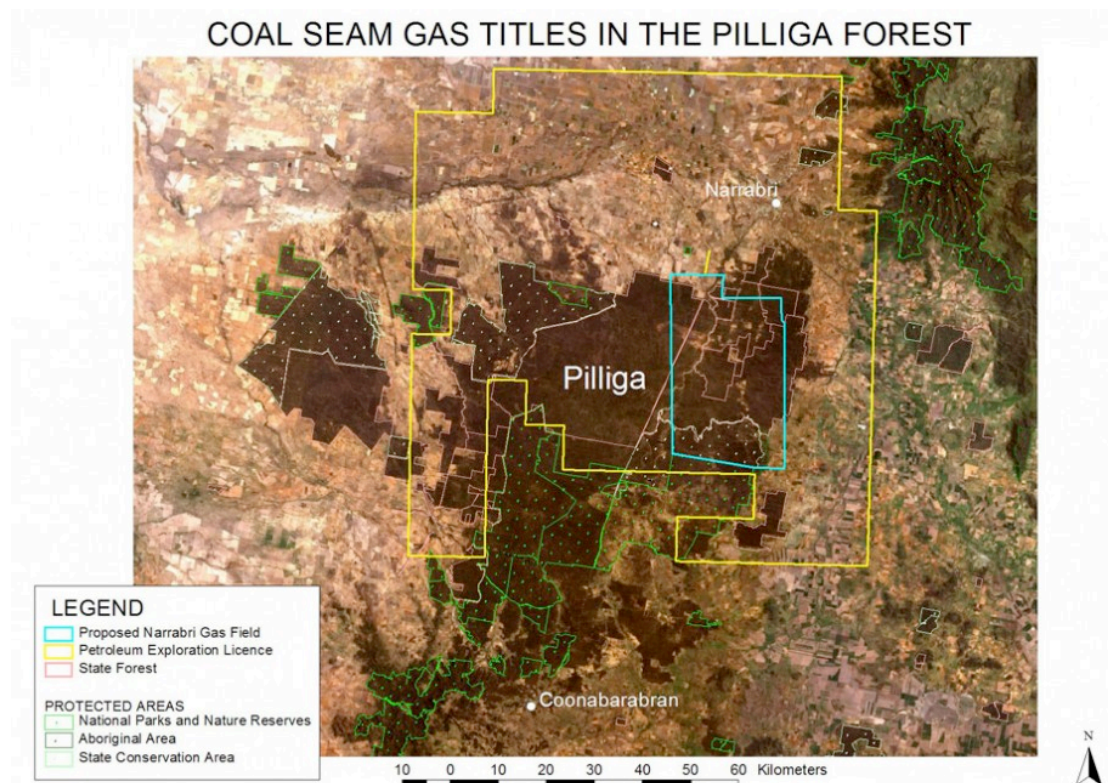


## Submission to The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012 -

I submit my arguments against the devolvement of environmental protection powers from the federal to individual state governments below.

- Past experience has shown that state governments cannot be trusted to protect unique natural assets. Some examples:- The battle in the 1980's to save the Franklin River; the Tasmanian government sought to create a hydroelectric scheme by drowning the river and an entire ecosystem. Still in Tasmania, the ongoing battle over the extraction of timber products from ancient iconic heritage forests, where the government has been unable to take a dispassionate, arm's length view of its natural assets. In Western Australia, international mining conglomerates together with the government are colluding to evade EPA assessments in order to speed up the establishment of an industrial complex at James Price Point. This will probably require the intervention of the federal government to achieve a satisfactory environmental resolution. In Queensland the state government is intent on expanding Gladstone Harbour port facilities to increase the volume of coal being exported from Australia via the Great Barrier Reef in addition to, for instance, the gas processing plant at Curtis Island. Clearly federal oversight will be necessary to avoid potentially massive destruction, as well as fulfilling Australia's international obligations to preserve and maintain this world heritage listed area. In Victoria, had the federal government not intervened, today we would be witnessing the conversion of Victoria's alpine parks into cattle paddocks. One can theorise whether the catastrophic introduction of the cane toad by the Queensland government in 1935 would have gone ahead if this project had been subject to federal oversight.
- State governments have agendas that seek to achieve internationally recognised positive credit ratings by instituting drastic cuts to their expenditure. These governments place environmental values (which are not quantified in currently accepted accounting practices) low in their agendas. Examples of this are the reduction in numbers of park rangers and financial support for scientific staff equipped to manage and understand current trends in the changing environment. This loss of knowledge and experience at a state level will have dire impacts in the future. Since many natural assets span state and regional borders, it is beholden on the federal government of Australia to take on these responsibilities. An outstanding example of the success of a federal overview is the federal government's recently promulgated network of marine reserves. This system is not only unique worldwide, but has been internationally recognised. No state government in Australia would have had the foresight or power to withstand parochial and commercial interests to declare marine parks within its jurisdiction. In addition, to be truly effective, these marine refuges needed to be created in all coastal and offshore areas of Australia to protect marine animals and provide sufficiently large breeding grounds to enable fishing stock the opportunity for regeneration into the future.
- The world's thirst for lower emissions energy has seen explosive growth in exploration and mining for coal seam gas, notably in inland Queensland and

New South Wales. The companies involved in coal seam gas exploration and extraction are, in great part, international conglomerates whose annual incomes rival those of many countries. An example of the conflicting interests at play between environmentalists, state governments and commercial interests, is in the Pilliga Forest of New South Wales – the largest remaining native forest west of the Great Divide. This forest contains vital habitat for threatened species such as the Pilliga Mouse, Black-striped Wallaby, South-eastern Long-eared Bat, Barking Owl and Koala. However, part of the forest, i.e., around 85,000 hectares, is proposed to constitute a 1,100-well coal seam gas development (see map below).



Local farmers and environmentalists are doing battle with their own duly elected state government and powerful international mining interests. Pollution from the activities may threaten the quality of waters stored in the Great Artesian Basin, as well as destroying a unique forest ecosystem and valuable farmland. No independent, accredited research into the environmental repercussions of such large gas extraction processes has been undertaken in the state government’s rush to progress the project. Lastly, the proposed export terminal at Newcastle will threaten the Kooragang RAMSAR wetland. It is clear that the federal government must be involved to provide clear guidelines for this emotive and highly contested issue.

- Tim Flannery’s recent essay “After the Future” (Quarterly Essay #48, Black Inc., 2012), details and analyses the current wave of extinctions taking place here in Australia. He provides evidence that lack of will on the part of state governments, habitat loss, feral competition, poor land management,

population growth, changing climate and a lack of knowledge and indifference by the general public are all taking their toll in species loss. Flannery looks at public-private interventions as a possible method of fighting the wave of extinctions, particularly giving mention to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. Cooperative projects between federal government and organisations such as the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, and local indigenous populations – where issues are understood and dealt with both locally, but also on a national basis can be dealt with more effectively. Cooperative projects such as the one mentioned by Flannery bring into play the synergies of a nationally focussed federal government with devoted, knowledgeable and caring not-for-profit agencies, resulting in successful outcomes.

- International environmental agreements, e.g., RAMSAR, can only effectively be policed and upheld by a federal government which is able to grasp an overview of the country more effectively than state governments.

25<sup>th</sup> December 2012

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