

Thursday, April 4, 2013

Re: Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 [Provisions].

I support the concept of amending any environmental protection legislation which would allow the Federal Government veto rights of any proposed projects that could adversely affect our environment, despite the possibility of being additional legislation above that which already exists in our states and territories. Recently publicised events in Queensland, regarding inappropriate and rushed approval of exploration and development licences for the CSG industry, has highlighted the need for such Federal oversight. Federal oversight would be welcomed as an additional layer of environmental risk management, a watchdog independent of such negatively influencing factors which may bring short term political or financial State or Territory windfalls.

Submission points:

1. I strongly support the bill and would like to see it passed quickly through the Senate.
2. I am very pleased that the bilateral approval provisions of the EPBC Act cannot apply to coal and coal seam gas developments that impact on water resources, and that there have been some improvements to the exemptions.
3. I would like to see that the exemptions contained in the Bill are minimised, and that key projects, such as the Arrow Coal Seam Gas project in Queensland and Camden in western Sydney, are not exempt from it. Therefore, I would still like to see minor amendments to remove s22 2b) and d).
4. I recognize that there are other amendments that would substantially improve the Bill, that may be required in the future, such as:
 - Amending the Bill to cover all unconventional gas mining, including shale gas and tight gas, and unconventional coal mining
 - Strengthening the role of the Independent Expert Scientific Committee
 - Defining significant impacts on water resources
 - Introducing a set of requirements for the Minister to consider when making decisions on water resource impacts
 - Including a requirement for bioregional assessments prior to approval.

Regards,
Anthony Poutsma