

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012

Monique Filet

I would like to indicate my strong support for amendments to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to prevent the Commonwealth from delegating the approval of proposed actions covered by bilateral agreements to a state or territory to be made.

The protection that the EPBC had provided for places and species of national environmental interest in the past has been significant in protecting these areas. For example, without the powers given to the Commonwealth by this Act, the Commonwealth would not have been able to intervene to protect the Great Barrier Reef from mining exploration, the Franklin River from being damned and numerous other unique Australian landscapes, ecosystems and species.

The need for independent assessment from those done by the states and territories is essential. In Queensland in particular, project approvals are being "fast tracked". The concern about this approval process is the reduction in the amount of assessment, reduced or eliminated opportunity for public comment and removal of most of the legal avenues for review of decisions. Queensland's political system is unique in having no upper house to review decisions made in the lower house and by making extensive use of its powerful State Development Act. This Act is administered by the unelected government position of Coordinator-General (unique to Queensland), a position which has a history of direct political appointments and whose decisions have no judicial review.

Project environmental approval conditions need to be independently monitored and enforced if necessary. How can this be if there is a conflict of interest and the project is built, conditioned and monitored only by the state?

I am deeply concerned that I will see my beautiful state and country slowly mined and 'developed' before my eyes. Without independent assessment and power to intervene given to the Commonwealth by this Act I believe there is a bleak future for our environment and our communities. Our health, safety, wellbeing and economy all depend on protecting our natural environments and biodiversity.

I hope to see the Commonwealth keep the EPBC and hold onto their abilities to intervene to protect our landscapes, species and biodiversity, our national icons.