

The Hon Greg Hunt MP;
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House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Safeguarding our environment under the EPBC Act

The protection of Australia's environment and natural resources is one of our most important responsibilities towards future generations. Recently some politicians, business leaders and media commentators have begun to use the phrase 'green tape' as a derogatory term to describe Australia's system of environmental protection. This is a cause for alarm, as it shows lack of respect for the process, and detracts from the serious work involved in safeguarding our precious natural assets. Australia's system of environmental protection forms a green safety-net to protect the ecosystem services so necessary for our economy and community wellness. Indeed, a strong economy and community are built on the back of the environment, without which the economy and community will ultimately go into decline.

Australia's environmental impact assessment process has been painstakingly built over many years. It is designed to safeguard our environment and ensure that any development meets our obligation, as its current custodians, towards future Australians and the international community.

The notion that the system is creating a large amount of unnecessarily onerous work is in our view misleading. If anything, the fact that the World Heritage Committee is considering placing Australia's greatest natural icon, the Great Barrier Reef, on the List of World Heritage in Danger, indicates that strengthening, not weakening of the system is required.

It is extremely concerning that the Coalition proposes, if elected, to enter approval bilaterals to devolve federal decisions under *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) to state governments. In our view the federal government should retain its important role in overseeing environmental protection around Australia, including for the new EPBC Act trigger for large coal mines and CSG projects that may impact on water resources, and agriculture.

The proposed plan to allow the states full power to approve projects puts in danger the objective assessment of proposals that may adversely impact on nationally and/or globally significant environmental assets.

We therefore call for a commitment from all political leaders participating in the election campaign to:

1. Promise to safeguard the EPBC Act, and not devolve decisions to state governments;

2. Maintain a strong environmental impact assessment process with federal powers to assess projects that have a bearing on national and international environmental assets; and
3. Desist from using derogatory and misleading terms such as ‘green tape’ in the media, and show respect for due process in protecting Australia’s precious natural capital.

From the undersigned Environmental academics and organisations

1. Dr Matthew Currell, RMIT School of Civil, Environmental and Chemical Engineering,
2. Dr Gavin M. Mudd, Environmental Engineering, Monash University
3. Dr Chris McGrath, Senior Lecturer (Environmental Regulation), The University of Queensland
4. Professor Craig E. Franklin, Director of Research Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve, Deputy Head of School, School of Biological Sciences, the University of Queensland
5. Assoc. Prof Clive McAlpine, School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management, The University of Queensland
6. Professor Clive Hamilton, Professor of Public Ethics, Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University, Canberra.
7. Dr Edd Hammil, Environmental Decisions Group, University of Queensland
8. Dr Samantha Hepburn, Associate Professor, School of Law, Deakin University.
9. Wayne Gumley, BSc LLM, Department of Business Law and Taxation, Monash University
10. Dr Isaac Santos, Associate Professor, Centre for Coastal Biogeochemistry Research, Southern Cross University
11. Dr Ruth Lane, Geography and Environmental Science, Monash University
12. Dr Sarah Bekessy, Senior Lecturer, Global Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University
13. Dr Georgia Garrard, School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University.
14. Dr Ascelin Gordon, School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University.
15. Dr Christopher Ives, School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University
16. Dr Tracy Rout, ARC Post-doctoral Fellow, School of Botany, University of Melbourne.
17. Dr Brett Murphy, Research Fellow, School of Botany, University of Melbourne.
18. Dr Beth Crase, School of Botany, University of Melbourne
19. Adj Prof David A Hood AM, Sustainability Leader QUT, National President (2012) Engineers Australia
20. Dr Peter Dahlhaus, Senior Research Fellow, Faculty of Science, Information Technology and Engineering, University of Ballarat.
21. Dr Ross Dwyer, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, School of Biological Sciences, University of Queensland
22. Mr Alex Kusmanoff, PhD candidate, Global Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University
23. Mr Hugh Davies, PhD candidate, University of Melbourne
24. Mr Chris Hallam, PhD candidate, Quantitative and Applied Ecology Group, School of Botany, University of Melbourne.
25. Mr Robert Clemens, School of Biological Sciences, University of Queensland

26. Mr Mathew Hardy, Interdisciplinary Conservation Science Research Group, RMIT Univeristy.
27. Ms Melissa Bruton, PhD candidate, School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management, the University of Queensland
28. Ms Claire Runge, PhD candidate, School of Biological Sciences, University of Queensland
29. Dr Martine Maron, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Management, School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management, The University of Queensland



30. The Sustainable Engineering Society (SENG) National Board.