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17.11.2025

Senator The Hon Murray Watt
Minister for the Environment and Water
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
senator.watt@aph.gov.au

Suggested changes to The Environment Protection Reform Bill 2025 (The Bill)

Dear Senator Watt

We strenuously recommend an amendment to the Bill that ensures that all Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) reports are independently created.

We suggest that proponents pay into a government fund, and the government appoint independent consultants. Only then can truthful, scientifically accurate, unbiased EIS reports be produced. All parties, the public and the proponent can then make submissions that are independently assessed.

This is necessary because the current process is completely flawed.

The way it works now is the proponent handpicks and directly pays consultants to produce the EIS. This delivers an exceedingly long EIS report that downplays or fails to mention negative impacts of the development.

We know of cases where the proponent commissioned an EIS but found it didn't support their development in the way they wanted, so they dumped the report and paid for another consultant to produce a report that did support the development. In other words, proponents know how to game the system to get EIS reports that serve their purpose.

Our organisation lately undertook a horrendous amount of work to respond to an EIS report commissioned by Walker Corporation for the Toondah Harbour Development in Cleveland in Southeast Queensland. The report was over 5000 pages, with numerous appendices. It was impossible to read the whole thing in the timeframe allocated for public comment. Our volunteers spent hundreds of hours reading and compiling comments. We also used our hard-won funds to engage consultants to help us. One expert told us it was the most biased EIS he had read – full of errors, scientific inaccuracies, and padding. The sheer volume of material and poor indexing made the report inordinately difficult to penetrate.

The Toondah Harbour Development should not have even reached EIS stage. Departmental staff advised against its going to EIS, but then-Minister Josh Frydenberg overrode their advice.

The consultancy industry is corrupted by the system. Consultants who stick to rigorous scientific endeavour are simply not engaged.

The other problem is that public submissions are returned to the proponent for comment. The proponent can simply modify the EIS to neutralise objections.

The Bill before parliament perpetuates the old flawed system. We urge you to rectify this and amend the Bill.

We need an open, transparent EIS process that produces succinct reports of integrity and scientific accuracy – in the interests of delivering an efficient, faster process that provides clarity to all parties.

Industry, community and the environment must be served better.

We also ask that you include a climate trigger. Developments that cause harm to the climate should not proceed. A healthy climate is critical for all.

Please close loopholes that allow deforestation to continue.

In closing, please ensure the Bill is fixed to make it fit for purpose. All Australians and the environment depend on it.

Sincerely

Murray Haseler
President, SIMO