

The fox in charge of the hen house



There's no need to read between the lines. The Productivity Commission is openly and actively seeking to implement a systemic conflict of interest within our Federal department.

How?

They want to put together a special list of projects (their priority list), to be progressed by a special group of people (their 'strike' team), who will be supported by a special senior leader (their Coordinator-General) who will maintain their singular focus on getting renewable energy projects to construction as fast as possible.

Their goal is clear. The faster the approvals get through the better. Along the way, environmental integrity regarding the EPBC process is lost and a legacy of environmental destruction is generated.

Think we're being hyperbolic? Let's be really clear about what the Productivity Commission is proposing.

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) is Australia's primary national environmental legislation.

It has onerous eligibility conditions and only comes into play if a project proposes to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance (referred to as a controlled action).

If a project requires assessment under the EPBC due to the scale of environmental destruction required, warning bells **should** be ringing.

Furthermore, unlike much of Australia's state planning legislation which has been changed to ease the path for renewable energy projects, the EPBC Act is a level playing field.

The rules are the same for everyone, and given the significance of the environmental destruction that any controlled action implicates, rightly so.

Not for much longer, if the Productivity Commission gets their way.

Not only will an extraordinary conflict of interest be systemically implemented via their proposed changes to the assessment process (with their special list of projects, expedited by a special team, who are supported by a special senior leader - Recommendations 2.2 & 2.3) but the Productivity Commission also wants to change the EPBC Act itself (Recommendation 2.4).

Most alarmingly, the Productivity Commission wants the EPBC Act changed to “require the minister to consider the needs of the energy transition”. The Productivity Commission states this will allow decision makers to “give weight” to their preferred projects without “overriding protections for the environment”. This is patently false. Overriding environmental protections is the whole reason they want to change the legislation.

The EPBC Act **should not be amended**. It already factors in renewable aims with its requirement for the minister to consider the social and economic impacts of a project.

Furthermore, the **assessment process for the EPBC Act should not be changed**. The costs to our environment are too significant to get this wrong.

We all agree that our Federal departments should be sufficiently resourced and timely assessments made on all projects.

However, the Productivity Commissions' recommendations are tantamount to putting the fox in charge of the hen house. And it's only going to end in one way.

Carnage, at the cost of our environment.