

I begin by thanking you for your attention to this critically important issue. As a member of the Management Committee & public representative of the Environmental Conservation group; Friends of the Forest Inc.

We are a group of self-funded volunteers from all walks of life. We receive zero funding from any other individual or organisation whatsoever & would not even consider receiving funding from any industry or corporation which harms the natural environment.

I say this so that it's clear that our only motive is to advocate on behalf of our native flora & fauna, many of which are now on the trajectory of extinction.

I am writing to respectfully request your opposition to any amendment which will lessen the effectiveness of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

We implore yourself, as a decision-maker, to lead the way in protecting our unique national biodiversity into the future, through the reinforcement of the protections to our natural environment that the EPBC Act was put in place to provide.

We have serious concerns regarding the proposed amendments to the EPBC Act which aim to speed-up the processes required for development approvals.

As you would be aware, the EPBC Act remains one of Australia's only major legal framework for safeguarding threatened and endangered species and the habitats that sustain them.

Its protections are essential for preserving our nation's unique wildlife.

We believe that the weakening of these safeguards would undermine a lifetime of scientific as well as grass-roots community efforts & would erode public confidence in the legislation.

The Act's rigorous assessment process ensures that any development projects are evaluated.

The majority of Australian citizens expect their government to consider environmental stewardship over short-term industrial gains. Lessening the effectiveness of the Act would undermine that trust. We are seeing this happening with Social License being withheld by communities in which corporate interests are conflicting with community interests, especially with regards to environmental issues.

Healthy ecosystems underpin sectors such as tourism, agriculture & fisheries. Protecting them is an investment in our future prosperity & long-term economic values.

The Act also aligns with Australia's commitments under global biodiversity conventions & international obligations. We do not wish to see our international reputation on these issues further damaged.

Any proposal that places industry interests ahead of our valuable biodiversity is unacceptable. Be request any change to the EPBC be performed transparently, with extensive public consultation & subject to a national referendum. Carola Fuentes. President - Friends of the Forest Inc.