



Emergency intervention to stop Gillard's attack on environment laws

Media Release

27 November 2012

Conservation groups and environmental lawyers express strong support for the Bill introduced to the Senate today by Greens Senator Larissa Waters, which would limit the disastrous moves by Prime Minister Gillard to devolve federal environment protection powers to the states.

“This Bill is a vital emergency intervention to protect existing federal laws and prevent Gillard from abandoning environmental and wildlife protection,” said Lawyers for Forests Vice President, Lauren Caulfield

“We need Commonwealth leadership to have these laws strengthened, rather than palmed off to the states, to prevent the worsening of the current extinction crisis,” said Environment Defenders Office CEO and Lawyer, Brendan Sydes.

“Anyone who thinks that the Commonwealth should be able to transfer its responsibility for environmental protection to state governments and supervise at a distance need only have a look at Regional Forests Agreements for an example of how disastrous this approach has been,” said Mr Sydes.

“In Victoria we are facing the extinction of our own wildlife emblem, the endangered Leadbeater's (fairy) Possum, as Premier Baillieu continues to allow the logging of its last forest strongholds,” said Ms Caulfield.

“Devolving powers to the state governments with their appalling track record on environment issues would be a disaster for our iconic wildlife and wild places, including the Leadbeater's Possum.”

“The states have shown many times in the past that they will always put the environment a distant second to short-term economic gains,” said Mr Sydes.

The inclusion of the provisions that this Bill seeks to remove were strongly criticised by Julia Gillard in 1999:

“... In this legislation they have enabled the states and the Commonwealth to now go through a process where, through a bilateral agreement, in future the Commonwealth could say to Victoria — and states with track records of environmental vandalism like Victoria — 'Here, you have the responsibility for the Ramsar wetlands. Here, you have the responsibility for the environmental impacts of a toxic dump,' and just let it happen.”

“In moving to hand over the Commonwealth's environmental powers, she has completely backflipped on those ideals,” said Cam Walker, Campaigns Coordinator, Friends of the Earth.

The moves to weaken environmental protection are as a result of lobbying by the Business Council of Australia – made up of Australia's 100 most influential corporations.

“Allowing the Business Council of Australia to have exclusive priority access to COAG and the government and to push for decisions that could totally undermine federal environmental protection is undemocratic, and has disastrous implications for our precious wild places and animals,” said Mr Walker.

“If MPs care about Australia's wonderfully unique and iconic environment they will support this Bill, and prevent Gillard from abandoning environmental protection,” said Ms Caulfield.

For more information please call:

Brendan Sydes 0439 355 747

Lauren Caulfield 0408 748 939