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Handing over environmental approvals to states threatens nature and business

Australia's national environment groups have warned business and all political parties that handing over federal environment decision making to the states would lead to very high costs for businesses and the environment.

The warning comes after yesterday's Supreme Court ruling that the Western Australian Government's approval of major industrialisation of the Kimberley was illegal. The alliance of environmental organisations has called on all major parties to strengthen national environment laws to ensure state governments cannot approve projects that damage nationally significant areas and put at risk tens of thousands of jobs in tourism, recreation and sustainable industries.

"These poor decisions are a blow to business," said Wilderness Society national director Lyndon Schneiders. "Illegal state government approval of the major industrialisation of the Kimberley has cost major petroleum and gas companies and their shareholders a multi-billion dollar licence to operate. It also cost these companies hundreds of millions of dollars in preliminary works. We have also seen similar outcomes from poor decision making by a previous Tasmanian Government regarding the proposed Gunns pulp mill."

The alliance of environmental groups is warning that a handover of Federal environment decision making to the Queensland Government, which has slashed protection of coasts and catchments draining to the Great Barrier Reef, will lead to major environmental costs for all Australians, and could result in an 'in danger' listing for the World Heritage area.

"While parochial state government decisions will certainly damage Australia's national and World Heritage areas, the economic damage will also be immense," said Australian Conservation Foundation chief executive Don Henry. "Hundreds of thousands of jobs will be put at risk, with the Great Barrier Reef alone generating over \$6 billion dollars annually for the economy and 60,000 jobs through tourism and recreation, more than the whole mining sector in Queensland."

The alliance said its combined million-plus supporters are increasingly concerned by poor decisions by state governments that risk Australia's natural heritage and increase costs for businesses.

"Millions of Australians visit and care about our World and National Heritage areas and threatened wildlife and will not stand by and let businesses or the Federal Government hand over decisions about the future of our national treasures to state governments which have consistently supported the parochial over the national interest," said Humane Society International Campaign Director Michael Kennedy.

WWF-Australia chief executive Dermot O'Gorman said: "We urge all parties to commit to strengthen national environment laws so state governments can't approve damaging projects that risk our environments, our wildlife, and increase costs and risk to businesses."

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