



**ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND BIODIVERSITY LEGISLATION  
THE EPBC ACT 1999 - A FEDERAL ACT UNDER REVIEW**

A once in 10 years review is taking place of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act 1999). The public was invited to comment on a discussion paper which came out in November 2019 – before the worst of the bushfires and well before Covid-19. To be fair, two extensions to the period for comment have been granted.

Cutting green and red tape was always part of the Review, but now, with the desire to get the country back to work as we emerge from the Covid, the Minister for the Environment and the PM have indicated that they will speed up development assessments even before the review is completed.

Aren't we getting things the wrong way round? The EPBC Act is supposed to **protect the environment and conserve biodiversity**. It is beginning to sound as though cutting green tape means giving a green light to proposals for development.

I write from the perspective of the Mosman Parks & Bushland Association, just one example of many similar organisations all over Australia, involved in bush care activities and advocating at a local level for the protection of their local environments.

What is so disheartening for such organisations, is to see their local achievements unsupported at a macro level where the environment suffers at the hands of land clearing, forestry, mining and development.

**What do we want?**

We want to hand on to future generations, an environment that is **at least** as good as the one we enjoy. We should aim for better.

We need to end the extinction crisis. Australia is losing species and their habitat at an alarming rate. What we are not doing deliberately by land clearing, forestry and development, bushfires are finishing off for us.

The Act needs an overarching object that will protect and conserve Australia's environment, its biological diversity, its species, its ecosystems and the land and water that support them.

Climate Change, missing from the 1999 version of the Act, **must** be included in the reviewed version. It is clear from the bushfires, drought and bleaching of the Barrier Reef that the Australian environment is fragile and threatened.

**What we don't want** is a watered-down Act with fewer environmental protections. There is nothing wrong with simplifying procedures and making them easier to understand, but we need to get the laws right and then we need a Federal Environment Protection Agency to ensure compliance and active support for the legislation.

## **Outcomes**

While our attentions are being focused on Covid-19, staying safe, staying afloat financially, staying sane and healthy, we are not paying as much attention to other things that matter. This Review of the Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act is something we can't afford to ignore.

As we emerge from the Covid-19 health crisis, the resuscitation machines will be pumping life back into the economy, into development and getting the country back to work. This will be good, but we can't afford to have our economy put **ahead** of our environment.

During the lockdown our natural places have been a source of sustenance. They are all part of our environment and have a far greater value than can be measured in dollars.

This is not about ideology. It is simply a matter of the Act living up to its name.

Kate Eccles  
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