8 January 2012

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012

Dear Sir or Madam

As a local conservation volunteer, I disagree with divesting federal powers to States and Territories for environment protection and biodiversity conservation, because it would result in poorer, not better, protection and management of the natural areas of Australia.

Historically, Australian States and Territories have focussed on development for State, Territorial or vested interests that have led to vast amounts of land clearing or change of land use. In the process, conservation of natural areas has been dismissed or overlooked which has led to: 1) an appalling and shameful record of species extinction in Australia; 2) isolated pockets of habitat that barely remain viable and restrict movement of species; and 3) widespread invasion of weeds and feral animals for which eradication or management are an enormous cost to governments, landowners and productivity. Nevertheless, some gems of natural areas remain across this nation and in its waters that must be protected by firm and appropriate conservation powers.

Here in Victoria, the Baillieu Government seems intent on continuing the degradation or destruction of natural areas—to name a few: 1) returning cattle to alpine areas—thankfully thwarted so far by a Federal court; 2) logging or 'ecological thinning' of native forests; and 3) virtually unrestricted expansion of development into green wedges and rural zones. I expect to see further environmentally damaging actions should more powers be divested to this State.

The Federal Government does not have the same developmental pressures as the States and Territories and is, therefore, in the best position to keep an overview of national conservation and management of natural areas and their connectivity, but with appropriate incentives or delegation that is accountable to the Federal Government for particular conservation purposes. Two recent and welcome Federal conservation examples are the Marine Sanctuaries initiative and the National Wildlife Corridors Plan, neither of which are likely to have come about if conservation powers were divested to States and Territories.

The Australian Greens Bill to wisely retain Federal powers for environment protection and biodiversity conservation is also welcome.

Australian plants and animals are unique in the world and iconic to this nation—most species exist nowhere else and identify this island continent—they are worthy of protection and the Federal government is the best agency to provide conservation of Australian's unique biodiversity. Therefore, I respectfully request that the Senate find in favour of retaining Federal Approval Powers in this inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2012.

Yours faithfully

Nina Earl