RESPONSE TO SENATE REFERRAL OF THE EPBC AMENDMENT (RETAINING FEDERAL POWERS) BILL 2012 FOR INQUIRY

I strongly support the passing of Senator Larissa Water's Environment Protection and Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012 for the following reasons:

1. Adopting this amendment will complement previous and current Australian government initiatives which reflect its commitment to slow global warming and protect the environment. These include

   -introducing a carbon tax on mining giants

   -Extending the no- take zone on the Great Barrier Reef

   -introduction by the Dept. of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency of a tax deduction for growers establishing forests for the dedicated purpose of absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere

   -Government rebates for installing solar panels on roofs (*wrong time to reduce rebates*)

   -home insulation scheme which has reduced the electricity consumption on thousands of Australian homes

2. My concerns are:

   a) Our current Queensland State government in its short term of office has shown utter contempt for environmental protection. It has to date

   -repealed environmental audits for new homes

   -announced plans to repeal laws that require all new homes to have rainwater tanks and gas, solar or heat pump hot water systems

   -reduced payment to Queensland households for solar electricity generation fed back to the grid from 44c per kWh to 8c per kWh.

   - Weakened environmental safeguards in the State Coastal Management Plan so that environmental safeguards which were once specified as requirements have now been downgraded to guidelines.

   – tightened criteria for declaring a privately owned block of land a Nature Refuge -

   -introduced a bill into state parliament to amend the Nature Conservation Act in order to allow commercial developments in national parks.

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b) The minutes of the COAG meeting in Canberra on the 7th Dec. whilst noting that it will introduce legislative reforms 'to further streamline and strengthen environmental legislation ' goes on to say 'COAG is committed to continue work to streamline environmental legislation that delivers strong environmental outcomes and *better conditions for business ' and to avoid…delayed approval processes.'*

Legislating to strengthen environmental legislation must have as its sole concern the protection of the environment. As I write, unprecedented (since records began in Australia) high temperatures are being recorded Australia wide and fires rage across four states. Protection of the environment has two critical roles: carbon sequestration, and ensuring the biodiversity of our amazing, precious and sometimes unique wildlife. It CANNOT be weakened to boost the confidence of miners and developers and it is inappropriate to reform the EPBC act to provide better conditions for business and avoid delayed approval processes. Is 'streamlining' a code for circumventing rigorous and detailed environmental safeguards??

The Federal Government's own chief Scientist has determined that 'carbon sinks can be the plant material above ground, below ground(roots) and soil that is enriched in carbon by dead plant material' It follows that as many natural areas as possible be protected under the EPBC Act , not just remnant vegetation and old growth forests.

c) Our new local council shortly after election cleared vast tracts of mangroves on the town reach of the Mary River. It went on to clear stands of mature trees and undergrowth from the Hervey Bay Foreshore. The council did not embark on these projects with a formal process of community consultation. State Department of Fisheries approved the removal of mangrove from the Mary River bank. Urgent letters to council to immediately cease the Hervey Bay foreshore clearing remained unanswered for 40 days while clearing continued and a petition with 2000 signatures to stop the clearing has been ignored. *There were no regulations (except for federal legislation on remnant forest) either federally or on a state level to which opponents had recourse. We were advised by a state government minister that 'works undertaken by council officers do no contravene the State Planning Regulatory provision for Coastal Protection'.*

In view of my real concerns and the commitments made by government with respect to addressing climate change, I support Larissa Water's Bill to ensure that Federal powers remain Federal on matters of environmental protection .

Ruby Rosenfield