Australasian Wader Studies Group

Joan Dawes
Conservation Officer

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

By email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to you as the Conservation Officer of the Australasian Wader Studies Group, a special interest group of BirdLife Australia, regarding the Committee's investigation into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012 (the Bill).

I wish to express the AWSG's strong support for the Bill. Australia needs robust environmental protection legislation, and any weakening of the existing system represents a grave threat to environmental protection. We need the Federal Government to uphold and strengthen environmental assessment standards to protect our environment. If the Federal Government delegates its approval powers under the EPBC Act to the States this will seriously dilute the effectiveness of federal legislation as an enforcement mechanism which has played a critical role in protecting matters of national environmental significance for many years. I would like to emphasise the following points:

- Environmental issues largely transcend State boundaries and require national leadership.
- State governments are by their very nature unsuited to assess development proposals in the national interest, and have a history of prioritising short-term profits and political interests over the environment. Short-sighted development proposals have threatened Australia's natural heritage several times in the past and the Federal Government has stepped in to prevent irreversible harm to some of our most iconic landscapes as well as important habitat for protected species.
- It is also important to recognise that delegating the environmental responsibility for major development approvals to the States will mean that there is insufficient federal control over matters that impact directly on the Australian Government's international environmental treaty obligations relating to threatened species, migratory species, wetlands and world heritage areas.

For the above reasons we submit that it will never be appropriate for the Federal Government to hand over their federal approval powers to the States, and strongly support the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012.

Yours sincerely,
Joan Dawes
Conservation Officer,
Australasian Wader Studies Group