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Labor's shock hand back of environment laws to states poses integrity, water, environment risks

Labor's environment laws look set to fast-track development, whether it's mining, fossil fuels or housing developments, by handing approval powers back to state governments who have shown they can't be trusted to protect the environment or listen to communities.

Community and environment groups from around the country have expressed shock and anger that the reforms as currently drafted go beyond failed attempts at state devolution by previous Coalition governments, which were strongly resisted by the environment movement and Federal Labor at the time.

Handing approval powers back to state governments creates a major integrity issue and poses genuine corruption risks:

1. States like NSW have had [high profile corruption findings](#) in the past related to decision-making around mining developments;
2. Jurisdictions like the Northern Territory [have very weak lobbying rules](#) and little protection against undue influence on government decision makers.

The reforms will also hand the 'water trigger' back to state governments for decisions, putting waterways, groundwater and agriculture at even greater risk from coal and gas fracking projects.

Carmel Flint, National Co-Coordinator at Lock the Gate Alliance said, "Wholesale handback of environmental decision-making to state governments will allow rural communities, farmers and Traditional Owners to be railroaded by corporate giants, whether it's for coal mining or renewables or critical minerals.

"This has been sprung on the Australian people without public consultation, even as big corporations have been in close discussions with the Federal Government for months. It's a betrayal of Australians who depend on the government to protect our natural resources for the good of all."

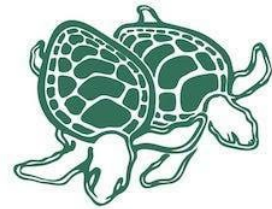
Kirsty Howey, Executive Director of the Environment Centre NT said "Integrity experts have said that the Northern Territory's lobbying laws are the [weakest](#) of all jurisdictions."

"This reform could leave the Northern Territory's spectacular landscapes at the whim of an NT Government which has been systematically dismantling environmental protections, and has become a [national laughing stock](#) when it comes to [regulation](#). To hand over power to the NT Government isn't just reckless, it's a betrayal of communities and a major corruption risk".

Martin Pritchard, Executive Director of Environs Kimberley, said "In the Kimberley, the water trigger is crucial to ensure that gas fracking doesn't pollute our rivers and drain our precious springs and groundwater. Handing these decisions to state and territory governments would be a terrible step backward and Minister Watt needs to make sure it doesn't happen under his watch."

Environment Centre NT

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Matt Roberts, Executive Director of the Conservation Council of Western Australia, said:

“The recent North West Shelf approval shows how deficient WA state processes are. Minister Watt highlighted that the WA EPA was constrained under the limited scope of the state framework and made decisions without full clarity and consideration on the volume and impact of emissions. Greenlighting further approvals under the deeply flawed WA framework, which has just enabled one of the most polluting projects in the Southern Hemisphere to continue operating until 2070, would be reckless.”

“Time and time again we see stronger federal conditions for WA projects highlighting the deficiencies of the state environment laws and processes reflective of a state captured by mining oil and gas interests.”

Shani Tager, Senior Campaigner, 350.org Australia said “These proposed reforms will facilitate and fast-track some of the most polluting coal and gas projects in the world, which will make it impossible for Australia to meet climate targets.

“As Australians struggle right now with the devastation of extreme heat and our landscapes and wildlife are hit with increasingly severe wildfire risks, it is completely unacceptable for our Federal Government to wash its hands of action on the biggest climate threats like this.

Dave Copeman, Director of the Queensland Conservation Council said, “Nearly every major successful environmental campaign in the country that has secured wins for nature in the last two decades has relied upon some form of federal accountability under the EPBC Act – think Toondah Harbour, Traveston Crossing Dam, James Price Point.

“The Queensland LNP Government just jammed through laws exempting planning decisions on Olympic venues from all Queensland environmental and cultural heritage laws, there’s no way they could be trusted with EPBC decision making.

Bronwyn Opie, Director, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, said “Handing decision-making on environmental assessments to the state and territory governments would be catastrophic in Queensland. We would have lost the precious shorebird habitat at Toondah harbour if this law had been in place.”

Leanne Minshull, co-CEO of The Australia Institute said “The political opportunity for strong environmental action under this Labor government, in this Parliament, is huge, but it can only be grasped if our federal government entrenches its responsibility, not abrogates it to the states.”

Statement sent on behalf of:

Lock the Gate Alliance, Environment Centre Northern Territory, Conservation Council of Western Australia, Queensland Conservation Council, Environment Victoria, Environs Kimberley, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, Arid Lands Environment Centre, 350.org, Australian Youth Climate Coalition, Friends of the Earth, Beyond Gas Network, The Australia Institute.

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