

Labor Environment Action Network

Environment Laws for the 21st century

STRONGER, SMARTER, SIMPLER



With thanks to the Australian Museum for use of John Gould's images of extinct Australian animals. In order of appearance: Nail-tailed kangaroo, Philip Island parrot, Beautiful parakeet, Robust zosterops, Philip Island parrot, Arthur Streeton - Sassafras 1926, Hare kangaroo, Central Wallaby, Thylacine.

Thanks to the Chifley Research Centre for its early collaboration on this project.

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AUSTRALIA'S ENVIRONMENT IS IN TROUBLE

Australia's unique natural environment matters to us. The amazing continent on which we live is a source of pride. Its koalas, platypus and emus are embedded in the national identity.

Governments have a responsibility to defend the community's interest by properly looking after the natural environment. Australians are right to expect this – but they are wrong to assume it.

All key indices of the natural world – including native species, pests and weeds, soils and protection of freshwater are being degraded at an alarming rate. They are all worse than they were when the current Federal environmental management regime was created, almost twenty years ago.

This isn't a coincidence. Australia's current approach to environmental management is based on laws and institutions which don't effectively protect Australia's natural heritage.

Fixing this is Labor's historic task.

LABOR'S ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACY

Labor has a proud history of protecting environmental icons: the Daintree, the Franklin River, Kakadu, Tasmania's forests, NSW wilderness, Cape York, Australia's marine parks.

Labor also has a history of being at the forefront of systemic thinking about environmental management. The Whitlam Government enshrined the Commonwealth's role in environmental management by embracing international treaty obligations. The nation's first Environmental Impact Inquiry was an early attempt at environmental assessment and established that sand mining on Fraser Island was untenable.

The Hawke Government explored systemic approaches such as Ecologically Sustainable Development, inspired by the Brundtland Report and established institutions such as the Resource Assessment Commission which began to test approaching key resource debates in a holistic manner.

It is time for us to re-apply ambitious system based thinking to protection of natural heritage.

CURRENT ENVIRONMENT LAWS

Australia's current Federal environment legislation, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*, which has governed the environment for nearly twenty years was written by the Howard Government.

At the time of its establishment, Labor Environment Shadow Minister, Kelvin Thomson said, *"Although it might be the largest environmental bill introduced into the Parliament, it is neither comprehensive nor fundamental reform"* (HoR, 29.6.99).

Julia Gillard described it as a *"hastily cobbled together legislative nightmare"* (HoR 29.6.99)

The Australian Conservation Foundation, the Wilderness Society and Greenpeace said at the time, *"Any Senator who votes for this unacceptable legislation in its current form will be supporting the degradation of Australia's environment"*. The Wilderness Society said the laws, *"will take national environment protection back to the sixties, not into the new millennium"*.

Good Labor Environment Ministers have, none-the-less managed to deliver many proud environmental outcomes, regardless of the limitations of the laws.

However in their current form, the laws fail to deliver a systematic approach to protection of Australia's environment.

The current laws are:

- too species-based, not protecting and sustaining natural systems
- often too complex, slow and costly. This locks out local communities and innovative businesses, instead favouring deep pockets – it is now one of the most unwieldy and often amended Acts of our Commonwealth Parliament. The Institute for Public Affairs reports that Federal environmental laws and regulations run to 4, 669 pages.
- too reliant on co-operative federalism with no one level of Government having clear responsibility for halting environmental decline
- too narrowly focussed on the conditions for approving or refusing projects, without a framework for accountable, active protection and management of the environment

And they are nothing like ready for the natural heritage challenges that climate change will bring.

It is time for a new generation of environmental laws and institutions. Laws fit for the 21st century. Labor committed to this at the last election. It is in the Platform too. It is time for us to embrace and progress this task.



THE PROBLEM DESCRIBED

The **2016 State of the Environment Report**, an overview of the health of the national environment produced by the Australian Federal Government every five years, concludes:

A number of key challenges to the effective management of the Australian environment remain:

- *An overarching national policy that establishes a clear vision for the protection and sustainable management of Australia's environment to the year 2050 is lacking. Such a program needs to be supported by*
 - *specific action programs and policy to preserve and, where necessary, restore natural capital and our unique environments, taking into account the need to adapt to climate change*
 - *complementary policy and strengthened legislative frameworks at the national, state and territory levels*
 - *efficient, collaborative and complementary planning and decision-making processes across all levels of government, with clear lines of accountability.*
- *Poor collaboration and coordination of policies, decisions and management arrangements exists across sectors and between different managers (public and private).*
- *Follow-through from policy to action is lacking.*
- *Data and long-term monitoring are inadequate.*
- *Resources for environmental management and restoration are insufficient.*
- *The understanding of, and capacity to identify and measure, cumulative impacts is inadequate, which reduces the potential for coordinated approaches to their management.*

Meeting these challenges requires:

- *integrated policies and adaptive management actions that address drivers of environmental change and the associated pressures*
- *national leadership*
- *improved support for decision-making*
- *a more strategic focus on planning for a sustainable future*
- *new, reliable sources of financing*

LEAN AND ENVIRONMENT LAWS

The Labor Environment Action Network is a group of Labor members and supporters who care for the environment. LEAN celebrates Labor's environmental legacy and campaigns to ensure environment is central to Labor's future.

LEAN is committed to ensuring Federal Labor is in a strong position to deliver world leading environmental legal and institutional reform when next in government.

A coalition of major environment groups including the Wilderness Society, the Australian Conservation Foundation and WWF is advocating for this reform. This community coalition, called "Places You Love" has been supporting a group of senior environmental lawyers, academics and former judges to produce detailed work on the issues and their resolution.

Labor's commitments at the last election were strong (see Appendix). Based on these, LEAN has established a project called *Environment Laws for the 21st century*. The project hopes to:

- engage the Labor Party and labour movement about the scale and urgency of the problem for our natural heritage and the options for Federal reform to solve it.
- identify the distinctively Labor elements of the challenge and articulate the connection between Labor's legacy of environmental protection and this new task.
- discuss the issues with stakeholders in the wider Australian community - in order to learn more about the details of the problem and gain insights into elements of the solution, and to build a

broad base of genuine support for change

- support the Federal Parliamentary Party in design of new laws and institutions

The key principles for legislative design and implementation are simple:

- **Federal leadership and responsibility** for proactive environment protection
- Clear and robust terms for **Federal development approvals**
- Principles of democracy and **protection of rights for civil society** involvement in environmental matters

The key principles for institutional change are equally clear:

- Genuinely **national institutions** that hold all levels of government, as well as individuals to account
- **accountable** to ministers and acting based on evidence
- with the **expertise, resources and mandate** to work with states and territories to improve the state of our environment over time.



MAJOR LEGISLATIVE CHANGE

Federal environment laws do two things:

1. Create the processes for assessment and approval of development proposals
2. Set goals and processes for the proactive management of the health of the Australian environment

Within the current Federal environment regime, most of the focus is on the first of these. Most of the environmental decline occurs because of the failure of the second.

There are three key design priorities for improving the laws.

- **Federal leadership and responsibility** for pro-active environment protection
 - Clear and robust terms for **Federal development approvals**
 - Principles of democracy and **protection of rights for civil society** involvement in environmental matters



FEDERAL LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY for environmental protection

When the Constitution was written, environment wasn't on the agenda. But the High Court has consistently supported broad ranging Commonwealth powers relating to the environment.

Major legislative change – whether in the form of a new Environment Act or through major amendments to the EPBC – should enshrine Federal leadership in management of Australia's environmental health. The Federal Minister should be made responsible for improving the state of our environment – and given the tools to do the job.

The existing powers for the Commonwealth to act rely on the concept of threats to “matters of national environmental significance” (MNES). This is reactive in its nature and denies the Federal Government effective authority to actively protect and manage whole systems and indicators. Further, the current “matters” are all important but there are gaps in this framework.

New laws require a stronger framework for Commonwealth action – either by re-building the MNES to reflect a system wide approach or using an alternative systemic framework such as the well-established categories and indicators identified through the *State of the Environment Report*.

These should support a clear mandate for the Federal Government to lead high level, goal and target oriented plans to address each of the key indicators of environmental health.

The Federal Government should look at the state of our rivers across the country, developing an approach for improving the dire state of our fresh waterways. It should consider our pollution regimes - Australia allows many toxins that most other developed countries have banned but there is no leadership to address this in a systematic way. It should take a national and interventionist approach to Australia's return to being a global deforestation hot-spot. This threatens Australia's biodiversity more than any other activity and currently the Federal Government plays no direct role in its regulation. Our marine systems, our coasts, patterns of bushfire, invasive species, our urban environments should all have national data, plans and approaches to improve our environment.

These plans would clearly identify Federal, state and local government responsibilities in the delivery of these outcomes. Nationally consistent bioregional plans would support these and provide the landscape scale picture and approach which is essential to halting decline. Bioregional plans represent the engine room for the reforms, allowing the federal government to bring the entire country into one manageable framework for environmental accountability.

Clear and robust terms for Federal DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS

Development Proposals which trigger Federal oversight could sit within these broader plans and objectives and be assessed against the consistent, nationally agreed environmental categories. Rather than the current approach where each development is considered in isolation and the interrelated and cumulative impacts ignored.



Principles of democracy and PROTECTION OF RIGHTS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY involvement in environmental matters

Civil Society rights in environmental matters must be reinstated.

Labor's ground breaking systemic environmental assessment legislation in Australia, such as Neville Wran's Environmental Planning & Assessment Act of 1979 had community participation as a central concept. This was seen as essential to adequately protecting the community's interest in contestation about public resource exploitation and land use. This meant mandated community involvement in decision making processes as well as the right to challenge decisions and compliance failures in the courts. This fundamental concept has been eroded over time.

Community rights will be re-instated as well as ensuring that Federal environment institutions are empowered and resourced to deliver robust compliance and enforcement.



Deforestation Nobody's problem

Tree clearing and habitat destruction is the single largest threat to Australia's environment. Habitat loss is the key cause of extinctions. Tree clearing is a major contributor to escalating climate change.

Tree clearing laws having been dismantled in both Queensland and NSW over recent years, leading to Australia once again being listed with Brazil and Indonesia as international deforestation hot-spots. 300,000 hectares were cleared in 2014/15 in Queensland, releasing 36 million tonnes of carbon.

Who is responsible?

There are a number of telephone book sized reports, from 1996 onward that catalogue the problem and

commit both state and Federal government to halting tree clearing and deforestation. The Native Vegetation Framework of 2012 is a COAG document that commits Australian governments to "Increase the national extent and connectivity of native vegetation". It echoes numerous other inter-governmental agreements.

The commitments are not being delivered.

Most recently, in response to the threats facing the Great Barrier Reef, the state and Federal governments made a string of commitments to the international community.

On tree clearing, the joint governments committed to: ***Strengthen laws to stop the destruction of trees in Reef catchments and deliver no net loss of wetlands and riverside vegetation in Reef catchments.***

Since that commitment was made to the international community, 108,000 hectares of bush was lost in Reef catchments in 2014-15 and almost 15,000 hectares of riverside vegetation was bulldozed in Reef catchments, leaving 1300 kms of riverbank vulnerable to soil erosion.

Legislative and institutional change is needed to ensure we actually deliver these commitments and comply with our international obligations.

Protected Areas Maximising outcomes with cooperation

Australia has nearly 18% of its land in protected areas, managed for nature conservation.

This includes:

- National Parks which are mostly managed by state governments but some by Federal government.
- Indigenous Protected Areas which are managed by indigenous owners with support from the Federal Government.
- Private land managed for conservation managed by both large-scale players such as Australian Wildlife Conservancy and individuals who covenant their land for nature.

Currently state and Federal Governments have their own completely separate criteria for establishment of protected areas. Although often contiguous protected areas owned by state, Federal or private players are managed separately.

Legislative and institutional change is needed for a national approach to be adopted and administered. This would allow for this amazing resource to be managed, built and grown in a coordinated fashion – avoiding duplication and focused on maximising outcomes.

MAJOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The current institutions that support the legal framework are not fit for purpose. They are unable to protect the community's interest in a healthy Australian environment.

This project will be testing the idea and potential scope of an Australian Environment Protection Agency, a tough independent watchdog.

A science-fuelled, politically empowered EPA could be tasked with ensuring the ambition of pro-active protection is delivered. Working to clearly mandated goals the EPA would lead the delivery of this bold new approach.

Reformed institutions will need to:

- Lead the development and implementation of national plans and strategies, with clear accountabilities.
- Build a repository of data, working with the states, developers and other holders of data to build a comprehensive basis on which to make decisions.
- Run the process for planning and development applications ensuring they are robust and independent and fit within the relevant bioregional plans and the national plan(s).
- Have wide powers to monitor and enforce compliance. This would be a pro-active role.

Who decides

Transparency, robust science and clarity are key in the new decision making regime associated with development approvals.

The responsibilities and decision making powers of state and Federal Governments and their agencies to be made clear. As well as the relationship between Federal Minister and the independent EPA in decision making processes. Options for Federal decision making approaches include:

- Decisions are supported by a transparent, public report by the independent EPA with Minister to make the final decision based on this advice.
- EPA makes a decision on basis of transparent, public report over which the Minister can intervene.
- A mix with different levels of decision making sitting with Minister, EPA or other bodies as appropriate.



SECURING AN ECONOMIC ASSET

The current environment laws are a source of conflict. For business proponents, critiques of the development assessment processes include:

- lack of clarity of expectations at the outset
- duplication, with different criteria at the state and Federal level.
- delay and uncertainty created by duplication and shifting expectations

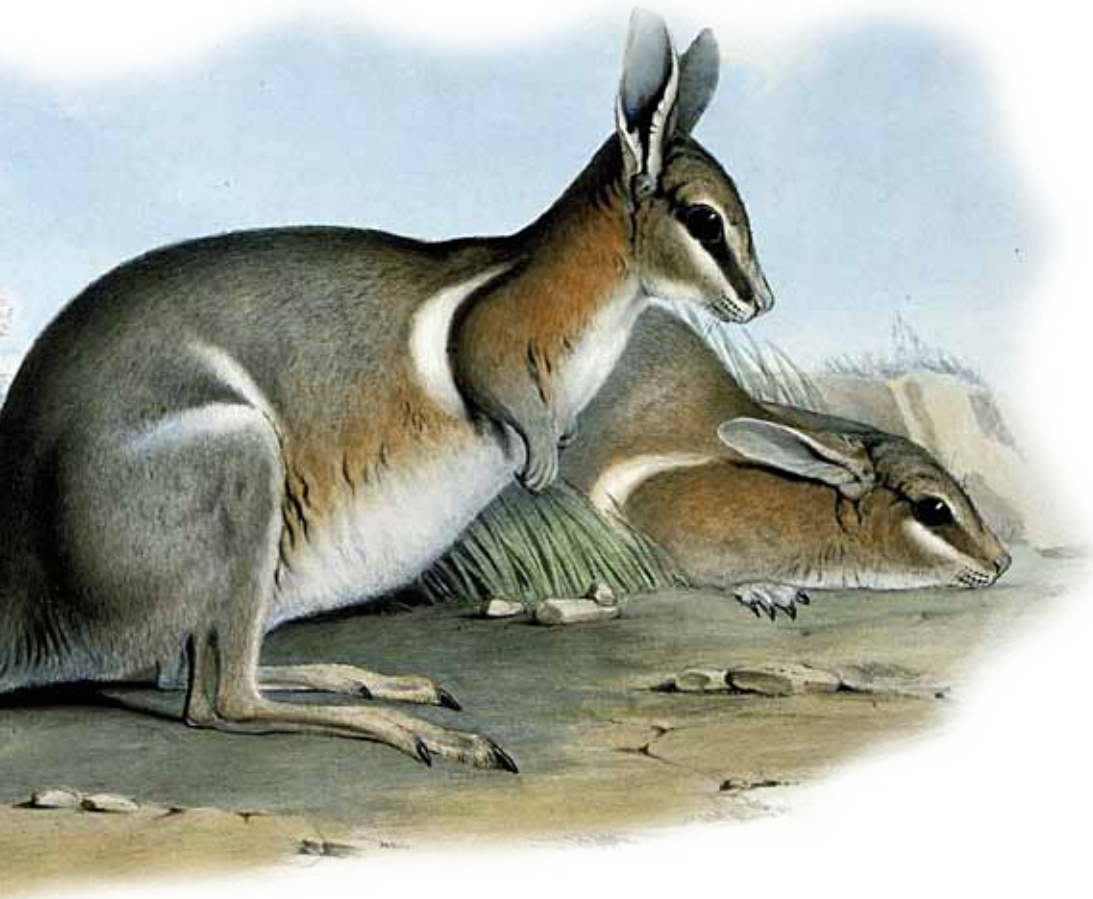
Another impact on the economy is the increasing loss of faith in the community in the current environmental protection regimes. “Law-fare” and on-ground protest are fuelled by what are perceived as weak and inadequate environment laws. This is not in the interests of individual development proponents or the reputation of Australia as a place to do business.

Key attributes of a Federally led approval process would be:

- Clarity and transparency of criteria and process
- Proponents would know exactly what was expected through a single, Federal lead process

- Early advice would be available to proponents that set out the chances of success and the pathway for assessment. Assessment processes would match the complexity of the environment issues at stake, made clear from outset.
- The EPA would lead the assessment process and ensure its integrity

Labor also asserts the importance of environmental health to the functioning of the economy. Failing to proactively protect natural assets delivers long term costs to the economy well beyond project by project considerations.



APPENDIX

LABOR'S COMMITMENTS TO NEW ENVIRONMENT LAWS

Labor's Election Commitment, 2016

Labor understands that the environment isn't an impediment to our prosperity, it's an asset that underpins it. That is why a Shorten Labor Government will strengthen the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and improve the policy architecture that underpins environmental protection in Australia.

Since the Abbott-Turnbull Government came to power in 2013, environmental policy and the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act have been under attack, threatening our environment and our prosperity. The Liberal Government's policy to hand over federal environmental approvals to the States and local councils has created uncertainty and dysfunction. The so-called 'one stop shop' is in fact an eight stop shop which has been divisive, complex and controversial, with no public or environmental benefit.

As the most recent State of the Environment Report concluded:

"Our environment is a national issue requiring national leadership and action at all levels... The prognosis for the environment at a national level is highly dependent on how seriously the Australian Government takes its leadership role."

Labor believes all Australian Governments have an enduring responsibility to protect matters of national environmental significance and a Shorten Labor Government will act on this belief.

Labor's plan

In order to improve environmental protection and streamline the environmental approval process, making it more efficient and transparent for developers and the public at large, a Shorten Labor Government will;

- Re-establish the Federal Government's responsibility for protection of matters of national environmental significance.
- Retain Federal Government powers of approval under federal laws.
- Streamline assessment processes with States and Territory Governments to remove unnecessary duplication.
- Develop new frameworks for truly national protection and management of Australia's natural environment.
- Explore options for an independent environment protection structure
- Reinstate the principles of democracy, respect and protection of rights for civil society involvement in environmental matters including funding for Environment Defenders Offices (EDOs).

Labor will convene an expert reference group within the first 100 days of forming government to work in partnership with environmental groups as well as industry to develop the detail of the new environment laws. This group will include environmental law experts, tourism, energy, mining, agriculture and other business groups, unions, community representatives as well as representatives from State and Local Governments.

Re-establish the Federal Government's responsibility for protection of matters of national environmental significance

The Federal Government has an enduring responsibility to protect matters of national environmental significance. Labor has a proud history of national environmental protection laws. These have been instrumental in protecting Australia's greatest natural treasures for decades. Labor will not support handing approval powers under the EPBC Act to State and Territory Governments.

Retain Federal Government powers of approval under federal laws

Since the change of Government in 2013 environmental policy and the EPBC Act has been under attack. The Liberal Government's policy to hand over federal environmental approvals to the States and local councils has created uncertainty and dysfunction. The so-called 'one stop shop' is in fact an eight stop shop which has been divisive, complex and controversial with no public or environmental benefit.

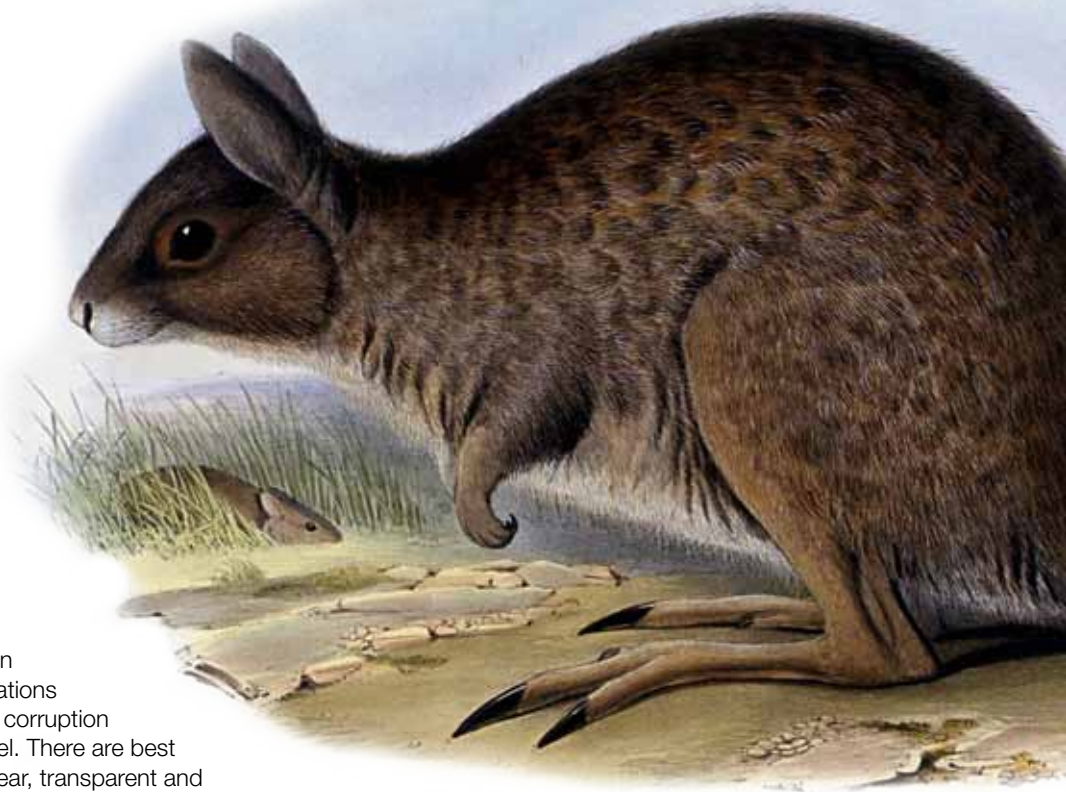
Streamline assessment processes with States and Territory Governments to remove unnecessary duplication

There is no doubt that the current system of environmental assessment and approval is complex and lengthy. For many years now concerns have been raised about the confusion between the role of the State and the role of the Commonwealth, the duplication of process and issues of audit and compliance.

Develop new frameworks for truly national protection and management of Australia's natural environment

Labor will develop new frameworks covering Matters of National Environmental Significance. We will strengthen the protection and management of Australia's natural environment through:

- Improving management, governance and decision making structures and responsibility, including the independence of institutions involved in environmental protection.
- Consistent standards and adequate data for decision making.
- Efficient and certain regulation including streamlined environmental assessment processes.
- Fair and efficient management of Australia's environment as a foundation for ecologically sustainable local jobs.
- Enhancing biodiversity for the benefit of current and future generations.
- Improved resilience in the natural environment.
- Explore options for an independent environment protection structure



There is a growing public demand for greater transparency and independence in decision making following on from accusations and confirmed instances of coercion and corruption around project approvals at a political level. There are best practice examples around the world of clear, transparent and robust decision making through independent structures. A Shorten Labor Government will explore how an independent environmental structure could be implemented in Australia.

Reinstate the principles of democracy, respect and protection of rights for civil society involvement in environmental matters

EDOs have for decades provided expert legal services to a wide range of Australians, including farmers and Indigenous Australians. EDOs unequivocally provide 'frontline' services, and frequently act to ensure that Australian environmental laws are complied with by corporations and governments.

Labor will commit to re-establishing Commonwealth support to all nine Environment Defenders Offices (EDOs).

EDOs play a vital role in general environment protection work as well as providing access to justice for individuals and groups who could not otherwise afford to take on large companies whose proposed actions may have adverse impacts on those individuals and communities. This is particularly the case in regional Australia, where the majority of large-scale projects with potentially adverse environmental impacts are carried out.

There are nine EDOs in Australia: One in each State and Territory, except in Queensland which has an EDO in Brisbane and another in Cairns to service far north Queensland.

Since being elected in 2013 the Liberals have attempted to gag civil society advocates and cut off their access to the courts. Without appropriate resourcing, these groups are left unable to fight the Turnbull Government's cuts and ideological attacks which are impacting the people and places they represent. Stopping community groups, farmers and NGOs

from challenging decisions in the courts is fundamentally undemocratic.

Registered Environmental Organisations contribute to the preservation of our natural environment and to the health of our democracy.

Labor's record

Labor has a strong history of acting to protect the environment. It was Labor who initiated the protection of the Great Barrier Reef during the Whitlam Government. It was the Hawke and Keating Governments that protected the Franklin, Kakadu and the Daintree as well as Antarctica. It was Labor that ended 30 years of conflict over Tasmania's forests and 120 years of disagreement over the Murray Darling Basin. We will continue to act.

Labor will take our proud and solid record of environment achievements and new, strong environmental policies to this election.

The Liberal alternative

The Liberal Government has repeatedly shown that it has little interest in Australia's environment.

The Liberals want to wash their hands of a decades old responsibility to protect environmental assets of national significance by handing over protection to State and local Government. This extraordinary decision would hand over this Parliament's responsibility, for example, to protect the Great Barrier Reef – one of the Seven National Wonders of the World – to State and Local Governments.

The Liberals' disregard for the role of government in protecting the environment can be seen in their decision to defund Environmental Defenders Offices as a way to avoid being held to account on their poor environmental record.

They have also attempted to stop community groups, farmers and NGOs from challenging decisions in the courts.

Since being elected in 2013, the Liberals have attempted to gag civil society advocates and cut off their access to the courts. Without appropriate resourcing, these groups are left unable to fight the Liberals' cuts and ideological attacks which are impacting the people and places they represent.

Registered Environmental Organisations contribute to the preservation of our natural environment and to the health of our democracy.

The Labor Party Policy Platform, 2015 p 63

National Environmental Law

33. The Australian government has an enduring responsibility to protect matters of national environmental significance. Labor has a proud history of national environmental protection laws.

These have been instrumental in protecting Australia's greatest natural treasures for decades.

Labor will not support handing approval powers under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 to state and territory governments.

34. Labor will develop new frameworks for truly national protection and management of Australia's natural resources. This will include:

- Management, governance and decision making structures and responsibility, including the independence of institutions involved in environmental protection;

- Consistent standards and adequate data for decision making;
- Efficient and certain regulation including streamlined environmental assessment processes;
- Fair and efficient management of Australia's environment as a foundation for ecologically sustainable jobs;
- Enhancing biodiversity for the benefit of current and future generations; and
- Resilience in the natural environment.

35. Labor will consider the appropriateness of a climate change trigger in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 and or successive framework, in the context of a comprehensive response to climate change. Labor will consider the appropriateness of a trigger to cover Australia's system of national parks.

Other Policy Commitments relating to Federal Environment Law Reform

"Climate Trigger" to be added to EPBC Change Action Plan Policy Paper, pg 36

WHAT WILL LABOR DO?

Labor will introduce a 'climate trigger' in federal legislation to allow the Commonwealth to regulate broad-scale land clearing to prevent a repeat of the fiasco under the last LNP Government in Queensland.

**“Water trigger” to be strengthened in the EPBC
Media Release, Shadow Environment Minister Mark Butler,
May 24, 2016**

WATER TRIGGER TO BE EXTENDED UNDER LABOR

Labor recognises the importance of, and the community concern about the extraction of gas from shales and tight formations. That’s why a Shorten Labor Government will extend the current Water Trigger to include shale and tight formation gas projects.

There are many parts of Australia that are being explored for new unconventional gas extraction. In recent years, there has been growing concern by environmentalists, farmers and communities about the possible impacts of coal seam gas (CSG) projects and increasingly about shale and tight formation gas projects.

When in government, Labor added a Water Trigger to the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act to cover CSG and large coal mining developments. This ensures that if these projects impact water resources, then they are rigorously assessed under the EPBC Act.

Labor’s policy will extend the protection provided by the Water Trigger to ensure that any shale or tight formation gas developments that impact water resources will also be subject to a full assessment under the EPBC Act and approval from the Minister for Environment; including an assessment by the Independent Expert Scientific Committee.

Through this process projects will be required to put in place systems to protect the environment if required and the concerns of communities in vulnerable regions can be addressed.

Labor wholeheartedly believes it is the responsibility of the Federal Government to protect Australia’s most precious environmental assets. Malcolm Turnbull on the other, hand has such little regard for Australia’s environmental values he’s throwing away this responsibility through his policy to delegate matters of national environmental significance to State and local governments.

Labor will ensure the gas industry operates to the highest environmental standards and will ensure full assessment and management of environmental and other impacts, including on water reserves and co-existence with other agricultural activities.

Labor is the only Party that will take action to ensure new shale and tight formation gas projects are environmentally safe and sustainable with rigorous science-based assessments. That is the only way we can manage environmental impacts and ensure sustainable local economic development.

**Federal oversight of National Parks to be added to EPBC
Media Release, Shadow Environment Minister Mark Butler,
June 16, 2016**

LABOR WILL PROTECT AUSTRALIA’S PARKS

The Abbott-Turnbull Government has spent the last three years undermining the protection of Australia’s environment and Labor won’t let it continue.

Labor will legislate to include a National Parks Trigger in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act to ensure any proposed developments in a National Park would be subject to the EPBC approval process.

Labor’s creation of a National Park Trigger under the EPBC Act will ensure our precious parks stay pristine, while also ensuring investment projects that deliver jobs and prosperity to our rural and regional communities happen in a sustainable and carefully managed way.

The policy will ensure that any development within a National Park (including Marine Parks) will be subject to an assessment by the Department of Environment and approval from the Minister for Environment.

Through this process, any possible risks to National Parks will be identified and the Minister will then have the power to impose specific conditions on projects to ensure the park is protected.

Labor has a strong record of protecting Australia’s environment and that extends to our oceans. The Whitlam Government established the nation’s first Marine Park to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

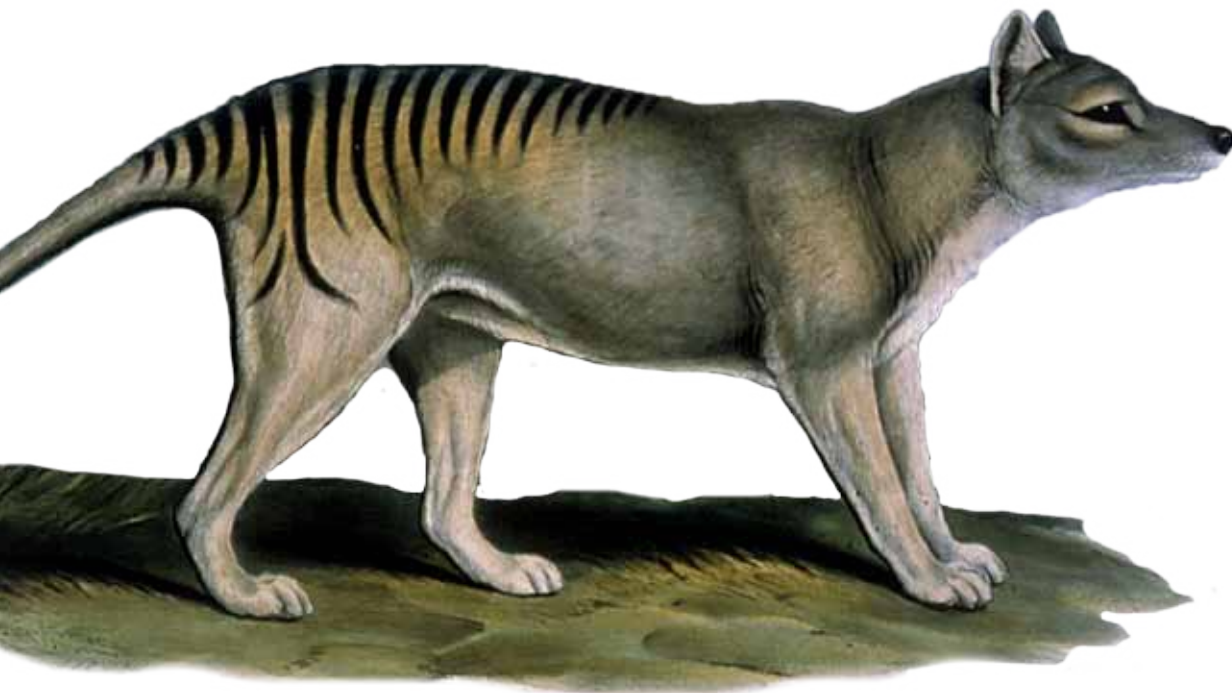
The former Labor Government established Australia’s Marine Park Network: the largest network of marine protected areas anywhere in the world at the time. Unfortunately, the Liberals set aside the management plans for the Commonwealth Marine Parks so that they could conduct a review — a review Labor had already done. Labor has already announced that we will re-instate the Marine Park Network.

Labor’s network of Marine Parks will help to ensure that Australia’s diverse marine environment and the life it supports remain healthy, productive and resilient for future generations.

It is Liberal Government policy to hand federal environmental approval powers over to the States for major project approvals, including in our National Parks.

Labor understands the importance of protecting our environment, especially our National Parks, for current and future generations.

*Labor understands
that the environment
isn't an impediment
to our prosperity,*



*it's an asset
that underpins it.*

2016 LABOR FEDERAL ELECTION POLICY