



Stronger Environment & Planning Laws

Most Australians assume that as a modern first world country, we have strong laws to protect our environment, because that's what the community expects. But sadly that's not the case. A recent Government review has confirmed that Australia's environment is in an unsustainable state of decline and laws set up to protect unique species and habitats are ineffective⁸. The 8 next Queensland Government can change this terrible situation by strengthening our environmental laws to protect and preserve nature.

Suggested policy solutions for the next Queensland government:

- Proactive planning for biodiversity protection: Link threatened species protections to land use planning laws to more effectively protect biodiversity and to make trade-offs between protection of biodiversity and other goals transparent, by requiring that public, landscape-scale environmental assessments that consider cumulative impacts of developments be undertaken to inform all land use planning across Queensland⁹.
- Advocate for stronger national environment laws: Advocate federally for a new national system of environmental protection, including a new Environment Act, and creation of an independent national Environmental Protection Authority. Commit to not entering into 'approvals bilaterals' with the Commonwealth under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth);
- Strengthen environment offset laws: Within the first year of the next term of government, pass amendments to the Environmental Offsets Act 2014 which will ensure that offsets genuinely compensate for the impacts of the approved development
- Strengthen planning laws: Protect the integrity of planning schemes by amending the Planning Act 2016 to allow local governments to prescribe mandatory assessment benchmarks where necessary and provide for more meaningful community involvement in development decision-making, as a check and balance on a developer approval focused planning framework.

- Empower traditional owners to protect land and culture: Support reform of the native title legal framework and the broader legal system to ensure Traditional Owners have the power to reject harmful projects on their country and are supported to meaningfully decide what happens on their land. Strengthen protections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage in Queensland.
- Queensland EPA: Create an independent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to assess, regulate, set standards and collate data on environmental matters in Queensland, ensuring the EPA is not overridden by any other department.

No backwards steps:

- Commit not to weaken the Nature Conservation Act, Vegetation Management Act, or environmental protections contained in other legislation.
- Protect the rights of citizens and civil society groups to challenge projects or actions that threaten our environment by not removing:
 - » third-party submission and/or appeal rights for environmental and planning decisions;
 - » the general rule that each party pays their own costs in the Planning and Environment Court;
 - » Existing rights of public assembly and protest.

For further details on these and other environmental law reforms see Environmental Defenders Office Election Policy.

⁸ <https://epbcactreview.environment.gov.au/resources/interim-report/executive-summary>

⁹ Including: Regional Plans and local planning schemes under the Planning Act 2016; State Development Areas under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971 (SDPWO Act); and Priority Development Areas under the Economic Development Act 2012 (ED Act).