

MEDIA RELEASE

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CRA Calls for Overhaul of Environmental Laws

Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) urges the Federal Government to reconsider its proposed environmental law reforms following an inquiry into a bill that seeks to amend the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

CRA recently lodged a submission highlighting elements of the government's proposed *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Standards and Assurance) Bill 2021 (the Bill)* which will push Australia further towards an environmental crisis if the Bill goes ahead.

On reviewing the inquiry into the Bill, CRA says the recommendations of the Final Report of the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee do not address the many weaknesses of the Bill.

CRA is troubled that the government's proposed Bill 'cherry-picks' from the recent independent Review of the EPBC Act conducted by Professor Graeme Samuel AC. The government's arbitrary selection of recommendations hinders the holistic impact of the 38 recommendations which form an integrally interrelated package of reforms that would strengthen the protection of the environment.

In its submission, CRA expressed concern that the passing of this Bill would ultimately "lock in" new National Environmental Standards that have been drafted by the government, but not released to the public for comment or consultation. Some media sources have reported that these standards are near identical to those of the current EPBC Act, ignoring the Review's recommendations.

"While the Senate inquiry agreed that the National Environmental Standards need to be strengthened, we're concerned that they have allowed for interim standards to remain in place, if Parliament cannot agree," said Anne Walker, CRA National Executive Director.

"This is contrary to strengthening the Standards, which should be implemented so that approval powers for mines and big developments are managed with a focus on genuine environmental conservation, not capital growth," she explained.

CRA President, Peter Carroll FMS pointed out the importance of not prioritising economic growth over the protection of the environment.

"Whilst we understand that, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, the government wishes to balance environmental protection with Australia's economic recovery, we ask the government to acknowledge that the natural world also faces a great crisis from which it may never recover if we do not use this timely review of the EPBC Act to implement measures that will halt and reverse some of the damage already done."

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