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**Nature Reserves Preservation Group
of Kalamunda, Inc.**

20 Nov 2025

TO: Tania Lawrence MP tania.lawrence.mp@aph.gov.au
Trish Cook MP trish.cook.mp@aph.gov.au

CC: Zaneta Mascarenhas MP zaneta.mascarenhas.mp@aph.gov.au

SUBJECT: New Environment Laws Reform Forum with Minister Watt 17 Nov 2025

Dear Tania Lawrence and Trish Cook,

Thank you for inviting NRPG to the forum and we appreciate your invitation to provide feedback and further questions on the briefing by the Minister of the new environment laws Bill. (Note that the NRPG also supports the submission by Dr Alan Hill to the Senate Select Committee Inquiry on the Environment Reform Bill).

The summary notes from the forum are largely intended to preface the further questions (below) which we request to be put to the Minister.

Attendees:

- Fed Environment Minister Murray Watt
- Fed MP Trish Cook
- Fed MP Tania Lawrence
- Nature Reserves Preservation Group, Kalamunda: Dr Alan Hill, Steve Gates
- Approx 25 other people, incl from CCWA, Transition Town Guildford, community

Location: Guildford Town Hall

Summary of Minister Watt's Briefing (not exhaustive):

- 30 recommendations of the 2020 Graeme Samuels Report to overhaul the 1999 EPBC Act: Labor is acting on implementing these.
- Stronger Environmental protection offered under the new legislation - including:
 - Creates first ever independent federal Environmental Protection Authority (will hold big companies accountable for damage, by significant increases in penalties).
 - Creates first ever National Environmental Standards and defines 'unacceptable' damage/projects.
- Timeframe: The new Environmental Legislation passed Lower House and will go to Senate in hopes of getting it through as soon as possible (hoping by end of the year) to avoid minimising damage that continues to happen under the present EPBC. There are senate inquiry hearings happening this week. Hoping to get this passed by end of the year, as it has been 5 years since the Samuels Report raised these serious issues.

- Enviro reform is intended to:
 - Give more certainty and efficiency for environment protection and restoration, business, renewable energy and housing. Part of this includes defining 'go' or no-go' regional and other zones and 'unacceptable impacts', so that time and effort/stress does not need to be wasted on proposals that are most likely to be rejected anyway if they were fully assessed.
 - Increase confidence of the public in robust protection of the environment, while allowing more efficient assessment processes both in time and reduction of duplication. For example, states may assess projects under both state and federal legislation concurrently, but final oversight/decision on federal approval will still have to be through the federal govt/Senate.
 - There are allowances for 'national interest' projects and Labor is still considering how to define these and to ensure adequate checks and balances, which will likely be negotiated with the Senate also.
- Reforms better or worse than EPBC Act?: Talk of the new Enviro legislation being 'a step backwards' is not a fair assessment as there are many positives making it much better, although practical compromises are necessary in politics, including when it goes to the Senate. **(Question asked:** Given Labor wants progressive reform, then why not work with the Greens and progressive Independents (rather than LNP) to get it passed? **Answer:** Because if the legislation is too progressive then a future LNP would have more drive to overturn it, and that would cause confusion and uncertainty for environment and business.

Questions:

Question asked - Offsets: The excessive use of Offsets has been a major flaw in the EPBC Act, and yet it is still included in the new laws along with pay to destroy. How will the new laws guarantee that we do not continue to destroy environment as in the past, considering that pay-to-destroy or fines are just considered part of the 'cost of doing business'? **Answer:** For the first time, a proponent must minimise impacts first, and "improve the environment" if offsets are used.

Further questions for the Minister's consideration and reply please:

- Importance of like-for-like Offsets: Example: Perth 'Airport North MDP' plans to destroy last remaining Bush Forever sites and other high conservation value bushland and wetlands (including MNES, TECs), largely for revenue-driven non-aviation commercial/industrial developments. Currently Airport North bushland appears protected from final development approval by the federal government so far, only because there are no 'like-for-like' offsets other than 80-100km away, and those are considered by DCCEEW to be unacceptable due to distance. Therefore, since the new law's 'Offsets' don't require 'like-for-like' areas, how would it protect this irreplaceable area, as part of what is referred to as the 'Jewel in the Crown of a biodiversity hotspot' by Prof Hans Lambers of the Beeliar Group of Scientists?
- Ministerial discretion and lack of transparency: Allowing discretion by the Minister and inability to hold Minister to account on scientific basis for decisions is a major concern, particularly with a less progressive govt. Why is this loophole allowed, and if it is, can it be very tightly restricted so avoid abuse or misuse?
- Exemptions for prior authorisations "continuations of use" allow continued unsustainable activities such as deforestation/native forest logging how can this be allowed to continue without federal assessment and approval even when these have significant impacts on MNES?

- Alcoa's bauxite mining of the Northern Jarrah forests in WA since 1961 has resulted in permanent damage to the areas mined as none of the 'rehabilitated' areas meet the requirements, nor will they ever because the key component for Jarrah is the laterite/bauxite rock which has been removed. [A Thousand Cuts - Mining in the Northern Jarrah Forests - Conservation Council of Western Australia 2023](#) Alcoa now plans to increase their mining area by about 50% in the next 15 years, and additionally, the recent agreement between Prime Minister Albanese and the US govt includes for Australia to supply gallium via Alcoa's mining. Both bauxite and gallium cannot continue to be mined from our small remaining Northern Jarrah forests as they are under threat from climate change, prescribed burning, Dieback etc. How will the new environmental laws protect our forests from continued permanent destruction, particularly given that they can be considered 'prior authorisations/continuations of use'?
- Concerns raised by the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO): Please confirm that the concerns of the EDO are adequately addressed (particularly as they also deal with legal issues), and if not, which are not addressed and why not?: [EPBC Act reforms make it to parliament – EDO's first impressions - Environmental Defenders Office](#)
- Climate impacts and environmental Legislation: Given that a 'climate trigger' is not intended to be included in the new laws, how will the Net Zero Plan, Safeguard Mechanism and/or other mechanisms work to prevent Australia increasing scope 1 & 2 emissions from new fossil project approvals?
- Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for Methane/gas: Fracking has very different risks compared to conventional gas extraction, because of the large number of wells needed and the marginal economics, which means that poor well completions and monitoring are more likely. Fracking has already been banned in many countries around the world, as well as in the states of Victoria, Tasmania and W Australia. Furthermore, Methane/gas does not necessarily result in lower emissions than coal, when leakage, venting and other losses are considered in the supply chain from well to point-of-combustion, and can be 30% worse than coal. [Gas industry in damage control as landmark study finds LNG 'worse than coal' for the climate - ABC News](#) The UNEP has called for dramatic reductions in Methane/gas emissions through the Global Methane Pledge and swift reductions methane can buy us critical time to reduce CO2 emissions. [Ministers urge decisive methane action as global report shows progress, warns of gaps](#) Australia has signed this pledge, and it is low cost to reduce gas emissions (Ref: Paul Bledsoe, former Clinton White House climate adviser. "It's effective and it's cheap to reduce methane – two-thirds of the reductions needed from the energy sector could be done at zero net cost."). Please confirm that the new legislation will protect Australia (particularly wild places such as the Kimberley and NT) from risks to water, land, pollution and climate from fracking for gas? [Fracking - Environs Kimberley](#)

We trust that Minister Watt will consider the above questions and ensure they are addressed in the new environmental laws.

Sincerely,
 Steve Gates
 Secretary, Nature Reserves Preservation Group
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