



PO Box 1040
Milton, QLD 4064

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Queensland Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 (WLA)

Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee

ipnrc@parliament.qld.gov.au,

Protect the Bush Alliance is an alliance of thirty NGOs and community groups in Queensland and Australia representing over 30,000 people. Our goal is to implement ways of preventing the continuing loss of areas of high conservation values to inappropriate developments. One of the ways we do this is by conducting flora and fauna surveys on properties of high conservation value and on the properties which link them.

On November the 25th 2013, Protect the Bush Alliance (PTBA) was a signatory to a call for a public enquiry at federal level for the protection of Queensland's World Heritage Values, biodiversity and water resources; such was the despair felt by many witnessing the actions of the Queensland Coordinator General's department in granting unfettered access to water to the resource sector in this state. Minister Andrew Cripps asserted, "We're placing agriculture and resources on a more level playing field, improving security for existing water users and striking a sensible balance between growth, the environment and the interests of local communities."

The outcome of those changes left water consumption unquantified and without a fair volumetric charge associated with its use. Any disagreement leaves affected landowners bearing the onus of proof and associated costs when such information should be provided by the companies in a fitting business model where 'user pays', as with every other water user in the country.

A failure to protect scarce fresh water and ancient artesian water will undoubtedly result in significant detrimental impacts on World Heritage properties, National Heritage sites, Ramsar wetlands, listed threatened species and communities and listed migratory species.

PTBA members acknowledge and appreciate the changes that the WLA makes to the Water Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Act (WROLA). However, we remain deeply concerned about the failure to revoke Part 4 of WROLA. To provide the mining industry with a statutory right to take underground water creates the most unequal of playing fields and severely discriminates against other water consumers, particularly the needs of 'Nature'. Further, a failure to revoke Part 4 of WROLA represents a very substantial breach of the promises which the Labor Party made in the lead up to the election, when it promised to '*repeal the Newman Government water laws which will allow for over allocation of Queensland's precious water resources*'.

Part 4 of WROLA if unchanged, will harm agricultural water users and the environment because it:

- Removes the requirement for miners to obtain a water licence for the vast quantities of groundwater that they generally extract during mining operations
- Reduces the ability of the Queensland Government to act transparently to prevent unsustainable levels of water extraction by miners during operations
- Removes the right for adjoining landholders whose water resources will be affected or lost due to the mining operations to challenge the grant of a licence
- Removes the role of the Land Court as final independent arbiter who can rule on appeals against water licences granted to coal miners

PTBA asks what may be considered in the description 'the principle of ecologically sustainable development'. Are the long term effects of this profligate use of water understood by legislators and what may be the serious long term cumulative impacts on the artesian system which has taken millennia to develop? The Great Artesian Basin is a unique and irreplaceable feature which **must** not be taken for granted. There is no level playing field for the environment - who will insist on a make good agreement for the loss of healthy water systems for all of our natural environment?

PTBA would be heartened to see Part 4 of WROLA suitably amended to revoke the granting of statutory water rights to the mining industry. With extractive industries potentially spread across 84% of Queensland, we consider that this liberal use of such a precious commodity, places too great a burden on the water that ensures a healthy life for all living beings and their habitats. We further note the previous financial cost of \$300million to improve the health of the GAB. Unknown factors such as rainfall and prolonged drought periods associated with climate change, would surely dictate immense caution in the delivery of unregulated water to industry.

We thank you for this opportunity to make a submission to committee on this water reform.

Yours sincerely



Sheena Gillman

Project Coordinator Protect the Bush Alliance.
Co-Chair Birdlife Southern Queensland.
Tel: 07 3201 1982
Mb: 0409 268 076