

Comment – Queensland Conservation Council

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Queensland Conservation Council (QCC) is the leading independent voice for the environment in Queensland and the peak body for Queensland's environmental movement. Strong environmental laws are essential for a strong economy. Nationally, nature contributes at least \$138 billion per year of direct economic benefits through nature dependent industries such as food, fiber, water and tourism. While including the value of ecosystem services this could be closer to half a trillion dollars (\$511 billion), 20% of national GDP. As well as ecosystem services, nature provides economic benefits through tourism. For example, The Great Barrier Reef contributes \$9 billion to the economy every year, supporting 77,000 jobs in tourism, fishing and other industries, while the Cape York region alone contributes \$130 billion to the economy annually. As of 2016, around \$3.62 billion is spent each year on nature-based outdoor activities in Queensland. This expenditure makes a \$1.94 billion contribution to the state's economy and supports around 33,500 direct and indirect full-time equivalent jobs. Strong nature laws protect these contributions to the economy.

31 July 2026

Queensland Productivity Commission
Impact of 2025 EPBC Act reforms on Queensland inquiry

Dear Commissioners

Re: Impact of 2025 EPBC Act reforms on Queensland inquiry

About QCC

Queensland Conservation Council (QCC) is the leading independent voice for the environment in Queensland and the peak body for Queensland's environmental movement, representing more than 50 community environment groups and organisations across the state. Since 1969, we have worked to protect, conserve and sustain Queensland's environment.

Introduction

The Queensland Conservation Council welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Queensland Productivity Commission's inquiry into the impacts of the Australian Government's 2025 reforms to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 on Queensland.

As the peak body for environment groups across the state we see first hand the impacts of poor environmental regulations as well as the community and environmental benefits of strong protections. Here in Queensland we are facing the extinction of over 1000 unique species while the impacts of climate change are ubiquitous and ever increasing. The communities we work with and the ecosystems we seek to protect are dependent on strong state and federal laws.

The announcement of the Productivity Commission inquiry was directly linked with a call to fast track oil and gas approvals, risking prejudicing its findings. We urge the Productivity Commission to properly examine the tremendous economic value generated from Queensland's natural environment such as ecosystem services and tourism and in doing so acknowledge positive implications of the reformed federal environment laws.

Dr Ken Henry AC, highly respected former Secretary of the Treasury for Australia and current chair of the Australian Climate and Biodiversity Foundation stated that stronger environmental protections would have a positive impact on the economy by providing clear and effective environmental standards and decision also stating that; "The biggest threat to future productivity growth comes from nature itself; more particularly, from its destruction"¹.

Announcement of Inquiry and Terms of Reference

As the peak body for Queensland's environment movement we are particularly concerned about the timing of this announcement, and its link to a call for oil and gas projects to be fast tracked as part of the "national interest" exemptions within the EPBC act. The Terms of Reference specifically mentions; *"The Queensland Government is leading the nation in taking proactive steps to build sovereign capability and bolster Australia's energy security by unlocking new oil, gas and coal production, including Australia's first oil field in 50 years at the Taroom Trough, for future fuel security. However, the reforms specifically exclude resource projects from the Commonwealth's National Interest Fast-Track Assessment Pathway."*

Linking the Productivity Commission inquiry directly with a call to fast track oil and gas approvals risks prejudicing its findings, suggesting a predetermined outcome. This ignores the massive economic contribution that a healthy environment makes to tourism, agriculture and other industries as well as the role fossil fuels play in causing climate change. We note this may have also had a "chilling effect" on engagement with the inquiry by a number of groups or individuals involved in conservation, as they may have been deterred by the perception of the inquiry working towards a pre-determined outcome.

The assumption that the Federal reforms to the EPBC Act are "slowing down" development mischaracterises both the cause of most delays to projects as well as the nature of the recent reforms. In reality, most project delays are caused by proponents' operational matters rather than issues arising from compliance with state or federal laws. Additionally, the recent reforms to the EPBC Act were explicitly designed to speed up the assessment and approvals process and result in quicker decision-making. Regardless, these federal laws provide an important check and balance to ensure projects that may have impact on matters of national environmental importance are properly evaluated. This separate level of decision-making is crucial to ensuring these matters of national environmental significance remain protected.

Economic value of nature - Ecosystem services

Strong environmental laws are essential for a strong economy, supporting and protecting the water, air and ecosystems we all rely on. We urge the Productivity Commission to properly examine the tremendous economic value generated from Queensland's natural environment and in doing so acknowledge positive implications of the reformed federal environment laws.

Nature and ecosystem services plays a critical role in the economy and our day-to-day lives such as:

- The direct provision of food, freshwater, medicine and raw materials.
- Our forests and waterways are critical for the filtration and purification of water and air.
- Our coastlines, wetlands and forests regulate our climate as well as provide flood and erosion control.
- Animals and insects pollinate plants ensuring healthy ecosystems and productive crops.
- Natural cycles are critical for soil formation and recycling nutrients.

Nationally, nature contributes at least \$138 billion per year of direct economic benefits through nature dependent industries such as food, fiber, water and tourism. While including the value of ecosystem services this could be closer to half a trillion dollars (\$511 billion), 20% of national GDP². As a few examples:

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates Queensland's forests, grasslands, savannahs and mangroves collectively provide \$11.3 billion in value through carbon retention.³
- Mangroves, saltmarsh and seagrass provide an estimated \$400,000 per hectare per year in storm and erosion protection, saving households an estimated \$65 million in annual damages nationally.³
- The environment contributed 10.8 million megalitres of surface water for drinking and use as a material at a value of \$864.³

Many of the benefits we gain from nature for the economy and of daily lives could be considered undervalued, or unquantifiable given our reliance on nature for ecosystem services, health and wellbeing, food, water and shelter. Strong environmental laws are critical for a strong economy and our day-to-day lives, this enquiry must be considered within this context.

Economic value of nature - Tourism

As well as ecosystem services, nature provides economic benefits through tourism. For this Queensland is dependent on a healthy environment. People travel from all over the world to enjoy the state's incredible and diverse landscapes and unique wildlife. All Australians want to see our native species survive and thrive, our waterways stay clean and flowing, and the Great Barrier Reef preserved for future generations.

- The Great Barrier Reef contributes \$9 billion to the economy every year, supporting 77,000 jobs in tourism, fishing and other industries, while the Cape York region alone contributes \$130 billion to the economy annually.⁴
- As of 2016, around \$3.62 billion is spent each year on nature-based outdoor activities in Queensland. This expenditure makes a \$1.94 billion contribution to the

state's economy and supports around 33,500 direct and indirect full-time equivalent jobs.⁵

- A study by The University of Queensland in 2018 showed that in one year, national parks in Qld generated spending that contributed at least \$297 million to the economy and supported at least 2,725 total jobs.⁶
- According to Tourism Research Australia International visitors spent \$2.6 billion on travel that involved birdwatching in the year to June 2024.⁷

Economic cost of activities which exacerbate climate change

While highlighting the importance of strong nature laws for the economy it is important to also highlight the economic, environmental and social costs of activities which contribute significantly to climate change, particularly in the context of the call for fast tracking oil and gas projects.

One of the greatest threats to our native animals, ecosystems and communities is climate change. The Australian Climate Service lists 63 nationally significant climate risks.⁸ Fast tracking fossil fuel projects means fast tracking the extinction of koalas and our other iconic species, while also threatening food supply, fresh water availability and the safety of our communities. The impacts of climate change also has a direct impact on the above economic benefits of tourism by making travel less desirable because of severe weather events, ecological degradation and coral bleaching. This all has a direct impact on the economy.

- 13% of Queensland's economy is directly exposed to climate disasters, this includes tourism, agriculture, forestry, fishing, transport and accommodation.⁹
- Between 2010 and 2025 the cost of major flood, cyclone, and drought events reached \$50-\$70 billion dollars. This includes agricultural losses, drought assistance and emergency infrastructure.⁹
- The climate council has projected that the cost of climate disasters could reach \$94 billion a year by 2060 if pollution levels remain high.¹⁰

Within the context of fast tracking of fossil fuel projects, which contribute significantly to climate change according to the Australian Energy Producers over the 12-year period, the industry contributed \$80.4 billion to the economy in Queensland,¹¹ significantly less than the yearly projected costs of climate disasters.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. We strongly urge the Queensland Productivity Commission to take the above considerations and the linked resources into account as they develop their report.



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