

Comment – Wildlife Queensland

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Our key message is that 2025 EPBC Act reforms and strong environmental standards will improve productivity when they reduce uncertainty, avoid late-stage conflict, protect natural capital, support regional stewardship and ensure that development proceeds within clear ecological limits. This can be achieved by:

1. Strong EPBC reforms, which can reduce uncertainty, delay and conflict
2. Protecting habitat protects Queensland's productive base
3. Better standards to improve investment certainty
4. Nature-positive reforms that can support regional jobs and capability
5. Cumulative impacts and intergovernmental cooperation to strengthen outcomes
6. Clear guiding principles for Queensland offset funds. These are outlined in the attached submission. The Commissioner have also requested our other recent submissions (also attached).

10 June, 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

Wildlife Queensland is one of the state's most respected conservation organisations. For over 62 years we have worked to protect Queensland's native wildlife and the habitats that sustain them. We have 13 branches across Queensland, over 20,000 supporters and members and engage over 520,000 Queenslanders annually through research, monitoring, community conservation programs, policy engagement and digital outreach. Queenslanders deeply value our unique wildlife and natural areas and Wildlife Queensland exists to safeguard these environmental assets for current and future generations.

Wildlife Queensland 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, and would like to thank the Commissioners for taking the time to meet with us on the 9th July 2026 to discuss this inquiry. Queensland's economy, regional communities and future productivity depend on healthy landscapes, functioning ecosystems, clean water, resilient catchments, intact habitat and the recovery of threatened species. Environmental protection should not be treated as separate from productivity. It is a foundation for long-term productivity. In this context, we believe that the scope of the inquiry as set out in the terms of reference are too narrowly focussed on perceived, and in our view incorrectly conceived, potential negative impacts of the EBC Act reforms on productivity in Queensland. Dr Ken Henry AC, a highly respected former Secretary of the Treasury for Australia, has argued that high-integrity, stronger environmental protection is a precondition for lifting Australia's productivity, rather than a drag on it. He links better nature laws to clearer investment signals, faster and more predictable project approvals, and the structural shift to a net-zero, nature-positive, higher-value economy. He has said that fixing Australia's "broken environment laws will do more for our ailing productivity than tax reform¹," arguing that productivity ambitions are impossible to achieve without serious environmental law reform. We urge the Commission to take a broad approach to the scope of the inquiry to identify the ways in which strong support for the strengthening of environmental laws and the application of the revised EPBC Act provisions, supported by strong and effective cooperation by Queensland Authorities can actually underpin sustainable productivity growth in Queensland.

Our key message is that 2025 EPBC Act reforms and **strong environmental standards will improve productivity** when they reduce uncertainty, avoid late-stage conflict, protect natural capital, support regional stewardship and ensure that development proceeds within clear ecological limits. This can be achieved by:

¹ <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/fix-green-laws-before-tax-to-create-growth-ken-henry-20250715-p5mf04>

1. Strong EPBC reforms can reduce uncertainty, delay and conflict

Dr Ken Henry argues that new national laws and a federal EPA can provide clearer standards, streamlined assessments, and more transparent, rules-based decision-making, which “allow for faster decision making... better decision-making and in that we’ll see a boost in productivity.” Strong national standards can improve productivity by creating clearer expectations at the start of a project. Proponents, governments, investors, landholders and communities benefit when the unambiguous rules are known early, high-value habitat is identified before project design is locked in, and unacceptable impacts are clearly understood. Delay is often caused not by strong environmental standards, but by unclear standards, poor early surveys, inadequate avoidance of important habitat, unrealistic offsets, incomplete information and late identification of environmental constraints. The standards must prioritise environmental outcomes, not just process. A project should not be considered consistent with a standard simply because a payment has been made or a procedure has been followed. It should only be approved where it is likely to deliver the relevant environmental outcome. Good regulation improves productivity when it reduces ambiguity, provides clear decision rules and directs investment away from high-conflict, high-risk proposals.

2. Protecting habitat protects Queensland’s productive base

Queensland’s productivity depends on its natural capital. Healthy ecosystems support agriculture, tourism, fisheries, water quality, soil stability, pollination, carbon storage, climate resilience, flood mitigation, recreation and regional liveability. Riparian vegetation, wetlands, remnant woodland, mature trees, hollow-bearing trees, grasslands, coastal systems and wildlife corridors provide services that are expensive or impossible to replace once degraded.

Offsets must not become a mechanism for continuing habitat loss. Not all habitat can or should be offset. Some places are too important, too rare, too old, too connected, too species-specific or too difficult to replicate. Where a genuine, like-for-like, additional and durable offset is not available, the impact must not be approved and the habitat must not be cleared. The standards should clearly identify no-go zones for irreplaceable, high-risk or critical habitat, including threatened species breeding habitat, roosting sites, mature hollow-bearing habitat, climate refugia, key wildlife corridors and habitat essential to species recovery. The experience in Queensland (and in other jurisdictions) where the predominant approach used by proponents is to make a financial contribution and transfer responsibility for finding and implementing the offset to government has been a major failure (our submissions to the Queensland discussion paper on environmental offsets and our response to the draft EPBC Act Draft Standard on Offsets are attached for reference).

3. Better standards can improve investment certainty

Queensland needs efficient, predictable and credible assessment processes. Wildlife Queensland supports efficiency, but this efficiency should come from better planning, better environmental information, clearer rules, stronger avoidance of harm and upfront decision-making, not by-passing them. Failing to consider sustainability and long-term environmental protection risks the creation of “stranded assets”². The Oxford University’s Smith School of Sustainability and Environment argues that strong, credible environmental laws and regulations are essential to manage transition risk, avoid disorderly asset stranding, and safeguard long-term economic and financial stability. In their framing, weak or delayed regulation actually increases systemic risk and future productivity losses, whereas clear, ambitious policy creates a more orderly, lower-cost transition.

Strong standards can improve investment certainty by clearly identifying which environmental values must be avoided, what survey effort is required, how cumulative impacts must be assessed, when impacts are unacceptable, when offsets are not appropriate, and how compliance will be monitored and enforced and the adequate consequences for non-compliance. The concept of required net gain must be defined in an actionable and assessable way. If net gain is not clearly defined through regulation, an offsets calculator or another objective method, its application may fall largely to Ministerial discretion. This would weaken certainty for proponents, communities, regulators and investors. Net gain should be measurable, additional, attributable, durable and directly relevant to the impacted matter. It should not be used to justify clearing habitat where the environmental values

² Caldecott, B., 2017. Introduction to special issue: stranded assets and the environment. *Journal of Sustainable Finance & Investment*, 7(1), pp.1-13.

cannot be replaced. In those circumstances, the only appropriate regulatory outcome is avoidance, redesign or refusal.

4. Nature-positive reform can support regional jobs and capability

Strong EPBC reform can support regional productivity by creating practical work in restoration, threatened species monitoring, weed and pest control, ecological surveys, Traditional Owner ranger programs, private land conservation, citizen science, environmental consulting and nature-based tourism. Queensland has significant regional capability in land management, conservation, science, natural resource management, Traditional Owner stewardship, volunteer networks and landholder-led restoration. EPBC reform should help mobilise this capability, not treat environmental protection only as a compliance cost.

Community data and local knowledge are productivity assets. Local communities often detect environmental change early, hold detailed knowledge of wildlife and habitat, and contribute records that improve assessment and recovery planning. However, regional opportunities depend on reform settings that direct investment into genuine, additional and measurable outcomes. Restoration contribution charges should be governed by the same principles as other offsets, including additionality, like-for-like outcomes, transparency, monitoring, accountability and a clear connection to the impacts being offset.

5. Cumulative impacts and intergovernmental cooperation must strengthen outcomes

Many environmental impacts in Queensland are cumulative. A single project may appear manageable, but repeated clearing, infrastructure corridors, roads, water extraction, light, noise, weeds, fire regime change, edge effects and climate pressures can progressively degrade biodiversity corridors, habitat and reduce species viability. Cumulative impact assessment must be elevated into enforceable standards and assessment requirements, considering past, present and reasonably foreseeable impacts across the relevant landscape, bioregion, catchment, ecological community or species range.

Commonwealth, State and Local Government systems should work efficiently together, but streamlining must not weaken protection. Accreditation, bilateral arrangements or delegated assessment processes should only proceed where Queensland systems meet or exceed national standards and maintain public confidence, environmental integrity, transparent decision-making and strong compliance and enforcement. Efficient intergovernmental arrangements can reduce duplication, but only if they strengthen outcomes rather than dilute them.

6. Queensland offset funds need clear guiding principles

Queensland needs clear guidelines or guiding principles for how existing and future offset funds are spent, including the reported \$129 million in Queensland offset funds. Offset funds should not operate as a general environmental grants pool or substitute for core government conservation responsibilities. They should be directed to genuine, additional, measurable and accountable outcomes that are clearly linked to mitigating the impacts for which the funds were collected, with transparent criteria for habitat outcomes, threatened species recovery, long-term protection, monitoring and regional delivery.

Conclusion

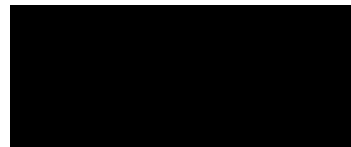
Wildlife Queensland supports EPBC reforms that deliver stronger protection for nature while improving Queensland's long-term productivity. Clear, enforceable and outcome-focused national standards can reduce uncertainty, protect natural capital, support regional jobs and improve confidence in decision-making. The reforms must not rely on process compliance, discretionary offsets or restoration payments that fail to deliver measurable gains for wildlife and habitat. Some habitat is too important or irreplaceable to offset, and where impacts cannot be avoided, minimised and genuinely offset, approval should not be granted. Queensland also needs clear, transparent and accountable guiding principles for how existing and future offset funds are spent, including the reported \$100 million-plus in Queensland offset funds, to ensure these funds deliver genuine, additional and measurable outcomes linked to the impacts for which they were collected.

At your request (from the 9/7/2025 meeting), we have also attached Wildlife Queensland's recent related submissions.

Yours sincerely



Emeritus Professor Marc Hockings, AO
President, Wildlife Queensland



John Tracey
CEO

Appendix: Recent Wildlife Queensland Submissions attached

- June 2026 Fresh start for Environmental Offsets Framework
- June 2026 State Development and Public Works Organisation (Critical Minerals) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025
- June 2026 National Environmental Standard for Offsets
- May 2026 National Environmental Standard for MNES
- Dec 2025 Protect and Conserve Nature Repair Market
- Dec 2025 Inquiry into Environmental Protection (Efficiency and Streamlining) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025