

Media release

Environment reforms a pathway to more jobs and a better environment

Statement from Tania Constable, Chief Executive Officer

Faster approvals, greater national cooperation and clearer guidelines on environmental management will boost jobs and investment and improve biodiversity outcomes.

The interim report of the independent review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act released today by Professor Graeme Samuel AC is a significant opportunity to secure a better environment, more jobs and faster economic recovery.

The decision by the government to move on immediate opportunities raised in the report is welcome, creating an important roadmap for Australia's post-pandemic recovery and better environmental outcomes.

The interim report highlights the need to address unnecessary regulatory complexity and duplication – including overlapping state and federal processes which deter investment.

The government's commitment to develop 'single' touch bilateral assessment and approvals, supported by National Environmental Standards will create more certainty for investment.

A shift from process-driven approvals – with the by-product of unnecessary and expensive delays – to outcomes-focused regulation, based on science, will help reduce delays to minerals projects.

And a focus on clear, effective regulation will provide certainty for businesses, the community and decision makers.

Innovative approaches through market based initiatives, such as national financial based offsets to support habitat restoration and strategic biodiversity outcomes, should be explored.

These reforms will help Australia attract the investment needed to create jobs and support stronger and growing regional businesses and communities.

The interim report notes the duplicative regulatory processes involved with uranium, and sometimes with rare earth and mineral sands projects, and the scope for state and territory management of approvals. The MCA supports the view that the ARPANS Act addresses the Commonwealth's regulatory requirements.

The MCA looks forward to contributing to the national engagement on protecting Indigenous cultural heritage, an area which has seen significant improvements over many decades across the country. This engagement comes as the West Australian government, industry and Indigenous groups complete their task of modernising that State's Aboriginal heritage laws.

Improvements to the EPBC Act will build on recent moves by the Morrison Government to reduce delays by fast-tracking approvals for major projects and reducing the backlog of projects under assessment through greater resourcing.

Australia's minerals sector is committed to the protection and restoration of our unique environment. As outlined in the interim report, regulation can be efficient and effective while safeguarding the environment, supporting the growth of the minerals industry and sustaining strong communities.

The interim report outlines the broad direction of reforms the design of which will need to be carefully considered to ensure these can be practically implemented. The MCA will work constructively with Professor Samuel so the final review report supports pragmatic reforms to enable Australia's speedy post-COVID recovery.

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