

Australia is a country famed for its natural fauna and unique ecosystems. Much of our tourism is based around iconic animals and features. As a country, we are frequently viewed as a world leader in environmental management and conservation, although the basis for this has been severely undermined in recent years. The government's approach of supporting so-called "development" at any cost (well represented by the Adani fiasco in Queensland) is damaging our international reputation. The recent proposals to rescind legal protection from 50% of marine areas places us in danger of becoming a laughing stock. Rather than leading the way with carbon trading, we are now reverting to pre 1950's policies. We have already seen the damage of such ignorance and blatant disregard for the natural environment. Please do not repeat the same mistakes of the past. Learn from them, realise that human degradation of ecosystems does not automatically repair itself and take steps to prevent further environmental vandalism. For too long, we have exploited the natural environment without concern for its longevity. Over the last decade or so, the realisation that we were damaging the very planet on which we live and depend resulted in increased protection for important ecosystems. It is inconceivable that the current government can now seriously consider removing environmental protection from many areas.

Current science continues to demonstrate the ecological and economical impact of insufficient protection of ecosystems. This is particularly true of marine ecosystems, where the adage out of sight, out of mind, appears to determine our response. Recent research has demonstrated there is less than 1% of marine ecosystems that have been unaffected by human activities whilst the amount of impact increases with proximity to land as well as the population density of adjacent human communities. Shellfish communities have suffered even more damage than coral reefs, with 85% of the previously known populations no longer existing. Furthermore, those communities that do remain, have been heavily degraded and suffered significant loss of productivity. Damage to these ecosystems result in economic losses, in the long-term. As such, it is not only short-sighted but also irresponsible for the government to even consider implementing legislation that would reduce the area of marine ecosystems that are currently protected/

Please, stop placing short term profits above long-term benefits - both to our own communities and the ecosystems on which we depend.

Regards,
Laura Cunningham