

OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER

27 March 2025

The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: Amendment to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act

Climate change and environmental degradation are central moral concerns of the Catholic Church, and Catholic Religious Australia (CRA), the peak body for the Leaders of 150 Catholic Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life, is a strong advocate for real and lasting solutions to the ecological crisis. CRA supports strong nature laws and has previously advocated for a “fundamental reform” of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, in line with the recommendations of the second independent review of the Act in 2020, to ensure that the Act better protects the natural world. CRA is deeply concerned that the bill to amend the EPBC Act, removing the right for third-party civil society organisations to call for review of past approvals of projects that threaten to harm the environment, has been passed.

As we understand, the amendment to the EPBC Act is to protect the economic interests of Tasmania’s salmon industry, a regional economic development that provides employment for many people from local communities. However, the government needs also to grasp the great importance of the current reconsideration of the prior approval of the industry’s expansion within the Macquarie Harbour, under the EPBC Act, in light of new evidence that this expansion is ‘critically endangering’ the Maugean skate fish species. Such reconsiderations under the EPBC Act are consistent with the government’s ‘Nature Positive’ plan to ensure our environment laws are enhanced to “better protect, restore and manage our unique environment.” To remove the right to call for review when new information emerges of environmental harm, which will not only apply to the particular case of the Tasmanian salmon industry, but projects more broadly, is a complete reversal of the government’s commitment and of great concern to CRA, and disincentivises the finding of innovative ways to create and maintain jobs for Australians, in harmony with nature.

One million global animal and plant species are threatened with extinction, and coal and gas projects continue to be the biggest drivers of climate-change causing emissions. Most recently in Australia, we experienced the extreme wind and rain conditions of ex-Cyclone Alfred, which caused widespread damage to beaches, housing, infrastructure and livelihoods. Millions of cubic metres of sand were eroded from over 500km of coastline, while parts of Queensland experienced record March rainfall, leading to flash flooding. Australia has been facing increasingly severe weather events over the past decade, with their intensity being

driven by climate change. Now, more than ever, we need reformed environment laws that respond to this ecological crisis, not worsen it.

We call on your government to reverse this amendment and, if elected for another term, your government must follow through on its promise to strengthen our nature laws. This action should include mandated consideration of climate risk when undertaking environmental assessments for new projects, as well as the right to review projects where there is significant change in circumstances or if new information emerges about climate change or other environmental impacts.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. J. Brady". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Gerard Brady CFC
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "A Walker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of the first name being capitalized and prominent.

Anne Walker
National Executive Director