



Budget 2020-21: Reforming our environmental laws and regulations

The Australian Government is prioritising reforms to our national environmental laws and bringing forward a package of improvements that will reduce green tape while protecting our invaluable environment.

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) is over 20 years old. Now, as we work to recover from the myriad impacts of COVID-19, it has never been more important to ensure this Act provides the right protection for our environment while also supporting our economy and the livelihoods of Australians.

The Australian Government is also committed to managing the environmental risks of industrial chemicals with improved regulation to enable a more consistent, efficient and effective approach across all jurisdictions.

Why is it important?

The Australian Government is strengthening our approach to environmental regulation, implementing policies and practices to support timely assessments and improve compliance under the EPBC Act as well as more effectively managing the environmental risks associated with industrial chemicals.

1. Delivering ‘single touch approvals’ under the EPBC Act

- This measure reduces duplication by creating a robust ‘single touch approvals’ system, which will accredit state and territory processes and reduce the need to refer projects to the Commonwealth. The ‘single touch’ system will be underpinned by Commonwealth-led environmental standards.
- Single touch approvals will reduce regulatory burdens, support economic activity and improve certainty around environmental protections.

2. Maintaining timely environmental assessments

- This measure cuts EPBC Act approval timeframes for 15 major projects that are worth over \$72 billion to the economy and will support over 66,000 direct and indirect jobs.
- This measure also continues to support businesses by providing timely environmental assessments for all other projects. This includes ensuring robust processes are in place to meet demands for infrastructure once COVID-19 passes.

3. Reducing the backlog of cases

- This measure will improve the timeliness of cases under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* (ATSIHP Act).
- Improving the timeliness of decision making under the ATSIHP Act will give more predictable and less costly outcomes for business, industry and Indigenous Australians.

4. Developing environmental markets

- This measure supports the exploration of new approaches to developing environmental markets and catalysing private sector investment in natural capital in response to recommendations foreshadowed in the Interim Report of the Independent Review of the EPBC Act.
- Environmental markets offer the potential to bring together landholders and the private sector to mobilise investment and accelerate landscape restoration, resulting in improved environmental outcomes and certainty for business.

5. Managing environmental risks of industrial chemicals

- This measure will ensure that national standards for managing environmental risks of industrial chemicals are implemented in areas under Commonwealth control through streamlined regulation of their introduction, use, handling and disposal.
- This is being done as part of Australia’s first national framework to protect our environment and citizens from chemicals of concern, such as PFAS and mercury, to improve confidence in safety and ensure consistency across all jurisdictions. Each state and territory will also implement the standards through their own regulatory frameworks.

Who will benefit?

EPBC Act reforms play a significant part in our recovery from COVID-19. Delivering environmental law reform and improving efficiencies in this sector will create opportunities for employment and economic growth while also protecting Australia’s iconic natural capital.

Reforms to managing environmental risks from industrial chemicals will help safeguard Australia’s land, air, waterways and people from potentially hazardous substances. The reforms will also make it more efficient and cost effective for Australian industry and manufacturers to navigate how they manage industrial chemicals.

What will this cost?

Table 1 allocated budget

Measure	Amount
Fast delivery of single touch approvals under the EPBC Act	\$ 10.6 million
Maintaining timely environmental assessments	\$ 21.2 million
Reducing the backlog under the ATSIHP	\$ 2.2 million
Exploring market-based solutions for habitat restoration	\$ 2.5 million