



Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
GPO Box 3090
CANBERRA, ACT, 2601

To whom it may concern,

Submission to consultation on draft National Environmental Standard for Matters of National Environmental Significance

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the consultation on the draft National Environmental Standard for Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES).

My electorate of Indi covers 29,000 square kilometres of Victoria's North East, from Corryong on the upper Murray River to Kinglake near Melbourne's outer north-eastern fringe. Indi's biodiversity is striking, providing essential habitat for many critically endangered species including the swift parrot, barking owl, common bent-wing bat, the vulnerable growling frog and many others.¹

People right across Indi care deeply about the environment. I regularly hear from constituents about the beauty of Indi's natural places and the ways constituents protect and enjoy our natural environment.

The development of the full suite of National Environmental Standards must implement the full intention of the Samuel Review² and deliver genuine protections for the environment. They must be strong, clear, and legally enforceable.

The proposed application of the Standard outlines it will "guide the Commonwealth and, where relevant, a partner state or territory government, to develop the bioregional plan." I sought to amend the Environmental Protection Reform Bill 2025 to ensure high value agricultural land and drinking water catchments were considered in the development of bioregional plans under the EPBC Act.

The Government has a difficult responsibility in managing competing land-use priorities. We need to balance climate, biodiversity and economic objectives in local communities.

Regional mapping which clearly defines land that isn't suitable for development activities, including high value agricultural land, drinking water catchment areas, land of cultural and environmental

¹ State Wide Integrated Flora and Fauna Teams (2025) *Threatened fauna North East & Gippsland, Victoria*, https://www.swifft.net.au/cb_pages/threatened_fauna_north_east_gippsland_victoria.php

² Samuel, Graeme (2020) *Independent Review of the EPBC Act*

<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/epbc-act-review-final-report-october-2020.pdf>



significance was my first recommendation to the Community Engagement Review undertaken by former Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, Andrew Dyer.

Done right, bioregional mapping can ensure our land is most appropriately and efficiently used for environmental protection and regeneration, farming food and fibre, and renewable energy. Research from Climateworks Centre and Deakin University demonstrates that it is possible to solve for these objectives at the same time.³

I recommend the MNES National Environmental Standard include an objective to protect areas high value agricultural land within bioregional plans, in addition to its important protections of natural spaces.

I am pleased to see the protection of water resources is one of the objectives in this standard. In particular, I am happy to see the standard explicitly includes the reliability and supply of water to support critical human water needs.

The Government must expand this beyond protection from only unconventional gas and coal mining development to include protections for water from all projects that may pose risk to drinking water catchments.

National Environmental Standards were the centrepiece of the Samuel Review.

I urge the Government to prioritise the creation of the full suite of Standards, including a National Standard for Community Consultation and Engagement. These standards are needed for the proper and fulsome functioning of the new EPBC laws, and for the protection of the natural environment.

Sincerely,

Helen Haines MP

30 January 2026

³ Climateworks Centre (2025) *Harnessing nature's power for net zero and biodiversity*
<https://www.climateworkscentre.org/news/harnessing-natures-power-for-net-zero-and-biodiversity-anna-skarbeks-address-to-the-forest-carbon-summit-at-national-press-club/>