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Media release

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Federal Environment Laws a Waste of Money

A new paper released today by The Australia Institute has found that the Federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC Act) has failed to provide adequate protection for the environment and is currently a waste of taxpayers' money.

“This legislation has cost taxpayers somewhere between \$72 million and \$180 million to administer, but after six years it has not resulted in any significant improvements in environmental outcomes”, Deputy Director of the Australia Institute, Andrew Macintosh said.

The paper found that of the approximately 1,900 development proposals that were referred to the Federal Environment Minister between July 2000 and July 2006, 76 per cent were declared to be exempt from the regime. Out of the remaining 462 applications requiring approval, only four have been blocked by the Minister.

‘Instead of striking a balance between the needs of the economy and those of the environment, the EPBC Act’s assessment and approval regime is little more than environmental window dressing,’ Mr Macintosh said.

Other key findings from the paper include:

- only around 50 referrals were made from the agricultural sector in six years, notwithstanding the evidence that agriculture is having possibly the greatest detrimental impact on the matters of national environmental significance;
- no referrals have been received from the commercial fishing sector;
- enforceable conditions have been imposed on fewer than ten dam and weir developments; and
- only one successful enforcement action has been taken in six years.

“Things have deteriorated over the past 18 months as the Minister has used the legislation to achieve political objectives, which has created uncertainty for developers”, Mr Macintosh said.

“If the Government refuses to use the legislation constructively, it should be abolished and the money redirected to other areas.”