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Media release

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Bald Hills Fiasco Emphasises Need for Change

In the wake of the Federal Environment Minister's back flip on the Bald Hills wind farm, the Australia Institute today called for the Minister's environmental approval powers to be transferred to a separate statutory authority.

"The Minister has finally injected some sanity into this process by approving the construction and operation of the Bald Hills wind farm. However, his original decision to block the wind farm has created considerable uncertainty for the business sector and underlined the need for the federal environmental approval process to be reformed", Institute Deputy Director Andrew Macintosh said.

"The decision to block the wind farm was blatantly political and it was only due to intense media and political pressure, along with a humiliating back down in the Federal Court, that the approval was finally forthcoming.

"If Australia is going to have a safe, low-cost and low-emission energy sector, we cannot have a federal regulatory process that is subject to this type of political manipulation.

"In order to minimise the risk of political intervention and to improve the integrity of the process, the Minister's environmental approval powers should be transferred to a separate statutory authority.

"The Minister's power to list heritage places like the Burrup Peninsula and threatened species should also be transferred to the statutory authority.

"This is contrary to the Government's centralisation agenda that was set out in the Uhrig Report, but the current federal environmental regulatory regime is flawed and it is failing to achieve its objectives.

"The Government should take this opportunity to ensure that the Bald Hills fiasco is not repeated in the future", Mr Macintosh said.