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Mr. Lazare Eloundou Assomo
Director, UNESCO World Heritage Centre
7, place de Fontenoy. 75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Via email only: l.eloundou-assomo@unesco.org

17 April 2025

Mr. Tim Badman
Head, World Heritage Team
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Via email only: tim.badman@iucn.org

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Dear Mr. Assomo and Mr. Badman,

Australian environment law changed, weakening protection of Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area.

1. Further to our letter dated 28 January 2025 and email of 14 February 2025, we write again with an urgent update, regarding the ongoing threat to the heritage value of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA).
2. Our organisations hold grave concerns about the Australian Government's response to the ongoing impacts of salmonid farming on Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area (which includes one third of Macquarie Harbour) and the **Maugean skate**, a species of recognised

world heritage value,¹ known to be at imminent risk of extinction due primarily to salmonid farming.²

3. On 26 March 2025, the Parliament of Australia passed an amendment to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) that **restricts the power of the Minister for the Environment to reconsider certain past decisions where harm is occurring to World Heritage values**, including species such as the Maugean skate. It removes the power of the Minister to revisit decisions in light of changing circumstances or non-compliance with conditions on the original authorisation.³
4. The Australian Government's publicly stated rationale was to provide "certainty, clarity and fairness" for industries that have already been operating for a significant amount of time.⁴ It aimed to **halt the reconsideration** of expanded salmon farming in Macquarie Harbour, triggered by the Australia Institute, Bob Brown Foundation, and Environmental Defenders Office on behalf of their clients the Australian Marine Conservation Society and Humane World for Animals (formerly known as Humane Society International) in November 2023.⁵ However, the government has subsequently admitted the change is not limited to salmon farming in Macquarie Harbour.⁶
5. EPBC Act **reconsiderations are required to be completed as soon as practicable** by the Environment Minister.⁷ However, with no further timeframe specified, and no outcome since the reconsideration began in November 2023, Australia's Prime Minister intervened to introduce an amendment to the legislation "to amend the flawed Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act to secure jobs and local industries".⁸
6. The EPBC Amendment (Reconsiderations) Bill 2025 did not seek to introduce a specified timeframe or allow actions already underway to continue while further assessments were undertaken. Instead, it removes the power to undertake reviews after 5 years for some decisions. There was no public consultation. **More than 50 environment and other non-government organisations signed an open letter to the Australian Parliament in protest** (see Attachment A). The Bill was tabled by the Australian Government on 25 March and passed with support from the opposition the following day⁹. This was the second last act of Australia's 47th Parliament, prior to an election being called. Parliamentary debate and normal processes were guillotined. Twenty-eight of 33 Parliamentary crossbenchers opposed the Bill, with many speaking passionately against it, including describing it as an **abuse of process**.^{10,11}

¹ DPIPWE [Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan](#), p 47

² Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water [Maugean Skate](#)

³ Katharine Huxley [Reconsidering reconsiderations – changes to the EPBC Act narrow the scope of merit review](#)

⁴ [ParlInfo - BILLS : Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment \(Reconsiderations\) Bill 2025 : Second Reading](#)

⁵ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water [EPBC Macquarie Harbour](#)

⁶ [Second Reading Speeches – Parliament of Australia](#)

⁷ S.78C(1) of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

⁸ Environmental Justice Australia <https://envirojustice.org.au/legal-explainer-alarm-over-plans-to-gut-environment-laws/>

⁹ Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Reconsiderations) Bill 2025

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=r7323

¹⁰ Second Reading Speeches

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Reconsiderations) Bill 2025

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result/Second_Reading_Speeches?BillId=r7323

¹¹ Independent Senator Pocock [The truth behind the rotten salmon legislation](#).

7. The amendments are controversial and already subject to a **Federal Court challenge**, in which the Bob Brown Foundation is seeking orders requiring the Minister to determine the reconsideration notwithstanding the amendments introduced by the Bill.¹²
8. Documentation released in March 2025, after a lengthy **Freedom of Information** Act appeal, show the Federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's (DCCEEW) advice to the Environment Minister explains that a 'Controlled Action' (CA) decision is the 'likely outcome based on scientific information presented on current impact'. As a CA, salmon farming in Tasmania's Macquarie Harbour **would have to be comprehensively assessed and subject to approval under national environment law**, including for its impact on the endangered Maugean skate and the harbour's World Heritage value.¹³ The advice was provided in November 2023 and includes:
 - Salmon farming is the primary human-induced threat and is the key action currently regulated under national environmental law. It notes that salmon farming companies will need to engage on their impact on the Maugean skate.
 - Due to being an attribute of the World Heritage Values of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, any significant impact on the Maugean Skate may also have implications for World Heritage Values and that additional provisions apply to protect these under national environment law.
 - If aquaculture operations continue this may further diminish recovery prospects for the Maugean skate.
 - The Department is investigating potential breaches of the current conditions.
 - The need for the reconsideration decision to be made as soon as practicable.
 - Encourages low-impact re-design of salmon farming.
 - The risks of continuing salmon farming include the Maugean skate decline, and World Heritage values being compromised.
 - That the department will engage with the Tasmanian Environment Protection Authority to recommend any potential licence renewals should include scope for alignment with potential future national regulatory requirements.
 - That salmon farming operations in Macquarie Harbour would have to stop while a comprehensive assessment is undertaken.
 - That 20 people are employed in Strahan in Offshore Caged Aquaculture, and that it is not identified in the top 5 employment industries in nearby towns or at regional level (2021 Census Data).
9. In February 2025, a committee of the Australian Senate revealed that Australia's Ambassador, Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, responded to a letter from UNESCO on 18 July 2024 with what we understand to be a holding response, indicating that the Government would provide "a comprehensive response in the coming months once the matter [i.e. the reconsideration] is

¹² Bob Brown Foundation [Albanese's new salmon law challenged in Federal Court](#)

¹³ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water [EPBC Act Reconsideration Requests – Macquarie Harbour Salmon](#)

settled”.¹⁴ The Australia Institute sought access to this correspondence, including via a Freedom of Information Act request, however this was refused.¹⁵

10. Australia’s Senate Estimates in February 2025 also revealed important information in relation to the EPBC Act reconsideration:¹⁶
 - a. The Department finally provided its briefing package on the reconsideration to the Minister on 20 January 2025. The briefing package was around 8,000 pages long and included a 21-page cover brief with 96 attachments, and a Departmental advice report of 136 pages with an additional 134 attachments, totalling around 3,600 pages. The **2,551 public submissions** received were also included, together with a summary report.
 - b. The Minister subsequently requested an update in light of the most recent Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) report and additional legal advice.
11. In March 2025, Macquarie Harbour was **globally recognised as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA)**, triggering KBA status under criteria A1a, A1e and B1 as defined by the IUCN’s *A global standard for the identification of Key Biodiversity Areas: version 1.0*.¹⁷ The KBA assessment notes that “Salmon farming is currently the most significant threat to Macquarie Harbour, in particular organic matter pollution from the farms and the associated reduction in dissolved oxygen concentrations.”¹⁸
12. Our organisations are deeply concerned by the lack of action by Australian and Tasmanian Governments to address the ongoing impacts of salmonid farming on the heritage values of the TWWHA. We are further concerned by the removal of avenues for recourse where threats to such heritage are found to occur.
13. These actions are **not consistent with Articles 4 and 5 of the World Heritage Convention**.

Request

14. Considering the above, we reiterate our request to the IUCN and UNESCO to jointly recommend to the World Heritage Committee, for consideration at its 47th session, that a **Reactive Monitoring Mission is sent to the TWWHA in the second half of 2025** to:
 - a. Examine the impact of marine farming operations in Macquarie Harbour on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, and
 - b. Any other relevant matters in relation to the TWWHA.

Yours sincerely,



Eloise Carr, Director, The Australia Institute Tasmania

On behalf of the above organisations

¹⁴ Australian Senate Hansard [Environment and Communications Legislation Committee 2025 02 24.pdf](#), p.96

¹⁵ The Australia Institute [Australian Government urged to release response to UNESCO concerns about Maugean Skate](#)

¹⁶ Australian Senate Hansard [Environment and Communications Legislation Committee 2025 02 24.pdf](#), pp. 87-88

¹⁷ IUCN (2016) A Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas : Version 1.0.
<https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/46259>.

¹⁸ Key Biodiversity Areas: Macquarie Harbour, Australia. <https://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/site/factsheet/201494>