

Efficient assessments key to unlocking renewable...

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Efficient assessments key to unlocking renewable potential



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Australia stands at a pivotal moment in its renewable energy journey. With the federal government targeting 82 per cent renewable electricity by 2030, Australia has the projects, the technology, and even the capital. What we lack is an efficient system to progress environmental assessments for projects, to unlock these resources and to turn ambition into action.

The Clean Energy Investor Group, representing institutional investors with more than \$38bn in renewable energy assets across Australia has worked with Herbert Smith Freehills on a new report, *Delivering Major Renewable Energy Projects – Review of the EPBC Act*. This report uncovers the significant barriers stifling renewable energy development under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Project assessments under the EPBC Act are crucial for safeguarding our nation's environment. While it is paramount those assessments are delivered in a robust manner, governments must also deliver them in timely manner. The findings are stark: the number of renewable energy projects referred under the EPBC Act nearly doubled from 2020 to 2023.

Yet, alongside this growth in

project proposals, the timeline for decisions ballooned. In 2021, decisions on controlled actions averaged 62 days. By 2023, this had risen to 136 days – more than double. Worse still, projects are waiting an average of 2.2 years for approval. For a sector built on momentum and investor confidence, such delays are untenable.

These inefficiencies represent a critical risk to replacing Australia's ageing coal power stations and greater cost to energy consumers. Each delay erodes investor confidence, raises the cost of capital, and threatens both the government's renewable energy ambitions and Australia's ability to honour its Paris Agreement targets. Without immediate action, we risk investment being diverted to other countries with more efficient processes and clearer pathways for clean energy deployment.

The EPBC Act serves a vital role in safeguarding our environment, but its current processes are ill-suited to the urgency of Australia's decarbonisation goals and the climate crisis. A recent survey of CEIG members found that, across all jurisdictions, the current slow and complex administration of environmental assessments was the number-one challenge to delivering renewables in Australia.

There are a number of quick wins that could be implemented immediately to make the assessment process more efficient, enhance predictability, and reassure investors. First, we must harmonise state and federal processes. Overlapping jurisdictional assessments create redundancy and inefficiency. Aligning state and

federal systems can reduce project timelines without compromising environmental protections.

Secondly, ambiguities in what is required for assessments cause procedural bottlenecks. Clear guidelines and limiting unnecessary requests can expedite decision-making.

Thirdly, ensuring the bureaucrats (the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment, and Water) are adequately resourced to address backlogs and speed up processing.

And finally, standardising environmental conditions, and creating predictable and transparent offset policies would help investors plan projects with greater confidence.

Beyond these quick wins, comprehensive legislative reforms are needed to ensure the EPBC Act aligns with Australia's climate goals. These include advancing national environmental standards, recognising the net-positive contributions of renewable energy projects, and implementing strategic environmental offsets. By integrating landscape-scale assessments for Renewable Energy Zones, we can balance ecological preservation with the urgent need for clean energy infrastructure.

The stakes couldn't be higher. Australia has the resources to become a global leader in renewable energy. The International Renewable Energy Agency reports that investment in renewables must triple globally to meet net-zero targets. Here at home, CEIG members – representing a project pipeline of more than 46GW across Australia – are ready to de-

liver on this potential.

If we don't act swiftly, the consequences are clear. Prolonged delays will push investors to markets with more predictable frameworks. This is a race. In an increasingly competitive global race to attract clean energy capital, Australia can't afford to be seen as a riskier bet. Moreover, inefficiencies in the system risk derailing the government's 82 per cent renewable electricity target, which is crucial to decarbonising transport and industry.

The EPBC Act reforms before parliament represent a significant opportunity to address these challenges. But waiting for long-term legislative changes isn't enough. The quick wins can – and must – be implemented now to shore up investor confidence and ensure Australia stays on track to meet its renewable energy targets.

The federal government holds the key to unlocking billions of dollars in investment. By fixing inefficiencies in the EPBC Act's processes, we can accelerate the transition to clean energy, create jobs, and lower electricity prices for Australian households and businesses.

As the CEIG has consistently highlighted, we have the capital, the projects, and the ambition. What we need now is efficiency. By addressing the regulatory roadblocks, we can transform Australia's renewable energy potential into a reality, delivering benefits for investors, the environment, and every Australian.

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